

BEST NEW COURSE ASIA

NORMAN'S NEW

VIETNAMESE ROLE

Greg Norman's 105th completed design, KN Golf Links – Cam Ranh, has added even more bite to the notion that Vietnam is the must-visit golf destination of South-East Asia.
By Ju Kuang Tan & Brad Clifton



WATER COMES INTO PLAY EARLY WITH SOME FAIRWAYS CURVING AROUND LARGE PONDS, ENCOURAGING YOU TO FAVOUR A CERTAIN SHOT SHAPE.



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GOLF development is alive and well and living in, well, Vietnam it seems. Word of more than a dozen new courses earmarked to be opened during the next decade is becoming more reality than rumour. And the opening of yet another world-class Greg Norman layout along the Vietnam coast points to this inevitability.

KN Golf Links opened in October 2018 and serves to be the premier course in the Nha Trang area. A 10-minute drive from Cam Ranh Airport (an hour's flight from Ho Chi Minh City) takes you to the vast, multi-purpose development spanning several hundred hectares alongside Cam Ranh Bay and right on top of what was previously a US military base during the Vietnam War. Adding to the army narrative is the fact that the course's owner is a decorated former war general who, legend has it, has so many medals he requires two jackets to display them all.

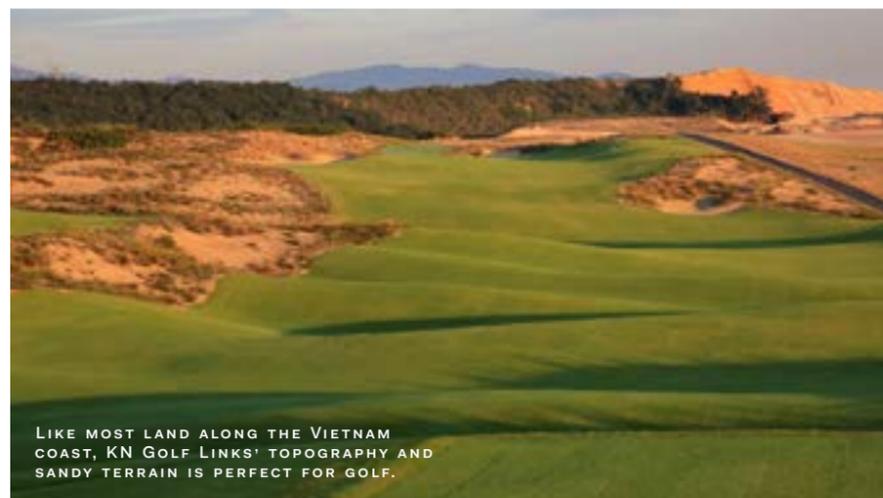
"KN is the third golf facility under the owners, the others being Long Thanh Golf and Residential Resort in Ho Chi Minh City, and Long Vien Golf Club in Laos," says Simon Mees, general manager of KN Golf Links. "They embarked on this project to further enhance their golf portfolio and their standing as one of Vietnam's main golf and residential developers. The vision for the KN Paradise master development is to

help Vietnam develop as a golf tourism and investment destination."

Helping that cause will be Norman himself, who, during the same trip to officially open KN Golf Links, was made Tourism Ambassador for Vietnam in what is a major coup for the country. In his role, Norman and his golf course design team will advise the Vietnamese government on how best to utilise golf as a platform for enhancing the growth of international tourism, assist in establishing a comprehensive environmental policy for golf development and maintenance,

assist in facilitating relationships with the international governing organisations in golf, the development of new golfers and enhancing the popularity of golf in Vietnam.

"I am honoured and privileged to have the opportunity to be a part of the development and success of the emerging golf tourism market in Vietnam and to use what I have learned over 40 years in golf, business and working alongside governments to help build a model of sustainable growth and development," Norman said. "Golf is a global language and Vietnam has seen tremendous continuous growth over the past decade."



LIKE MOST LAND ALONG THE VIETNAM COAST, KN GOLF LINKS' TOPOGRAPHY AND SANDY TERRAIN IS PERFECT FOR GOLF.



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NORMAN HAD A PERFECT CANVAS AT KN GOLF LINKS TO SCULPT A GREAT COURSE AND CONTINUE HIS DESIGN LEGACY IN VIETNAM.



“ “ WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT WHAT HAPPENED HERE DURING THE '60S AND '70S AND WHERE WE ARE TODAY WITH A COMMUNIST COUNTRY... – GREG NORMAN

Like most land along the Vietnam coast, KN Golf Links' topography and nature of the sandy terrain is perfect for the construction of a golf course. Little earth needed to be moved, and Norman had a perfect canvas to create a great course and continue his design legacy in this country that's spearheaded by The Bluffs Ho Tram Strip and BRG Danang Golf Club.

Like the two Norman courses that preceded it, the 18 holes on the Cam Ranh Peninsula, an easy 40-minute drive from the city of Nha Trang, possess the Shark's DNA of undulating terrain and the use of the dunes as vast visual elements. But the departure here is that water comes into play a little more pertinently with some fairways curving around large ponds encouraging you to favour a certain shot shape. And while the course may not be immediately located next to the sea, its elevated nature provides great views of the Cam Ranh coastline and the amazingly blue waters the area is known for.

“One of the striking features that hit me

when I first viewed the course was the elevation changes due to the rolling dunes,” Mees describes. “I was surprised that these were natural to the site. Obviously players will need to take these rises and falls into consideration with their club choices to ensure they are not swallowed up by the many run-offs and catchment areas. If they are accurate they will find that the greens are generally fair, however do beware that there is subtle undulation to contend with.”

The owners appear to have spared little in making KN Golf Links one of the premier golf establishments in the country. “The key selling points would be definitely be centred around the golf course,” Mees continues. “We believe that it is the region's first true links course not only in terms of design but more importantly playing conditions, thanks largely to our decision to use zoysia grass.

“One other unique addition to the services that we offer is that the caddies will all have the latest StayPrime hand-held, walker GPS technology, which I believe we will be the

first club in Vietnam to offer its players.”

For Norman, a man with great respect and thirst for global military history, the Cam Ranh project took very little convincing.

“When I first came over here I flew over the naval base at Cam Ranh Bay – one of the largest natural deepwater bays in the world – and spotted submarines,” Norman recalled while playing 18 holes with AUSTRALIAN GOLF DIGEST during the official opening. “If you take a look around you can see military radars and existing military compounds on the property. Soldiers even helped us plant the grass around the course. When you think about what happened during the '60s and '70s (at the height of the Vietnam War) and where we are today with a communist country... it's a free-market capitalist approach, right? It's just been an unbelievable transformation and I'm extremely honoured to be a part of what's happening here.”

Apart from the 18-hole links course, Cam Ranh Links boasts a nine-hole Oasis course with floodlighting, a driving range and practice areas, a golf academy, the Horizon Restaurant, the Links Café, two private dining rooms and two additional meeting rooms.

Visitors are welcome to enjoy the facilities with pay-and-play green fees available. The Wyndham Grand Hotel will open later this year, providing travelling golfers with on-site accommodation. “We will also work closely with many of the hotels on Cam Ranh Long Beach in order for them to offer stay and play packages,” Mees adds. 📍



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