

Arabian GOLF

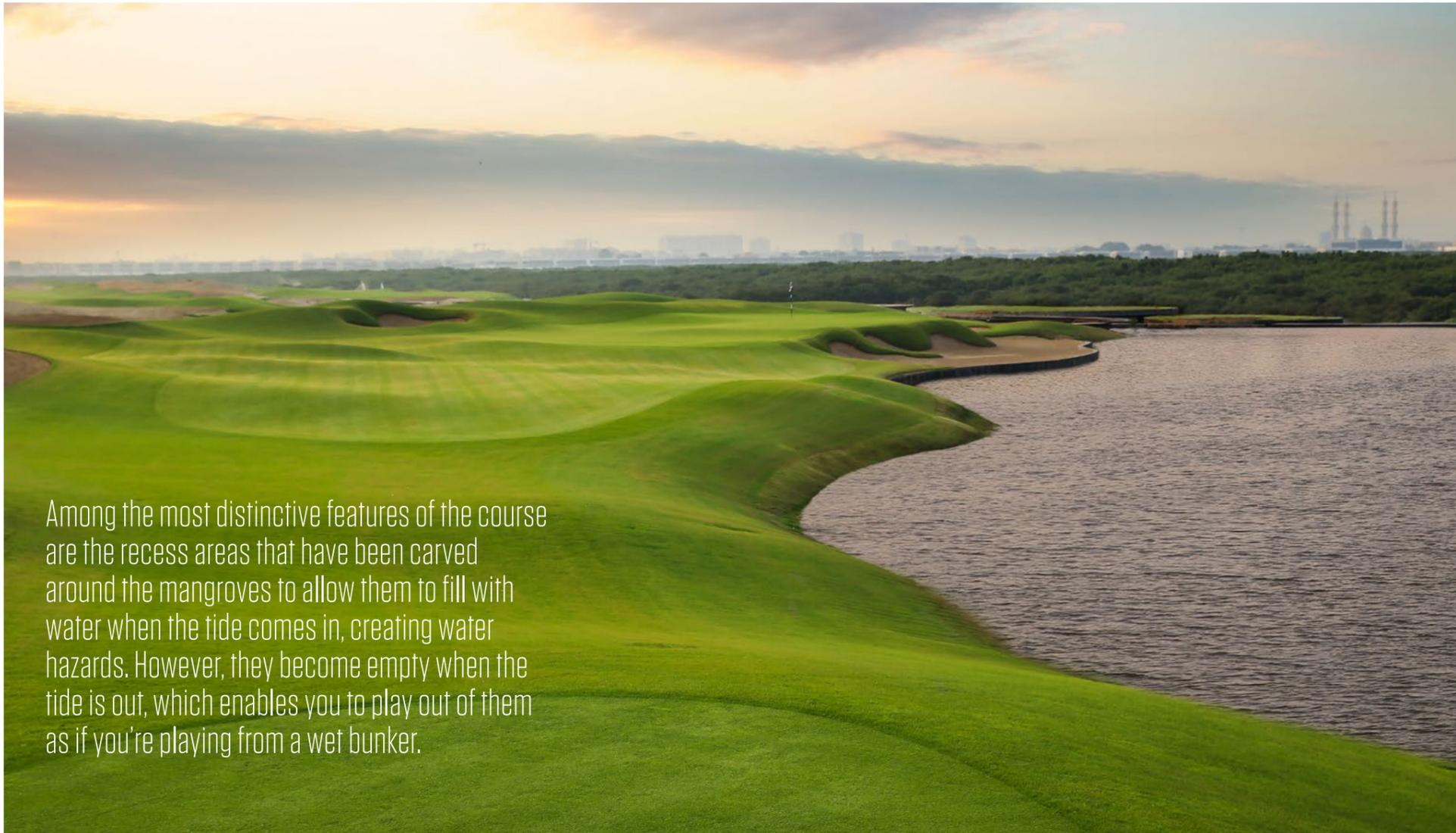
NEWS FROM THE LEADING CLUBS IN THE REGION

