

LAND OF A THOUSAND PARS

For many, Thailand is known for the wonderful mish-mesh of spicy delectables and a culture of welcoming friendliness. For golfers, it is that, and some 250 or so golf courses, each with its microcosm of all the good things that the Thais are known for.

Amongst them are three standout courses that every visitor must play – Alpine Golf Club in Bangkok and Black Mountain Golf Club and Banyan Golf Club in Hua Hin.

These are the courses that the newly launched SPH Golf Travel Club will bring members and guests to from January 26-28, 2018.

Partnering UOB Travel, this trip is set at a competitive rate beginning from S\$718 per head, excluding airfare, and covers golf, transfers, accommodation, all meals including a hosted lunch by the Tourism Authority of Thailand, as well as a goodie bag worth \$100 and lucky draw prizes including return air tickets by Thai Airways.

In Bangkok, Alpine is a Ronald M. Garl design that has proven championship pedigree since its opening in 1996. This is easily among the most challenging courses in the city and at a little more than 7,000 yards, is still a pretty long course by today's standards.

In the year 2000, a young Tiger Woods, fresh off winning six consecutive events, returned to Thailand to play the European Tour's Johnnie Walker Classic, an event he had won in 1998.

Testing himself against the small greens and tight fairways, at the par-5 seventh on Sunday, he left an indelible mark on all who came. At 555-yards and with pinpoint accuracy required, it is no mean feat to get on in two. Woods did and subsequently eagled the hole on route to beating Geoff Ogilvy by three strokes for the title.

Needless to say, all who came after, even till this day, still stand spellbound at the championship tees wondering how he achieved this feat. Thankfully, with four teebox choices, there will be one that suits all levels of play.

From there, Hua Hin presents a more serene respite against the hustle and bustle of Thailand's capital city. Site of the Thai royalty's Summer Palace, this is sacred ground with golf courses that are revered across the country as its finest.

The Black Mountain Golf Course opened in 2007 amidst much fanfare. It lived up to every hype said or written and has won numerous awards along the way, including this year's "Best Golf Resorts in Asia" by Golf Digest.

In 2009, the first Black Mountain Masters began as a US\$500,000 Asian Tour event.

In 2011, the Royal Trophy was held and then in 2014, the King's Cup arrived. All these add to the glamour and sheen that contributed to its success such that by 2016, the club had built an additional 9-hole West Course to make this a tantalising 27-hole complex.

Not far away and a year after Black Mountain was opened, the Banyan Golf Club was formed. Unlike its more boisterous cousin, Banyan fashions itself as a quiet set-up against a beautiful landscape of dunes and flowing fairways.

Its clubhouse is an oasis of calm that feels more like a five star resort than a golf club, which is probably why the facility is featured in the prestigious "Top 1000 in the World" by Rolex.

Golfing at Banyan is fun. A hallmark showpiece of American-trained local designer Pirapon Namatra of Golf East, this 7,316-yard course is long but forgiving.

But it is no pushover either. Without trees to confound play, the wide fairways are there for the taking, but they also undulate towards bunkers and shrubbery placed strategically to catch wayward shots.

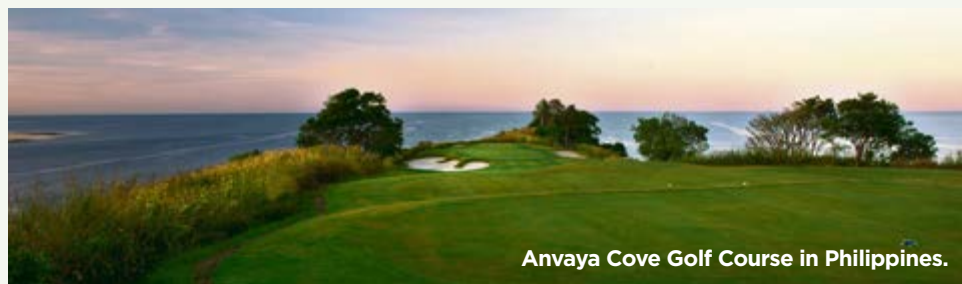
With so much to offer – food, culture and three different golfing experiences in a value-packed deal – Bangkok and Hua Hin are certainly fine places to start the year with.

