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Star Quality In Vietnam

As part of Banyan Tree Hotels and Resorts' stunning development on the shores of the South China Sea, Laguna Lang Co is set to take the term "golf resort" in Asia to a new level

BY PAUL MYERS • IMAGES © RICHARD CASTKA/SPORTPIXGOLF.COM



Vietnam may not seem the most obvious choice to develop a world-class championship golf course and resort facility. But when you see the spectacular location of Sir Nick Faldo's latest creation on the country's Central Coast and realise how few five-star coastal golf resorts exist in Asia, the new Laguna Lang Co Golf Club, which opened in December, makes sense.

Here, midway between the old imperial capital of Hue and Vietnam's third largest city of Danang, every amenity is available on site: a golf course with the hallmarks of being named the best new course in Asia, two exquisite hotels with spa facilities, fine dining, water activities, an arts centre and other indulgences for mind, taste buds and body.

The par-71 championship course, to be officially opened by Faldo himself in mid-March, is the third course in the region designed by a modern great of the game. The others – Montgomerie

Links and Danang Golf Club designed by Colin Montgomerie and Greg Norman respectively – opened in 2009 and 2010.

This trio of world-class golf courses makes Vietnam's Central Coast the leading golf tourism destination in Vietnam and one of the best in Asia. All three courses are members of Golf Coast Vietnam (www.golfcoastvietnam.com), a destination-marketing group established last year to promote golf tourism to the Central Coast region.

Featuring variety unique to golf courses in the tropics, Laguna Lang Co is routed through rice paddy, woodland, scrub, sand dune and coastal landscapes. The natural landscape has been left intact, which makes the course all the more interesting and challenging.

Even in the pre-opening stage before Faldo makes the ceremonial first official drive on the course, Laguna Lang Co has added a new dimension to golf tourism in Vietnam, which, although still a fledgling

golf destination, is rapidly growing in stature. Last November, Vietnam was named golf destination of the year for Asia and Australasia at the International Association of Golf Tour Operators (IAGTO) convention in Portugal.

Faldo, a six-times Majors winner, has been excited about the project from the outset. "This is a stunning and very diverse piece of land with gently rolling terrain, splashes of sand throughout and an impressive array of natural design features," he said when he commenced the project. "For this part of Vietnam it's a real hidden gem. Players will plot their way through some very picturesque surroundings and it will have a real sense of place. Players will need to plot their way through some very picturesque surroundings. The course will sport a ruggedly-handsome look with a real sense of place."

Faldo and his lead designer, Paul Jansen, have delivered on this promise

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Vietnam is a fusion of traditions and influences of the modern.

in spades. So much so that the multiple-character layout has all the ingredients needed to become Asia's best new golf course for 2013.

Its Zoysia fairways and Tiff Eagle greens are growing in beautifully on a (mostly) sand base and will be in prime condition for the official opening by Faldo himself in mid-March.

"We are really pleased with the way the course is coming along," says Laguna Lang Co's director of golf, Tim Haddon, soon after it opened for play in December. "Sir Nick wanted a hard bump-and-run type of surface and that's how it will play." Haddon, the former director of golf at Laguna Phuket, has relocated to Vietnam to become the inaugural general manager

of Laguna Lang Co Golf Club, a task he is tackling with infectious enthusiasm.

Not only has he had to order and organise everything from scratch – including more than 1000 different line items for the golf club alone – he has put together a caddie program with Lang Co locals, most of whom had no previous knowledge of golf. Now with 60 full-time caddies and a group of part-timers, visiting golfers will receive the same level of courteous, friendly attention provided at other golf courses in Vietnam.

Playing 6961 (black) / 6437 (blue) / 5979 (white) / 5238 (red) yards from the tees, it is a great test for top players, while being eminently playable for other handicaps.

Living up to Faldo's playing reputation as a masterful tactician, Laguna Lang Co is a course that demands guile rather than grunt. Tee shots demand a choice between seeking to "fly" mid-fairway sand traps or laying up for a longer second shot. Waste areas and heavily forested areas on some holes also make it important to hit the mostly expansive landing areas.

The par-3 5th is already standing out as the likely signature hole. Incorporating large "chocolate-drop" mounds around the green that mirror a mountain peak in the background, it is the only hole with any obvious man-made influence.

Undoubtedly, it will be the most talked-about in an alluring layout, although many others, including a beautiful dogleg par-5

finishing hole, have character that is sure to excite – and entice more visiting golfers to the region.

The finishing hole is also a beauty. Playing 621 yards (567 metres) from the back tees, it is a hole to savour and talk about after the game. Winding between waste areas and huge bunkers to a large, well-protected green in front of the large impressive clubhouse, it has a typical Faldo flourish.

Laguna Lang Co Golf Club is centrepiece of the luxurious integrated resort, situated on a 280-hectare beachfront site. It is open for membership as well as welcoming stay-and-play visitors. Golf-playing guests benefit from full integration of the course with other resort facilities: discounted green fees, internal billing, free golf bag storage and a four minute shuttle from the resort to the golf clubhouse.

Nestled in a crescent bay framed by a three-kilometre beach in Thua Thien Hue Province, the area was once a favoured holiday retreat for Vietnamese royalty and is renowned for its pristine coastline, tropical jungles and rugged mountains. The resort features Banyan Tree and Angsana hotels and spas, restaurants, a maritime facility, activities centre for children and handicraft centre where guests can take fine-art



classes led by local masters.

The Banyan Tree Group describes the development as the “first and largest fully-integrated world-class hospitality development in Vietnam”. The 280-hectare site is near Lang Co Bay and is framed by a three-kilometre beach in an area renowned for its pristine coastline, natural scenery and proximity to UNESCO World Heritage sites.

As Banyan Tree’s first foray in Vietnam, the company says Laguna Lang Co echoes the ethos of Laguna Phuket, the company’s flagship integrated resort community in Thailand.

Banyan Tree Lang Co features 32 one-bedroom lagoon villas and 17 one-bedroom beach villas on the shores of Canh Duong beach. Integrating clay-tiled pitched roofs, open courtyards and wooden rafter ceilings; the main building and villas feature modern interpretations of traditional garden houses in Hue.

Angsana Lang Co has 229 suites of 52 to 190 square metres, 100 of which have a private swimming pool. All have mountain, lagoon, or sea views and incorporate local materials including bamboo and Mother of Pearl. Resort residences, ranging from one to three bedrooms in condominium or villa style are also available for sale.

Three UNESCO World Heritage sites are within 90 minutes’ drive from the resort – the complex of monuments in Hue, Hoi An Ancient Town, south of Danang, and the nearby My Son cultural sanctuary.

Laguna Lang Co is 60-minutes from Danang’s international airport, which has direct flights from Singapore and Kuala Lumpur as well as Ho Chi Minh City, Hanoi and other cities in Vietnam.

Banyan Tree Lang Co has an opening promotional offer from US\$735++ per night with a minimum two-nights stay.

Laguna Lang Co

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(L) Darren Robson with Tim Haddon.