

Golf tourism



Simon and Louise Hudson

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Design and setting by P.K. McBride

9 The Impacts of Golf Tourism

Spotlight: Justin Timberlake's ultimate green golf course

Justin Timberlake at the opening of Mirimichi Golf Course, courtesy of Faith-Ann Young

Justin Timberlake is giving celebrity cachet to green golf courses, building an eco-friendly, Platinum LEED certified golf course development in his home state of Tennessee. Mirimichi Golf Course – a \$16 million project in Woodstock, near Memphis – is the first US course to receive the Audubon Classic Sanctuary certification. Audubon International launched the 'Classic Sanctuary' programme in 2008 for courses in the process of redevelopment or restoration.

Originally known as Big Creek Golf Course, Mirimichi was the course where Timberlake first learnt how to hold a club and hit a ball. His fan club website intermingles golf news and environmental achievements with his celebrity lifestyle and music career – reaching out to a different, younger demographic than the more typical baby-boomer golf target market. In his new Mirimichi website, Timberlake claims to be 'redefining golf courses' and creating harmony between golf, people and nature.

Opened in July 2009, Mirimichi boasts an 18-hole championship course with an educational walking trail where golfers and guests can learn about natural resource usage and responsible energy consumption. Timberlake rescued the course just before it was scheduled for auction. 'We thought it was such a landmark for the community, we'd scoop it and save it. And we did ...when it's finished this summer it will be a Platinum LEED certified green course. The first in the United States of America, so that's pretty exciting that you could take all that land and make it eco-friendly,' he commented.



Golf Tourism

Aiming for PGA Tour quality, the 303-acre site now features irrigation and drainage systems that re-use and maximize the use of rainwater. There are native grass areas, waste bunkers, lakes and streams that reduce maintenance and more lake areas and re-circulating streams that support wildlife. In place of equipment sheds and a maintenance centre, Timberlake has built a 'Natural Resource Management Centre' which features biodegradable treatment of rinse water.

Timberlake planned to use Mirimichi as the headquarters for his celebrity music career. Although the course is upscale and challenging, he also intends to nurture new golfers there with a nine-hole course called 'Little Mirimichi' and an 18-hole putting course. He wants the club to serve as a social and sporty hub for the local community with special programmes targeting families and children. Costs are relatively affordable – from \$59 for weekday rounds and up to \$71 for weekends and holidays. It was thanks to considerable family resources that Timberlake was able to open a new course during the economic downturn which had been sparking golf course closures for the previous two years.

The course features artistic stone cart-path bridges, manmade creeks with re-circulating water, Champion Bermuda greens and Patriot Bermuda fairways. Azalea bushes accent the surrounding landscaping with shade-tolerant grass or pine straw under all the trees. Drainage systems in the 80 sand bunkers prevent sand from washing away. Only half the 200-acre course will be mowed as native grasses have been planted in between play areas. Bordered by a forested buffer which prevents any future adjoining development, the new cart paths follow a shady route. The 18 holes have been transformed by Mike MacElhose and Randy Wilson so that the previously flat front nine now features undulating topography and both uphill and downhill shots on the rolling fairways. The workforce comprised around 120 construction and staff workers. In this nature-reserve style atmosphere, Mirimichi staff monitor water flow, count wildlife annually and calculate the club's carbon footprint.

Timberlake has already hosted his own PGA Tour tournament (the Justin Timberlake Shriners' Hospitals for Children Open) and regularly plays with professional golfers. During the 2009 PGA Tour events, the Golf Channel aired a series of short videos called 'Choose your course,' which highlighted the work of superintendents and the environmental benefits of golf courses. The messages were introduced by Timberlake.

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