

“TEE IT UP IN CHINA” by Cori Brett, Special to the AWGA



Pinch me, I must be dreaming. I'm in the world's largest golf clubhouse, 680,000 square feet, deciding which of 12 stunningly beautiful golf courses to play, and everyone seems to be speaking Chinese.

This is Mission Hills Golf Club. It's a 4,500-acre oasis in the industrial boomtown of Shenzhen, one hour north of Hong Kong. Mission Hills opened its first golf course in 1995, designed by Jack Nicklaus to host the World Cup. By its 12th anniversary Mission Hills boasted 12 courses. Now it's ranked the largest golf complex in the world by the Guinness World Records.

Bright red hibiscus and colorful bougainvillea flowers blossom all over Mission Hills. The tropical climate can be hot and humid, yet the few women players I saw were all bundled up -- long pants, long sleeves, and big brimmed hats with protective fabric down to their shoulders. Why? I'm told that white skin is highly prized so sun protection is vital.

Courses reflect their designers' styles, golf legends all. You might play "the Annika Course," or Duval, Leadbetter, Vijay, Els, Ozaki, Norman. Courses by Olazabal, Faldo, Pete Dye, and China's Zhang Lian Wei, plus Nicklaus' World Cup Course, complete the dozen. Scottsdale-based Schmidt-Curley Design collaborated as golf course architect on 10 of the 12.

I loved the cheerful caddies in their bright red uniforms and crisp white brimmed helmets. Mission Hills employs nearly 3,000 caddies, all female. Every player is assigned a caddie. They drive carts, spot balls, accurately club their players, and read putts with the best of them. I became accustomed to my caddie saying, "Hello, have you had breakfast?" It's a polite form of greeting and not an indication that I looked undernourished. Caddie wages include meals and lodging on site. No wonder competition is strong for caddie jobs.

Mission Hills is both a country club, with more than 10,000 members, and a destination resort. (www.missionhillsgroup.com) The staff mostly speaks English, and I felt comfortable traveling alone. Pro shops in the golf clubhouses carry familiar brands like Ashworth, Nike, Callaway, and Mission Hills' own brand of clothing. I spent as much time as possible in the luxurious clubhouse spas.



The Chinese version of hot stone massage uses smooth green jade instead of river rocks. Two blissful hours of authentic Chinese foot reflexology had me walking on air.

ASU grad and celebrity instructor Cindy Reid owns and operates her own 30,000-square-foot learning center at Mission Hills. Reid left her position as director of instruction at TPC Sawgrass after 17 years to come to Mission Hills. She loves Asia but says teaching golf through a translator can be tough!



Golf has come a long way in China since Mission Hills hosted the World Cup in 1995. That was the first time many Chinese had ever seen professional golf. Kids played in bunkers, people ran onto the fairways to take golf balls as souvenirs, and spectators wore dressy clothes and high heels. The event returns to Mission Hills

each November through 2018 as the Omega Mission Hills World Cup. Two-man teams from 28 countries compete on the majestic Olazabal Course. It's all about elevation changes through deep ravines, rugged mountains, and lush untouched jungle. This beautiful course makes for great TV viewing. We can watch the World Cup on the Golf Channel in the U.S. I'd like to see how the pros handle those 160 bunkers. And will they show the huge white marble statue of Guan Yin, some 90 feet high, that sits alongside the 18th tee? Guan Yin is the goddess of mercy and compassion, which all golfers need from time to time.

Done with Scotland and Ireland? It's time to experience all that China has to offer as a golf destination.

“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

