

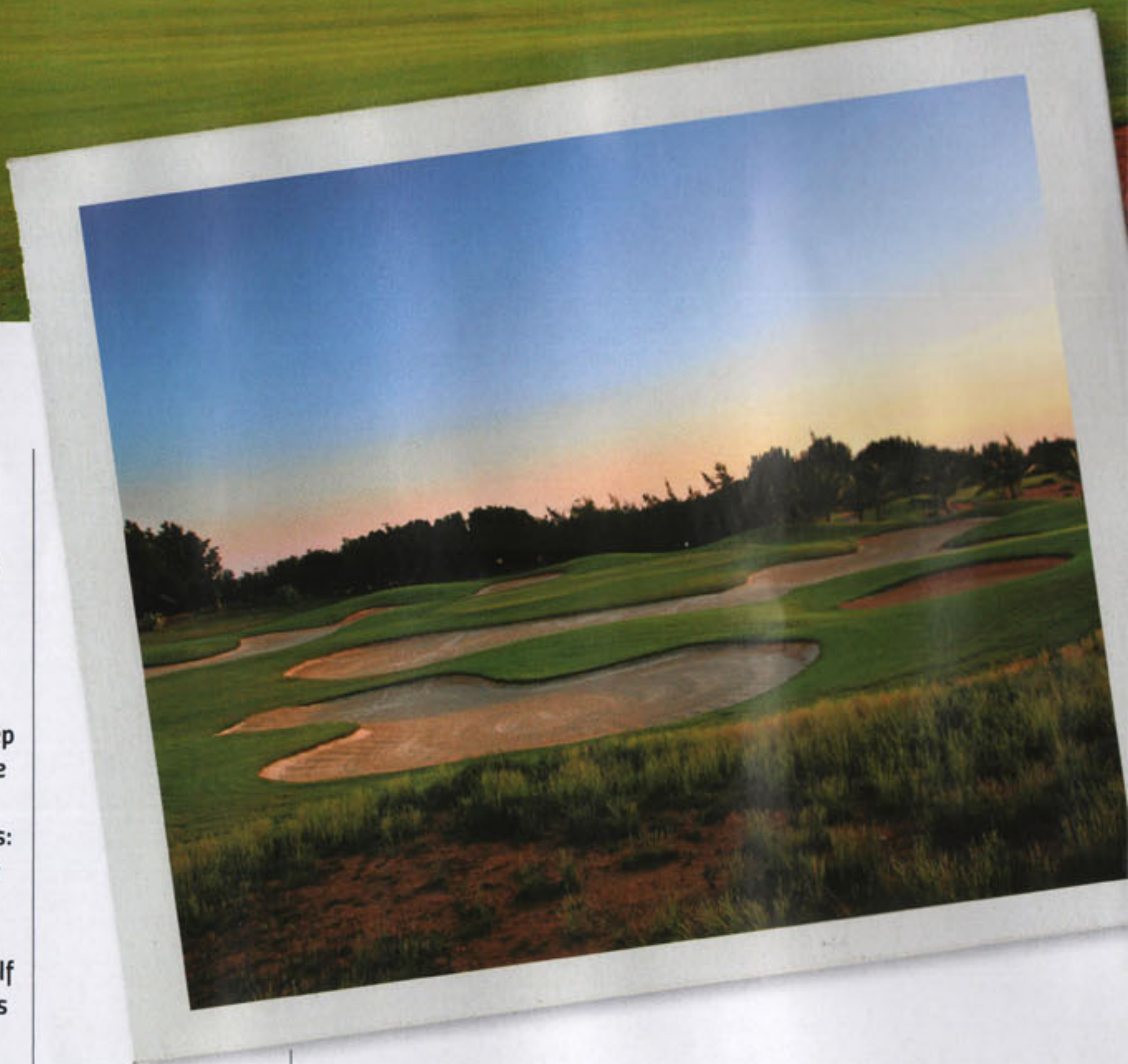


# A gift of golf

*Tee it up at Al Hamra GC just once and chances are you'll never consider the journey to Ras Al Khaimah a drive too far again.  
Words Kent Gray Images Al Hamra GC*







If Simon Mees and his team at Al Hamra had one wish for the New Year, it'd be that more golfers expand their horizons beyond the glitzy courses of Dubai in 2014.

