

play **it**



BY  
**BENNY TEO**



The 10th hole is a long and tough par-four and a typical risk-reward challenge.



The opening hole of the new Classic is a beauty to behold.



Hole 3, par-five is a 558-yard challenge.



Hole 17 was modelled after the famous par-three 17th at TPC Sawgrass.

# THE CLASSIC COURSE AT LAGUNA NATIONAL

The Laguna National Classic course. A fabled beast that has gone down golfing folklore amongst Asian courses for its difficulty that is near impossible to tame. Professional golfers have tried to do so, in tournament play and social daring.

Many have tried and few can declare that they have “played well” at the Classic. For those that have, it is a bragging right that they can proudly bear each time the revered course is mentioned.

Originally built in 1993, “The Beast”, as it was reverently termed, was redesigned by Andy Dye in 2010 at the behest of owner Peter Kwee to be “dramatic, cutting edge, beautiful and sensational.”

And it was. But in July 2016, the course was closed to embark on an extensive re-routing and reconfiguration. In September 2017, after 12 months of reconstructive work and another three months of growing in, the latest iteration of the Classic is born.

Last month on March 23, the course was officially launched, with members

of the media and guests outside of the club’s membership finally having the opportunity to test it.

At first glance, the familiar rising and falling of large, dune-like bunkers and heavily undulated fairways take centre-stage.

The first hole still bears some similarities to the fact that it remains a dogleg left hole, but that is where it ends.

The 55 or so bunkers that pepper throughout this opening hole is now drastically reduced.

Length-wise however, it has increased from 330 yards to its current 393 (measured from blue tees). The fairway is also enlarged to make it more approachable and generally, more playable.

From there, further changes can be

experienced right away in the form of a rerout. The second hole has replaced the former 13th even though it is essentially the same track, as is the third, which replaced the former par-five 12th.

Number four, or the old third, has transformed drastically from a ludicrous 270-yard par-three to a now comparatively benign 147-yard hole. Back in 2011, Tiger Woods famously teed off from the pro tees at 299 yards with a three-wood and made par.

The final big change appears on hole seven where the short par-three literally took a 90-degree shift to the right.

But to put it so simplistically would be to undermine the tremendous amount of effort that the club and their contracted design house, IMG Design, had put in in order to adapt to the change.

Two completely new holes (four and seven) needed to be constructed to make the routing work and keep the balance between the rerouted front and back nines.

All 18 greens and teeboxes were either rebuilt or relocated, or both, and a total of approximately 100 bunkers were removed, yet leaving the course with still a massive 250 at the end.

Thirteen holes feature enlarged or reshaped fairways, with three being com-

pletely new. One hole was completely removed (the old third hole) to make way for the new golf course maintenance operations centre sited alongside holes five, six and 15.

To act as safety barriers, more than 100 new trees were planted that, in future, would offer both aesthetic as well as environmental benefits to the golf course.

While all this was due mainly to the removal of the entire northern border of Laguna’s property to make way for two new MRT stations and its associated construction works, the result has become better for both club and members.

Despite losing multiple golf holes and land, the new course is 121 yards longer than the original course (from the back tees) and will gain an additional 69 yards when some land is returned to them around 2024 after public works has completed.

In all, the Classic will be a total of 190 yards longer than the original course. The club has also taken the opportunity to tone down some of its more extreme facets.

Features such as metres-deep pot bunkers surrounding up-turned greens, over-dramatic swales that put otherwise well-struck shots into blind approaches, or, in the case of the former third hole, unrealistically long tee-shots with no bail out area, have been replaced.

Today, the Classic course at Laguna National is still a beast, but one that many more golfers will enjoy fighting with.