

THE SIX-YEAR WAIT FOR A NEW 18-HOLE GOLF COURSE IN THE UAE IS OVER. WE HAVE FOLLOWED THE PROGRESS AT **AL ZORAH GOLF CLUB** WITH INCREASING LEVELS OF EXCITEMENT SINCE THE SUMMER, AND LATE LAST MONTH PLAYED ALL 18 HOLES FOR THE FIRST TIME. **AJMAN'S FIRST GOLF COURSE**, OPEN FOR PLAY ON **DECEMBER 9**, DID NOT DISAPPOINT
BY ROBBIE GREENFIELD

PLAY

DATE

▶ **YOU ALREADY KNOW ABOUT** the unique tidal flow system, the mangroves and the island tee boxes. Now it's time to look more closely at the holes themselves at Al Zorah Golf Club, a project by Nicklaus Design that is managed by Troon Golf and open for general play on the ninth of this month.

It was clear from our first visit in the summer that something exciting was developing here, but as the club have applied the finishing touches to the layout, Al Zorah has exceeded expectations. ▶▶▶





The simple fact is, golf courses are judged primarily by the quality and variety of their holes, and no amount of clever features can change that reality. Yes, they can enhance it, but the holes have to be fun to play in the first place. And here, they are emphatically just that. The ground at Al Zorah is firm and bouncy, like a British links in summer, and while the club expect conditions to soften as the turf continues to mature, this set-up does inject a wonderful pace and variety into the shots here.

The occasional bare lie might scare those with less reliable short games, but this is compensated by the sheer variety of options on every pitch, from soft floaters to bump and runs. Off the tee, Al Zorah Golf Club is generous. There are only a handful of holes where you really need to hit it straight, and like most other great courses, this layout is all about the approach shots. From greens guarded only by slopes and swales (like the 10th) to putting surfaces all but surrounded by complex bunker systems (six and eight), Al Zorah is anything but formulaic.

It's tough to pick stand-out holes, but the par 3s as a quartet are among the finest in the region. Balance is everything in golf, and senior design associate Dirk Bouts and his team at Nicklaus Design have struck a fine one between holes that demand caution, and ones where that caution can be thrown to the wind. And there's plenty of that latter element, too, on this exposed stretch of coastal land in Ajman. Al Zorah Golf Club is a tremendous addition to the golfing landscape in the Middle East, and it won't be long before avid local players are in full agreement. 📍

STARS PAY AL ZORAH GC A VISIT:

THERE HAS BEEN PLENTY OF EXCITEMENT SURROUNDING THE OPENING OF AL ZORAH GOLF CLUB, AND THE BUZZ HAS EVEN REACHED THE UPPER ECHELONS OF THE GAME, WITH RYDER CUP CAPTAIN DARREN CLARKE (RIGHT) AND RISING STAR BYEONG HUN-AN (BELOW) ENJOYING ROUNDS AT THE BRAND NEW LAYOUT LAST MONTH. BOTH MEN WERE IMPRESSED WITH WHAT THEY SAW.



HOLE-BY-HOLE

Our rundown of every hole at Al Zorah Golf Club

FRONT NINE

Hole 1

Par 5 • 538 yards

Arguably the most obvious birdie hole, this is wide open off the tee and very reachable in two for long hitters. If you lay up, a generous landing zone should leave just a wedge to a fairly well-sheltered green

Hole 2

Par 4 • 463 yards

Long and tough, especially into the prevailing wind. You'll want to avoid the native areas to the right of the fairway, with a good drive leaving a mid to long-iron in. There is room to the left of the green but either way a par will always be good here

Hole 3

Par 4 • 422 yards

Playing back across the native tidal area, this is a really good dogleg right. Big drives that bite off the corner will give you an opportunity to go at a heavily protected green with a wedge