For little more than an hour's drive north, the club's Scottish general manager oversees a golfing gift he is convinced will keep on giving once the uninitiated has made the effort to visit to the Ras Al Khaimah links oasis for the first time.

As Andrew Pinfold, Mees' director of golf at Al Hamra GC, says: "We find that most people, once we get them here once, we see them time and time again."

It's little wonder because Al Hamra offers far more than arguably the best value, and certainly some of the most fun, golf in the Middle East as its course of the year award at the MEGA's last month highlighted. With five luxury hotels within an 800 yard walk of the clubhouse and the beach, marina, a cinema and plenty of shopping nearby, Al Hamra GC is the epicenter of a "one-stop shop" family getaway.

"You can put your golf shoes on in the hotel in the morning and take them off in the hotel at night," says Pinfold. "There's the beach, fishing, the desert for dune bashing and the tourist can even pop over the hills to Musandam if they want. We've got

everything you need without the hassle of battling traffic."

Sounds like bliss right? Well, frankly, it is. In fact, when the top rack-rate of AED 495 is factored in for a round on the 7325-yard, par 72 Peter Harradine design, half the cost of golf at some of the elite Dubai clubs, it almost seems too good to be true. But wait, there's more.

For a mere AED 15,000, you can join the 160 members who



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already enjoy full-playing rights at Al Hamra and take advantage of an unbelievable reciprocal deal that offers complimentary access to Al Badia GC in Dubai five days per week along with admittance to Banyan Tree Beach Club, one of those five hotels mentioned earlier. Imagine it. Sneak out of the office for 18-holes midweek in Dubai while you plot your weekend getaway to Al Hamra. What could be better?

The best part of the deal is the quality golf on offer. Think immaculately manicured, wall-to-wall cl 2000 paspalum across a layout that meanders around four inter-connected lagoons fed by the tidal waters of the Arabian Gulf. Nine holes, the first through seventh and 17th and 18th, are floodlit so there is an after-dinner option as well as a par-three academy course to help sharpen your short game or introduce the family to the game.

As traditional links courses do, the front nine of the championship course, measuring 3578 yards from the tips, makes its way out and away from the clubhouse, while the back nine, all 3747 yards of it, returns home around the lagoon that borders the right hand side of the par-5 18th. Opened in 2007 after Peter Harradine and Harradine Golf had expertly shifted and shaped some five million cubic meters of sand, the challenge is refreshingly different on every hole save for the similar, but no less striking, par 4 16th and 17th holes.

As the club's website, [alhamragolf.com](http://alhamragolf.com), says: "The result is a stunning par 72 championship golf course measuring 7325 yards at full length, designed with five varying tee options on each hole. [The] course lends itself perfectly to all levels of golfers, providing the fledgling novice or the most accomplished of players with an enjoyable and interesting golfing challenge."

### On the tee

We opted for the secondary blue tees on our recent review day and at 6989 yards, certainly got the promised challenge for our level of play.

From the first tee you realise this is no grip-it and rip-it course despite the generous fairways that present themselves on most holes. A solidly struck driver will leave you with a short approach but there is trouble left and right if you spray it off the tee and getting at the pin takes early precision, especially given the firm greens.

The first water comes into play down the right hand side of the 560-yard third, a visually sumptuous par five that is all about clever club selection. The big hitter will be tempted into going for the green in two but with the water jutting in across the face of the green, the safer option is plotting your way up the fairway.

A short par-three follows before holes five and six test first your accuracy, and then your length off the tee. Take it from the author, it pays not to tangle with the trees on the right of the short par-4 fifth or you'll be left with a difficult approach through palms and over plenty of bunkering. The problem is, any tee ball tugged slight left brings water into play on this seemingly innocuous card-wrecker. Across the road to the sixth tee and a long drive, avoiding the fairway trap just beyond 200 yards on the left, is required if you are to have any chance of reaching this long par-4 in regulation.

At 470 yards from the blues, the ninth is another monster par 4 probably best approached as a three-shotter for the higher handicapper.

### Al Hamra's own Amen Corner

Probed for which hole he considered Al Hamra's signature, Pinfold agreed the 18th, with the impressive Royal Breeze towers and marina beyond that luring your eyes (but hopefully not your ball) across the lagoon, is often mentioned. But pressed, the stretch from 10 to 12 received the PGA Pro's nomination.