

An Oasis in the

BY REBECCA LARSEN

Many Americans view travel in the Middle East as a risky option, but Troon Golf, headquartered in Scottsdale, Ariz., has plunged into that part of the world with enthusiasm.

Troon now operates one golf course in the Middle East — in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates — and has also worked on a course in Qatar. The firm is working on five other clubs either under construction or in the planning stages elsewhere in the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait.

These areas of the Middle East, generally viewed as more stable than others, often serve as a recreational playground for wealthy Northern Europeans seeking wintertime sunshine and/or vacation homes. Travelers from Europe visit Dubai and neighboring areas not just for the climate “but also for the fabulous shopping, entertainment and leisure activities available,” says Sheryl Hillman, manager of marketing communications for Troon.

To some, the development and management challenges in these locations might seem huge — from supplying water to finding trained staff to maintaining safety for workers and golfers.

“It’s easy to understand why Americans might feel that travel in the Middle East is risky,” says Jeffrey S. Spangler, senior vice president of science and agronomy at Troon. “The reality is that the Middle East is much more westernized than people realize. And Americans don’t understand what a tourist destination the Middle East has become for the rest of the world. Turkey, Egypt, Dubai are all very popular, particularly with travelers from Germany and England.”

While Americans flee the snow and ice of places like New York, Minnesota and Michigan for Arizona and Florida, Northern Europeans look for wintertime escapes to the Middle East. Northern European golfers see the deserts of the United Arab Emirates and similar locations as preferable to Portugal and Spain, golfing meccas that can still get heavy winter rains.

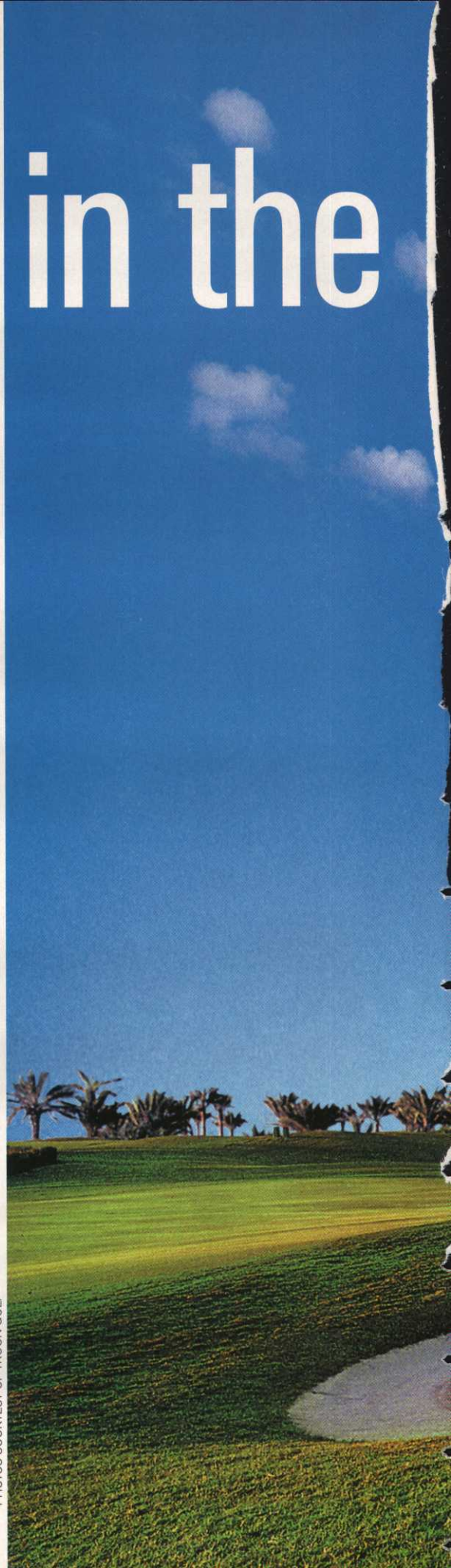
Troon’s business is exclusively third-party management of golf courses all over the world for on-site owners. The firm was hired for the Middle Eastern assignments largely because of contacts made with Troon’s Australian office, and the Middle Eastern properties are almost entirely run out of the Sydney office. As a result many Troon managers in the Middle East come from Australia. Others are from Europe. Workers in lower level jobs are often from Pakistan, Malaysia or South Africa. Some Americans do get hired, says Spangler, “but not too many of them are interested.”

In Dubai, Hillman notes, the government has been aggressive in hiring international companies for capital works programs and developments. “They

During the winter, Northern Europeans flock to golf resorts throughout the Middle East, much like Americans travel to Florida when temperatures drop.

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF TROON GOLF



Middle East

Troon Golf delighted
to be a player in this
'venturesome' part
of the world



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have encouraged international investment, and they have set up a free zone to make it easier for foreign-owned companies like Troon Golf to undertake business," she says.

One American manager who has played a key role for Troon in the Mid-

Troon Golf operates The Montgomerie Dubai, a 27-hole club that is host to the Dubai Desert Classic.

dle East is Ken McIntyre, who served two years at The Montgomerie Dubai as general manager and director of golf and is now being reassigned in the United States.

