

BY
TAN JU KUANG



ALL-INCLUSIVE LUXURY

NIKANTI PROVIDES FIVE-STAR EXPERIENCE

It has been said that golf needs a makeover. Indeed, a small club in a corner of Thailand is making big waves with a unique concept that just might hold an answer.

Nikanti Golf Club is certainly creating its own cache as a visionary place that is looking to combine a strongly designed course with an equally enticing customer experience.

The course, owned by the Sasomsub family, actually opened for play three years ago, but held its official international media launch this month.

Now that the clubhouse, restaurants, and 18-hole golf course are in full operational order, there is every reason to expect that Nikanti – about an hour's drive from the west side of Bangkok – will begin to draw the crowds with its farsighted approach.

In the first place, the luxuriant club – unlike most that shares its calibre – is open to the public. Visitors just pay a single rate, which includes green, caddie and buggy fees (including caddie tip), free flow of water and snacks on the golf course, and a meal before and after the round.

The all-inclusive experience is further enhanced by a careful attention to service and a clubhouse ambience that is second to none.

Every corner at Nikanti feels like it has been thoughtfully designed with the patrons in mind.

Locker rooms are sleek and stylish without be-

ing over-designed. Common spaces offer visitors a selection of different places to congregate with their own groups.

On the food front, the flamboyant resident chef Narakorn Lertnibuna, has brought his experience working with a UK celebrity chef on shore, and designed dishes that reflect the traditions of Thai cuisine, with the presentation of the contemporary West.

Apart from the complimentary buffets available before and after your rounds, more elaborate six to nine-dish set menus are also available at Nikanti's lovely Kan Restaurant. And the bar there is also a fine place to have a tippie before engaging in your multi-course meal.

The quality at Nikanti is a reflection of what Asian designers are capable of if given the opportunity. The futuristic clubhouse is the work of local architects and effectively combines the outdoors with sophisticated interiors seamlessly. Most significantly, Thai course architect Piraporn Namatra's layout at Nikanti would certainly not look out of place with that created by other internationally renowned course designers.

The most poignant thing about Namatra's course is that it goes against the convention of having two-nines.

Nikanti is laid out in three loops of six holes, giving golfers the option of playing six, 12 or 18 holes (golfers pay different all-inclusive rates depending on the number of holes they play).

Each six-hole combination ends at the clubhouse, and has two par-3s, two par-5s, and two par-4s so that the experience is not compromised regardless of how many holes the golfers play.

The first impression that you get of Namatra's

design is that it is pleasing to the eye. Contours of emerald, Bermuda fairways ripple and roll towards intricately designed green complexes.

Putting surfaces of TifEagle turf can confound those playing here for the first time, but then again, that's part of the challenge and fun.

Most of the par-3s are long, with three of the six in excess of 200 yards (black tees). But their design affords weaker golfers places to "lay up" in the event that they don't have a club, or a swing, to get their tee shots onto the green.

The design consistency throughout the course is worth noting as each six-hole grouping blends into the next without changing its general characteristics. However, unlike 18-hole courses designed with two nines, there is no strict distinction of a "finishing hole" as each of the ending holes in each six-hole configuration can stand as such.

While length can be useful off the tee, course management is probably worth more here.

Water can be found on many of the holes and force you to play around them. And on those where they are not, sand bunkers (and there are many of them) come into play. The raised sides of the holes give the course a stadium effect while preventing shots hit astray from rolling further into trouble. And the 4,000 or so trees planted on the course give it a resort-like aesthetic that reinforces the feeling of holiday golf.

There is an added advantage of playing in the afternoon here because the light takes on a nice glow as the sun sets over the horizon.

And ending your round with a cocktail, and a meal, on the terrace overlooking the golf course might just be the best way to end your five-star experience at Nikanti.

photo courtesy of Nikanti

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