

Golf in Gelephu Mindfulness City – Mindful Basics

The direction and growth of the Gelephu Mindfulness City (GMC) conveys one clear impression – it is mindful. Contrary to some early perceptions that it would be an explosion of commercialism, branded and driven by technology, the early initiatives validate a masterplan that blends Bhutanese values as the foundation of modernisation.

In mid-April, 2026, His Majesty The King emphasised three immediate priorities: the Gelephu International Airport that will connect Bhutan - year-round, all-weather - with the world; the transformation of the local Bhutanese town of Gelephu into a sophisticated hub of the GMC; and the vibrant spiritual sector with trulkus and lams showing the way. In February, 2026, His Majesty announced that Bhutan will raise, in one day on November 1, 108 15-metre high stupas (Jangchup Chorten) - a historical phenomenon.

GMC sees a traffic of high-end investors from different regions of the world. Inspired by His Majesty himself, global socio-economic magnates, political leaders, and digital pioneers are paying increasing attention to the concept of a mindful approach to modern living. And, even in the early stage of GMC's growth, the founding values are visible, balancing modernity and economic vibrancy as an approach to a future that places the wellbeing of people and nature as the goal for development.

GMC's progress is validating the natural transformation of a pristine landscape into a modern city - its economy growing at an accelerated pace, its intentions clear, its values unchanged.

In November, 2024, His Majesty introduced the GMC terrain to Bhutanese spiritual leaders. Within one year 14 landmark sacred sites were designed, the land consecrated, and construction begun. Another eight were granted Royal approval on May 1, 2026. In March, 2026, only weeks after a 230-acre habitat was cleared, edible fodder planted, water holes dug, and salt licks created by a wave of volunteers representing Bhutanese society, a herd of wild elephants and other animals became regular inhabitants. Today, an



► His Majesty The King with Ming Z Mei (centre), Tom Doak (right) and Vijit Nandrajog at the site of the golf course

18-hole world class golf course is the latest amazing story of the GMC genre.

Golf, GMC style

There is no city without a golf course today. For GMC, His Majesty The King has walked over the undulating forested terrain on the east side of Gelephu Mindfulness City with world-renowned golf course architect, Tom Doak, and Ming Z. Mei, the first Founding Member of GMC and financial supporter of the golf course. For the GMC team, Royal consent of a golf course means a mindful interpretation - or reinterpretation - of a sport widely viewed as popular high-end recreation, elevating real estate services and value.

So how does this course fit into a mindfulness city? The Royal Bhutan Country Club (RBCC) will be established in a central suburb of GMC to manage the resort and contribute all proceeds to the GMC. The clubhouse will sit on a strategic ledge, with the wide valley floor and Mao river in front and, across the river, GMC city merging into the Himalayan foothills. The forest on the northern fringe of the 270-acre course is the elephant corridor protected by GMC, also home to wildlife including the endangered Golden Langur.

The course, inspired by His Majesty, is a natural introduction to GMC and to Bhutan. Its primary goal is to make golf a meditative experience in the ecology of a Buddhist city. It

aims to be a direct expression of mindful prosperity, drawing from His Majesty the King's recognition that the world cannot continue to develop at a relentless pace without regard for humanity's deepest needs: harmony with nature and spiritual meaning.

In Comes Tom Doak

In April, 2026, Ming Z. Mei had persuaded the renowned golf course architect, Tom Doak, to visit the site of the GMC golf course. Tom Doak is a champion of the minimalist design which means, in his own words, rather than imposing a golf course on the land, he discovers one within the landscape. Working with co-designer, Vijit Nandrajog, his practice is to work with the natural grain and fauna of the land, removing as little as possible, and allowing a site's own character to determine the design. The essence is revering the environment, not seeking to tame the landscape.

The Bhutanese psyche recognises Tom Doak as being destined to design the GMC course. A veteran of 50 golf courses, 10 of them ranked among the world's best, Doak says his designs are inspired by the early courses in Scotland, the birthplace of golf, where initial games were played on land grazed by sheep and cattle, by farmers who were at their happiest walking the beautiful and raw surroundings. Given that perspective, not known to most people and even to many golfers, the



► Tom Doak: "... inspired by His Majesty's vision for the project and because the site represents the cultural and environmental ethics of Bhutan with its strong spirituality and pristine ecology..."

Himalayan foothills of GMC offer a model setting.

Tom Doak enjoys a stature where he can select courses to design, anywhere in the world, at any cost. So why did he choose GMC? His explanation is that he was inspired by His Majesty's vision for the project, and because he sees that the site represents the cultural and environmental ethics of Bhutan with its strong spirituality and pristine ecology.

Given the culture that GMC represents, what does a sport of privilege contribute to a city whose founding philosophy is mindfulness? It is an anomaly that Tom Doak himself has struggled with. He says he has accepted that some things are out of our control but what is important is that the course fits into the landscape and the community; it feels as though it has always been there, and always will be.

What will set this course

apart is what sets Bhutan apart - the identity of the people and the beauty of the landscape. Golfers will be intrigued by the idea of a great course in such a remote and beautiful country, he says. "I am sure that the presence of a great golf course will help attract more people to visit Bhutan. My wish is that the course becomes part of the fabric of the community, and that the links between golf and spirituality are more thoroughly explored as a result."

Given Bhutan's pristine ecology and a designer who allows the natural landscape to dictate the layout, the GMC course could be a pilgrimage destination for golfers who understand that the greatest courses are, in the end, the ones that change the way you see the world. It is a world that the Gelephu Mindfulness City aspires to be.

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