

TROON CHIEF RELISHING AL ZORAH OPENING

When Al Zorah Golf Club in Ajman opens for play next month it is set to take the UAE golfing scene by storm. In a region blessed with an abundance of world-class courses, there is nothing quite like this windswept, beautifully manicured coastal oasis. The Nicklaus Design, managed by Troon Golf, will offer something for everyone – from the weekend warrior to the touring professional, the variety of challenges available on this cleverly designed track is remarkable. But it's the opportunity of an 'escape to nature' which will prove truly tantalising to both the region's golfers and the significant tourist trade; the chance to escape the metropolis of Dubai to play golf among the mangroves and the flamingos with the wind in your face and the smell of the sea in your nostrils. Mark Chapleski, Area Managing Director, Senior Vice President, Troon Golf Middle East, has overseen the development of some of the area's finest courses but, as he tells Worldwide Golf, he's licking his lips in anticipation at the unveiling of the UAE's latest golfing gem.

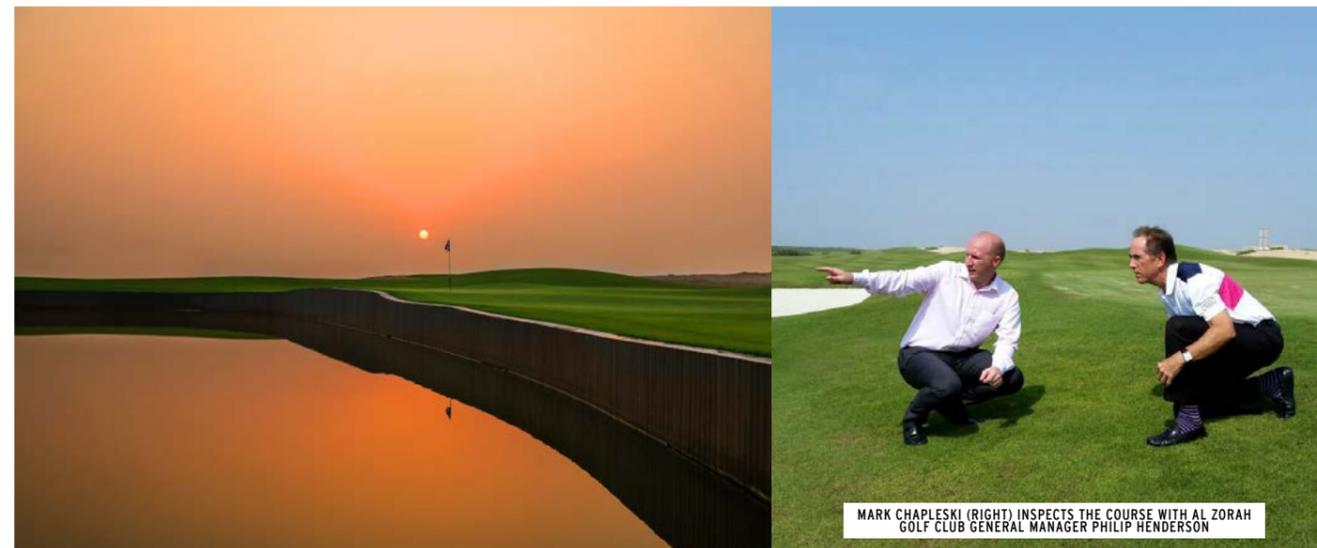
WORLDWIDE GOLF: What was it about the Al Zorah project that attracted you to a relatively unattractive piece of land that had few redeeming features?
MARK CHAPLESKI: The land site for the golf course at Al Zorah was never unattractive but it certainly presented an exciting challenge

to build the course around 1 million square metres of natural mangroves that make life at Al Zorah truly natural and unique. Al Zorah is a joint partnership between the Government of Ajman and Solidere International, who visualised the project, along with the golf course. The Nicklaus Design team, headed by Dirk Bouts, has done an amazing job of tying the golf holes into the mangrove system which has become one of the key features of Al Zorah. There are also subtle elevation changes around the course that have been created. All credit to the Nicklaus team and to Proscap, the contractor for the construction and Mike Knudsen, the Project Manager, all whom were involved from the very early stages. Finally, our Superintendent, Terrance Mohamed, and his team have done a magnificent job in growing the grass in, and getting it to the finely manicured state that golfers expect from a Troon property. Those living in the golf villas around the golf course will certainly have spectacular views! We are not far away from this level now, and will start doing VIP preview play in late November.

WWG: Using the incoming and outgoing tide in the recess areas of the mangroves to change the perspective of the golf course and the mangrove swamp, has become a unique characteristic of the layout – how was it conceived?
MC: That was something that the team

became aware of during the initial phases of construction. It's hard to imagine the magnitude of the tidal change that takes place over a one-hour period in the mangroves. The golfers who frequent Al Zorah Golf Club will learn when the best times are for being able to play out of the lateral hazards, and when your errant shots might go swimming. This will likely be the first golf course in this region where golfers will check the daily tidal charts before deciding on their tee time, like surfers do! This challenging golf course is just one of the many reasons to visit Al Zorah, which is also special for its natural landscape, diverse bird species and walkable environments.

WWG: You've been in the Middle East for quite some time now, so how does Al Zorah Golf Club rate among the rest?
MC: Golf courses are subjective, depending on the individual golfer. Some courses are enjoyed by almost everybody, like the Abu Dhabi Golf Club. You rarely hear anyone say they didn't like it. Other courses, even Tour Championship venues are often a case of love it or leave it. I believe that Al Zorah Golf Club is going to be one that almost everyone who plays it will enjoy the experience. On the whole, the UAE has many very good golf courses, with amazing service standards and amenities, compared to most places in the world.