The Magic of Al Zorah Golf Club

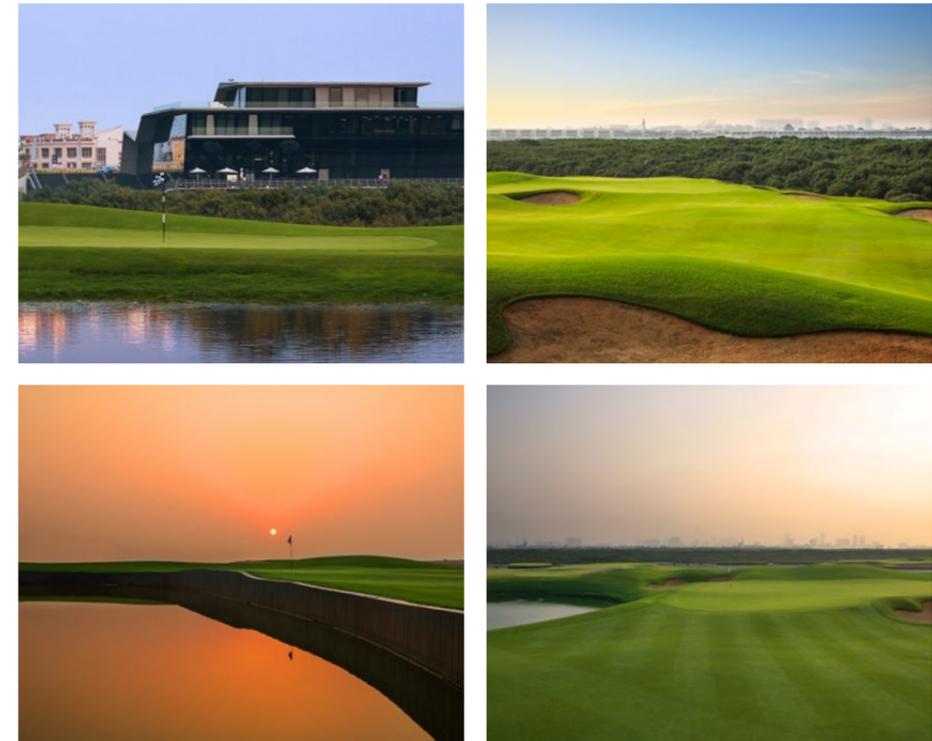
By Mohamed Suleman

AL ZORAH Golf Club in Ajman is the latest glittering jewel in the crown of the UAE golf scene. With the course set to open for public play on December 10, Worldwide Golf's Mohamed Suleman played the Al Zorah course on a windy Wednesday afternoon. Here's his impression of Ajman's first ever golf course.

“In the days running up to my date with Al Zorah, it was a case of great expectations. I'd seen the pictures in Worldwide Golf and read about the mangrove swamps moving around dramatically as the tide created its own unique characteristics. I was aware that the brand new par-72 Nicklaus Design course managed by Troon Golf measures 7,169 yards off the Championship tees while off the Gold tees it's a more manageable 6,522 yards. The place, I was aware, has a touch of magic about it. I was eager to review the region's newest layout and find out for myself.” ▶



Among the most distinctive features of the course are the recess areas that have been carved around the mangroves to allow them to fill with water when the tide comes in, creating water hazards. However, they become empty when the tide is out, which enables you to play out of them as if you're playing from a wet bunker.



"This is golf the way nature intended it to be played. It's certainly different from any other course I've played. I found it a memorable challenge. Maybe there is a magical atmosphere in being so close to nature. Whatever it is, I'd recommend the Al Zorah experience to any golfer," – Mohamed Suleman



Mohamed Suleman on the tee at Al Zorah Golf Club.

THE first thing that struck me when I arrived at Al Zorah Golf Club was the stunning natural environment I found myself surrounded by. It was like stepping into another world. It's precisely this mystical atmosphere that makes Al Zorah unique.

My ambitious tee-shot on the brilliantly designed risk-reward par four third found the water just short of the fairway, sending several members of Al Zorah's 58 species of birdlife into flight. Apart from the wildlife, it's the ever-changing landscape and environment that sets this place apart. Al Zorah genuinely becomes a completely different challenge, depending on what time of day you play it.

The golf course is nestled among one million square metres or more of native mangroves that Ajman is renowned for. When you're out on the course, you're literally surrounded by them.

Among the most distinctive features of the course are the recess areas that have been carved around the mangroves to allow them to fill with water when the tide comes in, creating water hazards. However, they become empty when the tide is out, which enables you to play out of them as if you're playing from a wet bunker.

