

Indian 'Golf Cities' Fuel Real Estate Boom, Attract Non-Resident Indians

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Townships with designer interiors and world-class architecture are passé. Developers are now turning to golf to attract non-resident Indians and high net worth individuals in the premium housing segment. Residential dwellings built around a golf course are the latest buzzword in the super-premium housing segment of the Indian realty industry, estimated at \$15 billion and growing at 35 per cent annually.

"The golf cities make an attractive proposition for NRIs and HNIs who together constitute 50 per cent of buyers in the premium housing segment," Kunal Banerjee, head of corporate communication, Ansal API, told IANS.

No wonder big players like Unitech, DLF, Ansal API, Omaxe and Jaypee have already taken the plunge with an array of golf-centric projects. Royal Indian Raj International Corporation, a foreign direct investment company in the Indian real estate sector based out of Vancouver, just last month announced a partnership with golf legend Jack Nicklaus to build as many as eight 18-hole courses as multi-million-dollar centerpieces to the firm's new resort and residential communities across India.

"These high end customers are ready to pay big bucks for a sprawling home amidst the greens with a promise of high class lifestyle," said a spokesman from DLF.

"And even with a hefty price range from Rs.7.5 million to Rs.90 million, these projects have been snapped up like hot cakes," he further added.

DLF Golf and Country Club, Gurgaon, situated on the outskirts of Delhi, is flanked by the twin luxury high-rise residential projects 'The Aralias' and 'Magnolias' inside the 18-hole DLF Golf Course. And DLF is not a case in isolation. After the Karma Lakelands project in Gurgaon with a 9-hole golf course, Unitech has launched Unitech Grande, over 347 acres along the Noida expressway neighboring the capital city. It offers an ultra luxurious residential project built around Greg Norman-designed 18-hole golf course. In the same locality, Jaypee Green, a township by the Jaypee Group, also boasts of luxury villas and high-rise apartments built around Greg Norman-designed 18-hole golf course. Omaxe is also developing a Golf Theme Township estimated at Rs.18 billion in Raipur, the capital of Chhattisgarh.

Developers attribute the trend to growing passion for golf among the elites.

"Golf is not just a game but it's a symbol of urban upper class lifestyle," Pramod K. Magu, executive vice president, Unitech, told IANS. "So from the top brass of the corporate world to those who aspire to arrive in life, everyone finds residences built around the golf course an ideal abode," Magu added. The fact that the project caters to an exclusive segment of society goes in favor of the developers. "Golf home projects are exclusive projects. Slight slumps in the market that generally slow down the middle housing segments usually do not affect these projects, as the buyer is exclusive and very selective about the property," Magu said. And the trend is fast spreading from metros to emerging cities. For example, Ansal API's Sushant Golf City Lucknow is spread over 2,000 acres on the outskirts of the Uttar Pradesh capital. "Earlier golf was restricted to a select group, but it has grown popular over the years with many middle level executives and business class taking active interest in the game," Banerjee said.

And with top-tier Indian players like Jeev Milkha Singh and Digvijay Singh teeing off at \$ 2.3 million world tournaments, the sport's popularity is booming across the socio-economic spectrum. That is the reason Ansal API are proposing a Royal Palms Golf and Country Club in Lucknow that will offer residents the services of golf trainers and coaches. Even Sahara is providing a golf academy to impart professional golf training in its Amby Valley project built around an 18-hole golf course at Lonavala, 96 km from Mumbai.

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Here are ten of the best courses where you can golf India:

1. Eagleton Golf Resort, Bangalore

This 18-hole par 72 course set on 170 acres of natural Bangalore beauty offers a championship golf course. The expansive club house and hotel is centrally air-conditioned and measures 3 million square feet, making it the biggest of its kind in South East Asia.

2. Delhi Golf Club, New Delhi

Built in 1931, Delhi Golf Club (originally called the "Lodhi Golf Course") contains many Tughlak and Lodi dynasty monuments & is also home to over 300 species of birds. It also organizes professional tournaments such as the Indian Open, part of the Asian PGA circuit.

3. Royal Calcutta Golf Club, Calcutta

Built in 1829, this was the first golf club constructed outside of Great Britain. This ageless wonder retains its challenges of small greens and frequent water hazards despite its mostly level terrain. There are also strategically placed water tanks to add to the course's adversity.

4. The Gaekwad Baroda Golf Club,

Badora the 'Lukshmi Villas Palace Golf Course is a part of 'The Gaekwad Baroda Golf Club'. It is located in the Lukshmi Villas Palace grounds, where the Royal Family of Baroda resides in the Lukshmi Villas Palace.

5. Coimbatore Golf Club, Tamil Nadu

Set on 180 acres of scenic fertile terrain this 18-hole spread has a distance of almost 6,800 yards. This modern course features deep fairways and fast greens. The wind is notorious for altering the score card and be sure to watch out for the shrub-covered canyon on the 8th hole.

6. Bombay Presidency Golf Club, Mumbai

This renovated 18-hole course set in a Mumbai suburb has an "elephant pit" hazard on the 16th hole. Overall the fairways are tight and the greens are sleek making for enjoyable play even though the course is a bit short (6,200 yards) by golfing standards.

7. Hyderabad Golf Club, Hyderabad

Managed by the Indian army but available for public use this 18-hole course has a natural lake and stretches into the 'Naya Quila' a part of the historic Golconda Fort complex now considered an archaeological site. The 12th green is located next to a bungalow once used by a young Winston Churchill. The 14th green is called Waterloo in memory of a golfer who took 6 puts to sink from less than three feet.

8. Agra Golf Club, Agra

This 9 hole course may seem small, but there is nowhere else in the world where you can play golf with the Taj Mahal as your background.

9. The Royal Palms Golf and Country Club, Mumbai

The Royal Palms sports an 18-hole championship course spread over 100 acres. Three manmade lakes add to the landscape, and the club also has various clubhouse restaurants to offer visitors.

10. Aamby Valley Golf Course, Pune

The Aamby Valley Golf Course was named Course of the Year by the Professional Golfers Association of India August 2005. It also hosted the inaugural Aamby Valley Asian Masters tournament on the Asian Tour in May 2006.

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