Unique miniature golf courses around the USA

by Susan B. Barnes, Special for USA TODAY | Published on July 27, 2015

Whether you know your way around the links or not, everyone can take a shot at a hole-in-one when it comes to miniature golf. Here, we take a look at some of the most unusual mini golf courses around the USA.

Mid-Atlantic

Let's start in Myrtle Beach, S.C. – also known as the “miniature golf capital of the world” – where four mini golf courses will challenge golfers of all skill levels: In North Myrtle Beach, two 18-hole mini golf courses follow the coastline of 1920s South America and the Foglift Islands in search of ancient gold and diamonds alongside Professor Hacker at Lost Treasure Golf; a 50-foot volcano erupts every 30 minutes at Molten Mountain Miniature Golf while golfers putt through 36 holes, 18 of which are inside the volcano itself; and Mutiny Bay Miniature Golf features another 36 holes to play, several of which are on board a giant pirate ship – ahoy! Every October, the “Master’s Tournament of Miniature Golf” is played at Hawaiian Rumble Mini Golf, where the 18-hole course is centered around a tropical Hawaiian garden complete with 40-foot volcano.

The world's longest miniature golf hole can be found on the 19-hole course at Rocky Gorge 4 Seasons Golf Fairway in Laurel, Md.

Waterfalls and aquatic gardens are found throughout the miniature golf course at Upton Hill Regional Park in Arlington, Va. Will you be able to make a hole-in-one on one of the longest mini golf holes in the USA?

Cows are the name of the game when it comes to miniature golf at COWTOPIA at the Bethpage Camp-Resort in Urbanna, Va. The cow-themed designed courses was designed by sculptor Mark Cline, who created colorful and whimsical bovines that are displayed throughout, including hippy cows in a VW bus, a daredevil cow, a mad scientist cow and more.

What do the Hatfields & McCoys, John Henry and the Civil War have in common? They're all featured along the 18-hole Mountain State Miniature Golf Course in Backley, W.V. Each hole is designed around a West Virginian myth, fact, or piece of history.

Also in West Virginia, Coal Country Mini Golf features a coal mining theme, staying true to the region's industry and history. Repurposed mining equipment is used along the 18-hole course, and some is big enough to walk through!

Northeast

Each hole of Lumberin' Cal Miniature Golf at the Okemo Mountain Resort in Ludlow, Vt., is themed with local legend and lore. Players choose their paths as they wind through the 18 holes and encounter elements such as the Okemo Mountain Fire Tower, the Ford Farm on South Hill, and the Black River Academy where President Calvin Coolidge attended classes.
A day in the woods is what playing the course at Humdingers Mini Golf in Keene, N.H., feels like. The course features gentle slopes, wide greens, animal sculptures, natural rock outcroppings and water features to add to the allure of the game.

South

In the land of theme parks, it's no surprise that Orlando has a few to choose from when it comes to play time, too. Disney's Fantasia Gardens miniature golf course themed after, what else, the Disney film "Fantasia," two 18-hole mini golf courses with snow and tropical themes can be found at Disney's Winter Summerland Miniature Golf; and 36 mini golf holes await at Hollywood Drive-In Golf at Universal CityWalk, complete with funny horror and sci-fi elements, including a flying saucer, 30-foot robot, the lab of a haunted house and more.

Dude! The brand new, 18-hole mini golf at Westgate River Ranch (about an hour south of Orlando) is in the middle of a 1700-acre dude ranch! Watch where you putt — buffalo and longhorn cattle will be watching your every swing!

Though pirates surround golfers at Captain Bligh's Landing in Clearwater, Fla., there's no need to walk the plank should you miss a shot. Instead, golfers have to walk the rolling deck of a pirate ship and venture into exotic caves.

Midwest

A round of miniature golf at the Putt People First Miniature Golf Course in Athens, Ohio, is more than a fun way to spend some time — all proceeds benefit the local community through non-profit organizations HAVAR and Athens Area Mediation Service. The 18-hole course is fun, too, weaving through obstacles unique to the area.

Ever considered playing golf in the mouth of a huge bass fish? Well, you can on the nine-hole miniature golf course at Big Cedar Lodge in Southwest Missouri’s Branson/Lakes Area.

Zao Island in Valparaiso, Ind., just outside of Chicago, is like an island retreat in the Midwest. Two 18-hole courses climb a three-story mountain with 25 fountains, 10 waterfalls, bridges and beach-themed houses. Oh, and watch out for the giant dragon!

Five different courses and 91 total holes make for a full day of miniature golf at Pirate's Cove Adventure Golf in Wisconsin Dells, Wis. The courses are made even more enticing by their landscaping — 17 waterfalls and sandstone rock formations.

West

Ahoy, matey! Pirates take over two stories and 18 holes at Buccaneer Bay Mini Golf on the Santa Cruz Boardwalk, California's oldest amusement park.

The original miniature golf course on Catalina Island, Calif., Golf Gardens opened in 1973 and is still in play today in its original state, complete with crevices in the pavement. The 18-hole "adventure golf" course is complicated, with unique holes that challenge any putter.

"A miniature golf course runs through it" at Squaw Valley Alpine Meadows in Lake Tahoe, Calif. Winding its way through the Village at Squaw Valley, the custom-built, mountain-style course reflects the ruggedness of the surrounding area, while challenging players by keeping the next hole out of sight.

Portland, Ore.'s pop-up The 19th Hole miniature golf course is on par through the summer at the Hotel Deluxe. As would be expected in Portland, a food trucks will be available to feed hungry golfers, and nearly 30 craft beers, Oregon wines and Pacific Northwest ciders will be available in cans to sip throughout the game — whether playing or watching.

Craft beer and miniature golf go hand-in-hand at Flatsick Pub in Kirkland, just outside Seattle. Twenty-four rotating taps featuring Washington-only beers and ciders compliment the nine-hole mini golf course, some holes of which putters will set their sights through kegs to reach the other side.

Three Great Wolf Lodge properties — Great Wolf Lodge Mason, Ohio; Great Wolf Lodge Grand Mound, Wash.; Great Wolf Lodge Pocono Mountains, Pa. — feature a Howl at the Moon Glow Golf Course wherein putters of all ages play under the "moonlit" sky. The course is lit entirely by black lights and glowing pathways, lined with a fluorescent psychedelic forest, and with woodland creatures and nature-themed challenges at each hole.