



Just 38km from Hanoi, a short speedboat ride whisks golfers to the forests, lakes and two 18 hole courses of the King's Island Golf Resort.

**Hong Nguyen** paid a visit

# ISLAND

After a lunch of delicious Vietnamese noodles at the clubhouse Swing restaurant, I went for a walk around the beautiful island along its red cactus and king palm lined paths.

Surrounded by mountains, trees and lakes, the island is cool and fresh, in pleasant contrast to the heat of the capital.

When this course was handed over to a Vietnamese group 20 years ago, no one could have predicted the future of golf in Vietnam. Jamie Westenburg is the golf director. "The Lakeside 18 hole par 72 course was designed by the famous American architect Robert McFarland," he says. "McFarland tried to keep the original terrain and make use of the 1,500ha water surface to make many water hazards to challenge golfers' skills."

The other 18 hole par 72 course, the Mountain View, was designed by Pacific Coast Designs, an Australian com-

pany well known for its many projects throughout Southeast Asia. With one course looking over the lake and another surrounded by mountains the island is a beautiful spectacle. This helped it earn the title of Vietnam's Best Landscaped Golf Course in 2008 and 2009.

Beside the speed boat dock, dozens of caddies gather waiting for customers. While the experienced caddies chat and joke, the newcomers watch and learn. Nearly 400 caddies are organized by four caddy managers. Binh, who lives less than 10km from the course, says it is a hard job: "After three months of probation, I remember feeling it was tough walking in the sun for hours, trying to understand, solve and satisfy customer requests. But now, the job is a part of my life. I have met so many very nice customers."

All of the caddies have to pass a yearly exam which decides their benefits for the whole year. This is to keep the quality of staff at a high level.

The young director's philosophy from his first day was to make the customer happy from beginning to end. To achieve this he believes all the staff have to be happy and energetic. The philosophy may seem simple, but it took a long time and great effort to turn it into practice.



*Following the success of King's Island Golf Resort, in 2009 BRG developed the new 18 hole par 72 Do Son Seaside Golf Resort in Haiphong and the Legend Hill Golf Resort in Soc Son district, Hanoi, is expected to open in 2014. All the golf courses are world class with both spectacular design and elite service standards.*

begin to understand why there are policies and why etiquette is so important."

If any complaints occur, they are addressed immediately and if necessary Westenburg himself will get involved. King's Island was voted Vietnam's Best Service Golf Course 2009 and also honoured as Vietnam's Best Caddie Golf Course in 2010 and 2011.

Thanks to the efforts of all the managers and staff, what is one of the oldest golf courses in Vietnam now has 1,400 members.

"The cost of running a golf club is increasing year by year, but clubs are surviving by improving the quality of the greens and reducing the cost for customers by launching promotion programs throughout the week," says Westenburg. "However, I do hope there will be more support and understanding from the government and sports authorities in the near future." He believes this will not only help the game of golf survive in this country, but also allow more people to play the game and attract more tourists, boosting the economy.

# FAIRWAYS

"I have worked in the golf industry in many countries, such as Canada, Thailand and Russia," says Westenburg. "With this experience I have learned to deal with many situations and Vietnam is no different. Because golf is still in its infancy here, there are both golfers who are very well educated on club pol-

icies and golf etiquette and those that are not familiar with either. A good manager has to understand that and act properly in each case and not get frustrated. I have to teach them from the beginning. Some may not initially agree with policies, procedures and etiquette, but as they play more they will

