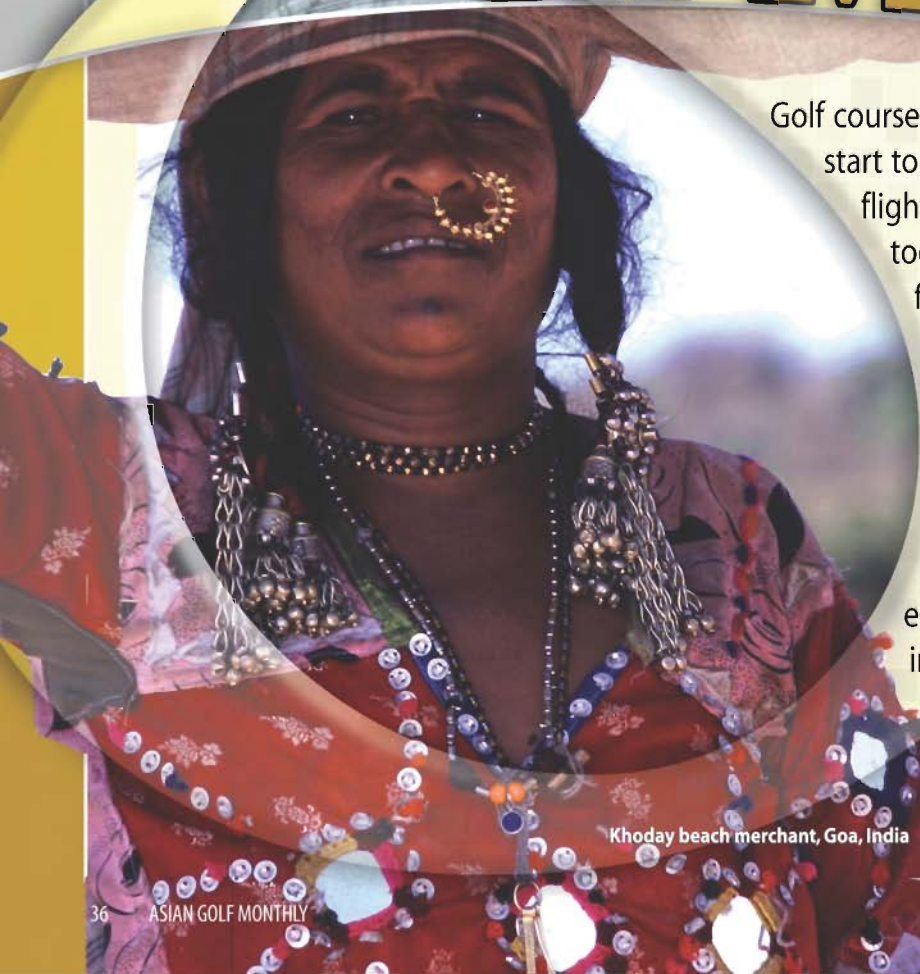




During the devastating tsunami that struck Banda Aceh in December 2004, boats were washed inland and thousands of lives were lost

# Eight Days In March



Khoday beach merchant, Goa, India

Golf course designer **Ronald W. Fream** has had a busy start to the year. In the first quarter, he made 37 air flights – on course to match the 148 flights he took in 2005. While it might appear glamorous from afar, Fream reveals that constant travel is not the same as periodic leisure trips. Nevertheless, he says: “The interest, challenge and satisfaction remain and I see no end in sight.” In an exclusive feature for *Asian Golf Monthly*, the Golfplan founder takes us on his latest Asian adventure – a whirlwind eight-day trip, comprising 10 flights, taking in beachfront steamy tropics to the steppes of Mongolia, and enduring temperatures ranging from more than 33 degrees Celsius to minus-10 degrees Celsius. “Just another business trip,” says Fream.



