

FEATURES

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13



Vietnam harvests a crop of golf courses from farmland

The Communist country is turfing out farmers to build playgrounds for the well-heeled

BY **SETH MYDANS**
NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE, PHAN THIET, VIETNAM



It may be the most capitalist enterprise in Communist Vietnam — by the rich and for the rich: a proliferation of golf courses that is displacing thousands of farmers and devouring the rice fields the country depends on.

Until last year, according to experts who have done the calculations, licenses for new courses were being issued at an average of one a week, for a total of more than 140 projects around the country.

Promoters created the idea of a “Ho Chi Minh Golf Trail,” a series of eight courses whose label is as good a sign as any of where Vietnam seems to be headed — its heroic wartime past redefined as a sales pitch.

If all those projects were completed, the number of courses would approach that of golf-mad South Korea, where there are close to 200. It would still fall well short of China, which has more than 300, and would be nowhere near the number in the US, which has about 16,000 courses, or even Florida, with 1,260.

For a country that had only two courses at the end of the war in 1975 and that according to some estimates has only 5,000 golfers today, however, the increase in projects over the past four years has been explosive.

But a backlash emerged within the news media and among academics and government officials over the social and environmental costs.

In the summer of last year, Prime Minister Nguyen Tan Dung ordered a halt to new construction pending a review, and last June the government ordered the cancellation of 50 of the projects. But most of the others are well under way, to add to the country’s 13 established golf courses.



Ramshackle houses about the Ocean Dunes Golf Club in Phan Thiet, Vietnam. More than 140 projects were planned around the country, but the government has canceled 50 over worries that they are devouring farmland and putting a strain on water supplies.

PHOTOS: NY TIMES NEWS SERVICE

“Developers and foreign investors are saying they want to make the country a tourist destination, and to do that you need to offer more amenities like golf,” said Kurt Greve, the American general manager of the Ocean Dunes Golf Club and the Dalat Palace Golf Club. Most of those tourists would come from elsewhere in Asia, especially South Korea and Japan, where golf courses are hugely overcrowded.

“They’re all wanting to grow golf,” he said, referring to the developers and investors, “but the government is saying, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa, wait a minute!’”

In its drive to industrialize, Vietnam has already lost large amounts of farmland to factories and other developments. According to the Agriculture Ministry, land devoted to rice, the national staple and a leading source of export revenue, shrank to 4 million hectares

from 4.5 million hectares, just from 2000 to 2006.

Many of the new projects seem to have to do more with capitalism than with sport. Taxes on golf courses are lower than those on other forms of development, and many of the projects appear to be disguised real estate ventures.

Only 65 percent of the land involved in the current projects has been set aside for golf courses, Ton Gia Huyen, an official with the Vietnam Land Science Association, said at a conference on golf courses in May. The rest of the land is reserved for hotels, resorts, villas, eco-tourism areas, parks and recreational projects.

One solution is to change the tax structure, said Nguyen Dang Vang, vice chairman of the National Assembly’s Committee for Science, Technology and Environment.

“Golf courses are for rich people, account for vast areas of land, cause pollution and affect food security, so taxes should be appropriately high,” he told the newspaper *Tuoi Tre* in July.

And when rich people play, it appears that farmers and villagers pay the price.

Development of a single course can cost the land of hundreds of farms, displacing as many as 3,000 people, sometimes devouring an entire commune, Nguyen Duc Truyen, an official of the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences’ Institute of Sociology, said at the recent conference. Only a small number of them find jobs on the new golf courses.

For example, the Dai Lai golf course in Vinh Phuc province drove thousands of people from their land but provided jobs for only 30 local residents, according to a report in July on the Vietnam News Service. Farmers are typically compensated at a rate of US\$2 to US\$3 a square

meter, the news service said, about the cost of a sack of rice.

Along with land, golf courses also put a strain on water resources, said Le Anh Tuan from the Can Tho University Environmental Technology Center. In a widely quoted estimate, he said an 18-hole course could consume 5 million liters of water a day, enough for 20,000 households.

“The dry season is critical,” said Kiet Tuan Le, the chief groundskeeper here at Ocean Dunes, 200km northeast of Ho Chi Minh City. “I’ve got to continually ask the water department, almost fight them, because there’s not enough water for the city people.”

Greve said that the resort was working to minimize its environmental impact, with a new strain of grass that was more salt-tolerant and would require less fresh water.

The nearby Sea Links Golf and Country Club, which is built on sand dunes, pipes in water from a source nearly 3km away, said one of the resort’s directors, Tran Quang Trung. Automatic sprinklers switch on every 15 minutes and individual hoses provide a continuing drip at the base of each tree.

The sumptuous, rolling 18-hole course is only one part of the ambitious, 170-hectare development, he said.

