

# SWINGING IN THE CITY OF ANGELS

Text: Justine Moss

**W**ith around 260 golf courses spread out over the country, the choice and diversity of layouts and conditions are plentiful when playing a round or two in Thailand.

It really is a golfer's paradise in every sense, with a number of well-maintained and challenging layouts, efficient caddies and excellent food and accommodation options. GOLF checked out a few in the capital Bangkok.



## NIKANTI GOLF CLUB

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**T**his unique golf club opened in December 2014 and was the first in Asia to feature three sets of six holes rather than two nines. Its name derives from an Indian Sanskrit word meaning 'delight' or 'great pleasure', and its logo is the number six written in Thai.

Each individual six hole layout loops its way back to the clubhouse and each features two par-3s, two par-4s and two par-5s – each six hole loop also starts and ends with a par-5. Measuring around 6,208 metres from the championship tees, there are many beautiful holes spread out over the par-72 course which is located 35 kilometres west of Bangkok. The design, by Pirapon (Ope) Namatra of Golf East, allows for three different points on the course to start – hole 1, 7 and 13 – and gives one the flexibility of playing six, 12 or 18.

Each loop ends at the magnificent 9,467 square metre clubhouse which has a pro-shop, restaurant, courtyard, wine bar and cigar room, locker rooms and function rooms.

This is well worth a visit more than once to experience either all three layouts or a pick of your favourite two. Another unique concept is the club's 'all inclusive' rates which includes 18 hole green fee, golf cart with GPS, caddie fee and tips in addition to meals before, during and after each round.

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## PRESIDENT COUNTRY CLUB

**T**he 36-hole championship layout (four par-36 nines named North, East, South, West) was designed by Robert Trent Jones Jr and is located around an hour's drive from the centre of Bangkok. The South course is the longest at 2,860 metres while the East is the shortest at 2,690 metres, however all four layouts are definitely challenging. Even though the fairways appear wide, strategic play and accurate club selection is key as placing one's drive in the correct position to attack the flag is a major factor to scoring well. Try and stay out of the tough Bermuda rough which can be tricky to get out of.

Most greens, which run fast and true, are well protected by deep greenside bunkers and getting up and down is no simple task. Water is present throughout and there are well manicured greens particularly noted for their texture and speed. What's more, thanks to a remarkable drainage system, the course is always playable even after heavy rainfalls. Due to the prevailing breeze, which changes direction with the seasons, golfers do need to try and control ball trajectory. Jones, Jr. though has allowed for low running shots to be played over the hybrid Bermuda fairways, onto most of the greens.

Facilities at the semi-private club include a clubhouse, practice facilities, restaurant, function rooms and pro-shop.

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## RIVERDALE GOLF & COUNTRY CLUB



**T**his 18-hole championship course opened in May 2010 and is the sister course of Phuket's renowned Red Mountain and Loch Palm Golf Clubs. Designed by Jon Morrow and Al Tikanen (who are also the architects of Red Mountain), it is carved into a Chao Phraya River Delta valley and is roughly 45 minutes drive from the centre of Bangkok. The par-72 layout is a stunner and while it's not long, it has plenty of variety and several holes feature elevated tee boxes.

There are plenty of challenges with trees strategically placed in the middle of the fairways and a large number of water hazards and bunkers to test both low and high handicappers, yet most will get a kick out of playing this course. Accuracy is key as, with limited trees lining the fairways, it's very easy to end up on a neighbouring fairway, yet while the design favours intelligent play, there are plenty of bold and subtle risk and reward options.

The par-3 eighth is the signature hole and here you get the choice of hitting two greens. Brave and low-handicappers can attack the island green which is situated a number of metres below the tee boxes, or the safer option is to hit across to another easier green. Each hole on this course is unique in its own way, whether it's the wide or narrow fairways, enormous undulating greens, sandy wastelands, or different-sized water hazards.

Facilities include a modern clubhouse which houses a restaurant and bar, locker rooms and a fully equipped pro shop.

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## THE ROYAL GEMS GOLF CITY



**I**f you've always dreamt of playing a round at Augusta – and who hasn't? - then the back nine here will give you a small taste. This course's back nine have been replicated from Augusta's 10-18 holes, while its front nine have taken their inspiration from a number of top courses such as Bayhill, TPC Sawgrass, Bethpage, Royal Troon, Oakmont, Doral, Belfry, Winged Foot and St Andrews.

While of course there are naturally differences between here and the real Augusta nine, this Ron Garl-designed course, which features Platinum Paspalum is similar on some of the holes. The par-5 13th is memorable and if you can avoid the creek to the left of the fairway, the decision to either lay up or aggressively drive the green can be a tough decision. A definite risk reward hole, and if you make it in two, you should be able to make eagle or birdie.

The par-4 18th is a lovely finishing hole with its uphill slight dogleg right angle – your tee shot needs to avoid the two large bunkers left of the landing area, and if you're accurate and find the fairway instead of trees or bunkers, your second shot should find the green.

Facilities include a clubhouse, driving range, pro shop, restaurant and bar.

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## PRESIDENT COUNTRY CLUB

**D**esigned by Denis Griffiths, this superb layout opened in December 1996 and is definitely worth a stop on your itinerary. This course is extremely enjoyable to play and the course condition is always of the highest standard, appealing to both the novice and seasoned golfer with its large bunkers, uniquely shaped greens, water hazards and immaculate fairways. The high-tech computer designed greens make for many interesting pin placements. The entire course features immaculate conditions, a neo-classic design and variety from hole to hole, along with an abundance of water and sand hazards. The course is a constant test of one's golfing proficiency.

Three solid shots are required to hit the monster par-5 14th hole in regulation. The drive should be aimed at the fairway bunker and the second at the drinks hut behind the green. When you eventually reach the green, you will find the flattest putting surface on the course. The par-4 15th is the most dangerous hole on the course as it has water awaiting both off the tee and for the second shot. You must favour the left side with your approach as both the green and fairway slope sharply towards the water.

Facilities include a driving range, clubhouse, pro-shop, bar and restaurant.

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