

Life

Al Zorah: First Look

Ajman's maiden golf course is nearing completion

For a country with the UAE's appetite for golf development, nearly six years without a new championship golf course amounts to a notable break. But this golfing drought is about to end and furthermore, the stunning Troon Golf-managed Al Zorah in Ajman will more than justify the wait. ▶▶



PAR 4
HOLE 16
359 YDS

PAR 3
HOLE 17
210 YDS

PAR 3
HOLE 15
189 YDS

A Al Zorah's mangrove reserve is a haven for wildlife, from flamingoes to other water birds and crabs

B A raised boardwalk helps integrate these closing holes with the tidal flow and native mangrove areas. These island tee boxes are shared by holes 16 and 18

C Nicklaus Design has used a variety of bunkering to protect Al Zorah's green complexes

D A unique tidal flow system will change the character and complexion of Al Zorah on an hourly basis. At high tide, these waste areas will form a network of lakes, while at low tide, you'll be able to play from them!

A

B

C

D

Al Zorah's 18th hole is a perfect example of how Nicklaus Design have integrated the mangroves without intruding upon them



"Ajman is one of the UAE's fastest growing emirates so it should come as no surprise that the Al Zorah golf course by Nicklaus Design will be the jewel in the crown for Ajman. Al Zorah is a premium lifestyle destination where luxury and rejuvenation combine to create a place where a healthy lifestyle takes precedence over all."

Imad Dana, CEO of Al Zorah Development Company

There are two high profile courses nearing completion in the UAE and their respective launch strategies are poles apart. ▶ One is spearheaded by Donald Trump, a man who is never content to simply let his golf courses do the talking. And in stark contrast with the business tycoon's brash declarations is the quietly confident approach adopted by the Al Zorah Development. Recruiting Nicklaus Design for its first UAE assignment, industry experts Troon Golf will manage a golf course of many unique and exciting firsts.

When Al Zorah opens for play in December of this year, Ajman will become the fifth emirate to boast a high quality golf course (only Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain will remain without). It is this unique location that makes Al Zorah a pioneer on several levels. As the centrepiece for a master development that will eventually comprise hotels, a waterfront and a luxury residential component, the project's focus is nature and the preservation of a natural reserve stretching across over one million square metres of mangroves.

So as well as being a first for Ajman, Al Zorah will also be a first for the region. Deliberately set away from the residential areas, the golf course will offer players the chance to escape to nature. Perhaps its most exciting feature though, is the integration of a tidal system that will alter the complexion of the course on an hourly basis. At high tide, players will find

themselves suddenly confronted by a network of new water hazards, while at low tide these chameleonic lakes will recede to allow intrepid golfers to pursue (and even play) waywardly struck balls.

It is difficult to accurately assess the eventual character of a golf course while it's still in the construction phase, but having previously taken similar tours of The Els Club and Saadiyat Beach for *Golf Digest Middle East*, the early signs are that Al Zorah will stand alongside those great tracks. As Course Superintendent Terrance Mohamed and Golf Project Manager, Mike Knudsen, guided us through the back nine, the par 3s, 15 and 17 immediately caught the eye.

"In my experience golfers tend to remember par 3 holes above any others, and from that perspective I think Al Zorah will have some of the best in the region," says Knudsen. "The fact that the developers

were mindful of giving the golf course ample space has been very liberating from a design and construction standpoint. The thing I love most about Al Zorah is that you can play any hole out here and feel like you have the place to yourself."

While the character and the surrounding environment is very different, Al Zorah shares plenty in common with another Troon facility, the immaculate Els Club at Dubai Sports City. Generous fairways and landing areas are a central theme for both, with the green complexes providing much of the challenge. That being said, wild tee shots could quickly lead to high numbers on several of the holes we saw. While Dirk Bouts, the senior design associate at Nicklaus Design, wants the waste areas to be 'playable', there are spots on this golf course you really don't want to wind up in, starting with the mangroves.

Nor is Al Zorah going to be one-dimensional off the tee.

The par 3 15th will see the course's tidal feature come dramatically into play



An aerial view of Al Zorah's back nine, with the 18th hole running adjacent to the mangroves



Generous fairways will play towards some challenging, well guarded green complexes



You can forget any notion of automatically reaching for the driver, as evidenced by the short par 4 16th, which plays from a set of island tees shared by 18 up to a well-protected green. A raised boardwalk weaves between the tee boxes and over the tidal areas, a feature that Knudsen cites as his personal favourite.

"I think Nicklaus Design has made the most of the opportunity provided by the tidal flow and the mangroves to make them part of the personality of Al Zorah," he explains. "It would have been much simpler to just fill the edge of the mangroves, but the raised boardwalk and the island tees will be well worth the time and effort

invested. The wildlife in this part of the golf course will also be a special addition."

Set about a kilometre inland but exposed to the elements, that most unpredictable variable of the golfing challenge - wind - will add even more changability to Al Zorah's playing characteristics. Prone to switch just as frequently as the tides that wash in and out of the waterways, Knudsen asserts that no hole will 'ever play the same way twice'.

"We believe golfers will love this course, and once they play it, they'll want to come back," he says. As anticipation begins to build, it's not difficult to share these sentiments.

—ROBBIE GREENFIELD