



Burj Al Arab: The only 7-Star Hotel in the World

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ON our way back from Scotland, my wife and I stopped over at Dubai for three nights to see how much the place has progressed since our last visit in 2002.

Dubai is a tiny emirate situated near the tip of a promontory of the Arabic Peninsula that separates the Persian Gulf from the Gulf of Oman. It is the second largest of the seven emirates that make up the United Arab Emirates, one of the richest Arabic countries.

Before oil was discovered in the 1960s, Dubai was poor and its people lived a nomadic life in a desert environment. In less than half a century, the desert land on both sides of the Dubai Creek has been transformed into a large oasis of concrete jungle, and this oasis is still expanding with more giant structures shooting up to scrap the sky.

It is estimated that 20% of the world's tower cranes are currently employed in Dubai. Of its population of about 1.5 million people, almost 80% are foreign workers from Pakistan, north-western India, China and Africa.

Burj Dubai, an office tower which is under construction and is scheduled for completion this year, will have an ultimate height of more than 800m, more than 40% taller than Taipei 101, currently the world's tallest building. It will take over that title and retain it for many, many years to come.

Dubai already has some gigantic shopping malls and more are under construction. In another year or so, five of the world's eight largest shopping malls will be in Dubai.



Another first is, of course, the well-known Burj Al Arab, often touted as the world's only 7-star hotel. Built on an artificial island in the vicinity of the luxurious 5-star Jumeirah Beach Hotel, this all-suite hotel is in the shape of a sail.

At 321m, it is also the tallest hotel in the world. And with its cheapest suite going for about Dh3,500 (about RM3,500) a night, it is definitely the most expensive hotel in the world.

We visited Burj Al Arab eight years ago by purchasing admission tickets at Dh150 each. We wanted to do it again this time, but were told by a pretty guest relations officer from China at the guardhouse before the bridge leading to the hotel that, to visit the hotel, one had to have a reservation at one of the hotel's restaurants and the minimum amount of spending per person was about Dh500!

So we decided to spend the rest of the evening admiring this beautiful, elegant and arrogant hotel from the beach. ■



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