



Golf in paradise

JAMES SHRIMPTON

It's easy to wax lyrical over the beauties of Tahiti and her islands, so why should their first resort golf course be any different?

Take over a mix of both flat and hilly virgin land on the French Polynesian island of Moorea, hire the creativity of Jack Nicklaus Design to map out 18 holes on land including 35 hectares of reclaimed swamp.

Add lakes and sand, then place the project with Gregori International, one of the world's leading makers of sports arenas and there you have the new Moorea Green Pearl Golf Course.

The signature hole is undoubtedly the longest, the 16th, a par-five of 557m; all downhill with fairways of sometimes slender width bounded by trees and rough with bunkers strategically placed along the way.

Photographer-golfers will find themselves taking more shots with their cameras than their clubs.

Cost of the 6,002m-long championship layout and the 165-hectare Warwick Moorea Golf and Spa Resort, with 154 villas and rooms now being constructed around it, has been put at \$137 million.

For more than two decades, reports of a planned resort golf course have periodically swept Moorea.

Only four years ago, the-then manager of French Polynesia's first golf club, 40km south of the

capital Papeete on the main island of Tahiti, was claiming it to be the best for 2500 miles in every direction. That is Hawaii to the north, Fiji to the west and South America to the east.

The par-72, 5950m-long Olivier Breaud course on Tahiti was built in 1968 by Californian designer Bob Baldock, and today the now Government-owned and well-maintained club has several hundred mostly expat members but draws few tourists.

The nearest resorts are 30km away, and only three or four carts are available for visitors.

But it became the site of the annual Tahiti Open on the South Pacific circuit, and notable for Arnold Palmer once having played there while on a business trip in the 1970s.

Now the big name in golf on Moorea is that of Arnie's old rival Jack Nicklaus, with his sons forming one of the world's most expert designing teams, which became involved in the South Pacific for the first time.

Jack himself did not visit the site of the Green Pearl course while it was being built, but the way now appears clear for an invitation to the veteran and his wife to take a holiday at the Warwick Moorea Golf and Spa Resort when it opens early in 2010.

Golf tourists at Moorea Green Pearl, and Australians and New Zealanders with their direct Air Tahiti Nui flights to Papeete, will be targeted.



The par-70 course's two nines opened for play several months apart. There are a number of long-standing resort hotels within a few minutes drive.

Closest is the Moorea Pearl Resort and Spa 5km down the road, its accommodation including 28 of Polynesia's famous over-water bungalows, plus 36 others and 30 garden-view rooms.

The Green Pearl course is located in the northeast corner of 136sq-km Moorea island, close to the ferry terminal and airport. From Papeete, it takes 25 minutes to Moorea by fast-cat ferry and just five minutes by air.

All the course is available for social rounds, although as of late March (we were told) the length and indexing of all holes had yet to be officially measured and confirmed.

IF YOU GO:

The Moorea Green Pearl Golf Course is located at Temea on the French Polynesian island of Moorea. Call (from Australia 0011-689-562-732), fax 0015-689-562-659, email infomooresgolf-resort.com

Website is www.mooreagolf-resort.com; more details from (0011-33-(0)562-799-300,

The adjacent Warwick Moorea Golf and Spa Resort is due to open early in 2010.

Closest major hotel now is the beachside Moorea Pearl Resort & Spa, 5km away. Details: visit www.pearlresorts.com, email resspmhotels.pf or call 0011-689-508-445.

Until June 1, Tahiti Travel Connection is offering a package from \$2750pp including air fares from Sydney with taxes, five nights with breakfast at the Moorea Pearl Resort, one night before and one night afterwards at the Radisson Plaza Papeete, plus ferries to and back from Moorea and all hotel transfers. Call tollfree 1300-858-305.

Holidays in Tahiti: see www.tahitinow.com.au or visit Tahiti Tourisme at 26 Bligh Street, Sydney 2000, or call (02) 9233-4920.

Air Tahiti Nui flies direct between Sydney and Papeete. Visit www.airtahitinui.cm.au or call World Aviation Systems on 1300-732-415.

■ *The writer was a guest of Air Tahiti Nui, Tahiti Tourisme, the Moorea Green Pearl Golf Course and the Moorea Pearl Resort & Spa.*



TEE-ED OFF: Tahiti has wanted for a premium golf course for some time, but little else. Dancers, below, and singers are frequent entertainment at resorts.