

# A Southern Delight

By Doug Neumann

When a golf resort has 36 holes to choose from, it is near impossible not to find one or two 'signature' holes, or discover a set of nine holes that offers the type of golf you like to play. But when you have a 54-hole golf complex the rewards are more often than not, even greater.

Anyone who ventures to the southern state of Malaysia in Johor, to play a few rounds of golf will not be disappointed if they select the 54-hole Tanjong Puteri Golf Resort.

Golfers will find 18-hole tracts, the Plantation, Straits and Village, which are all interesting in their own ways. Each of the courses measure at least 6,185 metres. All have four sets of tees: Blue, White 1, White 2 and Red.

Par for the gang of three is a consistent 72. And, for those who like to study scorecards the names for all 54-holes can be learned as they familiarise themselves with each layout's colour diagram that is on display to help players plan their round, and once on the layout guide

them around.

The Malaysian golf boom of the 1980s and a dip in oil palm prices at about the same time spurred the Keck Seng Plantation Group to convert over 800 hectares of land into a golf resort. Max Wexler was hired to design a course that was to keep the integrity of the terrain, which he promptly did. And, as a final touch Wexler arranged for special soft-textured sand to be trucked south from Perak to fill the bunkers he had strategically placed across his beautiful 18-hole creation.

As time went on two more courses emerged a short drive from the main buildings of the resort. The trio of courses for over a decade were known as the A (Alligator), B (Buaya) and C (Crocodile). Eventually, Tanjong Puteri changed the names to Plantation, Straits and Village in part because golfers interpreted the old names as grades, thus they favoured the "A" course, over the "B" with the "C" tract trailing the pack in rounds played.



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*No. 2, Plantation Course, is an index 1 hole. The fairway for this sharp, dogleg right hole leads to a large water hazard*

## Course Review Tanjong Puteri Golf Resort



*No. 14, Plantation Course, calls for a 90-degree dogleg to a body of water guarding its left front of a green that slants to the left away from the fairway*



*The Plantation's No 18 is more demanding than it appears*

### The Plantation Course

The 6,454-metre Plantation's 18 holes opened in 1992. It remains the resort's most popular experience for both members and guests, in part because it is adjacent to the activity of the property's 20 guest rooms, 34 double storey villas, restaurants and golfer's terrace.

The tract's opening hole is a straightforward par-5 that rises gently from tee-to-green. At 479 metres, it is reachable in two using today's modern equipment by many players. If this game plan is correct for you be sure to avoid a good sized sand bunker that sits on the green's left edge and once on the elevated two-tier putting surface stay focused or a three-putt experience may negate the good results of your aggressive style.

While it is not the course's

longest par-4, that honour goes to the 413-yard 12th hole, the 368-metre 2nd hole is the No. 1 index. The fairway for this sharp, dogleg right hole leads to a large water hazard that must be crossed on the approach shot to its green, a slim curving strip surrounded by four bunkers.

After a long 401-metre, level par-4 that is free of sand called "Long Lane," golfers are greeted by "Boomerang Green" a par-3 of 173 metres that ends with a huge green that resembles, you guessed it, a boomerang.

The third hole in this set of three water-free holes is the 395-metre par-4 No. 5, that yields when golfers stay clear of a large fairway bunker on the left and a greenside bunker that is also on the left.

Three of the last four holes on the front nine challenge

golfers with water. The 356-metre 7th hole requires an over-water tee shot; the more water you cross the shorter the approach shot. The 465-metre par-5 No. 7 can convert a player into a "Dreamer," of birdies because it is without water, but its five sand bunkers can make those dreams evaporate.

It is back to the water on No. 8 and No. 9. The 8th hole, a mid-length par-3 of 168-metres, sports a pond that grabs tee shots that drift right or are short to the left. Short is a word you do not want to use on the 380-metre 9th, as this par-4 ends with a green set tight behind water. It is okay here to take a little extra club for safety when attempting to clear the water, as two sand bunkers will stop your golf ball from bounding too far over the putting surface.

A par-4, par-3, par-4 and a par-4 start the back nine. Each of these holes has an index that is fairly golfer friendly, except for the 12th hole which owns an index of six.

The 369-metre No. 10 plays uphill and the 11th and 12th holes play downhill. On the 377-metre 13th hole, players need to stay right with their

drives to establish a comfortable approach to a partially hidden green.

After the layout's second longest hole, the 482-metre par-5 No. 14, that has water guarding its left front of a green that slants to the left away from the fairway, and golfers complete the tempting downhill 195-metre par-3, that goes by the name of "Tropical Paradise", players reach three outstanding finishing holes.

Water and sand reside as hazards on each of these single digit index holes. The No. 2 index 16th, the shortest of the group at 376 metres, is a dogleg left par-4 that presents an over water tee shot to a fairway that bends left around two huge sand bunkers. Golfers who stay far right away from the trouble will find a long difficult approach to a bunker-free green when they reach their golf ball.

