

# Driving range industry continues boom era in Japan

When one hears the expression "golf boom," the tendency is to envision lush courses around the world, expensive memberships, predawn lines of golfers awaiting tee times. For the Japanese, the obsession with the game also involves no courses, no pars. Driving ranges are booming at Clubhouse Japan.

According to information provided by Japan Golf Report (JGR), nearly 5,000 driving ranges are registered in the country. Based on 1989 figures, the average number

of annual visits to each range was 26,466.

Tokyo was the leader with 362 ranges and 15.14 million visits. But in that city, according to JGR, "The astronomical price of land has led to the closure of many inner-city outdoor ranges. Their place has been taken, however, by practice areas, sports clubs and golf schools created inside buildings throughout the Greater Tokyo district..."

In Yokohama, a 71-bay "Golf Dome" opened on land belonging to Japan Railways. The dome is an

inflatable tent, with the driving bays situated on three floors. Portrayed as an "urban-style amusement center," it was built on an 11,000-square-meter site in front of the Yokohama (Railroad) Station. The complex includes a pro-shop, restaurant, computer-simulated golf course and an art gallery.

Built at a "relatively low cost" of \$15.4 million (¥2 billion,) the dome was jointly developed by International Consulting and Planning, Inc., Xecta and Mizuno Corp. The inflatable structure weighs 43 tons

and takes about four hours to inflate.

The project was created "initially" for only a two-year period. Mizuno Corp. has planned another dome. An all-weather driving range called "Golf Dome 21."

Equipped with an automatic ball-retrieval system, the golf section will have 80 hitting bays, according to JGR, plus 20 for group lessons, 24 for golf schools and another 20 for bunker practice.

The dome's planned facilities also include Mizuno's original swing analysis system, a swimming pool,

sauna, shop, restaurant and putting courses. Expected cost for the dome is \$61.5 million (¥8 billion) and will take about two years to build.

Among the more than 120 million visitors to Japan's driving ranges in 1989, not all were visiting amenities. Outdoor ranges, particularly in colder climates, reflected a smaller number of visitors and the disparity between urban and rural sites. Tokyo's 15 million range visitors is a far cry from Akita, which had a mere 6,673 range users.

Especially in the country districts, there is a construction boom where large corporations "often develop new resorts and golf practice facilities on unused land." Still, it is not uncommon for ranges to go bankrupt," JGR said, because of too much competition, or too little consideration of location when they were built."

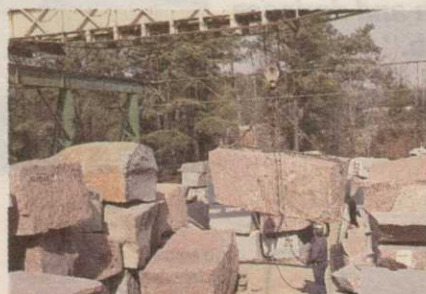
The Japanese driving range industry is "approaching an era of civil war," according to Shuichi Yamashita, editor of Kanto Golf Driving Ranges Federation News.

As land prices in Tokyo continue an upward spiral, many inner-city outdoor ranges have been closed. In their place, indoor golf schools and practice areas have been created throughout the Greater Tokyo area.

To put the popularity of driving ranges in perspective, in Tokyo alone the number of visitors to the ranges constitutes "more than one visit for every person living in the Tokyo area," according to JGR.

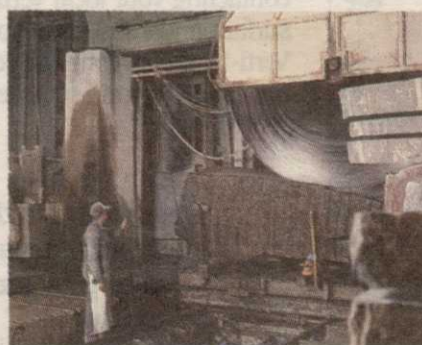


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## Volcanoes major fear at Unzen Golf Course

UNZEN, Japan — This community, in Nagasaki Prefecture, is the site of Japan's oldest public golf club, Unzen Golf Course, established in 1913. It's also under the shadow of Mt. Fugen, whose eruptions have already killed more than 30 people.

Although the course is not directly affected by the volcano, it has suffered a considerable drop in visitors and, consequently, revenue. Shimabara Country Club, a nearby course established in 1959, was forced to close June 4-July 29 last year after the volcano's activities closed area highways.

Shimabara has not suffered a direct hit, but reports an ash problem, which kills the fairway turf if left for long.

Mt. Fugen last erupted in 1792 in Japan's worst volcanic disaster, when nearly 15,000 villagers died, mostly drowned in tidal waves. The recent explosions are the biggest in 65 years in Japan, which has 77 active volcanoes.

The Japan Professional Golfers' Association has contributed ¥1 million (\$7,692) to disaster victims, and several tournament sponsors and professional golfers have made large donations as well.