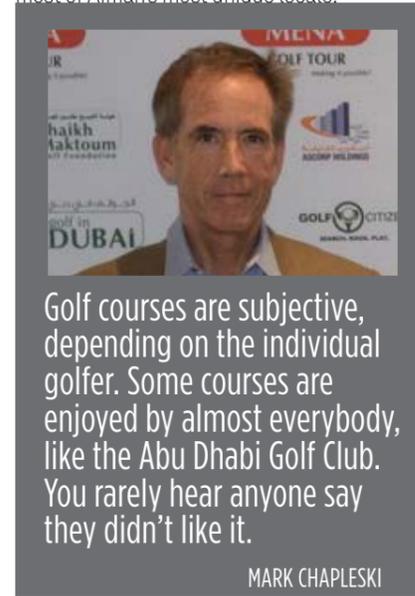


MARK CHAPLESKI (RIGHT) INSPECTS THE COURSE WITH AL ZORAH GOLF CLUB GENERAL MANAGER PHILIP HENDERSON

WWG: One of the abiding problems with the region is that there are too few golfers to fill too many golf rounds. Is Al Zorah Golf Club going to target the tourist to drive the business as well as creating a core membership – and how will you achieve these dual goals?
MC: The challenge in this region is filling in the weekday golf slots. The weekends are fully booked at almost all golf courses in the UAE during the October – May peak season. Al Zorah Golf Club has the unique opportunity to attract tourist golfers from both Dubai, Ras Al Khaimah and further afield. Not just because it's a wonderful, intriguing place but also because Al Zorah offers a variety of options to make the most of 'natural living,' including marinas for those with a penchant for sailing. Troon Golf has a large international database and relationships with key Tour Operators in every country that delivers golfers to the UAE, so we are working those areas very hard. There was certainly a lot of excitement surrounding the opening of Al Zorah Golf Club at the recent IGTM (International Golf Travel Market) show in Tenerife, which was fantastic for us. Al Zorah GC will be our seventh facility in the UAE so golfers have a vast selection when coming to the region and wanting to experience Troon courses. At the same time, Tour Operators can easily package multiple rounds of golf and stay within the Troon brand.

WWG: How does it rate as a challenge for the low handicapper while still managing to appeal to the occasional tourist golfer or weekend warrior?
MC: This is always the goal of a resort course designer, and Nicklaus Design has accomplished this with Al Zorah Golf Club. The distance from the front tees to the back tees vary greatly, and the landing areas are generous on most holes.
WWG: If it is to become a genuine popular resort course it needs to provide all the amenities that go with it – spa, swimming pools, restaurants, expansive clubhouse, and excellent hotels. Is this the objective?
MC: The permanent clubhouse that will be complete by 2017 will have a swimming pool and fitness centre, and the Resort currently has two hotels being built, The Oberoi Hotel and the Lux Hotel. The Oberoi (113 keys) is

scheduled to open in 2016 while the Lux (193 keys) will open in 2017. To add to this there will be marinas, restaurants, and a wellness centre that visitors will be able to make the most of. Al Zorah is a holistic development with a huge focus on contemporary and natural living. With properties situated around the golf course and along the beach, both residents and visitors will be able to make the most of Ajman's most unique locale.



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WWG: To attract local members, is Al Zorah prepared to cut its green fees and memberships to entice golfers from Dubai and further afield to come and play?
MC: The published Green Fees will be higher than those available in Ras Al Khaimah, but lower than the Dubai market. However, Troon uses a dynamic pricing model with our online tee time system, similar to those that hotels and airlines use, so the price that a golfer may pay will vary greatly, depending upon the day, time and demand levels.

WWG: Does Al Zorah Golf Club have its sights set on hosting a Tour Championship event in the

future to help put the course and Ajman on the international golf map?
MC: This is certainly within the realms of possibility. With the Oberoi and Lux hotels being a part of the Resort (opening in 2016-2017), considering the quality of the golf course and the permanent clubhouse, Al Zorah would be an absolutely perfect venue for one of the major golf tours to consider.

WWG: Would one of Al Zorah Golf Club's goals be to specialise in providing weekend golf breaks for local golfers?
MC: Absolutely. This will be a major attraction for the UAE market. With two 5-star hotels on site, and a further four 5-star hotels located on Ajman's Corniche, the overall pricing for a stay-and-play package will be very competitive within the UAE market. I imagine the weekends will be very busy with local golfers, many of whom will stay in the Resort hotels.

WWG: With Troon Golf managing the majority of courses in the UAE does it make it easier to organise, the more golf courses you manage?
MC: It certainly makes our loyalty programmes more valuable for the local market as well as being beneficial for our members to use the Troon Advantage programme in their own backyard. It also makes it very convenient for our associates who are interested in taking on a new challenge at another Troon property, but don't really want to leave the UAE. We have moved at least 50 associates over the past eight years to other properties within the region, with the majority of these moves being promotions.

WWG: What are the plans for the clubhouse and when is it expected to open?
MC: It is anticipated to open in 2017. Expect to see a very modern design, of modest size, but one that has all the necessary elements that golfers have come to enjoy here in the region. It will overlook the 9th and 18th greens and have a majestic view of the mangroves, similar to what the Pavilion has now. The Pavilion is a beautiful ultra-modern, mostly glass structure with four levels, and restaurants that have majestic views over the golf course and mangroves. First time golfers are going to be pleasantly surprised by the quality of this unique facility.