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NEW VENTURE

From gold to golf, Kolar has it all now

New Champion Reef Course Can Challenge The Best Of Players

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Bangalore: The prestigious \$1.25 million Indian Open held last October at the Karnataka Golf Association, one of the best courses in the country, certainly put Bangalore on the world's golfing map. By the time the next edition is held in the south, another course, close to Bangalore, and probably more challenging than the KGA, would be ready to host India's National Open on a regular basis.

Although only one half of the 18-hole layout at the Champion Reef Golf County near Kolar Gold Fields is ready, it is already spoken of in golfing circles as the next big thing to happen in the region after KGA and Eagleton Golf Resort.

Work on the second phase would begin soon after the Republic Day Charity golf tournament — an event conducted by the Times Foundation to celebrate its 175th year of publication — on January 26. By the time it is completed around mid-2014, IGU, the custodians of the Indian Open, who have decided to rotate the event region-wise, would certainly have Champion Reef in the frame.

Be that as it may, the four-laning of National Highway No. 4 till Mulbagal in recent months has not only eased traffic on roads to a large extent in east Bangalore, but on some of the golf courses in the Garden City as well. For, most golf addicts, who are always keen for newer challenges and newer conquests — although not many may brag of the latter as the course is quite a handful even for the pros — have included Champion Reef in the scheme of things.

"Ever since we opened in August last year, the traffic on the course has been steadily increasing, we have about 40 people playing on weekends," said project director George Menomprampil, who partnered with Confident Group to build the course and villas, numbering a little over 210, around it.

Champion Reef, named after one of the world's deepest gold mines at nearby KGF, was thrown open for the public last August, after three years of work by famed golf designer Ronald Fream and contouring expert Bill Kessener.

"Ron is a non-interventionist designer and has used what the site conditions have given him to carve a unique course," George pointed out. "It is a bouldery sight and the visual theme of the course is the inter-play of grass, water and rocks," he added.

Jeev Milkha Singh, the pioneer in Indian golf who showed the rest of the pros the way, had said that the key to growth of the sport, besides public driving ranges, was the need for quality courses. "The reason why Bangalore has been able to produce top golfers — pros and amateurs — is because they have challenging courses to play on," he said, referring to KGA.

The tough Champion Reef course is bound to throw up more champion golfers from the region. The course is still young, as the trees haven't grown to their full height, but once that happens and the course matures, it will pose every single challenge in the book.

With the wind being a major factor and a lot of water bodies, especially on the par-3s — one over 210 yards that can have even pros think twice before walking up to the tee — a few tight driving holes and fairways dotted with monstrous bunkers, golfers would certainly relish the challenges that the Champion Reef poses.

Throw in the practice facilities, which can put the ones at the KGA to shade, Champion Reef could soon become a must-play course for Indians. The driving range, which opened in June, 2010, has a capacity of 30 bays; they have a 12,000-square feet practice green and 8000-square feet practice chipping green, which will double once the second phase is completed and certainly match up to the best in the world.

"With large tees and massive greens, the nine holes can be played twice (as 18) and both feel totally different," George said and added that they were keen to start hosting tournaments. "We would like to host the South Zone amateur events and probably the Ladies pro events to start with," he added.

"We also played host to an IGU camp two years ago and a whole lot of ranked South Zone golfers were here on a four-day residential programme," the project director said. "Champion Reef has plans to start a junior player development programme, the announcement of which will be made shortly," said Arjun Lall, Director of Golf Operations at Champion Reef. "We are looking at promoting the sport amongst the youngsters and would be offering a 50% discount for juniors who use the facilities."



PICTURESQUE: A view of Champion Reef Golf County's greens in Phase I