Hole 4

Par 4 • 429 yards

There are four fairway bunkers to contend with but plenty of room nonetheless. Another four traps surround a raised green and while you're unlikely to find big trouble on this hole, it still requires two well struck shots to find the green

Hole 5

Par 4 • 418 yards

The first real test off the tee, there's a large lake left and bunkers right on this uncompromising par 4. Good players will probably hit 3-wood, then go in with something like a 7-iron to a green with sand left and front right

Hole 6

Par 3 • 170 yards

The first of four brilliant par 3s. It's the shortest of the quartet, but fraught with trouble, not least the tidal flat that floods at high tide, not to mention five bunkers that surround the green. Short and right is the only bail out, but it's tight!

Hole 7

Par 4 • 354 yards

What it lacks in length, it makes up for in precision. We played a mid-iron off the tee to leave a wedge in. Big hitters may fancy trying to drive the green from further forward, but with mangroves all down the left this is risky

Hole 8

Par 3 • 224 yards

Another outstanding one-shotter, the tidal system comes into play down the right as a diagonally-shaped green takes refuge behind a formidable bunker complex. One of your best shots of the day required here

Hole 9

Par 5 • 560 yards

One million square metres of natural mangroves flank your right side on a daunting tee shot. This will be a lay-up hole for all but the longest hitters, and you'll want to play down the left if you can

BACK NINE

Hole 10

Par 4 • 393 yards

The first of two consecutive greens not to feature any bunkers at all, this is one of the more straightforward par 4s. Nevertheless, tricky swales can still catch out mis-struck approach shots

Hole 11

Par 5 • 511 yards

A terrific looking hole that also spells a great birdie chance. With the mangrove bank alongside, you play from another set of island tees to a firm, sloping fairway, while the tide presents an ever changing picture up the left. Part of the challenge here is dealing with the many awkward lies you can find on both your second and third shot

Hole 12

Par 4 • 446 yards

A slope on the left side of this fairway will feed drives back to the middle, but you need some distance on this one because it's a tricky second shot. At high tide the water will once again come into play on the left of the approach

Hole 13

Par 4 • 450 yards

A strong contender for the toughest hole on the course, this par 4 has a lake that runs the entire length of its left side and a well-placed trap to catch tee shots erring towards the right. Flags tucked left on this green will need to be treated with extreme caution

Hole 14

Par 4 • 428 yards

If 13 gets your pulse racing, you should at least be able to pause for breath on a hole that offers plenty of room off the tee. There is a basin to the left of the green to catch approach shots that go left and a small bunker tucked in to the right

Hole 15

Par 3 • 200 yards

Into the wind, this is one of the hardest shots you will hit all day. Another lake makes its presence felt to your left, and two bunkers squeezed to the right make for a daunting challenge. Par will be a great score here

Hole 16

Par 4 • 371 yards

Heading back the other way, Al Zorah's second lake is once again a prominent feature on this dogleg left. 3-wood might well be the best play from the tee, because a string of bunkers lie in wait down the right