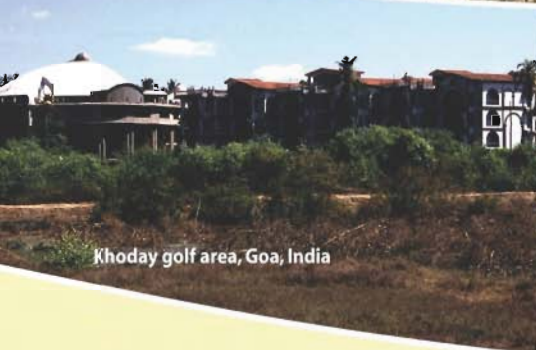
Mongolia



Goa, India



China



Khoday golf area, Goa, India



Baga Beach, Goa, India



Khoday Hotel, Goa, India

**T**he weather is exceptional in Goa this time of the year, balmy but without the humidity common to most tropical seaside resorts. Goa is India's premier seaside resort area. The Portuguese settled here some 400 years ago with good reason.

Today is Saturday. We have toured the partially completed hotel, which has been derelict since the 1997-98 Asian economic implosion. The new owner of the property is negotiating with hotel operators now. Some 190 acres of adjacent land, partially cropped, partially open grazing land for water buffalo, partially flooded in the rainy season, stretches west to the street where numerous shops front Baga Beach.

A beautiful tourist resort course will be created on this site. This is the only site in Goa where the government will permit golf.

Environmental and political protesters have kept golf out of the area until recently. To obtain enough soil to raise golf areas above the seasonal flood, a lagoon golf course will be created. Onsite excavation of the sandy ground produces a well-contoured course with many scenic lagoons. Coconut trees will be planted to frame the golf holes.

Baga Beach is only one of Goa's many delightful miles of beaches. Here, the sandy beach runs for 11 or 12 kilometres. Much of the shore-side edge is lined with thatched roof cafes, coffee houses, sushi shops, barbeque places and bars. Large numbers of Europeans lounge along the beach. Grilled tiger prawns, huge things, at waterside are a local treat.

It's KingFisher time, the local brew. A

cold beer after a few hours' walk around the golf construction area is surely justified as we wait for the driver to arrive for the trip back to the airport at Dombolin. Back we go to Bangalore. It's almost sunset.

The Indian Air flight arrives and departs an hour late. Indian Air is trying to modernise its operations. Bangalore is a 45-minute flight from Goa. Travelling domestically, in India, is no easier than international travel. The Bangalore airport is justifiably listed as the worst major airport in India. From experience, I know that most major Indian airports are at the bottom of any scale for efficiency and comfort. The crowds here greeting or saying goodbye confirm India's one billion population.

Our driver sneaks between the tuktuk three-wheelers and dodges buses and pedes-

trians. The occasional cow occupies a lane. A bullock cart can cause a major back-up. The air smells of diesel. At the hotel, I retrieve my large suitcase left behind for the Goa trip.

The 3,000-foot elevation gain at Bangalore is noticeable in the thinner air, but it is also thick with pollution. The city has grown since my first visit in 1993 when the population was approximately two million to more than five million today. This is India's main technology centre. The city has been flooded with rural peasants seeking a better life. Peasant housing just on the outskirts of this major city is basic.

Local government has not been able to keep up with roads, sewers, water supply, reliable electricity, air pollution or housing. Once British India's primary rest-and-recreation post from the seaside heat and humidity, this city suffers more each day.

The high-tech experts, call-centre operators, mega-malls, multiplex theatres and restaurants expand almost as fast as the three-wheel mini taxi tuktuks and fume-spouting trucks. Traffic is noisy and frantic. Turn signals and road courtesy do not exist here. The right-of-way goes to the loudest horn.

The demand for up-market housing is immense at prices that make California look inexpensive. Our two residential community golf projects around the city might finally overcome the red tape and obtain 'go ahead' approval this year. One of these projects has been in the acquisition and approval process for more than four years. Working in Bangalore requires optimism and patience.

Time to return to Bangalore International from another meeting, it's 9 pm. I fight my way through the throngs bidding farewell or awaiting incoming flights or trying to score a taxi customer. Keeping my wallet well-covered through this mass of humanity is essential.

Singapore Airlines business class provides peace and tranquillity. They serve a very good California cabernet. The flight from Bangalore to Singapore departs at 11:50 pm. The nearly four-hour flight with a 2½-hour time change arrives at Changi International around 6:30 am. The time for sleep was limited. Changi is often voted one of the world's best airports. No argument there.

