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Myrtle Beach resort exudes comfort, class



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Myrtle Beach may not be the first city that comes to mind when 300-high-end resort towns are mentioned.

But the South Carolina coastal town's reputation is quickly changing, especially since the addition of the Marina Inn at Grande Dunes.

Sure hotels with built-in waterparks are still plentiful along "The Strip," and there is nothing wrong with visiting these establishments. They can be a lot of fun.

However, some vacationers are looking for a quiet, luxurious retreat away from the hustle and bustle, and the Marina Inn at Grande Dunes is prepared to offer just that.

This inn is proof that high-end vacationing spots need not be snooty, fussy or pretentious. Instead, they can be laid back and comfortable, while maintaining a sense of elegance and class.

The inn's exquisite building features a Mediterranean style and is divided into three towers, all of which connect at the main lobby level.

Grande Guestrooms include either one king

bed or two double beds that guests will want to sink into after a long day. These heavenly beds include 300-thread-count Egyptian cotton sheets, European duvets and goose down pillows.

The rooms also include a comfortable reading chair and ottoman, a microfridge, DVD and CD players, a large desk with chair and a make-up vanity. But some of the small touches the inn offers — spa robes in-room, an umbrella in the closet and twice-a-day maid service (including turn-down) leave the biggest impression.

Spacious in-room bathrooms have granite countertops, separate showers and bathtubs.

Larger studio, two-bedroom and three-bedroom suites are available.

The multi-bedroom suites include a furnished kitchen, complete with all of the cookware and accessories needed to make a gourmet meal. As for the ingredients for this meal, guests can call Lowe's Supermarket, the resort's partnering grocery store, which will deliver items to the inn.

Each room has a balcony overlooking either



Photo by Ron Edwards

The Marina Inn at Grande Dunes is a beautiful place to relax.

the intracoastal waterway or the resort's private marina and swimming pool patio area.

Guests can splash around in Myrtle Beach's only saltwater infinity pool, which gives the illusion of being able to swim directly from the pool into the intracoastal waterway.

Two jacuzzis, an indoor pool and a full workout center are all nearby.

When weather permits, guests are invited to gather around the fire pit on the grand lawn for fun events, from marshmallow and hot-dog roasts to movie screenings.

Located on the intracoastal waterway, the resort features a marina that can accommodate up to 126 vessels, even those that are as large as 120 feet long.

Tennis lovers will want to check out the Grande Dunes Tennis Club, which has 10 HarTru courts, swimming pools, locker rooms and several professionals to assist you with lessons, clinics or tournaments.

The inn is only a few minutes from the resort's oceanfront property, where guests can let their inner beach

bum out to play.

The resort's oceanfront bar and grill offer frosty beverages and light meals. Changing cabanas, restrooms and plenty of free parking are available for inn guests.

Those visiting during prime beach season, however, do not have to drive. Instead, they can ride a shuttle that runs between the resort and beach on a regular basis.

Golfers have access to preferred tee-times at the resort's two award-winning courses — the Grande Dunes Members' Course and the Grande Dunes Resort Course.

The resort course is set upon a bluff overlooking the intracoastal waterway, with numerous elevation changes, wide Bermuda grass fairways, generous bent grass greens and acres of lakes.

This course was designed by the former Senior Designer for Robert Trent Jones, Roger Rulewich.

Grande Dunes Members' Course follows the natural terrain of the land and features generous landing areas.

Many of the golf holes are sculpted to create a natural look and incorporate the "feel of least

disturbance," advocated by its designer, Nick Price.

The member course is, as the name insinuates, open to members only, with the exception of Marina Inn guests. The course was designed by Hall of Fame inductee Nick Price and award winning architect Craig Schreiner.

This course offers more challenging shots than the resort course with its gently rolling terrain.

There is no shortage of shot-making challenges on this gently rolling terrain. A 27,000 sq. ft. Italianate clubhouse overlooks the 9th and 18th greens.

Shuttle service to both courses is available to inn guests.

Anyone wishing to feel pampered can make an appointment for an in-room spa treatment.

Guests seeking a worry-free vacation can rely on the resort's concierge staff to assist with everything from dinner reservations to directions to area attractions.

On-site restaurants and lounges include Waterscapes, a full-service restaurant located inside the inn; Anchor Café, a waterfront bistro that is adjacent to the marina; the Pool Bar &

Grill, an open-air venue, featuring sandwiches, burgers and salads; the Cabana Beach Club; and Reflections, a relaxed atmosphere, located inside the main lobby, for enjoying a beverage. Room service is also available for those who prefer to dine within the comfort of their own room.