The Montgomerie is a 27-hole club that is famous as the site of the Dubai Desert Classic, a tournament that has attracted such PGA stars as Tiger Woods and Mark O'Meara.

McIntyre, joined by his wife and children on his assignment, says he was

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never afraid in Dubai, although "we were advised to be cautious at times, but you can generally do what you want when you want to."

Other U.S. management firms indicate that they don't know of anyone besides Troon involved in the Mideast. Ben Keilholtz, marketing director for Intrawest Golf in Scottsdale, says: "I can say we have no specific plans to move into management in the Middle East. This is really not due to any political or international issues; our goal is to identify new opportunities which create synergies with our existing operations, so our focus will continue to be in the Greater Phoenix area, British Columbia, the southeastern United States, and other complementary areas."

Although safety isn't a major concern, managers of the Middle Eastern courses fret often about their grass and irrigation systems. Just as in deserts of the United

States, few grasses can thrive. TifEagle and FloraDwarf are often used on greens.

"We have 419 bermuda on the fairways and the rough on these courses," Spangler says. "But we're shifting there, as in south Florida and Caribbean climates, to paspalum in cases like this where there is high sodium in the soil and water."

On bermudagrass courses, overseeding is done in November with ryegrass.

Two water sources are available in Dubai and surrounding areas. "There's treated effluent, which doesn't come close to meeting the needs at golf clubs, and large desalination plants, which are a very costly source," Spangler says. "They use 2 million gallons a day at Montgomerie, about one-third more than is used at the typical Arizona course. That's because they have very loose, sandy soils."

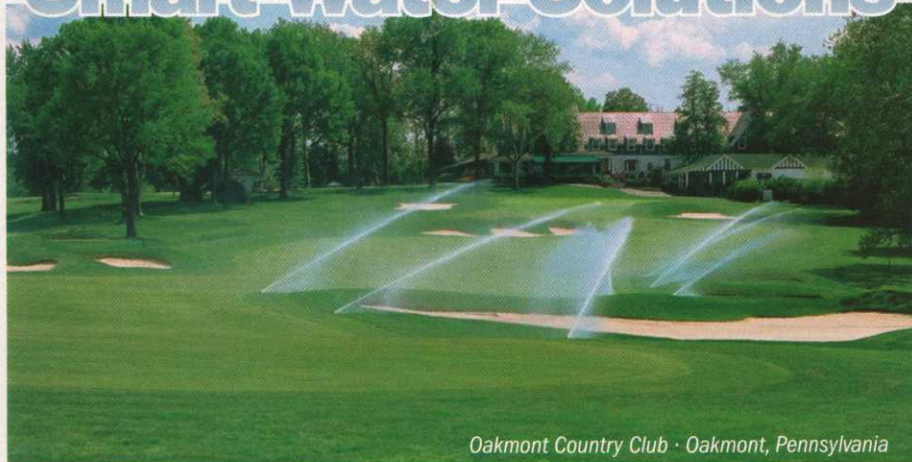
Desalination, requiring huge amounts of electricity, is done through the membrane process, which involves filtering and reverse osmosis, and thermal distil-

lation in which seawater is heated, turned into steam and then condensed into a purified form.

Troon did not supervise construction of The Montgomerie, designed by European golf star Colin Montgomerie and the late architect Desmond Muirhead. The club was built by Emaar Properties, a Dubai-based company specializing in real estate development. Among Emaar's other projects is the fantastic Burj Dubai, billed as having the tallest residential building in the world and the world's largest shopping center. At The Montgomerie, Emaar is building a new boutique clubhouse and hotel that will include 17 deluxe rooms and suites as well as a health club, brasserie-style restaurant, snooker room and cigar room.

"We took over The Montgomerie about three-and-a-half months after opening and spent December 2001 to December 2002 getting the grass to the standard that the owners wanted it to be,"

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Large desalination plants provide much of the 2 million gallons of water used every day at The Montgomerie.



Troon Golf's role in the Middle East:

The Montgomerie

The courses: The club has an 18-hole championship course and nine-hole par-3 course designed by Colin Montgomerie and Desmond Muirhead.

Location: Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Status: Troon began managing the club in 2001, shortly after its completion.

Arabian Ranches Golf Course

The course: This 18-hole course was designed by Jack Nicklaus and Ian Baker Finch.

Location: Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

Status: Troon managed construction for this club, which opened in 2004 and is now operated by a local owner.

Doha Golf Club

The courses: Doha has an 18-hole championship course and 9-hole academy course.

Location: Doha, Qatar.

Status: Troon did some brief preparatory work on this project.

Troon is also working on planning and construction of the following courses and clubs:

The Palm, a 45-hole club, on a massive man-made island in Dubai, is scheduled to open its first course this year.

Dubai Sports City, with 18 holes, designed by Ernie Els, and a Butch Harmon Golf Academy and an Olympic-style Village, will open this year.

