

GARDEN ROUTE - SOUTH AFRICA'S GOLFING MECCA

Movie buffs will associate the small town of Carmel in Central California with the actor Clint Eastwood, who served as its mayor in the 1980's. More importantly though, the town forms part of the Monterey Peninsula, generally accepted as the golfing mecca of the USA. Some of the world's most recognizable golf courses such as Pebble Beach, Cypress Point, Spyglass Hill and the Links at Spanish Bay are part of 25 golf courses that are nestled in a 300 km² area.

Within the Monterey Peninsula lies 17 Mile Drive, a 27 km scenic route that incorporates 8 golf courses (including the ones mentioned above) and only accessible by paying an entrance (toll) fee! Golf is not cheap – to play Pebble Beach will set you back \$ 525 and accommodation in one of the resort hotels, which will guarantee a tee time, starts at \$ 800. The Monterey Peninsula receives 4 million visitors each year, of which golf is a significant contributor to the local tourism industry.

Fast forward to South Africa. There are a few areas that may stake claim to being the country's golfing hub - Cape Town with its popular international appeal and Johannesburg with some great parkland courses - however, that accolade belongs to the Garden Route.

The 140 km coastal stretch between Mossel Bay and Plettenberg Bay boasts some of the most breathtaking scenery in South Africa. There are 13 18-hole golf courses situated on this route, namely Mossel Bay (Pinnacle Point, Mossel Bay GC), George (Outeniqua, Montagu and the Links golf courses at Fancourt, Oubaii, George GC, Kingswood), Knysna (Simola, Pezula, Knysna GC) and Plettenberg Bay (Goose Valley, Plett GC). Six of these golf courses, including the country's number 1, are ranked in the top 20 of Golf Digest SA's top 100 golf courses in South Africa.

There is no doubt that the Garden Route is Africa's alternative to the Monterey Peninsula with the number and quality of golf courses, coastal beauty, nature reserves and prime property attributes that both share. In fact, Pinnacle Point has often been referred to as South Africa's Pebble Beach.

What makes this golf stretch so special is the variety of golf courses, ranging between links-type and parkland layouts and situated on the coastline or slightly inland. World renowned golf course designers such as Gary Player, Jack Nicklaus, Ernie Els and Peter Matkovich have a footprint in at least one golf course on the Garden Route. The fairways are predominantly kikuyu and the greens a variety of bent grass.

Despite the similarities with the Monterey Peninsula, there is one big difference – price and value for money. One can play any of the Garden Route golf courses for less than 20% than their Monterey counterparts, and the same applies to accommodation as well. Consider other tourist attractions and the weather and our region becomes a real value for money destination.

Although big strides have been made over the past decade to promote the Garden Route as a golfing destination, for example the golfing theme at George airport's arrivals section, websites advertising Garden Route golfing packages, B&B's targeting golfers etc., we can learn a lot from Monterey Peninsula.

Our approach to golf is still too fragmented, and we require the collective cooperation between West Cape tourism, local municipalities, the local tourism industry and our residents to truly establish the Garden Route as South Africa's golfing mecca.



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