

Strolling down a tight, palm-tree-lined fairway, shoulder to shoulder with a young woman, who could pass as a runway model, may seem like a dream scenario. However, this scene is how golf is played in the Philippines. The model is actually my umbrella girl, and she is part of the pampered experience that Manila's Valley Golf and Country Club offers. It's my fifth different course in as many days, and, as I look back, this particular round served as culmination of everything I've experienced during my golf journey to the Philippines.

Standing on the tee of yet another impossibly beautiful, ultra-tropical hole at Valley Golf, my umbrella girl is now multi-tasking—that is, holding the umbrella to protect me from the 90-degree heat while using her other hand to create a breeze on my back with a pink polka-dotted Japanese fan. Apparently, my umbrella girl is also my fan girl.

After making yet another 10-foot putt for par, thanks to the keen read by my other new female friend that day who serves as my caddie (she drives the cart, pulls clubs, and, by day's end, probably has run a 5K chasing after us), I come to the following realization: it really is 'More Fun in the Philippines,' as my hosts with the Association of Inbound Golf and Tourism have been touting all week.

A five-day trip last October to a country which lays claim to some of the best beaches in the world, friendly locals, typhoon-like thunderstorms, and mind-numbing traffic delivered exactly what I had hoped to find: great golf, great people, and delicious cuisine.

If you can get past the traffic that makes Manila seem more like Mumbai, you'll find that the Philippines can be a worthy off-the-beaten-path golf destination, although getting there is a journey in itself. My 17-hour flight took me from O'Hare to Manila, with a brief layover in Tokyo. The Philippines are 13 hours ahead, so plan to lose a day when departing and gain a day upon your return. Fly Japan Airlines or Cathay Pacific and you'll quickly realize why they are among the best in the business; both airlines present food and services worthy of any AAA Five Diamond Resort, even in economy class.

Golf in the Philippines is reserved for the wealthy. Most clubs are either 100% private or semi-private, although accessible for tourists with a phone call, or booking through a tour operator. My group included a wonderful mashup of writers from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong, and Japan.

My week in paradise consisted of six courses in six days and not one of the courses disappointed me. I was challenged at each layout, and I felt undeserving of the overwhelming hospitality that was extended to each golfer. Unlike the U.S., most Asian courses supply you with a caddie. In the Philippines, they tend to be female, between the ages of 20 and 50, and wear bright-colored uniforms and have warm, friendly smiles. An average caddy tip is 500 Philippine pesos (about \$11), but a \$20 U.S. bill will be greeted with much delight and appreciation from these hard-working women. Treat them nice and by end of the day, you'll have made a new friend in the faraway land.

A caddie's life outside the course is anything but easy, so when you can give them an extra gift such as chocolates, a brand new Pro V1, or in my case, a small cooler bag to hold a bottle of water or Gatorade, their appreciation is genuine. My umbrella girl at Valley Golf was a 28-year-old single mother living with her parents and two young children. She wakes at 4:00 AM five days a week and travels an hour and a half each

17 Hours to Paradise

How I Fell In Love With Golf In The Philippines

By Dave Silbar



Mt. Malayara 9th Fairway



Mt. Malayara 18th Hole

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Fairways and Bluewater



Jeepneys

way on sardine-packed public transportation to the course.

Besides people, if there's one thing Manila has it's a plethora of Jeepneys—the public transport that is a symbol of the Philippines. Each Jeepney seems unique. Modeled on the American army jeep after World War II, they can be highly polished silver steel, or festooned with colorful signs and paint jobs. Commuters cram shoulder-to-shoulder inside under the low-slung roof, or hang on to the back outside. According to my hosts, Jeepneys are an endangered species due to their gas-guzzling tendencies and poor seating arrangements (you sit along the walls). It would be sad to see them go, though. To Western eyes, they are part of the charm of a country trying to carve out its own tourism niche.

The Philippines is not on the list of the Ten Most-Visited Asian countries, a list dominated by China, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea, and Singapore. Closest neighbor Taiwan is at No 8, ahead of Vietnam and India. As tourists fall hard for the charms of mainland Asia, the Philippines is trying to catch more overseas eyes with its longtime, aforementioned "It's More Fun in the Philippines" campaign. It's also chasing golf tourism, with its golf clubs, tour companies, and hotel chains working together in that pursuit.

My first round was at South Forbes Golf City, a short, mountainous course about 90 minutes south of Manila. Our host and the director of golf, Eugene Dimaano, was quick to offer a free shirt to anyone who didn't lose a golf ball, as the last time that happened was seven years ago. From the get-go, it wasn't hard to figure out why. The elevation changes on South Forbes are akin to a rollercoaster, with tight winding fairways and five straight par 3s that complete Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, which is what local call the front nine. My lone lost ball came on the fourth hole, a short downhill par 4 that doglegs to the right with mountain terrain lining both sides of a narrow fairway.

Torrential rain can come on suddenly in the Philippines, and the thunderstorms are something to behold. With that in mind, I asked the staff at Manila's outdoor penthouse Bayleaf Intramuros restaurant what they did should it rain, as it briefly seemed to most days. Would I get a replacement meal? Seconds later the first watery splat arrived. Then another, and another.

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Eagle Ridge Norman Course



Fairways and Bluewater



Eagle Ridge Dye Course



Eagle Ridge Aoki Course

With major elevation changes, sweeping island and ocean views, a waterfall, and pristine lakes, this is one course that seems to have it all.