The connection to Jakarta leaves in an hour on another Singapore Airlines flight.

The one-hour-and-17-minute flight crosses the equator and into teeming Jakarta, a city of some 15 million. Arriving early on a Sunday avoids gridlock traffic. The city has made vast strides since my first visit in 1973. The countryside remains rural agrarian, far from the 21st century, but what could be expected of a nation comprised of 17,504 islands, 9,000 of them unnamed, and 100 or more languages. Many of the islands lack electricity or other modern conveniences. In 1973, there were some 105 million Indonesians; today, nearly 210 million. The island of Java, smaller than California, is home to

**“ In Bangalore, traffic is noisy and frantic. Turn signals and road courtesy do not exist. The right-of-way goes to the loudest horn. ”**

almost 100 million people.

With two hours' sleep, I have meetings all-day Sunday and an early night. The hotel has a nice Indonesian buffet and the Australian wine is good. Monday morning, the Mercedes arrives at 5:15 am. The deputy chairman of Golkar, the principal political party in Indonesia, joins me for a 6:20-flight to Aceh to tour a site for a new tourist and fly-in meeting centre golf course. We fly the length of Sumatra Island and cross the equator again.

Our Garuda International flight arrives into Banda Aceh Airport after a 2:12 flight. While trying to emulate Singapore Airlines, the service is not the same. Being well inland, the Aceh Airport was undamaged in the December 26, 2004 tsunami, although a few cracks from the earthquakes remain visible. The golf course site we are visiting is even higher on a large well-wooded plateau overlooking the airport and in view of several volcanic cones. This is lush tropical forest region.

The golf is meant to satisfy local players' needs. New air services will connect direct to Kuala Lumpur and Singapore. Holiday and weekend golfers can mix with their friends from Jakarta. A hotel will do duty for tourists, business meetings and political events. Along with several Jakarta-based construction groups, Golkar is one of the project's

sponsors. The golf is only another way to create local jobs and try to re-establish a normal life after the earthquake, tsunami and a peace agreement with Islamic rebels.

After trekking the proposed golf site, my hosts suggest a drive to the coast. This is not a pleasure trip. Obvious new construction, two or three-storey brick buildings are in various stages of construction. Nearing the central business area of Banda Aceh, what multi-storey buildings there are, mostly up to six floors, show cracks or structural repairs. Some taller buildings had collapsed. The streets are open and clogged with motorbikes, three-wheel tuktuk motor taxis and cars. Most construction here is of the typical shophouse style, commerce on the ground floor with residential living space on the second and third. There are numerous large trucks hauling bricks, sacks of concrete and piles of corrugated roofing materials.

Continuing northwest, toward the coast, the new construction of brick, plywood or canvas with tin roofs fill what was once the fishing village of Lampase. Piles of debris separate the rebuilding areas from the open space among the obvious remains of brick or concrete block homes. Mostly all that remains are the concrete slab foundations. Few large trees remain. Piles of debris are everywhere.

A mountain ridge reaching up from the seaside partially shields Banda Aceh from the Indian Ocean. However, the old port, first utilised by Portuguese sailors over 400 years ago, and what was dense surroundings of thatch wall, tin roof fisherman's village houses and warehouses near Lhoknga Aceh Beach, face the Indian Ocean directly. At high tide, the area is two metres above the tide.

Debris at main mosque in Banda Aceh



This was part of a city of over 250,000. Now, nothing much remains. The earthquake, a monster 9.0 on the Richter scale, struck around 7:58 am on a Sunday just as the sun began to rise. [For reference, the 1964 Anchorage, Alaska quake was 9.2 and the 1906 San Francisco quake was 7.8.] The epicentre was in the seafloor just 96 kilometres to the west. The thatch and bamboo pole construction withstood the shaking force. Concrete cracked, tile roofs and brick walls fell. Floors heaved. Villagers came out feeling lucky to be unharmed. Some 30 minutes passed then the sea began to retreat from the beach exposing colourful, stranded flopping fish. Villagers went out to collect the bounty. No one knew of tsunamis. There had never been one on Lhoknga Aceh Beach.

