

face of the month



People Behind Paintball

Yannick Borlee started an enjoyable interactive sport and recreation form - Paintball - in Muscat, making it a favourite with everyone, irrespective of age, gender and sporting ability



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Yannick wanted a recreation option in Muscat that could be enjoyed by everyone, and paintball is fun, tactical, thrilling and a good workout... all in one!

Muscat Paintball, located in Shatti Al Qurum, has been immensely popular ever since it opened up a year ago. In Oman, it's the brainchild of Yannick Borlee, managing director, Xtreme Sports LLC.

A well-known diver and diving instructor in Oman for a decade now, through his Global Scuba diving outfit, Yannick wanted to start up a sport activity that could be played by all, irrespective of age, gender, fitness or sporting abilities. Paintball is, really, a game for all, and popular worldwide. Sophia, Yannick's wife says, "He decided to bring paintball to Oman even before playing his first game!"

After a year of operations, Muscat Paintball now has the laser tag game option, where you play with laser-enabled electronic guns, rather than traditional paintballs. "Once paintballing got really popular here, the

younger children (it's for age 12 and above) who wanted to play were upset, but for safety reasons children below 12 aren't allowed to play paintball. It was disappointing for the little kids and a small percentage of adults who are scared of getting dirty and bruised, which is part of the fun, but not everyone's cup of tea. Now they can with laser tag, as it's the same concept – but with no paint and no pain!" says Yannick. An electronic device on the laser tag gun is programmed to give a reading of shot count, game scenario and more. And you still have the excitement of regular paintball, with the shot sounds that the laser tag gun makes.

With the summer, paintball also gets excitingly affordable. In June, you can pay just RO 5 (per head) for a paintball game; Laser Tag is also relatively cheaper than normal paintball. Players can choose different packages to suit their budget – a set of two, three or four games. "The best response has been from parents, who are so thrilled to see their kids actively enjoying an outdoor



The paintball playing kit includes safety gear, the playing gun, paintball pellets etc

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PAINTBALL PICKS

- Each paintball game has a different scenario: objectives can range from 'Capture the Flag' (of the opposing team) to 'Shoot Your Boss' for corporate team-building games. Muscat Paintball holds two corporate tournaments every year.
- There is no ideal number of players - though an average group consists of 10 to 12 people. If you're solo and don't have a team of friends to play with, Muscat Paintball will put you in with other groups.
- The paintballs used by Muscat Paintball are the same brand used at the World Cup tournament - gelatin capsules filled with vegetable dye, water dissolvable, non-toxic and biodegradable. They just wash off.
- A safe, popular activity with women: in keeping with the culture, Muscat Paintball has female staff to help gear up women players, and offers privacy during a game for women's-only groups or families.
- From June 1, the summer promotion gives you a chance to play at just RO 5 per head. A special birthday package option (at RO 13 per head for Laser Tag, RO 15 for regular paintball) include games for an hour, food and party host in tie-up with Wally's and entertainment.
- Paintball field layouts can be Professional (with inflatables placed around the field) or a wreck field (where you can have anything from cars, barrells to a forest area; it's left to your imagination. Only, no sharp objects that could hurt anyone).

Leo, their son, is known as 'paintball kid' and helps out with designing field layouts and instructing child players on safety procedures

game than sitting cooped up indoors with their PlayStations," smiles Yannick. Given that the paintball field is enclosed and private is added incentive. "Parents leave their kids here and come back later to pick them up. We're very particular about the safety aspects and rules as well. Every time you want to play, you go through a strict safety briefing, no matter how many times you've played it here. Two referees are always on field, and a player can get sent off the field for flouting any safety rule."

"We've had visitors from abroad, who've played in other countries, get really surprised at the gear we provide here - which is what professional players buy for themselves - including chest and neck protection. Usually, just working overalls are given out," says Yannick. "The best part is when players come off the field, that's when you should see them - they're so excited and happy - the look on their faces can't be described. And we've not had a single person who's just felt so-so about it. They all have a great time."

For professional players, there are GCC and world level tournaments, including a World Cup. These players are not part of national teams, but just private teams that represent their country. Yannick himself is part of a team training to participate, from Oman.

Yannick, who started out as an electronics engineer from Belgium, came here on a vacation 12 years ago and stayed on, is now one of Oman's chief recreation activity providers.

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