

“EXOTIC GOLF IN MALAYSIA” by Cori Brett, special to the AWGA



Bukit Jambul Country Club with Penang in the background

I made my way to Baggage Claim at Penang Airport through throngs of colorfully dressed people who were definitely in a party mood. Laughter and greetings filled the night air, thick with humidity and tropical scents. Something big was happening. When I finally located transportation and asked what was going on, the answer was, “It’s Buddha’s birthday!”

FORTUNE magazine had sent me to Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, and Penang on what turned out to be one of my favorite golf assignments: to write an article about the top golf courses in Asia. I assembled a panel of golf experts in various Asian countries to tell me their favorites. Now I was seeing the courses first-hand.

My first stop was Singapore Island Country Club (SICC). Singapore’s laws are fairly strict, especially when it comes to journalists. I was assigned a “handler,” a lively young woman named “Foo Kit Loo,” who rarely let me out of her sight. SICC dates from 1891 when then-Governor Sir Cecil Smith launched SICC as Singapore’s first golf club. It remains the most prestigious club in Singapore, with four 18-hole courses on two different sites.

The club's President kindly invited me to play the stunning Island Course. It was quite hilly, with fairways weaving in and out of jungly terrain and around the banks of Pierce Reservoir. Playful monkeys accompanied our round, swinging like acrobats among the tree limbs high above. After a few holes, he became very quiet. Ms. Foo, following closely behind in a golf cart, drove up alongside me and whispered, "Not a good idea hit ball farther than President."

I was in Penang to visit the second course on my list, Bukit Jambul Country Club, which was designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr. Jones told me he made "donations" to snake charmers at the local temple near the property in order to resolve a "cobra problem." I had one eye out for cobras the entire time.

Bukit Jambul was fun yet challenging with lots of doglegs and blind shots. From the tenth tee, some 160 feet above the fairway, panoramic views extended out over the island all the way to the eight-mile bridge connecting Penang to the Malay mainland. I'm glad to say that no cobras appeared, only a lazy green iguana lumbering across the fairway.

I stayed at the lovely Hotel Equatorial, next to Bukit Jambul, and was introduced to Malaysian cuisine. Wow! It's a delicious "cosmic array," derived from the country's multi-ethnic population, who are mostly of Malay, Indian, Thai, Arab, and Chinese ancestry. I'm on the lookout for a Malaysian restaurant in Phoenix.



The Hotel Equatorial overlooking Bukit Jambul Golf Course



The Mines Resort & Golf Club

Top LPGA players will come up against Malaysia's humid equatorial climate this October when they compete in the inaugural Sime Darby LPGA Malaysia at Kuala Lumpur Golf and Country Club. In another "first-ever in Malaysia," the PGA TOUR introduces the CIMB Asia Pacific Classic October 28-31, at The MINES Resort & Golf Club, just south of KL.

The MINES was once a derelict wasteland on the site of the abandoned Hong Fatt Mine, formerly one of the world's largest tin mines. Malaysian magnate Tan Sri Lee Kim Yew purchased the ugly duckling and transformed it into The MINES Resort City, which includes a beach resort surrounding a 150-acre lake and the championship golf course, another masterpiece designed by Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

Mr. Lee's latest project, MINES Golf City, is a 63-hole golf course designed entirely by female golfers. Good for him! He's already enlisted Annika Sorenstam to design the first 18. Se Ri Pak will be the designer for the next 18 holes.

Malaysia is on the move, rivaling China as Asia's leading golf destination. For more information, contact Tourism Malaysia at www.tourism.gov.my. I can't wait to go back!

"Escape with Cori" on assignment to exotic and fun golf destinations. First-hand impressions from an experienced golf travel writer and AWGA member, available only on the AWGA website. www.coribrett.com