The tidal surge, or series of waves, began as a vast wall of dark boiling water. Almost 20 metres tall, the wall tore through everything. Survivors said the noise was huge and penetrated well inland. Sea-edge Mangrove, thought to be a shore stabilisation factor, was shorn off. People tried to run, but the water moved onto the beach faster than they could move. Houses, cars, bullock carts, boats, fishing nets, and anything else not anchored were swept inland. The thatch and bamboo housing collapsed and then later floated to the surface as a mass of debris drawn seaward by the retreating waters. These nearly encircling ridges compressed the magnitude of the tidal surge, concentrating its force and retaining the depth of the water. The funnel-like inland opening jetted water into the main downtown parts of Banda Aceh. The water was several miles inland as the series of waves began to retreat. Water was over half a metre in the main streets of Banda Aceh, well



Lhoknga Aceh Beach

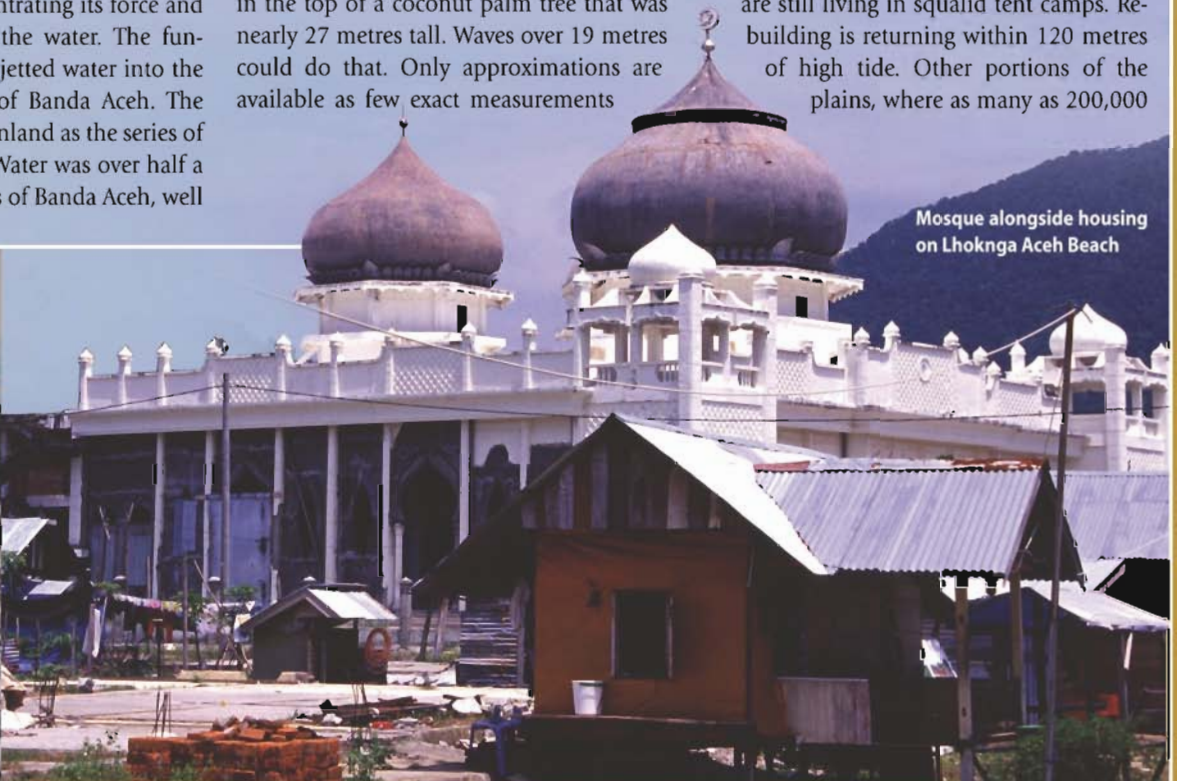
**“ Golfplan is going to provide the design plan for a new nine holes that will occupy open beach land, north of one of the mass grave areas. The golf will be a public course and a memorial to the golfers and caddies who died. ”**

inland, some eight kilometres.

