



"THIS WAS AN INCREDIBLE OPPORTUNITY TO OPEN A MARQUEE FACILITY IN THE UAE AND CREATE HISTORY IN AJMAN BY OPENING THE FIRST GOLF FACILITY IN THE EMIRATE."

PHILIP HENDERSON

AL ZORAH GOLF CLUB RUGGED, WINDSWEPT ADVENTURE

In just over 18 months, the Nicklaus Designed Al Zorah Golf Club in Ajman has gone from little more than a pile of dirt to a fully fledged, fully grassed, spectacular 18-hole masterpiece.

This latest edition to the UAE's golf offering is a sight to behold and a different proposition to any other track in the region. Just a short 25 minute drive from Dubai International Airport the course, which is set 1km back from the shoreline, forms part of the ambitious 5.4 million square metre Al Zorah Resort Project which will include five residential communities, hotels, a beachfront and four marinas.

Scheduled for a December opening, there's a wonderful feeling of windswept escapism and adventure about the eco-friendly Al Zorah

course which will definitely appeal to golfers looking to flee the bustle of Dubai for the weekend as well as to the international tourist trade the resort is sure to attract. From the flocks of flamingos and 58 different species of birds to the 1 million square metres of signature mangroves and the unique recess areas which empty and fill with water at different times of the day according to the tidal system, there's something a bit special about this new Troon-managed course.

Phil Henderson is the man charged with steering the ship on the golf side in his new role as Al Zorah Golf Club General Manager. Here he talks exclusively to *Worldwide Golf* about what attracted him to this unique development and his plans for the role going forwards.



PHILIP HENDERSON



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WORLDWIDE GOLF: Tell us about your background in the game and your career prior to the Al Zorah appointment?

PHILIP HENDERSON: I've been playing this beautiful game since early childhood and have a massive passion and drive for golf. I think in some ways I was destined to be a part of this industry. I've been operating with Troon for the past 11 years and over that time I've been given the opportunity to work in England, Portugal, Egypt, Greece, UAE, Bahrain and most recently in Azerbaijan where we opened the first golf course in the country.

WWG: What attracted you to this position?

PH: This was an incredible opportunity to open a marquee facility in the UAE and create history in Ajman by opening the first golf facility in the Emirate, as well as the first Nicklaus Design course in the Middle East.

WWG: There's already an abundance of golf courses in the UAE – how will Al Zorah stand out from the crowd?

PH: The environment and setting of the golf course will offer an extremely tranquil and relaxed feel to our members and guests. One of the unique points of this golf course is the tidal system, which means playing during high tide will provide a different experience to playing during low tide.

WWG: What can people expect as far as a golfing experience at Al Zorah Golf Club goes?

PH: The Troon experience delivers optimal playing conditions and a personalized level of service, so members and guests can certainly expect that when they go to Al Zorah Golf Club.

WWG: Being a resort course means it has to be all things to all people to a certain extent. How does the course succeed in being a challenge for low handicappers, while still being enjoyable for the occasional golfer?

PH: The use of different tee boxes will be a key factor in determining the difficulty of the golf course, as that will affect the carry distances to the fairways and whether the water hazards will have an impact on your wayward tee shots.

WWG: The course has been developed in lightening quick time, which is very unusual – particularly in this region. How has that been achieved?

PH: The strong working relationships between Nicklaus Design, Troon and Al Zorah have been instrumental to where we are currently.

WWG: Al Zorah Golf Club will be a public course – what sort of price point will you be positioning the green fees at?

PH: We will position the facility in line with our nearest competitors and below the current rates set in Dubai or Abu Dhabi. Our facility will offer affordable luxury to our members and guests.

WWG: Tell us about the overall project – what else can people expect?

PH: Al Zorah's master plan, which is spread across 5.4 million square metres, includes five distinct communities set around multiple natural entities, including 1 million square metres of mangroves, not to be found on this scale anywhere else in the UAE. The project has a beautiful setting with spectacular views of the ocean, beach, creek, and of course the 18 hole Nicklaus Design golf course. Solidere International has partnered with the Government of Ajman to create this green, one-of-a-kind lifestyle and leisure destination for residents and visitors, alike.

The initial investment in the project includes four state-of-the-art marinas, two world-class beachfront hotels and resorts, an 18-hole golf course and clubhouse, golf villas, serviced residential apartments, and more. The golf course, golf villas and four state-of-the-art marinas, along with the infrastructure and landscaping, will be the first components of Al Zorah to be completed. The flagship hotels in the development, The Oberoi Al Zorah and LUX*Al Zorah, will also be central to the project and will welcome visitors looking for a relaxing holiday. Recently, Al Zorah also announced the Al Zorah Beach Residence and Golf Estates, which allow residents views of the beachfront and golf course, respectively.

At Al Zorah's iconic, The Pavilion, visitors can indulge in a wide range of relaxing activities that are guaranteed to add a flavour of luxury to their day. Watching pink flamingos in the mangroves, witnessing breath-taking views, enjoying fine dining culinary delicacies, and playing a round of golf are just some of the experiences that Al Zorah has to offer.

Residents can look forward to these and more, including the truly unique walkable environments, where interconnectivity is seamless, via bicycling, walking and running trails, which cut across the entire development. The marinas are already complete and from January 2016 those with a penchant for sailing can start taking advantage of Marina 1 at Al Zorah, which is currently being fitted out to welcome boats



L-R: PHILIP HENDERSON (AL ZORAH GOLF CLUB GENERAL MANAGER), ROBIN EVANS (TROON VICE PRESIDENT CONSTRUCTION AND AGRONOMY), DIRK BOUTS (NICKLAUS DESIGN SENIOR DESIGN ASSOCIATE) AND MIKE KNUDSEN (AL ZORAH PROJECT MANAGER GOLF COURSE).

WWG: Given that the course is outside of Dubai, how important is the 'stay and play' aspect?

PH: Stay and Play will be important to the success of our business model, however the facility is only a short 25 minute's drive from Dubai International Airport and I think people staying there will happily make the drive to play this incredible golf course.

WWG: Are there any plans for Al Zorah to look at hosting a professional event down the line?

PH: The golf course can facilitate a professional event and this will be an avenue we will look into once the facility is open.

WWG: What else still needs to happen for the course to be 100% complete?

PH: The major works to the golf course have now been completed and we will be focusing on the day-to-day cultural practices as well as our operational requirements.

WWG: What is the schedule for the clubhouse and what will it feature?

PH: The permanent clubhouse will be completed by the end of 2017 and will offer the luxury that our members and guests are exposed to in our neighbouring Emirates. However, there is a temporary club house at The Pavilion, where golfers can make the most of the spectacular views of the mangroves and golf course, whilst enjoying some light food and refreshing beverages.

WWG: What are your aims for Al Zorah Golf Club over the next two years?

PH: Initially, we will launch a limited membership model which is expected to attract plenty of discerning golfers from around the UAE. Our team is also working very closely with Oberoi and LUX Resorts & Hotels who are both part of the Al Zorah development to ensure that our Stay & Play packages are a successful component of our facility.

To make a tee-time reservation, please visit www.alzorahgolfclub.ae The course is expected to open this coming December.