● **For bookings and enquiries, please call UOB Travel at +65 6252 6822 during their operating hours or send an e-mail to UOBTP-Leisure@UOBgroup.com.**

play **it**



BY
BENNY TEO



Anvaya Cove Golf Course in Philippines.

SPH GOLF TRAVEL FAIR

Come April 6 to 8, 2018, golfing fans in Singapore will be able to visit the nation's largest golf travel fair at Marina Square Shopping Mall.

Organised by SPH Pacom Pte Ltd, publisher of Golf Vacations and golf/Women magazines and golfing events, with Official Travel Agent UOB Travel responsible for bookings and fulfilment, they have invited a host of participating golf clubs, resorts and tourism associations to come to this 3-day event that is open to the public and free.

With three Country Pavilions and exhibition booths, there will also be activities for visitors across various areas of

the exhibition to partake in.

More importantly, there will be superb deals and offers to take advantage of these three days.

Participating golf clubs include Kota Permai Country Club, Forest City Golf Club, The Els Club, Damai Laut Golf and Country Club, Ria Bintan Golf Club, Spring City Golf Club, Bintan Lagoon Resort Golf Club, Laguna Golf, Black Mountain Golf Club, Pattana Golf Club, Siam Country Club and the courses belonging to Ayala Land in the Philippines.

Of the Country Pavilions, the Tourism Authority of Thailand and Philippines Tourism have confirmed their participation.



WORLD GOLF AWARDS

Inaugurated in 2014 to mirror the growth of golf tourism across the globe, the World Golf Awards was created by World Travel Awards, a global programme that serves to acknowledge, reward and celebrate excellence across all sectors of the global travel and tourism industry since 1993.

This year's World Golf Awards Gala Ceremony took place at La Manga Club in Spain on 23rd – 26th November with voting period from 14th March till 1st October 2017.

All votes are submitted online and can come from professionals working in the golf travel trade as well as the public using a first-past-the-post system with options given in each category.

Votes are submitted online via the World Golf Awards website. The winners of each national award will go head-to-head with the winners of the other countries before the unveiling of the World Winners.

Here are some prominent winners in Asia:

- Malaysia's Best Golf Course – Kota Permai Golf & Country Club
- Thailand's Best Golf Course – Black Mountain Golf Course
- World's Best Par 3 Golf Course – Bukit Pandawa Golf Club
- Asia's Best Golf Course – Ba Na Hills Golf Club
- World's Best Golf Club Brand – TaylorMade
- World's Best Golf Shoe Brand – Footjoy

AMATEUR GAMES

This year end has been exciting for top level amateur golf in Singapore. Last month (November 21-23), the 9th Warren-



MST Amateur Open took place in the golf club's newly renovated 18-hole championship course.

Participants included 57 men and 22 women, many of whom had flown in across the region to compete in the World Amateur Golf Ranking event.

This year's event was won by SEA Games hero Marc Ong (above, left), who is set to turn professional in the new year. The Warren-MST Amateur victory will be relished as probably his final amateur trophy.

A few days later at Raffles Country Club's Palm Course (November 27-29), 19-year-old Callista Chen revenged her sudden-death play-off defeat from 9 months back to win in extra-time in the 12th Faldo Series Singapore Championship.

Noted for grooming the world's finest golfers into successful professionals, former world No. 1 Sir Nick Faldo takes great pride in the worldwide success of this championship series that is spread among 14 events in the West and 20 in the East this year, including two Grand Finals.

It is also interesting to note that Callista came from a third place finish at the Warren-MST Amateur just four days earlier to register this win.

Finally, on December 19-22, a new event, the JGTA Bintan Lagoon Junior Championship saw current Asian Amateur champion and US Masters bound Lin Yuxin from China compete in a tournament that has its sights set on grooming young golfers for a life as a college athlete in the US NCAA system.

Supported by dwell Student Living, an accommodation brand of Centurion Corporation Limited, it is held at Bintan Lagoon Resort which will also play host to next year's event.