I was told a resident saw what he described as a railroad tie like wooden beam in the top of a coconut palm tree that was nearly 27 metres tall. Waves over 19 metres could do that. Only approximations are available as few exact measurements

of the maximum crest exist. Eyewitnesses did not survive.

The concrete constructed mosque at the north end and another at the south end of the beach withstood the force of the wave. The mosques were built to higher construction standards. News photos of the event clearly showed vast expanse of floating debris encircling each building. As I took photographs from the roof of the north mosque, floor slabs, only weeds, young trees, debris and shiny new tin roofs were in view. Various international relief agencies are providing funding for new houses. Some are still pipe frames and stretched plastic sheeting. Others are plywood and tin roofs. A few are more substantial brick or concrete block with tile roofs. Other new homes are being placed on stilt pilings. Some people are still living in squalid tent camps. Rebuilding is returning within 120 metres of high tide. Other portions of the plains, where as many as 200,000



Mosque alongside housing on Lhoknga Aceh Beach



Ronald Fream on clubhouse foundation, Lampuur Golf Club



Barge resting two miles inland



Fachri My visiting remains of his home

had lived, is only covered with piles of debris and weeds. A strange desolate feel and look exists here.

The dark brown wave surge here could have been in excess of 20 metres and moved fast. Mass graves contain a huge body count that could total 100,000. Over 100,000 people are unaccounted for having been swept out to sea by the receding waters.

An eerie, disembodied feeling makes walking through the space of the seaside Lampuur Golf Club clubhouse disconcerting. Only one kilometre from the north mosque, this homemade nine-hole course, along with Lhoknga Aceh Beach, had been part of 'ground zero'. Twelve golfers out for an early morning round and 40 caddies died. Part of the two-metre high concrete seawall fronting the clubhouse at beach edge is now well inland. Almost 30 metres from the beach, only the concrete slab and floor tiles remain from the clubhouse building. Zoysiagrass and Bermudagrass grow in patches among the weeds and seedling trees. Many old, tall Australian pines that had dotted the golf course were pushed inland. Those that remain near the seawall

show the effect of the tidal wave with branches removed some 14 metres up the trunk. A greensite area or two can be identified as can a bunker hollow. Little else. The beach looks calm and tranquil. The day is warm and the beach is empty.

Golfplan is going to provide the design plan for a new nine holes that will occupy open seaside land, north of one of the mass grave areas. The golf will be a public course and a memorial to the golfers and caddies who died.

A large barge, at least 30 metres long and 10 metres wide, and fishing boats resting five kilometres from shore remain a testament to the tsunami's force. I was in disbelief walking around the barge and trying to contemplate the means by which it arrived at its current resting place.

Walking with my guide, Fachri My, to where his home had been, I experienced shock, pity and grief. Inland one kilometre or more, he had felt the earthquake and his family's substantial cement block home survived with only minor damage. A few minutes later, his father saw the wave and yelled for him to take his daughter – just five days'

old – and run. Fachri ran inland to an elevated area. The wave demolished his home. His wife, father, brothers and aunt – seven in all – died in the onslaught. Only the concrete slab floor of the home remains.

Leaving Aceh for Jakarta that evening, crossing the equator again, via Medan, the flights were 44 minutes and just over two hours, respectively. We were only given a snack en route. Talking about what I had seen was difficult. I could have used a glass of wine or whisky. Domestic Garuda flights serve soft drinks and coffee. Finally back to a hotel, sleep was difficult that night. This was quite an 18-hour day. The memories will remain.

The taxi arrives at 7 am. Cathay Pacific runs a close second to Singapore Airlines in service, even in coach. It's 4:15 flying Jakarta to Hong Kong, again crossing the equator; four times in three days. Hong Kong airport is modern and its frequent-flier lounge is restful. Hong Kong to Hangzhou, a 1:41-flight on Air China, is a downgrade in service. Dinner it isn't. Coal smoke is thick in the air when I arrive at 10 pm at the Xiaoshan airport of Hangzhou, the Garden City of China. Coal-fired central heating

## Close Escape

My girlfriend, Yoko, was just reaching the first floor landing of her beachside hotel in Phuket when the first wave hit the beach. She ran up to the third floor rooftop and watched the turmoil unfold below. Had her breakfast lasted 10 more minutes, she likely would have been killed.