Stay Connected

The weather has finally turned and a new golf season is upon us! The start to every golfing season begins with some much needed outdoor practice. Every season at the Bolingbrook Driving Range and Rabito Golf Academy we see golfers working on tips or drills they may have seen on TV during the winter months. A commonly seen drill is hitting balls with a towel under the arms. Golfers frequently hear that the arms and body must stay connected in the backswing. This thought leads to right-handed golfers locking and pinning the left arm against their chest in the setup. Also, in an effort to stay connected, this is why we see golfers practicing with the towel under their arms. This practice drill is exactly what we do *not* want.

There's a great misunderstanding concerning "connection" in the golf swing. Instead of thinking the arms and body must be connected, think the arms must work in tandem with the body in the swing. In order to do that, one must maintain the swing width throughout the swing. Swing width is defined as the distance between the elbows and the armpits, not the hands and armpits. If the right elbow is closer to the ribs at the top of the backswing than it was at address, the swing width is destroyed. The proper swing width mandates that the right forearm be parallel to the spine angle at the top of the backswing while the forearms create an equilateral triangle. Because the right shoulder has only so much external rotation, the tremendous advantage of this position is that it allows the club shaft to shallow out on the downswing by itself. On the other hand, if the right elbow is tucked and pointing at the ground at the top of the backswing, the shoulder cannot rotate much further back than it already is and the club shaft cannot shallow out on its own. This forces the golfer to shallow out their body in order to get back to impact, which causes the right shoulder to dip towards the ground and the hips to spin out or open. This leads to all sorts of errant shots including fat, thin, and topped shots.

Start this golf season out with some better thoughts and it will lead to better shots, lower scores, and much more enjoyment. To learn more about Rabito Golf and The Bolingbrook Golf Club "Journey to Better" Game Improvement Guarantee, visit www.bolingbrookgolfclub.com/journeytobetter.



Incorrect backswing: right elbow tucked



Correct top of backswing: right forearm parallel to spine angle



Incorrect impact: body shallows club and right shoulder dips to ground



Correct impact: club shallows by itself on downswing allowing you to move forward to impact

INSTRUCTION

JOURNEY TO BETTER



Carl Rabito



17 Hours to Paradise

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We retreated indoors and indeed got replacement meals. It was a shame we had to head inside, as the view from the roof deck across the skyline was spectacular. Hundreds of feet below were the stone walls, churches, palaces, and courtyards of old Manila, with rows of car lights weaving by and the sounds of the city for once muted. By way of compensation, Bayleaf owner Beth Dar plucked three of her staff from around the table and had them sing acapella while we finished our dinner. Filipinos love singing, and suddenly being thrust into the limelight couldn't have come more naturally.

In contrast to Bayleaf, Ang Bistro Sa Remedios—specializing in authentic Filipino food—was at street level, dishing up local specialties in the heart of the old district, surrounded by boutiques, bars, discos, and novelty stores. As we ate local dishes with names like Dinuguan at Puto, Taba ng Talangka, Pancit Palabok, and Crispy Pata (pork knuckle), the band played a Philippines hit about a homesick Filipino living overseas—more than 10 million do—lamenting being so far from Manila. At the time, we joked that he must love traffic.

If there is one star that steals the show, it's the Fairways and Bluewater Resort and Golf Club located on the island of Boracay. A 45-minute plane flight from Manila, this could be an ideal place to spend your entire vacation. With white sand beaches and impossibly clear blue waters, Boracay was voted the "world's best island" by *Travel + Leisure* magazine in 2012, ahead of Bali, Galapagos, and Maui. As solid as any AAA Four Diamond resort in the U.S., Fairways and Bluewater is far and away the nicest resort on an island known worldwide. With numerous activities offered inside this gated resort community, Fairways and Bluewater lays claim to the island's only golf course, and it's spectacular. With major elevation changes, sweeping island and ocean views, waterfalls and pristine lakes, this is one course that seems to have it all. Even a downpour on the first hole did not come without a memory as my new friend from Malaysia and I waited out the storm from behind a waterfall that was behind the first green.

Another of the week's biggest standouts was Mount Malarayat. The challenging 27-hole championship layout offers magnificent mountainous scenery on every hole and was designed by the California-based J. Michael Poellet Design Group. The par-5, seventh hole has a spot as one of the top 500 golf holes in the world by *Golf* magazine, while *Asian Golf* magazine named Mount

Malarayat the best course in the Philippines in 2009.

Severe, multi-tiered greens are a major feature of the Mount Malarayat golf course. These are double and triple tiers. Sometimes the tiers work sideways rather than head on. No. 7 on the Makulot course is among the country's most famed holes, featuring a downhill drive to a well-bunkered fairway that tilts left to right. Once you round the gentle corner framed by brown rushes, an impressive lake and green complex come into view.

Overall, golf in the Philippines is a treat—a virtual oasis of calm. The clubhouses are large and ornate, with palatial

facilities, attentive staff, and terrific 19th hole atmospheres. Beautifully designed by some of the world's finest golf architects, the courses were both fair and challenging, with reasonable green fees—the most expensive was around \$120 U.S. One of the most outstanding is Mount Malarayat, just \$63 for a weekday tourist and optional cart less than \$30.

After experiencing all things golf in the Philippines, I want to conquer more golf in this hemisphere. Needless to say, my fond memories of golf in the Philippines was beyond 'fun' and closer to a life-defining experience for this dyed-in-the-wool travelling golfer.



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