The 17th hole is a dynamic 507-metre double-dogleg par-5 that is defined by a narrow "Roller-coaster" fairway. Near the green a pond rests on the fairway's left and two large sculptured bunkers that protect an elevated putting surface's right side.



*The Straits No. 4 is stunning and guarded by a well-designed group of sand bunkers*



*Dubbed the "Rock", No. 13 is the Straits longest par-3. From tee-to-green the hole is nearly filled with waste-type sand bunkers and large rocks*



*No. 17, Straits Course, may be the tract's shortest par-3, at 148 metres, but the degree of difficulty is about landing well on its island green*



No. 12, Village Course, can prove to be quite a distracting experience



No. 5 is the signature hole for the Village Course at 179-metres. Water covers the landscape from tee-to-green

The relatively short 377-metre 18th hole is more demanding than it appears. Its fairway is more rolling than the one on No. 17, no matter how good the drive is the golf ball rarely comes to rest in a level spot. So swing away and use the elevated tee from which you start as an aid for added distance on the drive. The slope of the hole's fairway near the green directs balls that are short towards the large body of water that rests on both sides of a small piece of fairway that fronts a green protected by several greenside bunkers on this No. 3 index hole.

### Straits Course

This 6,185-metre layout is home to the resort's largest greens.

While the elevation changes across the layout are not severe and its fairways offer generous landing areas this course, that has a slope of 120 and a rating of 71.2, can be a handful when the wind blows from the nearby Straits of Johor.

Like the resort's other two layouts, the Straits greets golfers with plenty of water. Three of its four par-3 holes present the wet stuff. The toughest of the quartet is the 17th hole. While it is the tract's shortest par-3, at 148 metres, the degree of difficulty for its tee shot is about equal to landing a fighter jet on an aircraft carrier, as an island green must be found.

The same ratio of water to non-water holes applies to the course's four par-5s. Only the 450-metre 6th hole is without the challenge of water.

Wildlife is prevalent on this tract as a majority of its holes touch swampy landscape or come close to dense jungle. So



Village Course: No. 17 – don't mess your shot on this hole

during your relaxing round look around and you may sight a lizard or two, a monkey here and there and even a wild boar on occasion.

My personal favourite for this review is the 4th hole. This gem of 324 metres offers a well-designed group of sand bunkers straight ahead from the tee. On the fairway's right side is a large lone bunker and the fairway weaves its way through all of this bunkering as a thin sliver and then turns left toward the upper edges of the bunkering to the left to reach a very well protected green. The visual intimidation on this short hole is stunning.

Another hole that is pleasing to the eye is the tract's longest par-3. This, the 178-metre 13th hole, has its terrain from tee-to-green nearly filled with waste-type sand bunkers that are also the home to large rocks that act as decoration, a near impossible hazard to escape from if your golf ball happens to land against their unforgiving sides.

One hazard that has not been mentioned is the deep, deep grass bunker that occupies much of the 16th hole's approach area to the green. It is a hazard that gives this 536-

metre par-5 its name of "Big Decision."

### Village Course

The Village course is considered the narrowest layout at Tanjong Puteri and to some more deceiving than the Plantation or Straits.

While both these characteristics may make this tree-lined layout sound overly demanding, do not be afraid to take on its 18 interesting holes, that play to a slope of 127 and a rating of 73.3, even if you are a high handicap golfer, as it is a fair test of golf.

What players will find when they venture out on the Village is that, it is full of well-protected, small, elevated greens, that the majority of holes offer downhill tee shots, and a good number of uphill approach shots complete the majority of its holes.

Water is present on 14 holes and over 90 sand bunkers dot this demanding layout. Club selection is extremely important, so be sure of the distance you normally hit the club you choose and be sure your short game is in top form.

The signature hole for this tract is its 179-metre par-3 No.

5. Water covers the landscape from tee-to-green. Its putting surface, which is much closer than it looks, is both extremely elevated and undulating. When the flag is in the far back left portion of the green only a career shot will fly the water and sand safely and then drop like a feather to leave a short birdie putt.

The 7th, a 367-metre par-4, is another hole that invokes excitement. At "Cliff Hanger" golfers need to find a spot between a long narrow bunker to the left and smaller, lone bunker to the right. As this fairway slopes from right-to-left and drops down before rising to an elevated green set against a small pond, only an excellent drive will set up an approach to the green that will give you a change of reaching it in regulation.

The Village closes with five holes where water dominates. The two closing holes, both par 4s, are the layout's index No. 4 and 2, respectively. Length is not the issue on this pair as the 17th is 366 metres and the 18th is 384 metres. If you have not lost a golf ball over the first 13 holes, that feat will surely change on holes 14 through 18.

If you are planning a trip to Johor, be sure to call ahead and learn about the resort's reasonable golf packages with and without accommodation. It is also good to plan ahead as the resort is very popular with golfers from Singapore.

**Tanjong Puteri Golf Resort**  
**81707 Pasir Gudang, Johor**  
**Tel: 607-2711 888**  
**Fax: 607-2711 333**  
**www.tpgr.com**