

# Only In Dubai Fantasy Becomes Fact!

By: **Habeeb Salloum**

"What are you saying? Dubai will host 40 million visitors by 2015! You must be joking!" My fellow journalist seemed surprised when I told him that Dubai was well on its way to becoming the tourist Mecca of the future. Yet, any knowledgeable traveler who stops in this city, which in the last three decades has been transformed from a desert outpost to an ultra modern metropolis, will not dispute the fact that this figure is realistic. More than 5 million visitors each year bring the country some 2 billion dollars and they are increasing by leaps and bounds. In fact the projected number of 40 million tourists could well be exceeded.

No nation in recent times has been transformed in such a short period. Airplanes and some of the best superhighways in the world have replaced dhows and camel trails as means of transport. Skyscrapers and other mega structures have erased the mud



Burj Al Arab-Inside

برج العرب من الداخل

huts and nomad tents. It is a fantasyland come true – a spic and span metropolis luring tourists and business people. And Dubai tourist officials are making sure this trend continues.

Visionary ideas for many mega-projects are fully grasped and quickly implemented, as

Dubai works its way to becoming the world's premier 'nation resort'. Entrepreneurs from the four corners of the world continually flock in with plans for something unique or different and as often as not, they find willing ears. The country's officials dream big, and it seems, always realize their dreams. Their achievements prompted the prestigious Financial Times publication, FDI Magazine to describe Dubai as the 'Middle Eastern City of the Future'.

All this activity has sent this throbbing heart of the United Arab Emirates into an unstoppable building boom. Palm Islands – three partially completed enormous manmade islands resembling palm trees that will add some 520

km (323 mi) to Dubai's coastline. Self-declared the 'eighth wonder of the world', they are, besides the Great Wall of China, the only manmade structure that can be seen from outer space. One of these islands has been completed and the other two will be finished in the next few years. All will ➤

## City Tourism



Dubai Dhows plying Dubai Creek

الدحو يبجر في خور دبي



JAHGR Golf Course

نادي الغولف

be saturated with tourist oriented luxury villas and boutique hotels which can be purchased by the locals, expatriates and nationals of other lands.

Keeping pace with these gigantic creations are 'The World's Islands' – a series of 300 manmade islands, covering an area 7 by 9 km (4.4 by 5.6) and positioned strategically to form the shape of the globe's continents. Each island will vary in size and shape. The project, whose slogan is 'find your own place in the world', will be completed in 2008. It caters in the main, to the elite residential and tourist market. A person who buys his/her island can build whatever they fancy as long as their plans do not conflict with the country's laws.

Even more intriguing and seemingly out of the fantasy world, Ski Dubai Snow Park is the first snow playground in the Middle East. An indoor resort completed in 2005, it specializes in winter sports.

Adding more fairytale aura to these 'Believe it or Not' projects is a the world's only luxury under-water hotel, whose construction has been put on hold. It will be anchored off shore 20 m (76 ft) below the surface and will only be accessible through a 520 m (1,700 ft) transparent tunnel via a shuttle train.

A top ground, spectacular world-class hotels, the ultimate in luxury, are springing up everywhere. The six or seven star, depending on who one talks to, Burj Al Arab, shaped like a mammoth sailboat and towering 400 m (1,312 ft) high, is called the most luxurious hotel in the world. However, it is being challenged by the two boutique hotels of the neighboring Madinat Jumeirah, an extensive Arabian themed leisure

complex oozing with traditional architecture, more spectacular than any the world has seen in the last quarter century.

The 124 storey Burj Dubai will be the world's tallest building when it is completed. It will house a hotel, private apartments, already sold, corporate offices and suites. The spire will also hold communication equipment. Even more grand is the \$4 billion Dubai Marina complex of apartments and hotels, which, when completed, will house a community of 75,000. The enormity of this project is mind boggling.

There seems to be no end to colossal projects. Dubailand, Dubai's answer to Disneyland, a massive 5 billion \$U.S. shopping mall with 50 hotels and a theme park as well as an artificial rain forest under an enormous glass dome is slated to open in 2008. In addition, nearing completion, in the next few years are: the Dubai Festival City, a retail, and entertainment centre; the Lost City, a re-recreation of a series of old lost cities from different parts of the ancient world; Dubai light rail, a futuristic project, aimed at curing the city's traffic ills; and in the works is Dubai Healthcare City aimed at turning Dubai into a global hub for specialized healthcare where patients will recover in the atmosphere of a five star hotel. Dubai's building frenzy to boost investment and tourism with grandiose projects, climaxed last year when plans were unleashed to begin work on a gigantic waterfront development at Jebel Ali. A beachfront landmark, it will be larger than Manhattan and form the first phase of a larger project that will include Madinat Al Arab (City of the Arabs) and the 75 km



Dubai Marina

المارينا

Arabian Canal – the world's largest man-made canal. Like the legendary and beautiful Arabian horse, Dubai is galloping ahead on its competitive tracks with a grace that dazzles the world.

Due to the large movement of men and materials from the four corners of the globe to construct the mushrooming projects, Dubai International Airport has become one of the fastest growing in the world. The award winning Emirates Airline, Dubai's star emblem, is expanding by leaps and bounds, bringing masses of tourists to this playground of the Arabian Gulf.

For recreation, golfing has become a Dubai specialty. There are now eight courses almost all created in the style of Americas' best golf resorts and more are on the way. From the many tourist-oriented projects completed or now in progress and others in the planning stage, the goal of 40 million annual tourists in ten years' time looks truly realistic. ■