I was at Fewa Lake in Pokhara, Nepal. Pokhara sits on the south edge of the Annapurna massif, an 8,000-metre high mass of the Himalayas. Locals

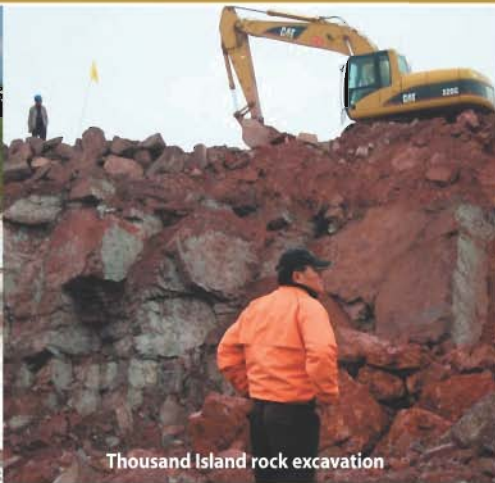
noticed that just past sunrise (local time) the water level on Fewa Lake rose and moved in an unconventional rippling manner. This wave was about two feet (60 centimetres) high.

In fact, this was an indication of the earthquake's continued radiation of force out from the epicenter near Banda Aceh. These clashing tectonic plates in the Indian Ocean produce the forces that continue to raise the Himalayas.

Ronald W. Fream



Wave damage near harbour, Banda Aceh



Thousand Island rock excavation



Grand Dynasty Beijing – building dike at river edge

stations dot Chinese cities to heat the hot water radiators. Winter is receding, but it is still cold.

A taxi takes me to the hotel. No dinner but a nice breakfast buffet. Early that morning, a driver arrives for the 2½-hour drive southwest to Qian Dao Hu, an emerging tourist zone along the edge of Thousand Island Lake. This man-made lake is massive enough to contain the purported 1,000 islands.

Putting in 18 championship holes is not easy. The rocky site has great views to the lake. Drilling and blasting go on every day. Rainfall stops everything. Mud flows. Plans call for the moving of several million cubic yards of rock and soil. Some of the rock faces being blasted are 12 metres or more in height. Blocks of stone the size of refrigerators litter the ground. A dramatic tourist course will emerge from the rock pile. When there is money, the will and big bulldozers, a way exists.

A fine new auto route is nearing completion. Hangzhou, with its five million residents, will only be 90 minutes away. Shanghai, the economic colossus of China, with 16 or 17 million residents, will be less than a three-hour drive. Housing, hotels, the

“ Our golf site is a delightful contrast to Thousand Island. No rock here, only a fine, uniform river sand covers the ground making an easy, efficient place to work. ”

golf and even a new brewery are all coming to cater to the ever-more affluent Chinese. Lunch is on a boat at lakeside. Floating pens contain the fresh fish we will shortly enjoy, both steamed and grilled. The pork ribs are good, too.

Five hours of trekking for site inspections at Thousand Island Lake turns to a drive back to the airport for a night flight to Beijing via Air China, marginal service, marginal meal, no wine, but only an hour-and-47-minute flight for a 10 pm arrival. I am met by the manager of the Grand Dynasty Hotel. The hotel's owner is Chinese-Korean. He caters to Korean businessmen.

The hotel fits my needs too. The golf course will be focused on the many Koreans who frequent Beijing on business. Karaoke and golf are their leisure pastimes.

A 36-hole daily-fee golf course will be created along Thacheo Ba River, a 45-minute drive east from Beijing. Breathing in Hangzhou was difficult, but Beijing is worse. Coal provides winter heat here too. The smoke stays close to the ground. The sky is gray and depressing. Cleaning up after some 16 million residents is not easy. A vast contrast exists between being inside major Chinese cities and the nearby countryside. Conditions can be measured in decades of difference. A totally-modern China might never be achieved.

