

The green greens grass of homes

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In a two-part series

John Davids looks at homes that are above par – in all senses. Whether renting or buying, you are likely to pay a premium for living close to a golf course. But is the ability to travel just a short distance to the first tee really sought after when people go house hunting on the Eastern Seaboard?

My mind’s

capacity for retaining trivia never ceases to amaze me, yet ask me for my phone number here in Thailand and my mind just goes blank. Can’t fathom it.

The reason I mention

this trivia retention aptitude is that I recall years ago being told the secret of house buying success: If you can’t be near water, live next to a golf course!

I can’t

remember who imparted this pearl of wisdom, but, no matter. It seemed reasonable advice then and I think it still holds good now. The only trouble is that this mystery sage didn’t also tell me how to earn enough money to enable me to put this motto in practice – at least not here in Thailand.

In the past I

have owned three houses close to the same course in the UK. Therefore, to use a golfing term, you could say I’m hooked! Hopefully, the editor will allow me one bad golfing pun. But, that’s it.

So,

to find myself visiting some the many golf courses in the area that have housing in one form or another, was a real labour of love. Although I have to confess that most of the prices being quoted would seem to suggest that my “living close to the clubhouse” days may be over. But only maybe!

Dependent

on which golf course you set your sights on, prices can go from a modest baht 3.5m to, well, the sky is almost the limit. Those with the odd baht 20m plus to spare should definitely read on. Actually I exaggerate a little, but you can certainly pay a premium for living near a course.

Take Golf Country

Villas (GCV), for instance. GCV can be found about 500 yards past the main entrance to the Phoenix course when approached from the Sukhumvit. It’s the sort of distance you would think little of covering in a golf buggy. Prices there start at baht 22.5m and you get a lot of buzzes for your baht. Indeed, at one stage, I wondered whether it wouldn’t be best to write about GCV as part of the series I’m doing on the “wow factor”.

What

will the figure buy? Well, each of the eight plots is at least two rai, with living areas in excess of 700 sq m. It is described as single-storey but, in reality, the main house is on four levels.

Level

one is a basement entertainment room that looks into the swimming pool. Also in the basement is a huge storage area. The ground floor contains all the four bedrooms and a similar number of bathrooms and has steps leading up to a mezzanine level. Here there are two substantial "platforms" either side of the stairs suitable for an office area or even for an artist to set up an easel, the natural light is that good. Moving up another flight the top platform on the show home commands great views towards Pattaya itself. It's the sort of space I could imagine perching on a well-placed sofa with an equally well-placed glass of something cold nearby.

Back

all this up with a totally self-contained separate guest block, a pool with Jacuzzi, parking space for eight or more cars and CCTV and you get some idea of what is on offer. Of course, you really should not attempt to compare a UK house with one in Thailand but just for a bit of fun I can tell you that the show home at GCV costs about £20,000 more (dependent on exchange rates) than a three-bed detached house I am selling in the middle of Kent. Does my house have an entertainment room, pool, guest annex and a sizeable garden? Would I be here if it had?

Sole agent for GVC, Khun Tommy (Bunchan Thongdi), of Super Consultants in Soi Buakhao, told me the CCTV would allow, say, someone in the kitchen to see any other room in the house. "And this can be extended to you tuning in even when you are abroad," he told me.

Philistine

that I am, I said: "I'm not at all sure I'd like to be sitting 6,000 miles away in England only to tune into the CCTV in my Thai house and see something I didn't like."

"We can do it if you want it," was his diplomatic reply.

I

asked contractor on GVC Michael Carlsen, of Charoensup Sothorn Co, if he thought the price would put people off. "We know of houses not far from here on just one rai of land with price tags baht 10-12m higher," he said.

First three to buy at

GVC will be given either a new Toyota Yaris or a deal involving golf membership. Nothing against Toyota, but I question if someone with that kind of money to spend on a house is going to be impressed by a Yaris. But, maybe it's just the job for shuttling to and from the course. After visiting GVC I decided to tour the area within the grounds of the Phoenix course. A company's name that kept cropping up on my mini-tour was that of Premier Homes, whose MD is American-born Clayton Wade.

Clayton lives near

one of the holes but is no golfer. "I just love it there for the peace and tranquillity. The scenery is beautiful and I can walk the dog without being bothered," he said motioning to a retriever puppy sitting

nearby. Money no object, he could think of only one other place in the Pattaya area where he would consider living – the Silver Lake winery.

“I estimate that prices of properties close to the golf have gone up 30-40 per cent in the past two years,” he said in reply when I asked if living next to a course was a “in demand” here as it is in the country of his birth.

When Clayton came to Thailand more than a decade ago he was involved in housing US executives at the Burapha course – 40 minutes away from Pattaya but close to the big Eastern Seaboard industrial park.

Burapha, like most golf courses, is a little off the beaten track. Clayton said: “I would say Burapha is a remarkable place to live provided you can tick at least two of these three boxes – for work you need to be within 10 minutes of the industrial park; you like the course so much you feel no desire to visit others in the area; you have children of school age.”

Clayton was referring to the International School Eastern Seaboard (ISE) at Burapha operated by Northbridge Communities in a joint venture with the course.

Northbridge’s man looking after Burapha is Rob Brewitt. “Demand to live at Burapha has increased significantly in recent years. We said. The school is a big lure with numbers of students increasing from 280 to nearer 400 in recent years, according to Rob. The Burapha course, with its 36 holes, has played host to many Championship events sanctioned by the Thailand Professional Golfers’ Association (TPGA) including the Singha Open. The housing was introduced there in the early 1990s in response to demand for international standard housing and schooling for executives working at the Mab Ta Phut refinery and their families.

“But we have people living there who don’t play golf and don’t have any children,” said Rob. In recent years he says he has noticed a trend to move to the country away from Pattaya.

Is golf course living as popular here as in the US or the UK, I asked.

Rob gave me the impression that the golf aspect was almost a nice bonus, but not key to why people lived there. “It’s about having a gated, protected community. There’s a sense of space here and freedom of movement. Yes, it’s pleasant to look out your back window onto the course but it’s more than that which brings people here,” he concluded. “It’s no coincidence that the word ‘community’ appears with great regularity on the Northbridge web site.

Another golf course with potentially a similar story to tell to that of Burapha is the St Andrews 2000/Green Valley set-up on the way to Rayong.

There

they also have an international school and a large planned housing area. I visited it a few months back as a potential genuine purchaser. I say "genuine" because at times, as part of my research for this magazine, I visit sites where, for a variety of reasons (including not wishing to pay big sums) I cannot really claim to be a buyer.

But

my interest in St Andrews was real and I liked much of what I saw – although the show homes I visited did not boast actual golf hole views. However, from recollection, prices started around the baht 3.5m mark so the "close to the clubhouse" dream may not be totally shattered!

A

couple of things I did slightly raise an eyebrow about at St Andrews were that I could not get hold of marketing material in English. Not sure if they had run out or maybe never produced. Also, one of the homes I saw had no real kitchen to talk of. But I understand this style is no longer being offered.

As

this issue went to press a new head of marketing was taking up the post so I hope to be able to talk to him/her in time for next issue.

Also

next time I will report on a nine villa development just a kilometre away from Phoenix with prices of bath 9-11.5m from Property Partners Asia. Similar homes at Pratamnuk are commanding baht 16-18m. Building is yet to start on this one.

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