The inn also offers more than 14,000 square feet in meeting space, making it the perfect venue for a conference or a meeting of any kind. Included in the meeting space is a full-service business center and a boardroom.

An elegant 5,100-square-foot ballroom has been used for many weddings and corporate events.

It is hard to imagine needing or wanting more than the inn already offers its guests — a luxurious place to unwind without even the slightest bit of pretension.

The Marina Inn at Grande Dunes is located right off Highway 17 in Myrtle Beach, S.C., just a few minutes away from all of the area's many fun attractions.

For more information, visit the Web site — www.marinainngrande-dunes.com.



Photo by Stephanie Edwards

With two challenging, well-manicured courses, golfers will find Nirvana at Grande Dunes.



Photo by Stephanie Edwards

Sink into one of the most comfortable hotel beds you will ever find.

Restaurant worth a seven-hour drive



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Not too many chefs take the time to make a 45-minute drive to hand pick the freshest seafood possible for their restaurants.

However, James Clark, executive chef at Myrtle Beach's Marina Inn at Grande Dunes, takes the hands-on approach to the cuisine that he and his staff serve at the inn's restaurants.

Several times a week, he drives to the docks at Murrells Inlet to select fresh fish.

His passion for creating unique, flavorful entrées for inn guests is obvious.

At WaterScapes, the inn's full-service restaurant, a special three-course meal allows guests to select any of the following three courses at an affordable price: an appetizer, a salad, a bowl of soup, an entrée and a dessert.

The fresh fish offerings on April 10 included local soft shell crabs and the low country trio, featuring sautéed trigger fish, salmon croquette and pan seared flounder.

While keeping all of this in mind, I opted to order the Carolina Gold Risotto with shrimp, the soft shell crabs and the trio of crème brûlée.

The risotto, was surprisingly creamy, considering that this dish was made with the indigenous

long-grain rice, instead of arborio (Italian short-grain rice that is typically used for risotto). This was accented with several flavorful shrimp.

The softshell crabs were lightly breaded and fried and had an incredibly rich flavor. Who needs lobster when you can have these instead? These crustaceans were served atop a smoked chicken potato galette (potato cake filled with smoked chicken and other savory ingredients) and braised broccoli.

The smoked chicken potato galette is possibly the best food item I have ever eaten, and it accompanied the softshell crabs extremely well.

Thanks to pastry chef, Tina Spaltro, the dessert menu was completely mesmerizing, but I stand by my choice — the crème brûlée trio, featuring vanilla bean, bittersweet chocolate and Bailey's cream.

Although I am an extreme chocolate aficionado, I favored the vanilla bean version. If I lived closer to the resort, the dessert would definitely become an addiction.

My husband, Ron, ordered roasted corn and pepper soup, which is drizzled with caramelized vidalia onion oil; the chilled duo — fresh tahitian tuna tartar and curry jumbo lump crab salad; and the low country trio for his entrée.

The soup was a mouthwatering blend of corn and peppers; and the sweet vidalia onion oil complemented the soup in ways I would have never thought possible.

Just as surprising was the way the curry accented the flavor of the seafood in the crab salad.

Ron's entrée was also amazingly well done from the presentation to the divine flavors.

The trigger fish had a bit of a punch, but in a good way. It was definitely a meaty fish, as in it could easily have been served in steak form. The salmon croquette (or salmon cake) was made from the some of the freshest salmon I have ever tasted, and the pan seared flounder, was equally



as amazing.

Because Spaltro wanted us to try some more of her goodies, she brought out the housemade candy plate. And we weren't about to argue.

The dessert consisted of six delicious confections — a peanut butter tart, a coconut and chocolate candy bar, a cheesecake lollipop, a raspberry gelee, a salted caramel and a pecan praline. And believe me, these aren't like any candy you have ever eaten.

The elegant presentation, along with the complex preparation that obviously went into making these candies definitely showed off Spaltro's talent in the kitchen. My sweettooth was only too happy to oblige.

At the end of the meal, our server brought out a bowl of homemade cotton candy, which Chef Clark said helps sweeten the receiving of the bill.

Ultimately, what sets this restaurant apart from the rest is the staff's great attention to details, from purchasing fresh local fish to serving baskets of warm bread with homemade butter and tapenades.

If you are vacationing in Myrtle Beach, be sure to stop in for at least one meal. Actually, on second thought, having a meal at the restaurant may be enough of a reason to visit Myrtle Beach.