

# Mission Hills

## Seeing is Believing!

By Dominic Wall

These days we are often bombarded with advertising from various companies and organizations claiming to be the world's best, the number one, the biggest and greatest. It can be difficult to distinguish the truth from the fiction. Not so in the case of the Mission Hills Golf Club located in Shenzhen, China. All the claims are true... and more!

Having been fortunate to have visited Mission Hills on three occasions over the last 12 months, it must be said that overall, the 'Mission Hills' experience is certainly one to savour.

The statistics alone make fascinating reading:

- Mission Hills Golf Club is currently the largest golf resort in the world with twelve 18-hole golf courses (216 holes). The designers including a who's who of world golf: Jack Nicklaus, David Duval, Pete Dye, Nick Faldo, David Leadbetter, Jumbo Ozaki, Ernie Els, Vijay Singh, Greg Norman, José María Olazabal, Annika Sorenstam and China's Zhang Lian Wei. Two courses are also equipped with floodlights which allow golfers to play until 2 o'clock in the morning. The courses are located in two areas across the 15 square kilometre site at Shenzhen and Dongguan.
- On average, 1,500 golf rounds are played each weekday, 2,500 rounds each weekend day, and almost 3,000 rounds on a peak day. 450,000 rounds were played in 2005 and 500,000 rounds in 2006. This number is expected to grow again in 2007 with the opening of the Dye and Lian Wei Courses.
- There were over 7,000 employees at the end of 2006, of which 2,500 were caddies. There are also around 1,500 security guards who are all members of the Chinese Army. It is also interesting to note that Mission Hills provides accommodation and meals for all staff on-site - a significant operation in its own right.
- There were over 1,400 golf carts in operation at end of 2006.
- Six driving ranges operate across the site including China's first David Leadbetter Golf Academy and the Mission Hills Golf Academy with Cindy Reid (to be open in June 2007).
- There are two clubhouses with the new 63,000m<sup>2</sup> Dongguan Clubhouse containing a luxury spa, golf specialty shops and a Grand Ballroom with 4,500 square metres that can cater for a capacity of 3,000 persons in western and Chinese banquets. It also has 38 functions rooms sized from 23 - 188 square metres catering for up to 1,000 guests.
- Mission Hills Golf Club has hosted over 30 international tournaments and events including the World Cup of Golf in 1995 (and will host the World Cup for twelve consecutive years from 2007 - 2018), the 1st and 2nd Dynasty Cup's and the

inaugural Goodwill Trophy. The inaugural Mission Hills Asia Pacific Open Amateur Championship took place in 2006 and Mission Hills is the host venue for the next 10 years. This championship is conducted by the Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation and is already the premier amateur championship in Asia. Mission Hills is also the Home of the Faldo Series Asia.

- There are various levels of membership with the Chartered Diamond Membership costing US \$167,000 with no annual fees and provides access to the twelve courses seven days a week. Diamond level costs US\$143,000 (plus US\$174/month) which gives access to 10 courses seven days a week. A gold membership costs US\$72,000 (plus US\$174/month) and gives access to either the five Shenzhen courses or the five courses at Dongguan. Emerald Membership gives access to the first 10 courses on weekdays for US\$63,000 (plus US\$89/month).
- To complement the golf courses, Mission Hills also features four spa locations, a 315 room 5-star hotel - Mission Hills Resort, a Country Club featuring the largest tennis centre in Asia with 51 courts - including a 3,000 seat stadium court, real estate development, function rooms and various recreation facilities. The total investment to date is US\$625 million.

Despite the size of the operation, the ability of Mission Hills to maintain high standards of service across all areas of operation is impressive. The caddies are educated about golf, friendly and speak English sufficiently well enough to assist players navigate the courses. Operational staff always appear friendly and courteous, even the course marshals (and there are two per nine) when they try to hurry slow players along!

Maintaining the courses to championship standards is no easy task given the variety of fairway and green turfs. For fairways, six courses utilise Paspallum, four use Zoysia and two use Tiff 419. On the greens, seven utilise Tiff Eagle and the remaining five use Tiffdwarf. Despite the potential for maintenance headaches, the course staff appear to manage well. To oversee golf course management, each course has a dedicated number of greens staff with one supervising superintendent. Leading the individual course superintendents is an Assistant Director for each area (Shenzhen and Dongguan) who in turn answers to an overall Director of Golf Course Management.

Aside from the impressive operational aspects of the development, it is the high quality of the individual course designs that should drive a positive future for Mission Hills. Having played three courses (Nicklaus, Norman and Faldo) and 'toured' the others, there is a great variety to tempt golfers of all levels. The Norman course, already rated as the most difficult in Asia, not only offers spectacular views but provides players with a sense of complete 'isolation' from its neighbouring tracks.

The Faldo Course at first appears to offer



The Grand Ballroom of the Dongguan Clubhouse is spread over 4,500 square metres with a capacity of 3000 people.



Heavy bunkering guards the fairways of the Olazabal Course - confirmed as venue for the 2007 World Cup

some respite but slowly starts to bear its teeth, finishing with three stunning holes all adjacent to the same water hazard, including the signature 16th hole which requires a tee shot to an island green. Nick Faldo himself has rated this as one of his finest design achievements.

In contrast The Nicklaus (or World Cup) Course requires long, accurate driving off the tee. It was not only the venue for the 1995 World Cup but hosted the 2006 Asia-Pacific Open Amateur Championship and will host this major amateur title for the next 10 years. The inaugural Open Amateur was won by English National Squad member Gary Boyd when he holed a six-foot birdie putt on the first hole of a sudden death play-off to defeat Japan's Ryuerto Nagano; both players highlighting how tough the course can play with level par 288 over the preceding 72-holes.

The soon to be completed Pete Dye course is starting to attract international attention, as is the Olazabal Course, confirmed as venue

for the 2007 World Cup.

Golf courses aside, it is almost incredible to fathom the short period of time it has taken Mission Hills to get where they are today. Construction started in 1992 with the first courses at Shenzhen opening in 1995. From a nation that did not have a single golf course on the mainland just over 20 years ago they have created something truly remarkable and provided a great legacy and asset for golf. Maybe they have also provided us with an insight into what we can expect to see from China at next years Olympics.

The statistics behind the Mission Hills operation speak for themselves, yet taken in isolation don't do the development real justice. For the golfing fanatic, Mission Hills is surely as close as it gets to paradise and seeing is believing!

\* GBN would like to thank Mission Hills for providing the data that appears in this article.

*Dominic Wall has over 22 years experience at national and international level sports management. His 16 years with the Australian Golf Union (now Golf Australia) included the roles of National Director of Coaching, Manager Development and Acting Executive Director and had previously worked as Development Manager for the Australian Coaching Council based at the AIS. He operates his own consultancy company called Golf Development & Performance Services, and his current clients include the Saujana Golf Resort in Malaysia, the Asia-Pacific Golf Confederation and the Taiwanese Golf Association. He has completed a book for Fairfax Publishing entitled Golf Excellence which will be released in mid 2007.*