

## Myrtle Beach History and Culture

### Myrtle Beach, SC -

Myrtle Beach, SC, is known for many things . . . It sports titles such as "The Seaside Golf Capital of the World," "Branson by the Sea," "The Campground Capital of the World," and "The Miniature Golf Capital of the World." It has been called the "Hottest New Destination" by Destinations Magazine in 1994, and one of "10 Outstanding Family RV Vacation Destinations," by the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association in 1995.



But, where did it all begin? Simply enough, it seems the natural beauty and bounty of the place attracted its first "vacationers." The unusual combination of rolling dunes and giant oaks standing guard over wide sandy beaches must have evoked a sense of wonder in the Waccamaaw and Winyah Indians who first inhabited the area. They called the land, "Chicora." The waters off the coast contain a history of their own. During the 18th century, pirates found the unpredictable waters of the Atlantic a virtual paradise for their wild revels.

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Legends began here, the most popular being the infamous "Blackbeard," who regularly terrorized the Carolina shores before his gory death in 1718!

Treasure hunters still search for the loot thought to have been left buried somewhere near Murrells Inlet by the famous "Captain Kidd" himself.

The gentle climate and easy landscape of Carolina's coast offered potential that wasn't noticed until the late 1800's when a majority of the real estate was purchased by F. G. Burroughs, a Conway businessman. Some refer to Burroughs as a "visionary," and hindsight certainly supports this description when it comes to his decision to claim 80,000 acres, including the entire coastline from Little River and Murrells Inlet.

He worked hard to make his vision a reality and, around the 1900's, the outside world was introduced to what was then being called "New Town," by Burrough's own, Conway & Seashore Railroad. The railroad made New Town easily accessible to people everywhere and the tourism business began in earnest. It wasn't long before the town's name was changed to "Myrtle Beach" in honor the Sweet Myrtle Tree, a waxy shrub native to the area. (A contest among local residents to rename New Town, and, to no one's surprise, F. G. Burrough's wife was the winner!)

The area's first hotel, The Seaside Inn, offered \$2 rooms in 1901. Soon after, growth was underway and simple cottages began popping up all along the coast. Beachfront lots were a mere \$25 back then, and many served as peaceful summer retreats, tucked away in the secluded beautiful setting of sand dunes and crystal blue Atlantic waters. (Peaceful, that is, unless a herd of semi-wild hogs chased sunbathers off the beach! There are actual accounts of early visitors being pursued by porcine intruders. Thankfully, the hog population is no longer a problem in Myrtle Beach unless you show up on Biker's Week.)

In 1925, Myrtle Beach gained the attention and respect of the "rich and famous." A wealthy textile magnate from Greenville built the Ocean Forest Hotel, with an enormous ballroom, elaborately decorated rooms, the coast's first golf course, horseback riding and tennis. It was a well-known "playground" for the wealthy until it was demolished in 1974.

By 1954, when "Hurricane Hazel" began brewing offshore, Myrtle Beach had grown into a pleasant little resort area, but Hazel had a mind of her own. The powerful hurricane ripped ashore... crushing everything in its path. Following the storm, the push toward resort development was bigger, better and stronger... and it hasn't slowed since!

Now, motels dominate the resort scene of Myrtle Beach and those simple little beach cottages are getting harder and harder to find. The Grand Strand has had a long and colorful history, and history is still being made as this popular beach resort continues to grow and prosper.