Hole 17

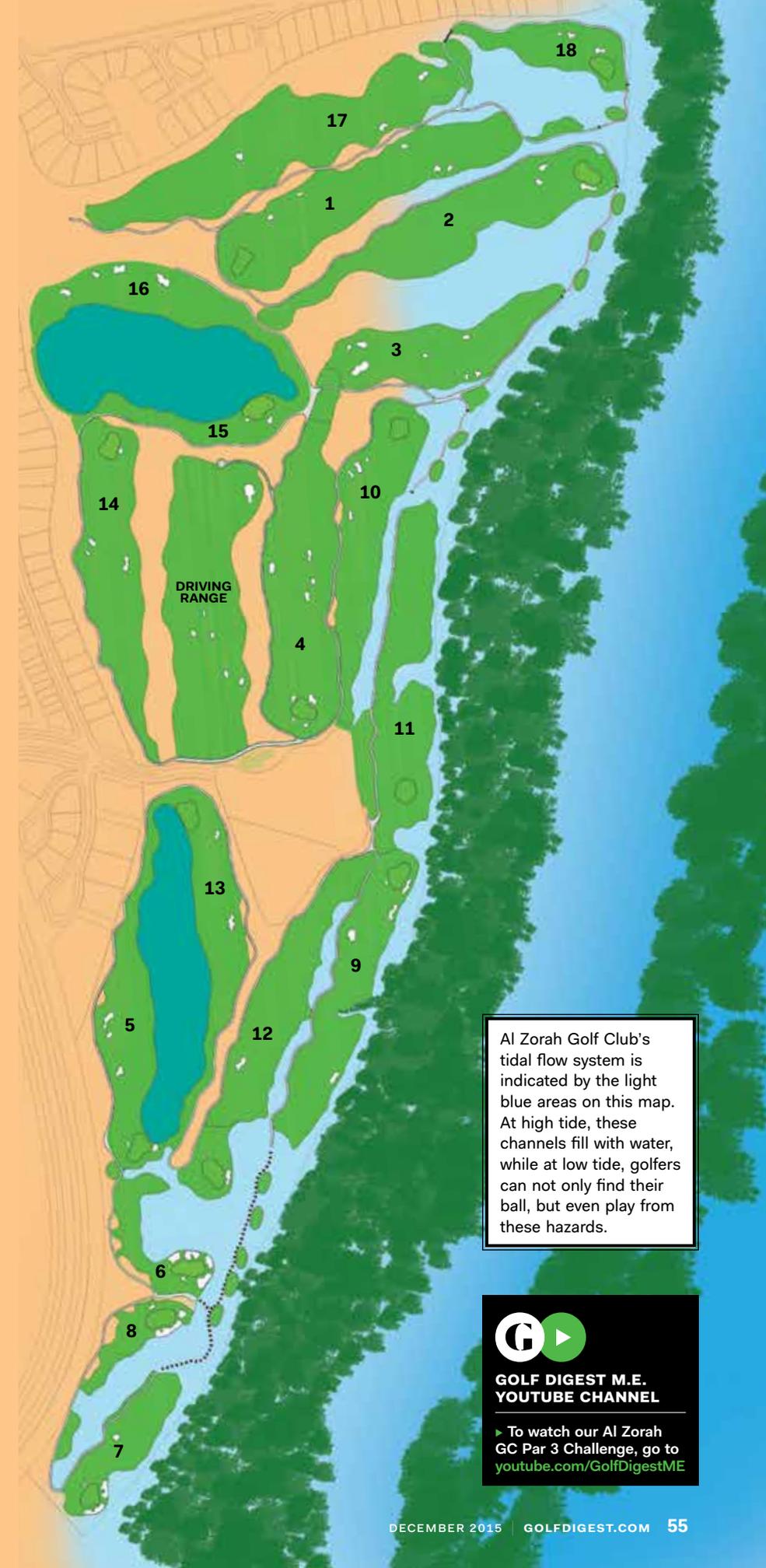
Par 5 • 555 yards

Another wide landing area off the tee gives players the chance to find a precious birdie late on in the round. Confident pitchers will be able to play just short in two on this par 5 and attack the flag locations on a fairly flat putting surface

Hole 18

Par 3 • 237 yards

The only par 3 finisher in the Middle East, Al Zorah Golf Club signs off in style with this picturesque but lengthy beauty playing back towards the mangroves. From the back tee you will need at least a hybrid to find a slanted green with a distinct hump running through the middle. A par here will definitely send you back to the clubhouse with a smile



Al Zorah Golf Club's tidal flow system is indicated by the light blue areas on this map. At high tide, these channels fill with water, while at low tide, golfers can not only find their ball, but even play from these hazards.

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YOUTUBE CHANNEL
 ▶ To watch our Al Zorah GC Par 3 Challenge, go to youtube.com/GolfDigestME