Sahara Golf Club, this 18-hole course, is located just outside Kuwait City, Kuwait, and will open this year.

Jumeirah Islands, located in Dubai, with 36 holes, is set to open this year.

Al Reem, this 18-hole course is located in Ras Al Khaimah in the United Arab Emirates and will open in 2006.

McIntyre says. "It had been fairly unhealthy and needed changes in water and fertilizers. It needed to be upgraded to what we expect a property to be like."

Troon prides itself on maintaining a worldwide reputation for outstanding playing conditions. In the case of The Montgomerie, the harsh summertime temperatures create tough challenges.

"It can get to the mid-120s in summer," McIntyre says. "As hot as it is, some people play in early morning or late afternoon because there is so little else to do. In summertime, golfers still play a couple thousand rounds a month."

As in the deserts of Arizona and tropics of Florida, the biggest months of play are December through March, but October and November are also popular, McIntyre says. When the summer

temperatures climb, golfers also play on a nine-hole par-3 course that has floodlights for the evening. The driving range is also lit in the evening.

Other non-Troon courses in the area do the same: Nad Al Sheeba in Dubai has a regulation 18-hole course completely floodlit for nighttime play.

The 18-hole championship course at The Montgomerie, McIntyre says, is the only all-green North American-style course in Dubai. It is well known for having what managers claim is the largest green in the world, 58,000 square feet, on the par-3 No. 13.

There are the typical tee boxes, fairways and greens, and then massive gardens run from the rough up to the homes, for which 7,000 sites are being

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created on or near this course. The main housing development, which Emaar calls the "Beverly Hills of Dubai," is Emirates Hills.

"The course has been planted out so as not to appear as desert," McIntyre says. "It has a tropical desert look with succulent ground cover, bougainvillea and palms. It was one of the first residential courses in the Mideast, and they didn't want the homes to back up to the course. So out of your windows you see a massive wall of color and beyond that the fairways. There are actually 92 acres of gardens with millions of plantings."

The course is semi-private, and many of the members, homeowners and tourist golfers on the course come from England and Germany. "But there are people who come there from every continent," McIntyre says.

Players have come from Singapore, Korea, Malaysia, Russia, Kenya, Iran,

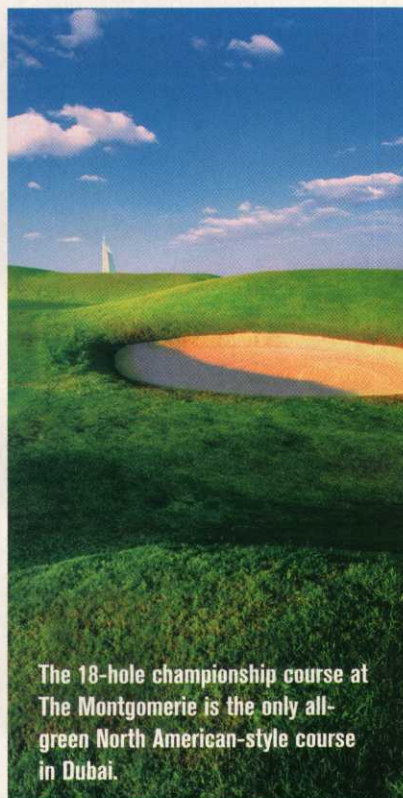
Switzerland and even the United States. Many have been guests at the eight resorts located within 15 minutes of The Montgomerie. The high-season green fee is about \$165.

The only real slowdown in play came in the months leading up to the Iraq war. "After the war started, everyone came back," McIntyre says.

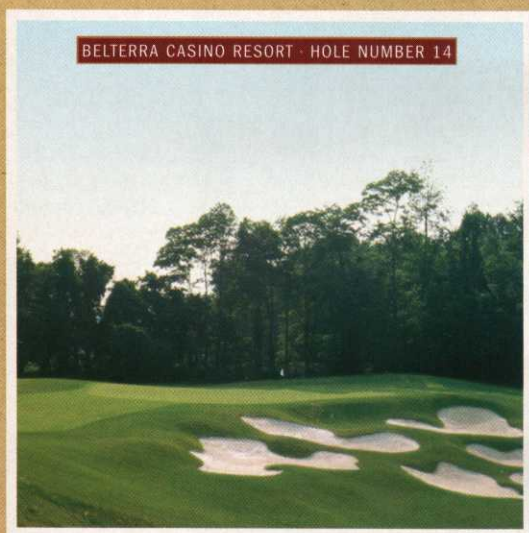
The membership base at the club is largely expatriates, many of them experts in banking and finance who work in the country and buy homes on the course. But local interest in golfing — among natives of Dubai — is on the increase.

There are 6,500 registered golfers in Dubai, McIntyre says, but only 11 natives of the United Arab Emirates are members of his club.

"Right now, it's a first-generation golfing community," McIntyre says. "In a generation or two, the local nationals will drive the game. The junior national team of the UAE is already one of the best." ■



The 18-hole championship course at The Montgomerie is the only all-green North American-style course in Dubai.



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