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Get an inside peek at the new Hard Rock Park in South Carolina.

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AMUSING  
MYRTLE BEACH  
RIDES, RESTAURANTS AND ROCK AND ROLL D6

# Myrtle Beach rocks

Nothing could be finer than music and fun in Carolina

BY TONI SALAMA  
Chicago Tribune

**T**hey 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. Never mind the KISS signature grinds; it's the establishment's architecture that percolates interest (843-626-5477, [kisscoffeehouse.com](http://kisscoffeehouse.com)). 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 dragonlike nostrils? Nearby, the party crowd converges on **Señor Frog's**, a Mexican chain of bars that earned notoriety among spring-breakers in places such as Cancun and Cabo (843-444-5506, [www.senorfrogs.com](http://www.senorfrogs.com)). A few well-directed steps away looms the pyramid-shaped, pharaoh-bedecked **Hard Rock Cafe Myrtle Beach** (843-946-0007, [hardrockcafe.com](http://hardrockcafe.com)).

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 three 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** (800-386-4662, [broadwayatthebeach.com](http://broadwayatthebeach.com)).



The IMAX 3D Theatre has 16 screens and stadium seating.

## OTHER AMUSEMENTS

Myrtle Beach-goers who enjoy midway rides and water slides will be satisfied with **Family Kingdom**, an amusement and seaside water park where patrons can pay for each 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 (843-626-3447, [family-kingdom.com](http://family-kingdom.com)).

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 (\$18.99 adults, \$9.99 ages 6-11; 800-734-8888, [ripleysaquarium.com](http://ripleysaquarium.com)).

**MagiQuest.** A 20,000-square-foot interactive fantasy involving unicorns, dragons and a magic wand that makes it all happen, yours to keep (843-916-1800, [magiquest.com](http://magiquest.com)). Admission is \$25.95 for kids playing, \$7.95 for parents watching.

**The Palace Theatre:** Live shows include the acrobatic review "Le Grande Cirque" or "The Magical Spirit of Ireland" presented by Spirit of the Dance (843-448-0588, [palacetheatremyrtlebeach.com](http://palacetheatremyrtlebeach.com)).

**IMAX 3D Theatre,** a 16-screen cinema with stadium seating (\$11-\$13, 843-448-4629, [imax3dmyrtlebeach.com](http://imax3dmyrtlebeach.com)).

**Dragon's Lair Fantasy Golf,** a miniature golf course.

**The Pavilion Nostalgia Park,** good for kiddie rides, \$3 each (843-913-9400, [pavilionnostalgiaiapark.com](http://pavilionnostalgiaiapark.com)).

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. Three chain hotels. Fireworks.

Around the rest of Myrtle Beach are miniature golf parks set with dinosaurs or pirates or elephants; big-box souvenir

shops sporting playful whales or angry sharks or giant crabs on their roofs; pizza joints; strip clubs; bars; golf courses; a speedway; and lots of palm trees — just like most any other beach with mass appeal. And speaking of the beach, there's enough soft sand to satisfy the most ardent sand baby.

But if there's one attraction that puts the Grand back in this Strand, it's a sculpture park called **Brookgreen Gardens** (\$12 adults, \$5 ages 6-12; 800-849-1931, [brookgreen.org](http://brookgreen.org)). This is the sort of place art students would expect to sketch on summers abroad in Europe — except that this National Historical Landmark constitutes what is considered to be the nation's largest and most comprehensive collection of American figurative sculpture, with more than 1,200 works.

On grounds that once included four plantations, walkways now guide visitors through landscaping that frames the sculptures with floral displays or neatly trimmed hedges.

## GETTING THERE

**BY CAR** Myrtle Beach, S.C., is about 700 miles south of Long Island.

**BY AIR** Round-trip fares between New York and Myrtle Beach are running in the \$225-\$300 range through August.

**GETTING AROUND** Most hotels, restaurants and attractions are strung along U.S. Highway 17 and Business 17, aka King's Highway, between Pawleys Island and Little River. The rest can be accessed from U.S. Highway 501.

**INFORMATION** Contact the Myrtle Beach Area Chamber of Commerce at 800-356-3016 or [myrtlebeachinfo.com](http://myrtlebeachinfo.com).

## HARD ROCK PARK

Only weeks into its incarnation, **Hard Rock Park** (843-236-7625, [hardrockpark.com](http://hardrockpark.com)) is as predictable as Keith Richards' next wrinkle, as tiresome as a Grace Slick interview. Its theming is dominated by the notion that rock and roll began with the Beatles, peaked with 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 midsize stages for resurrected acts such as **KC & the Sunshine Band** and emerging artists such as **Singleton** and **Needtobreathe**. After all, the Grand Strand's other showbiz 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



Hard Rock Park

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 Zepplin — The Ride** roller coaster — pumping 1,200 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 better be ready for a road trip: 475 miles south of here to Orlando.

With venues such as **Family Kingdom**, above, and **Hard Rock Park**, right, Myrtle Beach, S.C., is shedding its image as a sedate Southern town.

## ON THE COVER

Riding the roller coaster at **Family Kingdom** in Myrtle Beach, S.C.



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## WHERE TO EAT

All the locals will send you to **Angelo's** (21st Avenue South at King's Highway; 843-626-2800; open for dinner only) for what everyone says are the best steaks on the beach. After slicing into their \$24, 14-ounce rib eye, I have to say the local advice is worth heeding.

If you are comforted by eating from a familiar menu, you'll thrive on the abundance of chain restaurants here. Mexican food puts me in my comfort zone, which I found on the \$10 enchilada plate at **Abuelo's** (740 Coastal Grand Circle, at Coastal Grand Mall; 843-448-5533, [abuelos.com](http://abuelos.com)). I wish I'd been in town long enough to try **Collector's Cafe** (7740 N. King's Hwy.; 843-449-9370), an art gallery known for its Mediterranean cuisine.

## WHERE TO STAY

If you're going to come all this way to the beach, you want to get a place on the oceanfront. Even during the peak months of July and August, you can do that through the major travel search engines for about \$160 a night, maybe less if you're willing to stay in an older property such as **Caravelle Beach Resort** (800-507-9145, [thecaravalle.com](http://thecaravalle.com)) or **Grande Shores Ocean Resort** (877-798-4074, [grandeshores.com](http://grandeshores.com)), where I spent two nights booked through Orbitz.

This is also a good place to check out vacation rentals. Agencies such as **Dunes Realty** (888-889-0312, [dunes.com](http://dunes.com)) can put you in an oceanfront condo starting from about \$900 a week.