

ON THE WATERFRONT

Waterfront City, the focal point of a newly proposed Dubai land development twice the size of Hong Kong, is set to become the business and residential heart of Dubai's transformed coastline, writes Jodie McLeod.

A rendering of developments in progress with the centrepiece, a silver sphere, described by its designers as a self-contained urban neighbourhood, where public, residential and office space intertwine.



Recent renderings of the future coastline of Dubai paint a very pretty picture. Immediately recognisable is the 'Palm Trilogy' – the elaborate triptych of luxury residential and resort islands – Palm Jumeirah, Palm Jebel Ali and Palm Deira. But Dubai-based developers Nakheel, responsible for the Palms, have pencilled in additional, even more ambitious land sculptures. They are: The World, a cluster of 300 islands in the shape of the seven continents, the land for which has been fully reclaimed; The Universe, a swirling earthen interpretation of the galaxies next to The World; and Waterfront, a project that will transform 1.4 billion square feet of desert into a business and residential region that will double Dubai's population. While other islands in Nakheel's opus have a luxury tourism and housing focus, Waterfront will incorporate the city element of high-end living into its programme.

Situated in the southern half of the Nakheel land bank on the border of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, the 140,000,000m² Waterfront area, twice the size of Hong Kong, will be home to 1.5 million new inhabitants. In total Waterfront will add 70km of coastline to Dubai's meagre 15km stretch of natural shores.

At the region's centre is Waterfront City – a 1,310m² island designed by Dutch firm Office of Metropolitan Architecture [OMA], responsible for the CCTV building in China, and led by project architect and OMA partner Reinier de Graaf. Nestled into the mainland and moated by artificially constructed waters, the square island will be programmatically layered with a mix of business, residential, cultural, retail and leisure spaces, including a Manhattan-style Central Park. Following its completion in 2018, the city will accommodate a residential population of 92,000, and a working population of 310,000.

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Ultimate city experience

With aesthetics, community and the environment the guiding influences of the design, Waterfront City will aim to deliver a superior quality of life to its people. The four districts that surround the central square each have their own distinctive character. Boulevard is defined by its soft water edges and extensive public parkland containing a mix of private plots and commercial spaces. Madinat Al Soor is a traditional Arabian community. Marina will combine the street-level vitality of a marina with high-rise residential buildings, and Resort will offer resort lifestyle with luxury hotels, resorts and residential spaces, including the OMA-designed high-rise to be known as The Spiral. The central island will parade some iconic structures of its own, also by OMA, including an 82-storey tower, inspired by the minaret of the ninth-century Great Mosque of Samarra, and a 44-storey silver sphere. The sphere is described by the designers as a self-contained urban neighbourhood, where public, residential and office space intertwine.

Managing Director of Nakheel, Matt Joyce, says that the combined neighbourhoods offer a unique city experience where theatres, music halls, museums, restaurants, shopping and yachting are all within a short walk, metro stop or bike ride away.

An emphasis on public transport, and the convenient, compact design of the city will encourage visitors and residents to leave their cars at home, reducing exhaust emissions. Congestion will also be minimised with an easy flowing network of roads, based on a five-by-five grid. The use of recycled water for irrigation and cooling, cogenerative power sources and the 'green' positioning of buildings to maximise shade and block out the heat will also help to reduce the city's carbon footprint. These elements are the result of research conducted by Blue Communities, a \$136 million R&D initiative established by Nakheel that is dedicated to discovering ways to reduce the environmental impact of their and other companies' waterfront developments.

Building the impossible

Nakheel is expected to deliver homes to three million people across a massive 3.5 billion square feet of land in Dubai over the next two decades. It sounds like an impossible, surely extravagant, development task – but according to Nakheel CEO Chris O'Donnell, it's neither.

'Dubai is increasingly becoming the business and tourism hub of the Middle East,' he says. 'With 1.7 billion people living within a four-hour flight radius of the Emirate, the sheer numbers in the context of the region bode well for its future growth.'

Other figures also point to growth in Dubai, spelling good news for the property market. Currently, the city's population is increasing by 6–7% per annum. So by 2020, with construction capacity constraints the way they are (80,000 dwellings per year), even Nakheel's residential projects may not be enough.

'For this reason, I believe the market will continue to move at the same pace, showing no signs of slow down,' he says.

The liquidity of the 'petro-dollar' in the region has meant the US subprime mortgage crisis had minimal impact on Nakheel's progress, according to O'Donnell. This, combined with the strength of UAE currency against the US dollar and clear property laws and legislation in Dubai, is making the Waterfront an increasingly attractive option for European investors. The luxury residential area of Veneto in Waterfront sold out within five days of its release, and the same investment enthusiasm is expected for the City. ■

DESIRE FOR DUBAI

Proof of the desire among investors for projects in Dubai and other parts of the Middle East can be seen in the success of the Cityscape Dubai events that have been held for the last seven years.

The conference has excelled in bringing the best ideas to the international investors, introducing them to leading property developers, governmental and development authorities, architects, designers, consultants and professionals involved in all aspects of the property industry.

At last year's event, 51,855 professionals from 136 countries passed through its doors to see 849 exhibitors showcase their projects and services in an enormous exhibition space. Cityscape Dubai 2008, on 6–9 October, will be far bigger still, with 1,000 exhibitors.

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Image courtesy of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA)