

The golf course that survives against all odds

WHAT golf course hasn't had its fair share of trouble? Red imported fire ants continue to chomp into Texan greens, while Thai golf courses battle with termite invasions. A crocodile at the 13th hole of the Lost City Golf Course in South Africa once scared a few punters away. Down Under's solution to a freshwater version wallowing in a lake at the 14th hole on a course in Townsville, Australia, was to tell players that it was posing "no significant threat" and to resume play.

Following the reptilian thread, the one about the crocodile that ate a golfer on The Breakers Hotel golf course in Palm Beach, Florida, is a complete hoax (but it makes a great story).

Every African golf course has its uninvited visitors, including the unfenced Skukuza Golf Course in the Kruger National Park, South Africa, where the signature 9th hole is played across Lake Panic, aptly named as there are quite a few hippopotami, impalas, warthogs, baboons and giraffes down by the lake side as well.

But a golf course that I feel deserves special praise is one in Zimbabwe, which has survived human rather than nature's mismanagement.

Leopard Rock, a chateau-style 58-room hotel complete with turrets opened in 1946 in the country's undulating Eastern Highlands hills, was badly damaged by rocket fire in the 1970s, closed in 1980 due to fuel shortages, then finally reopened in 1993. At the same time a magnificent PGA 18-hole

championship golf course was built here to United States Golf Association specifications.

It has since then impressed the golfing world with many accolades including being awarded the Hertz International Travel Award for the Best Golf Course in Africa and Middle East in 2000. This year it joined the Prestige Collection, a group of the world's best golf resorts. Gary Player, Nick Price, Ian Botham, Mark MacNulty and others of note have all played here.

All well and good, but it is the toil behind the scenes that makes this place special. For the last 10 years the country's internal strife – ranging from mismanaged elections, stealth of third-generation-owned farm land, the highest inflation rate in the world, plus serious health issues – has obviously affected the golf course too.

A countrywide lack of infrastructure means shortages of essential commodities like water for the grass, power for the mowers and fuel for just about everything else. For almost a year the resort has not had a landline telephone, and the nearest hilltop to get a mobile phone signal is nine miles away.

Power remains intermittent, and when there is a fault rather than a scheduled load-shedding from the local power authority, the club professional – who also multi-tasks as the resort's driver – personally fetches the power supply company employees in the nearest town some 30 km away as they do not have transport (let alone fuel) to fix the problem. The resort has a generator but this too needs fuel.

In recent years visitors merely trickled in, so the spotlight was on golfers from within the country.

Last year when inflation was particularly bad, you could buy a Rolls Royce with a certain amount of Zimbabwean dollars one week and the next week all the same amount could buy was a cup of coffee! Local punters therefore offered to pay their greens fee using rice, maize meal, tins of baked beans or petrol coupons.

Baked beans?

"It's a more stable commodity," the club pro said at the time. Playing golf with pockets full to the brim of worthless currency notes had its logistical problems too.

This barter trade was, before the Zimbabwe dollar was banished in February in favour of the US dollar, the only way to beat inflation. Other local golf

enthusiasts fixed the resort vehicles in exchange for greens fees.

When the greenskeeper, a displaced farmer and now also a jack-of-all-trades, was asked how he had managed to maintained the greens so well over the years with sporadic fuel supplies, problems sourcing pesticides and an erratic supply of water his reply was brief. "We make a plan. Zimbabweans always make a plan."

Having a skeleton greens keeping staff of 11 has its disadvantages, but all are multi-taskers. Caddies double up as toilet cleaners and hotel waiters improvise if there isn't a beer in sight (sometimes by sending a runner to Mozambique). The staff have remained loyal, and are still smiling.

They will be smiling even more once the refurbishment plans of the new owners, LonZim are completed. Once visited by the Queen Mother of Great Britain and later on by princess Diana, by May next year Leopard Rock Hotel and its golf course may well host others of their ilk or even more PGA celebrities, for David Lenigas, LonZim executive chairman was intent on holding a PGA golf tournament here "as soon as the refurbishment is completed to relaunch this very special hotel".

Let's hope the new unity government has some new infrastructure plans too.