Unfortunately for me the tide was in when I played my tee shot on 18, and so its destination was a watery grave! The marshals informed me that had I been playing the hole two hours earlier,

I would have easily been able to climb down and have a shot at getting up-and-down from the recess. As they say...timing is everything in golf!

I've played every golf course in the UAE and I can safely say that I've never played out of bunkers as pure as the ones at Al Zorah.

Blindingly white and incredibly soft, these traps made from silica sand from Saudi Arabia, took me back to my childhood days of building sandcastles on the beach!

I'm no maestro when it comes to playing from the sand but I felt I could trust how the ball would come out from the greenside and fairway bunkers.

Snow-white bunkers

The snow-white sand looks pretty but, from a player's perspective, it's very reassuring when you know you can take a full swing and splash the ball out of a bunker.

Although the greens were still a work in progress, it was abundantly clear that they will play like any classic Troon putting surface – fast and very true.

Once you decipher the line, you can back yourself to hit it without second guessing. If there's one thing that Al Zorah doesn't lack, it's character. Every golf course has its own unique personality and this beauty is certainly something special.

From the mercurial mangrove recesses and the

intricate series of boardwalks linking the holes, to the plethora of birds that you come across all around the course, Al Zorah Golf Club stands out from the crowd.

Another striking feature is there are island tee-boxes on five holes. Standing over the ball, you feel a wonderful sense that it's just you and the golf course out there and nothing else.

In more ways than one, it's just so typically 'Al Zorah' to have a tough, long par three, with the mangrove recesses well and truly in play all along the right side of the fairway, as the finishing hole.

The penultimate hole is a generous par five, making it a classic birdie opportunity but the 18th hole makes for a truly exciting grandstand finish.

Overall, Al Zorah is a very fair golf course. Players of all abilities can expect to be rewarded for smart course management while at the same time, not be punished too severely for the odd bad shot.

The rough around the edge of the fairways is cut generously short, so your errant drives won't cost you too dearly.

That's not to say it's a pushover of a golf course. Not by a long shot. But if you're constantly wayward and have an inconsistent short game, you could end up posting some big numbers.

I enjoyed the most fruitful run of play in my

round from holes 4-8, where I managed to string together four straight pars and a birdie. This stretch of holes provides a really good chance for some low-scoring and I expect it will see a lot of birdies and eagles.

Better players than me won't think twice about going for the green on the short par four seventh, which plays a shade over 350 yards off the championship tees with the wind usually helping from the behind.

Challenging back nine

But it's early on in the back nine that Al Zorah really starts to bare its teeth. While there are stretches of holes where you can fill your boots, there are also times when it's best to humbly put your head down, respect the course, and be satisfied with a steady par.

Holes 11, 12 and 13 provide a true test of a golfer's ability. Hole 11, which plays as stroke index one, is a monstrous par five which brings the mangrove recesses into play with your second and third shots. Anything slightly left or short will be swallowed up by the recess area and depending on what time of the day it is, you can could either be in the drink or have a tricky shot at redemption.

Less said the better about how I stumbled aimlessly through those few holes.

All-in-all, if you take advantage of the scoring opportunities the course has to offer and

don't take on too many hit and hope shots on the more enticing but difficult holes, there's no reason why you shouldn't walk off with a respectable score.

Regardless of how good you may think you are you have to take notice of the wind and act accordingly. It can be swirling and howling and it wants to throw you right off course.

Like most seaside golf courses, Al Zorah becomes a completely different proposition when the wind starts to blow. It was somewhat windy when I started, although not too troublesome, but by the end of the back nine, it certainly began to be a serious factor.

Par fours suddenly felt like par fives and at times par fives seemed impossible to reach even in three. But on the holes that played downwind, it was a different story. I felt like Rory McIlroy whipping out my gap wedge to play a 130-yard approach shot on the par-four sixth!

Whether you're a seasoned pro or someone who has only recently made a decision that may haunt you forever by taking up the sport, Al Zorah has something for everyone.

This is golf the way nature intended it to be played. It's certainly different from any other course I've played. I found it a memorable challenge. Maybe there is a magical atmosphere in being so close to nature. Whatever it is, I'd recommend the Al Zorah experience to any golfer. ■