Our golf site is a delightful contrast to Thousand Island. No rock here, only a fine, uniform river sand covers the ground making an easy, efficient place to work. Today is said to be the start of spring with a daytime reading of 12 degrees Celsius for the first time this year. Mornings are still near freezing though. Dust from the Gobi Desert is tinting the sky. This seasonal problem turns the sky over northern China and Korea a



Grand Dynasty Beijing – sheep grazing on golf course site



Grand Dynasty Beijing – marking a tee site



Grand Khaan Irish Pub



Kharkorum Country Club – Fream (right) on site with Enkh Amgalan and J. Od

milky white each spring. A few years ago, this Gobi dust was even collected in Southern California.

After the easy site walk and review, lunch of pork and vegetable filled dumplings (local takeout), we return to the hotel for more discussions. A typical Korean dinner of barbecue beef ribs on a grill set in mid-table follows. Kimche is prominent. Soju, the Korean sake-like drink, flows. An after-dinner massage on my birthday is not such a bad thing.

At 7 am, a car is waiting for the return trip to Beijing Capital International Airport, an efficient, modern airport. My 9:20 flight is basic Air China once again. It is just under two hours flying time to Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia. Mongolia is the 66th country I have visited on business matters. When I was last here, in November, it was cold. It's still cold with temperatures hovering around minus 10 degrees Celsius at sunrise. After humid Jakarta, and smoky Beijing, stepping into the dry, light air of Ulaan Baatar was, in its way, refreshing. At a 1,450-metre elevation, Ulaan Baatar is the true image of steppe geography. This is 'big sky' country for sure. The history of Chinggis Khaan is prominent here.

Much of the city reminds me of the older communist parts of Beijing or what was Leningrad – rigid, symmetrical, featureless mid-rise buildings left from Soviet times. Modern life is rapidly replacing the blandness of communist environments. The young women are very fashionable. New townhouse developments rival those found in California.

Golf in Mongolia is a new business for

**“ The views are grand; treeless but jagged mountains frame much of the view. The project site is spectacular with great south-facing views, sunrise, sunset, the river and golf. ”**

an energetic group of young entrepreneurs. The CEO is a Harvard MBA. They do satellite communications, HP, Dell, Coca-Cola, brew Chinggis beer, distill Chinggis premium vodka, own Great Khaans Irish Pub, and now golf. Guinness on tap on March 17th was an appropriate accompaniment to a lunch of ceasar salad and lamb stew. Dinner would be at a Kazakhstan restaurant. Australian and Chilean wine is available.

Today is Saturday. We take a short drive northeast of the city to the Terelj National Park. Early in the day, it is well under freezing. Sheep, angora goats and a few camels are in view. The brilliant blue sky erases recent images of smoggy Beijing. At midday, coffee and Glenfiddich soften the just-freezing and breezy conditions. The Tuul River, which borders the site for the golf course, is frozen solid. Frost and wisps of snow line the hillsides. No hint of spring growth on any of the scraggly willow and popular trees lining the river.

The views are grand; treeless but jag-

ged mountains frame much of the view. The project site is spectacular with great south-facing views, sunrise, sunset, the river and golf. Housing will be put in to catch the sun and these views and provide a prestigious residential community at Mongolia's first proper golf course.

We are planning sites for the golf villas and executive meeting centre, hotel and corporate suites. Part of the clubhouse will resemble the traditional felt Gur round tent the nomadic peoples of Mongolia traditionally live in. Indigenous Bactrian camels, long-haired and with two humps, will be used to pull a drink trolley around the golf course to dispense various refreshments. We will name the project Kharkorum Golf Club after Chinggis Khaan's capital city of 800 years ago. A Great Khaan's Irish Pub will provide clubhouse atmosphere. The traditional Gur will serve as our half-way houses on the golf courses.

With over 5,000 Koreans residing in Ulaan Baatar, I expect there will be great interest in this golf course. Golfplan has designed 12 courses in Korea. We are familiar with the Korean love of golf and fully intend to tap that market here. The emerging middle class and travelled elite of Ulaan Baatar have also expressed serious interest in the project.

The golf season is only some six months due to the Siberian climate. Nonetheless, we expect eager visitors from Seoul, Tianjin, Beijing and Shanghai, when those huge metropolises face the pollution, heat and humidity of summer. The spring and summer will offer mild, sunny days without a trace of humidity. ☺