Rows of villas, 315 of them, stand behind the course like soldiers on parade, with many sold before they were built. A five-star hotel overlooking the course has almost been completed.

Just beyond the development area, the red earth is already being turned for the construction of six ocean-view apartment buildings with 550 units.

In the future, Trung said, it will all be known as “Sea Links City.”

[LIFESTYLE]

Culinary cosmetics from the kitchen cupboard

Rice and coconut cleanser? Face mask with burned banana cake in it? Here’s how to make your own beauty products from readily available ingredients

BY **BIBI VAN DER ZEE**
THE GUARDIAN, LONDON

May I suggest not washing your hair with eggs when you’ve got a hangover? Putting your hands into a jug of the stuff, stomach still gently reeling from a late night out, is like a cruel bushtucker trial. And I’m not even sure it will clean my hair.

This is what happens when Mark Constantine, the head of Lush cosmetics, is in your kitchen. A polite inquiry as to how hard it would be to make beauty products at home has resulted in a masterclass, in what can only be described as gunk, from Constantine and his colleague Helen Ambrosen, who has been working with him from the very earliest days when he was starting up the Body Shop with Anita Roddick.

The two of them zoom into my kitchen, giggly with excitement at the chance to plough through my cupboards and see what they can come up with. Within minutes there are heaps of porridge oats, desiccated coconut, dried beans, bananas, mushrooms, ground almonds, a pot of honey and a forlorn little pile of flower petals, ripped cruelly from the bouquet they brought with them.

“Right,” says Constantine. “Now, the first thing you have to do when making skin care products is not get into all those little boxes that

the cosmetic industry wants you in — greasy, combination skin, all that. You have to think about exactly what you want to achieve. What do you want?”

“Erm ... something to clean my skin. And hair,” I reply. He stares at my hair. “Oily at the roots, dry at the ends, a lot of static, I bet, flyaway ...”

While Constantine lists the various items in my kitchen that can be coerced into working on my terrible hair, Ambrosen prepares a rice roulade for my skin. I have said that I only want to use items that you would naturally have to hand, but she asks if she can include three reasonably cheap ingredients which, in one form or another, are the basis of many of the products you buy in the shops (you can buy all of them at your chemist). She has brought glycerin (this is a humectant, which means it holds the moisture in the skin — it is impossible to moisturize your skin with water only), sweet almond oil (for recipes that need a vegetable oil, this is the most useful) and kaolin clay (clays are vital for tightening and helpful for cleansing). Using them in different proportions varies their effect.

There is one ingredient she has not bought, however, because “the great thing about making your own products is that you don’t have to use preservatives. All cosmetic companies must by

law put preservatives into their products, but they’re horrible things.”

Constantine agrees: “Basically, they are there to kill any organisms that may get into your product, and for no other reason. What you have to understand about the modern cosmetic industry is that what the product will actually do is probably the last thing they’re interested in. When they’re putting a skin or a hair product together, they’re calculating how long it will last, how it will travel, the cheapest way to make it smell nice. It’s only after they’ve sorted all this out that they might have a little think about whether it will actually work.”

Ambrosen rubs the roulade on the back of her hand. “Try this. Is it scratchy enough? How scratchy do you want it?” A little scratchier, I say, and we look around for something else to add. A large spoonful of desiccated coconut gets chucked in, and then some of the oil of evening primrose capsules I have lying about.

“This is the best thing about my job, just messing around with things, coming up with something great at the end, or just having to ditch the whole day’s work,” says Constantine. The roulade is nearly ready and smells unexpectedly delicious. We spend a couple more enjoyable hours fiddling about (to my great joy, the burned

bits of a banana cake I have made are included in the face mask — charcoal is good for your skin) and then they zoom off again.

Using these recipes and ingredients, some of which work, some of which don’t, is much messier and feels somehow more alive. The eggs, for example, leave my hair soft but with an unpleasant powdery texture that comes away on my hands when I touch it. I admit that I neglected to rinse afterwards with lemon juice, so this might be my fault. But for the next few washes — with normal shampoo — it comes up absolutely gorgeous, healthy and shining in the way it only does after I’ve been to the hairdresser.

My conclusion? Beauty products are like technology; sometimes the latest must-have is a sideways or even a backwards step, or just a bit of exploitative marketing. But sometimes they represent genuine progress. And so it is with beauty products. The cleansers you might buy in a high street chemist are pallid, synthetically perfumed, expensively packaged, and not a patch on the cleanser I made at home with some desiccated coconut in a quarter of an hour, and which I am using still. Oats in my bath: yes, please. However, when it comes to washing your hair in eggs, a little progress is perhaps not such a bad thing.



Honey, I shrunk my zits.

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