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## Myrtle Beach rocks, but not where you think

By Toni Salama | Tribune reporter  
June 15, 2008

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MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.—They like to call this 42-mile expanse of Atlantic beachfront the Grand Strand, an appellation that makes Myrtle Beach sound sedate, proper, Victorian. Parts of it are anything but.

The '70s metal band KISS has opened a coffee shop here. Nevermind the KISS signature grinds; it's the establishment's architecture that percolates interest. What self-respecting head-banger wouldn't be drawn into a building hedged by gigantic replicas of the group's signature elevator boots, one of which snorts smoke out of its dragon-like nostrils?

Nearby, the party crowd converges on Senor Frog's, a Mexican chain of bars that earned notoriety among spring-breakers in places such as Cancun and Cabo. A few well-directed steps away looms the pyramid-shaped, Pharaoh-bedecked Hard Rock Cafe Myrtle Beach.

You'd think these three hot spots might be part of the scene at the 55-acre music-themed Hard Rock Park, which opened here in May to a volley of media coverage. But they're not. They're 3 miles away at an outdoor shopping/dining/entertainment/hotel complex almost seven times larger than Hard Rock Park: the 350-acre Broadway at the Beach.

Only weeks into its incarnation, Hard Rock Park is as predictable as [Keith Richards'](#) next wrinkle, as tiresome as a Grace Slick interview. Its theming is dominated by the notion that rock 'n' roll began with the Beatles, peaked with Jim, Jimi and Janice, and ended with the Ramones.

On a purely practical note, Myrtle Beach and its vacationers stand to benefit from an infusion of small- to mid-sized stages for resurrected acts such as KC & the Sunshine Band and emerging artists such as Singleton and Need to Breathe. After all, the Grand Strand's other show-biz enterprises already are occupied by Dixie Stampede, the Carolina Opry, Legends in Concert, Medieval Times and so forth.

So Hard Rock Park's four performance venues—the largest can pack 10,000—serve a need. And if concertgoers can ride a roller coaster or two, catch a family-friendly beach-party show and tank up on coffee and pretzels while they wait for the curtain, there's no harm done. The \$50-a-pop admission (plus \$10 parking fee) covers all concerts except for biggies such as The Moody Blues and the Eagles, which command higher ticket prices.

People coming to Hard Rock Park for a concert stand a good chance of getting their money's worth. But despite the park's blistering Led Zeppelin-The Ride coaster—pumping 1,200

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watts of "Whole Lotta Love" per ride—and beyond the psychedelic, black-light, 3-D effects of the laid-back journey through Knights in White Satin-The Trip, anyone looking for over-the-top themed rides and attractions had better be ready for a road trip: 475 miles south of here to Orlando. On the Thursday of Memorial Day weekend, and with a big motorcycle convention in town, Hard Rock Park was almost as empty as the rack of "Free Air Guitars" that stands just inside the park entrance.

Myrtle Beach-goers who enjoy midway rides and water slides will be satisfied with **Family Kingdom**, an amusement and seaside water park where patrons may pay per ride; buy an all-day pass to the amusement park for \$23 or the water park for \$18; or get a \$32 combo pass for a full day in each park.

Or there's the aforementioned Broadway at the Beach, pegged as South Carolina's best travel destination by the state's Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism. In addition to the KISS Coffeehouse, you'll find:

- Ripley's Aquarium: The Believe-It-or-Not museum chain gets you up close to rays, sharks and such.
- MagiQuest: a 20,000-square-foot interactive fantasy involving unicorns, dragons and a magic wand that makes it all happen, yours to keep.
- The **Palace Theatre**: Live shows include the acrobatic review "Le Grande Cirque" or "The Magical Spirit of Ireland" presented by Spirit of the Dance.
- **IMAX** 3D Theatre.
- A 16-screen cinema with stadium seating.
- Dragon's Lair Fantasy Golf, a miniature golf course.
- The Pavilion Nostalgia Park, good for kiddie rides.
- The 23-acre Lake Broadway: feed the fish, ride the pedal boats, catch the water taxi, watch the dancing fountains.
- A hundred-and-some shops.
- A bunch of restaurants, pubs and snack bars.

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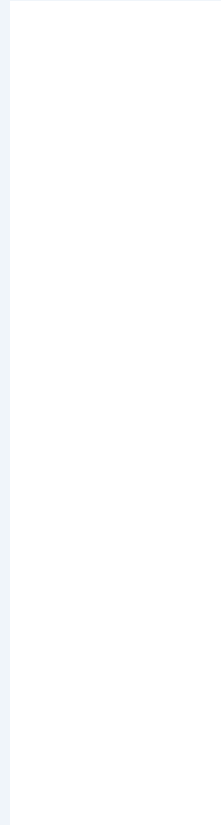
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