

RED CLIFF

RED MOUNTAIN GOLF CLUB

Lined with luxury resorts and sandy white beaches, Phuket is well regarded as a haven for visitors, and now with the addition of one of the finest tracts in golf, there is even more reason to visit.

BY BENNY TEO PHOTOGRAPHY BY PATRICK LIM

For many years, the resort island of Phuket has seen vacationers through its gates and many of them, with golf bags in tow. Major events like the Johnnie Walker Classic has been held here long before China had seen Tiger Woods tee-off.

Back in 1998, residents of this isle set within the confines of the lush Andaman Sea, had already set their eyes upon a young, lanky 22-year-old Eldrick, whose bravado and strength has won him both fanfare, as well as the title over Ernie Els.

That was in Blue Canyon Golf Club. Fast forward 10 years and now, within the lush Kathu Valley farther south, there is another championship golf club waiting on its wings to flourish. Opened quietly in late 2008, Red Mountain Golf Course takes its moniker from the reddish hue of mud rocks that meanders below the mountains and it is arguably one of the finest golf design the region has ever seen.

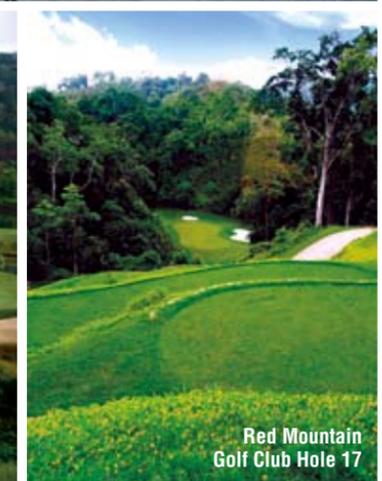
Sister to neighbouring Loch Palm Golf Course and belonging to the same company responsible for the MBK shopping centre in Bangkok, this course is the brainchild of local entrepreneur K. Banterng Tantivit, who turned what used to be a tin mine into the deathly difficult golf course that it is today.



Red Mountain Club House Terrace



Red Mountain Golf Club Hole 10



Red Mountain Golf Club Hole 17

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They certainly have invested wisely, and course designer John Morrow has been given a free hand to design a world-class tract in all of its 1,400 rai, or 554 acres (1 rai equals 2.53 acres) that puts emphasis on course management at all levels of play more than any other course on the island. It is also one of the driest, with its use of Novatec grass on the greens such that even after a heavy downpour, it will be playable in a very short time.

The course is not long. At 6,781 yards from the tips, some might even be foolish enough to take the big stick out on every conceivable hole, but that would be folly. Using the lay of the rock-laden land to full use, Morrow has thrown in blind tee shots and approaches into the mix with well-placed bunkers, lush forestry and water hazards that require the most precise judgement, even for conservative play, to stay out of.

THE COURSE OF PLAY

From the outset, the first hole in a downhill 366-yard par 4 (all measurements from the blue tees from here on) that offers a reasonably wide fairway landing area. Already evident here, shot placement is of prime importance. Guarding left of the fairway but not entirely in play are two deep bunkers to catch long-hitters trying to leave a short approach to the green. Too far right and one of two big rocks guarding left and right (or front and back, depending on perspective) will block the approach to the green, and thus requiring a lay up from even as short as 120 yards.

The play here is to hit a shorter club off the tee and lay up safely left-centre of the fairway, or missing left just before the bunkers, leaving for a clear short to mid iron approach to the green.

Although a relatively simple hole to visualise, this sets the tone of the round to come and it will come very soon. Hole number two is the first of a daunting four par 5s in this course. The others being holes 4, 12 and 18. Considering its total length, that is a lot to play in, but lest anyone thinks it is a good chance to shoot birdies, think again.

At 476 yards, the Index 8 second is treachery from the teebox and even more so from the approach. With water guarding left and right of the fairway and bunkers left and in front, not only stray shots will be punished; long-hitters may want to think twice before piling it on as well.

In almost the same way as the previous hole, the second shot must then be threaded carefully, but now

between dense tropical forestry instead of red rock. If you can come off with a par the first time round, that will make for a very good score.

Rounding off the outward nine at Hole 8 is a short 305-yard par 4 that reads index 15 on the scorecard. It is short but the degree of difficulty accorded to this hole location does not coincide with its actual play.

Off an elevated tee with lakes left and right of a pencil thin fairway and a small green guarded by bunkers on the left and the erstwhile mentioned lake to its right, even the longest and bravest of hitters will not dare to drive this green.

And therein lies the crux of the situation. Favouring precise iron play, distance measurement and shotmaking is key, as it is gauging wind conditions. Good iron players will love this hole but those who are not better be ready to lose some balls.

Red Mountain
Golf Club Hole 2



At the turn, the 10th is a downhill, dogleg left par 4 with another lake to the left and another that should be out of general play, to the right. At 409 yards, this hole resembles the 8th in terms of routing but with the added distance, it may be a daunting mid to long iron approach (depending on what you select to do off the tees), and hence its low stroke index of 5.

Now, we haven't talked much about the par 3s

hole; A golfer's hole that one will not easily forget. As you perch atop its elevated teebox some 525 yards away from the green, there appears to be an open fairway ahead but then, with a steep downhill slope towards water.

A courageous and straight drive is required here at the longest hole on the course, otherwise, anything too left or right will end up lost in the woods. The

Red Mountain
Golf Club Hole 18



here but mind you, they are a spectacle to play and to watch. Number 14 presents a challenge with length, and depending on pin position, accuracy in order to secure a birdie chance.

With water enveloping the front of the teebox all the way ahead and then to the right of the green, the safe play for this 172-yard hole is to the right. But that is, if you can meander between the bunkers guarding front and back as well as left of the green. Again, wind conditions vary and can cause problems, especially for those seeking the pin for a short putt.

The other noteworthy three par is the signature 17th. Apart from being a very scenic hole location however, it is actually not that hard a hole to play. From a teebox elevated about 200 feet above – depending on where you're teeing off from – and an amphitheatre of lush jungle all round, winds are not a big factor here and a short 9-iron or wedge is often sufficient to get there. Take straight aim, and you will be fine, and take your camera out of its bag too.

And then as you walk away from the 17th green, you will find yourself moving upwards again to the penultimate hole. The 18th is a fabulous finishing

approach must also be threaded carefully. A tree with a bunker lies about 120 yards from the green somewhere right-centre of the fairway and so, the right play will be to the left. This is not an easy hole to manage and certainly not one to come up with many low numbers.

The 18th is a fabulous finishing hole; A golfer's hole that one will not easily forget.

Back at the contemporary styled clubhouse, you can relax over a snack and drink at the terrace overlooking the course and watch while others plough through what you have just tried. It is a wonderful sight and one which is intelligently designed so you can marvel at the entirety of the course you have just played.

There is also a full service proshop with the latest equipment for sale and hire such that you will not even need to bring your own clubs. Eventually, there will be villa accommodation as well as a boutique hotel to stay in for that complete experience. If, of course, you are looking for more golf, its sister Loch Palm course is simply a short hop away. 🏌️

www.redmountainphuket.com

Red Mountain Golf Club
Hole 14 Par 3