SPEAKING OUT

by Cheryl Mandy

NEXT MONTH



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ON THE MOVE

<p>Kapek joins Traders Qaryat Al Beri Traders Hotel, Qaryat Al Beri, Abu Dhabi has announced the appointment of Stephan Kapek as hotel manager. Kapek moves from the Shangri-La Hotel, Beijing where he was resident manager. He brings with him over 10 years of experience in the Middle East, having previously worked in the UAE, Egypt and Oman.</p> 	<p>Promotion for Collot Fabrice Collot has been promoted to hotel manager at the Banyan Tree Al Areen in Bahrain. Collot joined the resort in 2007 as director, food and beverage and was then promoted to executive assistant manager. Prior to joining Banyan Tree Al Areen, he worked in France, Jordan, Ukraine, the US and Russia.</p> 	<p>Mövenpick Bahrain gets new GM Heinz Krähenbühl has been appointed as general manager at the Mövenpick Hotel Bahrain. Krähenbühl started his career in the F&B department in 1978 and has had several postings in Switzerland, Russia, UAE and countries in the Middle East including Beirut, Jordan, Lebanon and Kuwait.</p> 	<p>New appointments at HHC Hilton Hotels Corporation has announced Robert Webb (right) as chief information officer. Webb joins Hilton from Equifax. Victor Louis joins as regional director of sales for Arabian Peninsula & Indian Ocean. He moves from Hilton Fujairah Resort where he was general manager, the position now taken by Remco Werkhoven.</p> 	<p>New role for Al Idrissi Rosewood Hotels & Resorts has appointed Khaled Al Idrissi as director of sales and marketing at Al Faisaliah Hotel and Hotel Al Khozama, Rosewood Hotels in Riyadh. He joined the company in 2007 as director of sales. Prior to this, he was DOSM at the Kempinski Hotel Mall of the Emirates, Dubai.</p> 
<p>Khan joins Radisson Blu Dubai Creek The Radisson Blu Hotel, Dubai Deira Creek has appointed Raheem Khan as assistant director of sales. Prior to joining Khan was recognised as a top performer consistently achieving annual sales, financial goals and increasing market share and profits in his previous role in another Dubai city hotel.</p> 	<p>New Rotana F&B director The Media Rotana Dubai has appointed Nicola Zamboni as director of food and beverage. Zamboni was previously F&B manager at the Fujairah Rotana Resort & Spa which he joined in 2006 as part of the pre-opening team. He started his career in Greece in 1998 working in specialised resorts chains.</p> 	<p>Johnston takes the helm at Raffles Raffles Hotels & Resorts has appointed John Johnston as the new company president. He joined the company in 1998 as president for Delta Hotels & Resorts and later was promoted to executive VP, development, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts. He was subsequently appointed executive VP, Europe, Middle East & Africa, Fairmont Hotels & Resorts</p> 	<p>New GM for Lebanon hotel InterContinental Hotels Group has appointed Walid Kanaan as general manager of the InterContinental Mzaar Lebanon Mountain Resort and Spa. He steps into his new role from his previous position as general manager at the Holiday Inn Salmiya Kuwait. Kanaan joined the company in 2001 at the InterContinental Phoenicia Beirut.</p> 	<p>Swiss-Belhotel appoints new executives Swiss-Belhotel International has appointed two new executives for the Middle East region. Ayla Haas (right) joins as regional sales and marketing manager, Middle East, and Hicham Eldah has become regional operations analyst where he will be analyzing operations in Middle Eastern hotels.</p> 
<p>flydubai's new appointments flydubai has announced the appointment of former Emirates Airline executive Hamad Obaidalla (right) as chief commercial officer, and Neil Mills from easyJet as chief financial officer. Obaidalla, a UAE national, was previously divisional senior vice president with Emirates. Mills was previously procurement director with easyJet.</p> 	<p>HR director position for Jabri Beach Rotana Abu Dhabi announced the appointment of Basel Jabri as assistant director of Human Resources at the hotel. Jabri's previous roles include employee relations manager at the Shangri-la Hotel in Muscat and employee's relations manager at the Raffles Hotel, Dubai before moving to his new position in Abu Dhabi.</p> 	<p>Financial boost from Nair Al Murooj Rotana Dubai recently welcomed its new area director of finance, Sashi Nair to the management team. Nair brings years of financial expertise with him from Rotana Hotels, the Riviera Hotel in Bahrain and Al Jazira Beach Resort in Abu Dhabi. Prior to this he was the Al Bustan Rotana in Dubai.</p> 	<p>New GM at Safir Doha Selim El-Hage has been appointed general manager at the Safir Doha Hotel Qatar. El Hage began his career as assistant F&B director at the Ramada Hotel Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco before taking up positions in Turkey, Jordan, Bahrain, Yemen, Dubai and Sharjah most recently as general manager for Golden Tulip Sharjah.</p> 	<p>Al Ain Rotana appoints executive chef Chef Mauro Seu has been appointed executive chef at the Al Ain Rotana. Chef Sau began his career with the Sheraton Hotel in Italy and has also worked with the one-star Michelin restaurant Milano, in Marburg, Germany. He joined the Rotana family in 2007 and the Al Ain Rotana team in July 2009.</p> 