

Always Mix Business *with Pleasure*

— STEPHEN BANKS
General Manager of
Bukit Pandawa Golf &
Country Club



One of only four World Golf Awards nominations for World's Best Par 3 Course 2017, Bukit Pandawa Golf and Country Club is well on its way to making Bali an international golfing destination. To learn more about this new tourism sector Asia Dreams talked to General Manager Stephen Banks, a well-travelled British PGA golf professional who has been involved in golf course management for over 23 years. Hailing from Manchester in the UK, Stephen explained the happening trend of Championship par-3 golf courses, how he started out in golf and what he has planned for this venture.



Q: Stephen, I hear Bukit Pandawa Golf Course is the first 18 hole championship par-3 golf course in Southeast Asia, can you tell me a little about it?

A: It's a superb par-3 course built to full international USGA specifications, exactly like you would find in high-end properties in Dubai and Singapore. The golf course, managed by AccorHotels, forms part of the 150-hectare Bukit Pandawa Resort & Golf integrated resort, which within the next few years will see a Waldorf Astoria Resort, Mandarin Oriental Hotel and Residences, Swissôtel and a soon-to-be-announced property that has long been synonymous with the finest things in life, all opening along the luxurious cliff top overlooking the beach.

The course was designed by Bob Moore of the California-based JMP Golf Design Group, who rose to the challenge of working with the limestone topography and rocky outcrops here and created a truly intricate, challenging and aesthetically pleasing course – it's a masterpiece. We also use a new type of grass, Pure Dynasty, a flexible and durable seashore paspalum, so the playing surface is absolutely world class.

Championship Par-3 courses are a brand new concept and as a professional golfer I'd honestly say it's more difficult to play under par gross at BPG&CC than a standard golf course. My plan is to host a World Par 3 Championship for Southeast Asia here, hopefully in 2018; it will be a Pro-Am

tournament, with similarities to the highly successful World Par 3 Championships in Bermuda.

Q: What are your biggest challenges here on a cliff top, a relatively arid area?

A: We have a truly fantastic course with superb facilities that is easily accessible, but will not reach V2 speed until the hotels are fully completed. We have to face the fact that in Bali there are more people arriving carrying surfboards than golf clubs, so we're working hard to overcome this. And the wind can be a bit of a factor too!

Q: Is golf tourism a promising sector in Bali?

A: Golf is popular world-wide and the exclusive, refined sophistication of this



Q: Tell me a bit about your career, how did you end up here in Bali?

A: With a degree in golf course management from the UK, my first job after graduating was in Saudi Arabia. I've lived in China, Vietnam and more recently four years in Africa to include Nigeria, pre-opening the IMG managed Lakowe Lakes Golf and Country Estate, followed by a stint in Egypt.

My first time in Bali was in 2008 as general manager setting up New Kuta Golf, where we hosted the EJ Indonesia

Open, it was a co-sanctioned European and Asian tour event, the largest sporting event in Indonesia at that time.

Q: What do you hope to bring to this role?

A: Success – measured by hosting a professional tournament, filling the golf course, offering unprecedented service, plus bringing in the bottom line for the owners.

Q: What advice would you give to anyone looking to get into golf course management?

A: The British PGA program is definitely the way to go, there are lots of exams and you have to get down to a 4 handicap; it's the backbone of my career. Even if you play golf, you still need all the skills in finance, admin and management to make it to the top.

Q: When you're not at work, what do you do?

A: I love to spend time with my girls, I particularly enjoy fine French red wines, vintage cheese and an imported fillet steak, rare.
www.bukitpandawagolf.com

integrated resort is sure to make it highly desirable. We will have upscale, luxury hotels alongside a world-class, challenging championship course that, being a par-3 course, can be played in around two and a half hours. Generally, even on holiday, people don't have the time to spend the whole day playing golf, BPG&CC works!

Q: What facilities are available now at Bukit Pandawa Golf and Country Club?

A: The golf course and 3,000sq.m. clubhouse are complete, we have the most exclusive event facilities and a helipad. Upstairs we're just launching The Kul-Kul Restaurant, named after our signature Balinese kul-kul tower at the 13th hole. It has superb vistas across the course and ocean, thus we've already hosted a couple of key golf events and luxurious weddings. On the ground floor is the infamous Spike

Bar, overlooking the 18th, where you can have a drink on the terrace and watch the world go by. I would say we have the best location for a clubhouse in Bali by a country mile, the panoramic views over the course and sea are astounding. We are currently planning for a tennis court, swimming pool, with lawn areas already a go – all the facilities you would expect in a high-end development.

Q: So how did you end up playing golf?

A: My brother and I used to save up our pocket money for sports stuff and when I was 7 years old, we came across a rusty old 3 iron and started playing on the muddy school field. Later my parents bought me a club membership; I won the men's club championship, amongst others, at an early age of 16, played for my country and turned pro. The rest is history as they say!

