

Brunei

Asia's Newest Destination For 'Golf Tourism'

Brunei-Islamic Tourism



Empire Hotel-Golf Club (Courtesy of Mr. Derick McGroarty)

فندق إمباير - ساحة الغولف (تصوير ديريك مكغروارتي)

Brunei, a tropical paradise with splendid natural and cultural sites is now adding golf to its numerous tourist attractions. Earlier this year the Brunei Open put the sultanate firmly on the international golfing

map. Brunei authorities do not intend to do things in half measures. They are confident that the Brunei Open will develop into a multi-million dollar national championship, worthy of taking its place

alongside established opens in Malaysia, Singapore and Hong Kong. Golf is still very much in its infancy stage in Brunei, which has yet to produce its first touring professional. The royal and ➤

ancient game was introduced in the sultanate in the early 20th century through expatriates who worked in the oil industry. A nine-hole course in Kampung Bunut was the only facility then but when local senior executives got hooked on the game, other courses were built to meet the growing interest.

Now, there are five 18-hole courses and two nine-hole layouts to cater for an estimated 3,000 local golfers. The Jack Nicklaus-designed Empire course, which overlooks the South China Sea, is undoubtedly the jewel of the crown.

The nation with a moderate population of 380,000 people is determined to produce calibre golfers in the mould of Zhang Lianwei of China, Thailand's Thaworn Wiratchant or India's Jyoti Randhawa and the Brunei Darussalam Golf Association is working closely with the Ministry of Sports to mould home-grown champions.

Sheikh Jamaluddin Sheikh Mohamed, an avid amateur golfer himself and one of the prime movers of the Brunei Open pointed out it was the first time the government is putting in our resources to host the Brunei Open and it can certainly become bigger and better. "A prize fund of US\$300,000 is a good start but we want the Brunei Open to join the family of events that offer prize money of over US\$1 million and above. This can be achieved in five years time, or even sooner."

Brunei Darussalam Golf Association Vice president Pehin Ariffin said the idea of hosting Brunei's first national open was mooted some years back but it did not get off the ground due to the unavailability of a championship course.

"But in Empire Country Club, we now have a world-class course. Our golf association wants more kids to play golf and through the Ministry of Sports, we are inviting more school children to learn the game.

One of the pioneers of the professional game in China, Zhang, a five-time winner on the Asian Tour, offered his advice to Brunei's golf authorities, saying they should build on the launch to develop golf more extensively.

"Every level of the game needs attention, and even for local professionals, the Open



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alone is only the start. Officials should not ignore the professional ranks during the other weeks of the year." said Zhang.

India's Amandeep Johl, the Chairman of the Tournament Players Committee on the

Asian Tour, believes the emergence of Asia's newest event could lead to other tournaments being launched across the region.

The future is bright as Brunei looks forward to its own Tiger Woods. ■