

renaissance ross bridge golf resort and spa

by *Cristina Velocci*



Imagine a sprawling, Scottish estate situated on a championship golf course with spectacular views of the surrounding mountains as a backdrop. Bagpipers perform one hour before sunset every day, a stacked-stone fireplace greets you in the mosaic-tiled lobby, and the friendly staff treats you with the utmost in hospitality. No, this isn't the infamous St. Andrews in Scotland. In fact, such a place exists much closer than you think—just a two-and-a-half hour drive from Chattanooga—and it's called the Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort and Spa, on the southwest outskirts of downtown Birmingham, Ala.

Nestled in the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains, this Renaissance-style luxury hotel, built on land once farmed by the Ross family, opened in August of 2005 and has already made a name for itself as a major golfing destination. The 259-room hotel has 11 suites, and was recently rated by AAA as one of three 4 Diamond Properties in Alabama. All guest rooms have granite counters in the four-fixture bathrooms, triple-sheeted beds with comfy duvet covers, and balconies that overlook the verdant golf course.

The 8,191-yard Robert Trent Jones-designed golf course is the third longest in the world, making it the premier course on the Robert Trent Jones Golf Trail.

Before teeing off early in the morning, you can grab a cup of coffee from the Starbucks in the hotel lobby. Should you get hungry along the way, pull your golf cart over at the Clubhouse for a quick bite to eat. Otherwise, the hotel's main restaurant, Brock's, specializes in steaks and uses fresh grown produce from around Alabama to create savory food with a Mediterranean flair. To unwind, Brock's holds free wine tastings every Wednesday and Friday for guests.

For a truly relaxing experience, step inside the 12,000-square-foot full-service spa and salon. After a long day of swinging, slicing, and putting, the Golf Trail Massage will work out any tenderness you might be experiencing. This targeted deep tissue sports massage relieves overworked muscles in the back, shoulders and neck, and can last up to 30, 60, or 90 minutes, at your choosing. Another signature service is the Ultimate Caviar Facial, an anti-aging treatment that hydrates and firms skin using protein-rich caviar and Chinese botanical antioxidants. If you can't choose from among the services the extensive spa menu offers, including hydrotherapy, reflexology, aromatherapy, manicures, pedicures, haircuts and even make-up application, consider booking a spa party. They can accommodate 5-10 people, and each member of your party gets a personal gift bag of spa products in addition to complimentary consultations on skin, hair or body care.

On the other hand, if you're a thrill-seeker looking to get your adrenaline pumping, the Porsche Driving Experience offers one and two-day courses that combine classroom and track driving sessions at the nearby Barber Motorsports Park. Learn how to take on the challenging 2.38 mile track in high-performance vehicles—but act fast. Sessions are typically sold out months in advance.

Outside the resort, there is plenty to do. Explore Birmingham's Civil Rights District, the Botanical Gardens, the Museum of Art, Oak Mountain State Park or Vulcan Park. But with a luxury spa and an 18-hole championship golf course on site, we can't blame you if you never



Photos courtesy of Renaissance Ross Bridge Golf Resort and Spa

While most golf courses cover 150 acres, this one stretches a seemingly endless 330 acres and includes a 1,100-yard waterfall that connects two scenic lakes.

Though it was specifically designed for PGA tournament play and is home to the Regions Charity Classic, the course accommodates both the casual golfer and the tournament player. Gather a group of your closest gal pals and hit the greens here to perfect a new hobby in a lush landscape.

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