

Jeremy Pern routes Benin's first course around sacred grove and voodoo shrines



Avlèkété Golf Course will occupy a long, thin stretch of land of about 100 hectares

Construction firm **Gregori International** has started work on **Avlèkété Golf Course**, a new 18-hole golf layout by Jeremy Pern, near Cotonou, the largest city in Benin.

"With government procedures in Africa being quite lengthy, I started working on the project on an unofficial basis around 18 months ago, producing sketches and looking

at sites," said Pern. "After going through all the procedures, we got the official green light at the beginning of the year. We more or less started building the course straight away."

The site for the golf course is one kilometre from the coast. "It's a long, thin stretch of land of about 100 hectares," said Pern. "Parts of the land are great, and parts are a bit of

a challenge. About half of it is rolling sand, very 'linsky', plus or minus a couple of metres in height, where farmers were growing tomatoes, peppers, manioc, maize and all sorts on the sand. Surrounding the sandy area is swampland and a coastal lagoon. There's also a wide range of trees - including a variety of palms, coconut and mango.

"One thing that I have been impressed by is the level of environmental surveillance and permitting, quite different to my past experience in Africa. There have been comprehensive environmental impact studies extending to social, cultural and financial issues including government compensation to the farmers. All the coconuts and palms in the playing areas will be transplanted into the rough. However, we have to avoid the forest clumps. If there is a special tree that we can't move, then the golf course has to be routed around it. And with 100 hectares to play with, we have plenty of room."

It is not just trees that will be protected. "There are seven voodoo shrines on the site, of which there are several we can't touch," said Pern. "Three or four of the voodoo temples - they're shrines and altars in the trees - can be moved by their priests. And in the middle of the site is a sacred grove, which is a clump of trees covering an area of about half a hectare, that has to be preserved and isolated. This sacred grove sits beside the big lagoon and is dedicated to the fishing deities."

Construction is expected to take two years, with 250 local people employed to help **Gregori International** build the course, which is expected to open by the end of 2025.

Read more about the origins and design of Avlèkété Golf Course on www.golfcoursearchitecture.net