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A golfer's haven

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IF there is a golfer's paradise on earth, this is probably it - Borneo Highlands Resort in Sarawak. It is a mix of Mother Nature's beauty and man's will to conquer.

The resort is located 1,000m above sea level with year-round spring-like weather (between 18 degrees Celcius and 22 degrees Celcius), virgin jungles, sounds of nature and eco-friendly facilities. Adjacent to the Kalimantan border, the resort is 70km south of Kuching. The only way up is by four-wheel drive as the roads are steep and narrow with many blind corners. As you go up, keep looking back, as the views are spectacular.

Set on a 2,300-hectare plateau in the Penrissen Highlands, this resort is for the true golfers - for golf is the theme throughout.

Not only is there a golf course, there is also a golf library, a golf video collection and a golf gymnasium.

Non-golfers, however, can choose to commune with Mother Nature by jungle trekking or simply taking an electric golf buggy and ride around the course.

Ironically the resort was recently launched by non-golfer Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohammed who, in his speech, said he never understood the game.

At the border you can stand at the edge of Malaysia with the canopy of Kalimantan forests stretched out in front of you - but one step forward and you plunge into Indonesia for the cliff is 90-degrees downwards.

The 18-hole golf course and clubhouse is the first phase of the resort, called the Hornbill Golf and Jungle Club. Eco-engineered over five years, this place is a RM500 million joint-venture project between Country Heights and Sarawak's Land Custody and Development Authority.

The resort is said to be fully independent - the water source being the springs from the highlands and, in future, electricity will be generated by its very own turbines. At present, solar power is used to light the street lamps.

The resort is said to be working out ways to ensure that there is no shortage of water as happened during the launch when the number of visitors was more than expected.

It is interesting to note the obsession with the golfball here. People are willing to experience much joy and despair in pursuit of this little white ball over hectares of plain greens.

The key of your club room comes with a golfball and golfballs adorn the banisters. All along the corridor of the walls, there are clay settings of the different holes of the golf course. Enter the room and more golfball-framed pictures depicting the days when golfers used little more than wooden sticks adorn the walls.

The rooms in the clubhouse are built to represent a different hole that golfers would not have to part unless they retire to bed.

After completing the holes, the golfers can still continue chatting in the common shower about how the intended long putt turned out short and how the ball refused to get near the hole.

One is constantly reminded of the game. The ladies' spa and common shower room has a very interesting statue of a Victorian lady teeing off.

Those who yearn to be pampered can request a Thai-style massage by trained blind masseuses and be laden with organic essences of aromatic plants and flowers from the resort's very own gardens.

The chrysanthemum and organic gardens are definitely worth visiting.

After that, golfers can soak in the jungle spa with creepers hanging all over the place, talk of how they miscalculated the golf course and try to soak away all the tensions from holding the golf clubs.

All these - right under the open sky with in-house steam baths, saunas, spas, jacuzzis and hot springs. To rejuvenate, get a bowl of bird's nest or herbal chicken soup at the Hornbill Bar.

And when you retire, if you cannot afford the chalets and the suites, the clubhouse offers rooms which are just enough for two, fitted with the most bare necessities - in line with the concept "Back to Basics, Back to Nature".

The wooden walls, panelling and very Borneo artifacts give the room a native and ethnic touch. With the open toilet concept, one can answer nature's call with the windows wide open with Mother Nature watching - a very original idea. Forget air-conditioning as one is asked to leave the doors wide open all night, inviting fresh mountain air.

In the morning, if you are lucky enough to open your eyes to the first chirping of the birds, you are supposed to be able to see the clouds coming into your room. Wake up a bit later and the sun will be staring right in your face!

If you can pay more, then the suites are recommended as there is an attached bathroom - with a door - a little more than the basics!

Each room is unique, with its decor complementing the different in Sarawak. No two rooms are similiar. One would be intrigued with the various Borneo artifacts inside the room. Be advised though; do not lean against the walls as they are painted with a type of Australian native wall colouring.

The chalets are cosy timber abodes on stilts - with ayam kampung and pigeons brought up from the lowland, clucking and cooing under the chalets.

The clubhouse cafe Annah Rais boasts a menu of true healthy living, with pure vegetarian meals and buffets complete with fruit juices only.

"Annah Rais" means highlands in Bidayuh and is said to originate from the story of how a Dutch princess named Annah married a Bidayuh lad named Rais. Their longhouse is still very much in existence and visitors can go there to visit their handsome descendants.

There is no meat or liquor served in the resort and smoking is not encouraged. Thus, this is a place for those who want to try to practise true healthy living - provided money is no option.

For those who refuse to come down again to earth, there are "heavenly home" bungalows in the plans.

For more information, contact Borneo Highlands Resort at 011-225897/011-225898.

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