

“WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CORI BRETT?”

May 2011

“MY CHINESE CADDIE”



Cori Brett with two caddies at Mission Hills Resort, Haikou, China.

The first time I played golf with a female caddie was in Singapore. She was about five feet tall and maybe 100 pounds, and she carried my bag for the full 18. It was extremely hot and humid that day. I was exhausted just walking and playing. But watching her carry my heavy golf bag the entire round, I felt like a pampered foreigner and even a little guilty.

Mission Hills Resorts in Shenzhen and Haikou, China, employ several thousand female caddies between both locations. Caddie jobs are highly prized. Many applicants show up when an opening is announced. Selection is highly competitive, and the positions include lodging and meals on property. Vocational schools train young girls for caddie jobs.

Each player at the Mission Hills Resorts is assigned a caddie. I love playing with my own caddie, especially one so personable and knowledgeable. After just a few holes, she knows how to club me. It's amazing. Just when I'm sure the shot calls for my seven-iron – it's my 100-yard club, after all – my caddie protests, “No, you need six- iron.” Patiently she explains - this hole plays longer, the approach is slightly uphill, and there's a slight wind in my face. Oh. Of course, she's right. She knows her player, and she knows her course. Especially impressive at Mission Hills, where Shenzhen has 12 courses and Haikou has 10.



Cori's caddie riding on the modified golf cart

Mission Hills has special golf carts with a little platform on the back so the caddies can stand up. Or they can drive the cart if you prefer to walk, and they will run across the fairway to bring you the correct club. They read putts, find lost balls, rake bunkers, and occasionally give advice when it's just too hard not to speak up.

My caddie wears a bright white helmet with a wide brim and a jumpsuit with lots of pockets. She's a treasure trove. Golf tees long and short, ball markers, divot mix, bandaids, sunscreen, and even cookies. Before we start, she stocks the golf cart with bottles of water. She spreads a towel across the seat, so much more comfortable than sticking to the plastic on a hot day.

Caddies with more training and better English skills are allowed to wear a gold bib. Newer caddies wear a red bib. Sometimes I've found the red caddie is better than the gold caddie. But they all have to endure the rating system when the round is over. Each player is handed a card with the caddie's name on it, and asked to rate her performance by dropping the card in one of the slots marked "Excellent, Good, Average, Poor." The caddies watch surreptitiously but with some trepidation to see which slot receives their card.

Along the way, I learned some Chinese words and she learned some English. We laughed and chatted, enjoying our disjointed conversation and finding a bond of communication in the common language of golf. As I have come to know, it's the same all over the world.

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