

Malaysia

GOLF PUNK
ON TOUR

Boney M did their best to spoil things, but Golf Punk came away from Malacca impressed with its steaming bouquet of golf courses. **Words: Richard Asher**

I don't mean to be rude or anything, but are we gonna f***in' get started any time soon?"

Well, quite. After all, the unmistakable sound of an impatient Australian was as good a way as any to herald the start of Golf Punk's three-day Malaysian adventure. Brenton, one of two craggy, sun-dried and all-round legendary blokes from Adelaide in our party, was keen to get his cart going and the first round underway. But not before hurling some quality abuse at his countryman and fellow Kooyonga Golf Club member Peter: "Don't take a picture of him mate," he says straight-faced to the official photographer on the first. "He's an arsehole."

Malaysians being a largely accepting race of people, the photographer shrugged in the face of this unfamiliar Antipodean brashness and got on with his job at Orna Golf & Country Club, one of three courses we were set to play in the historic Malacca area. Situated near the coast a couple of hours away from Kuala Lumpur, the region is a teeming nest of golf courses – all of them boasting 27 holes and facilities with a mothbally 1960s feel to them. But, once you reminded yourself that you hadn't time-warped back into the admin corridors of the pre-facelift Jan Smuts airport, the décor

didn't really matter. Nor did the institutional feel to the places – though the lunch buffets over-run with screaming children were definitely a world apart from the typical South African club-house.

Orna, of which we played the North and East nines, was a gentle introduction to three days of golf which would get tougher and tougher. Plenty of tee shots and greens at Orna had an inviting look to them, with Golf Punk's Deputy Editor even nearly almost breaking 50 on the opening nine. Joining myself and Peter was Johnny, a Sydney-based chap who was clearly far too polite to be a real Aussie. The truth came out soon after the first tee shots were struck; turned out he was a Malaysian ex-pat on one of his regular trips home. It was impossible to take golf too seriously with Johnny around; he found the game utterly hilarious, all the more so when he struck one of his many wayward shots. His relentless cackling was to be an abiding memory of the week's games.

A mid-afternoon tropical rain torrent curtailed the round with a hole to play, but not before Peter came impressively close to nailing Brenton with his tee shot as the latter – playing in the group ahead – departed the East Course's par-three 8th green. A cry of "fore" was conspicuously absent as Peter

watched his ball descend on his sparring partner with a glint in his eye. The volley of cussing that filtered back to the tee after a near miss, though, had volume aplenty. Peter just smiled. Aussies: you gotta love 'em.

The next day it was on to Tiara Melaka Golf & Country Club, where the manager gave us a brief run-down of the 27 holes before we headed out. An ex-military man, Col Andrew E.C Ong wasn't holding back: "These last three holes will kill you. Be advised not to relax after six: the final three are going to hurt."

Just as we began scribbling our sick notes, though, came the good news that the murderous nine in question was the one we weren't going to play. The unspeakable Lakes course could wait for another day: we were headed for the slightly less violent Meadow and Woodlands nines.

These were testing enough in themselves, though, with the thick jungle crowding the Woodlands course showing no mercy to errant tee shots. Although Golf Punk wasn't too thrilled about this, the presence of cute monkeys in the trees did much to repair the general impression. The thick forest did have its dark side though: unusually for a round outside our own fair shores, we were warned not to carry valuables on the

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course. The jungle, our army man said, could in theory provide ample cover to anyone who might need it. Not that they had any crime, he hastened to add with a well-timed cough. It was just best to be safe than sorry...

Happily, though, we got through the round at Tiara without mishap. Golf Punk played with Thabo, a dignified fellow South African writer whose graying goatee invited frequent accusations that his surname was Mbeki. With six Comrades Marathons to his name, though, a mix-up with our not particularly sporty former President had to be ruled out.

An Olympic-sized swimming pool seemed a little out of place on a golf club terrace, but we're always up for trying something new. It turned out to be a great feature: the enormous body of water came in most welcome after another steaming day on the course. Who needs a shower when you can cool off with ten lengths?

That night at dinner, Golf Punk learned even more interesting facts about the Aussies. Peter, it transpired, "had an interest" in a saltwater crocodile farm in the Northern Territory. It's a subject that really gets this man of few words talking. "The hard part," he explained, "is stoppin' them from killin' each other when they get to six months of age. They've gotta live longer than that to produce good skins."

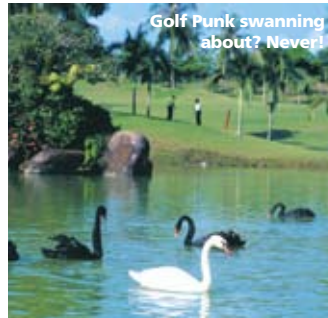
Discussion then moved on to the golf: next morning we're set to take on the challenging course (or, to be precise, the Palm and Rocky nines) at A Famosa – the somewhat rustic resort where we're staying. It's named after the historic fort in downtown Melacca, a city recently added to UNESCO's list of World Heritage Sites. In keeping with Islamic Malaysia's incongruous



The sprawling A Famosa resort



Peter, Johnny and GP's Richard



Golf Punk swanning about? Never!



A Famosa's Palm Course opens with this terrifying water carry



Christmas obsession, the strains of Boney M reach nearly every corner of the resort 24/7. Ninety renditions of Jingle Bells in the space of three days is enough to puncture the soul, trust us. The course itself, though, is a beauty – and, even better, the only place you can't hear the carols. Our visit to this top-notch layout was to co-incide with the final round of the World Amateur Inter-Team Golf Championship, a fun annual open event featuring teams from around the world – including one from Bellville.

With the toughest golf challenge yet to come, a spot of after-dinner practice seemed a fine idea – one made possible by the brilliant floodlit chipping green. As if mastering the sand wedge under lights wasn't enough of a new experience, being interrupted by a herd of the resort's resident elephants was on a whole new level. They were no trouble, though; merely heading for bed via the chipping area. As were we.

Before even reaching the first tee the following morning, Brenton's already in a bad mood after learning he'd need to wear long trousers to the WAITGC prizegiving that evening. A shorts man through and through, his responses to having to wear longs were invariably single-syllable and proudly Australian.

But despite persistent rain he couldn't help but cheer up and enjoy the lovely boulder-strewn course, which doesn't allow a single let-up. Almost every hole requires a





mid or long-iron approach, and players face several daunting carries from the fairways. Miss a green here and you'll invariably have a near-impossible chip shot too: mounds, swales and bunkers aplenty see to that. Not to mention the 'cow grass' rough...the name says it all really.

Still pondering what Peter had told us about the challenges of snaring a 21-foot croc, Golf Punk finds itself paired up with a jovial, sweet-putting Indonesian, a quiet Malaysian with a booming (if wayward) driver and Johnny the Sydneysider. With carts not allowed on the fairways – surely it'd be quicker just to walk? – it makes for a long old day. But any round without a lost ball has to be considered a reasonable success.

The long-pants prize-giving wraps up three long days of golf; Golf Punk cheers loudly as the Bellville boys pick up second place in the WAITGC. The Aussies don't look impressed when the karaoke starts, especially when one of the locals tries Frank Sinatra. Brenton mutters something about a one-legged duck-swimming circus, while Golf Punk sips on Sarsi – a great Malaysian Fanta Grape alternative infused with Sarsaparilla. It's been wild. 🎯



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