

THE BLUFFS AT HO TRAM STRIP

GREG NORMAN'S SPECTACULAR COURSE IN VIETNAM TAKES A TRIM, AND COMES OUT EVEN BETTER

It is rated as one of Asia's top golf courses and one of the few to

break into Golf Digest's rankings of the 100 top golf courses in the world. But not resting on its laurels, The Bluffs in Ho Tram Strip has undergone an extensive enhancement programme over the last two years.

It is a golf course that leaves you wanting to go back, not least because it can beat you up if you are not keeping the ball straight.

Visually spectacular, it is a must-play for any serious aficionado of the game, especially considering it is right here in Southeast Asia.

Other than getting humbled by the course, I took the opportunity to speak to the man who takes care of Asia's pride, Bluffs course superintendent Ali MacFadyen.

Top of the mind was asking him why the club took a buzzsaw to a Greg Norman course that was already earning rave reviews around the world.

GV: What are the changes that The Bluffs has undergone over the past two years? What prompted the need for those changes?

Ali MacFadyen: The original intent from Greg Norman was to design a links-style course using natural sand dunes and with native plants with sand exposed to give a natural look. During construction, dune establishment was difficult due to the limited water restrictions so we had to plant extra natives to hold the dunes in place.

The natural vegetation regenerated and took over the dunes again. This restricted air flow and sunlight on our turf and promoted ideal breeding grounds for turf disease. In 2016 we had huge issues with disease pressure on our greens.

Therefore, we had no option but to reduce the vegetation around the course. This has increased air flow, sunlight and has reduced moisture in the greens so our turf grass can be stronger and healthier all year round.

How would you best illustrate the before-and-after effect of making those changes?

Before we started the enhancement programme, the vegetation was growing into the turf areas, restricting playing areas, slowing down play due to lost balls, losing natural character of the dunes to excessive vegetation.

It was also very humid around the course from the lack of air movement. Removing the vegetation has also reduced insecticide spraying to every four to six weeks, improving environment conditions around the course. It has also increased the lizard and kingfisher populations around the course.

The Bluffs is rated inside the world's Top 100 golf courses by Golf Digest.

We are very proud to currently be No 71 in the world. We are very determined to stay within this ranking and hopefully improve on it. Ever since making it to the Top 100 back in 2016, we always look for ways to improve.

What are the challenges in maintaining a top 100 golf course like The Bluffs?

The biggest challenge we have is dealing with the harsh wet seasons. We can get 1-3 metre rainfall in six months. High humidity means high disease pressures, so our preventive programmes are intense to keep the greens as dry as possible and disease free.

In the last two years we have invested in the irrigation system and critical machinery for improving our greens. Since this investment has been made the condition of the course keeps improving each year.

What are some of the incredible events that have happened at The Bluffs since its inception?

We've had so many memorable events here over the past five years. The most high profile obviously was

the Ho Tram Open in 2015 where it was a pleasure to welcome some of the top names in golf (Ed's note: Sergio Garcia won that tournament).

What advantages do you have in being located at Ho Tram?

Ho Tram itself is maturing and developing as a destination within Vietnam. There are gorgeous beaches here. In terms of accommodation we have the integrated resort, The Grand Ho Tram Strip, which includes The Grand – a 541-room five-star integrated resort.

Ongoing construction includes the 559-room second Grand tower dubbed, The Beach Club, which will further expand the entertainment amenities available at the resort.

These facilities will make this a sought-after spot for future investments in years to come.

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