

GRAND STRAND

6 easy places

Need to save money, gas and travel time? We'll save your summer vacation

BY JOHN BORDSEN ♦ TRAVEL EDITOR

HARD ROCK PARK



RANDALL HILL - SUN NEWS PHOTO

Ride the Led Zeppelin roller coaster at Hard Rock Park.

LOCATION: Off U.S. 501 on the site of the largely replaced Fantasy Harbour/Waccamaw Pottery complex. Take the exit for Forestbrook Road (first up) or George Bishop Parkway; both lead to Hard Rock Parkway.

THE SKINNY: Southeast's newest theme park opened this spring, and its five areas are each themed to rock 'n' roll. Biggie attraction: 15-story Led Zeppelin roller coaster synched to "Whole Lotta Love." Dig its 120-foot loop. Max speed: 65 mph.

INSIDE LINE: Park excels at attention to details. Examples? Entry arch's ceiling is a riff on the Sistine Chapel's - with Adam holding a guitar. Fountain outside Zeppelin ride issues musical notes when you push your hand into the "12-string" water jets. Save with \$150 annual pass.

DETAILS: \$50; 3 and younger, free. \$10 parking. Summer hours: 10 a.m.-4 a.m. daily. 843-230-7625; www.hardrockpark.com.

CLOSE BY: Fun 6 p.m. dinner/show for kids at Medieval Times (through July 6, 12 and younger free with paying adult; regular admission: \$46.99; \$28.95 for ages 3-12; 800-436-4386; www.medievaltimes.com).

BROOKGREEN GARDENS



BROOKGREEN GARDENS PHOTO

Take a ride on a pontoon boat at Brookgreen Gardens.

LOCATION: About 18 miles south of Myrtle Beach, on U.S. 17, in Murrells Inlet, S.C.

THE SKINNY: Nonprofit Brookgreen is the largest sculpture garden in America, with the pieces (all by American artists) set in elaborate gardens. The vibe is laid-back and classy.

INSIDE LINE: Wednesdays-Fridays through Aug. 15, the "Cool Summer Evenings" series has great 5-9 p.m. sit-out Wednesdays, live local theater, Thursdays with solo-musicians tunes, Fridays, a mixed bag (jazz to blues) on the lawn. Bring lawn chairs/blankets; beverages are for sale. At "Cool Summer Evenings," you can explore the creek on a pontoon \$7 extra; also offered during regular hours.

DETAILS: \$12; \$10 for 65 and older; \$5 for ages 6-12; 5 and younger, free. Summer hours: 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m. daily. 800-849-4332; www.brookgreengardens.org.

CLOSE BY: Murrells Inlet Marshwalk is a marina with restaurants - watch the boats, dine outside. Details: www.murrellsinletmarshwalk.com.

FAMILY KINGDOM



JANET BLACKMON MORGAN - SUN NEWS PHOTO

Have fun at Family Kingdom amusement park.

LOCATION: 300 S. Ocean Blvd. (Third Avenue South), in the heart of Myrtle Beach.

THE SKINNY: No charge to enter old-school amusement park. Buy an all-day wristband (or individual tickets) to do the bumper cars, go-karts, carousel and other rides. Swamp Fox coaster is a wooden classic (1966); 2,640 feet in a figure-8; top speed: 50 mph; vertical drop: 62 feet.

INSIDE LINE: Park is busier on evenings and weekends. If you retain your lunch after the Swamp Fox, try the Slingshot Drop Zone (110-foot freefall). Something grand and slow? Opt for the Giant Wheel. Adjoining Family Kingdom water park is less expensive than Myrtle Waves water park out on the U.S. 17 Bypass - but smaller.

DETAILS: All Day Unlimited Ride Wristband (all ages) \$22.75 plus tax; individual tickets: \$1.05 plus tax; rides priced at 2 to 5 tickets apiece. Water park: All Day Unlimited Ride Wristband (guests 48-inches and taller): \$7.95; \$16.70 plus tax for anyone shorter. Amusement/water park combo: \$32.35 plus tax. Hours: 4 or 5 p.m.-10 p.m. or midnight most days (amusement park); 10 a.m.-5 or 6 p.m. (water park). 843-626-3447; www.family-kingdom.com.

BROADWAY AT THE BEACH



OBSERVER FILE PHOTO

Visit Broadway at the Beach when the sun goes down.

LOCATION: Off U.S. 17, between 21st Avenue North and 29th Avenue North.

THE SKINNY: Complex built around a lagoon boasts more than 100 shops, 20 restaurants, 11 nightclubs and 15 attractions.

INSIDE LINE: Go to www.broadwayatthebeach.com before-hand to figure out what stores you want to visit (and where your posse will regroup), but be aware the map's orientation is flipped (south is at top of page). A handful of old Pavilion rides are at southeast corner of complex. Ready to "Have a Nice Day"? Go to the Retro Active store for '60s-'70s clothes; buy 'em and wear 'em to Revolutions Retro Night Club.

DETAILS: www.broadwayatthebeach.com.

CLOSE BY: Fleec conspicuous consumption across 21st Avenue at BBCT Coastal Field, home of the Class-A Myrtle Beach Pelicans, a farm team for the Atlanta Braves. Games start at 6 or 7 p.m. Tickets: \$7-\$9. (Details: www.myrtlebeachpelicans.com.)

BAREFOOT LANDING



HOUSE OF BLUES PHOTO

Relax at the House of Blues at Barefoot Landing.

LOCATION: Off U.S. 17, in North Myrtle Beach. Northbound, Business 17 and 17 Bypass will merge; continue north 3.2 miles; it's on your left.

THE SKINNY: It's like Broadway at the Beach, only smaller and partly facing Intracoastal Waterway. It also rings a lagoon, but this one has gators in it.

INSIDE LINE: Just as Broadway at the Beach has Senor Frog's and Hard Rock Café, the biggie nightspots here are Dick's Last Resort and House of Blues, respectively. Also here: Alabama Theatre (long-running revue show "One," plus occasional concerts: www.alabama-theatre.com). On Mondays through Aug. 30, the boardwalk has entertainers from 7 to 11 p.m. and fireworks shot over the lagoon at 10:55 p.m.

DETAILS: www.barefootlanding.com.

CLOSE BY: Barefoot Landing adjoins Alligator Adventure live-animal park with more than 800 gators (including a pair of albinos), snakes, otters and tropical birds. Hourly demonstration or feeding show. Open 9 a.m.-9 p.m. daily (\$16.99; \$10.95 for ages 4-12; \$14.95 for 62 and older; 843-304-0789; www.alligatoradventure.com).

THE MARKET COMMON



RANDALL HILL - SUN NEWS PHOTO

Shop at the new and upscale Market Common.

LOCATION: Between Kings Highway and U.S. 17 Bypass, south of downtown and just beyond the airport. Turn on Parkway and keep your eyes peeled.

THE SKINNY: Shopping/dining complex that opened in April (on site of former Air Force Base) has residential condos in the mix. Built for hanging out, with narrow streets, benches and sidewalks.

INSIDE LINE: Aims for the upscale consumer with high-end Tommy Bahama, Ann Taylor, etc. (Anthropologie, selling clothes and housewares, has vintage-looking furnishings throughout; worth a look-in even if you're allergic to \$80 T-shirts.). Check Barnes & Noble for beach reading. Try outdoor seating at Gordon Biersch brewpub; Tommy Bahama also has a café.

DETAILS: www.marketcommonmb.com.

CLOSE BY: Market Common is across the street from Grand Park, which has a 1/4-mile walkway with footbridges around its swan-filled pond.

The Charlotte Observer
date: 6-22-08
circ: 296,771