




DUBAI: UNIFINISHED SKYSCRAPER CITY



Dubai Rental Car Tour

DUBAI: BASIC INFORMATION		World Rank	Similar To
Urban Area Population (2010)	2,500,000	151	Caracas, Changsha
Projection (2025)	3,550,000	133	Curitiba, Casablanca
Urban Land Area: Square Miles (2009)	600	50	Kansas City, London, Delhi, Bangkok
Urban Land Area: Square Kilometers	1,550		
Density: Per Square Mile (2007)	3,300	719	Portland, Dallas-Fort Worth
Density: Per Square Kilometer (2007)	1,300		
<p>*Continuously built up area (Urban agglomeration) Land area & density rankings among the approximately 850 urban areas with 500,000+ population. Data from <i>Demographia World Urban Areas</i> (http://www.demographia.com/db-worldua.pdf)</p>			

February 1, 2010

I picked up a copy of *The Wall Street Journal-Europe* on the concourse while boarding my Emirates Air flight from Paris to Dubai in late November of 2009. The lead story provided an unexpected relevance to the trip --- my first to Dubai. Dubai World, owned by the Dubai government, had announced a 6-month moratorium on payments of some of its \$60 billion in debt. Since the announcement, stock markets have been dropping and recovering, company officials have attempted to calm borrowers and government officials have provided less assurance than Dubai's investors might have preferred, though richer, neighboring Abu Dhabi backstopped Dubai with \$10 billion in December.

The United Arab Emirates: Dubai is one of the seven emirates of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which like the United States and Canada is a federation. Broadly speaking, the emirates are as states or provinces. By far the richest is Abu Dhabi, with something like 10% of the world's oil reserves. Just 100 miles up the eight-lane freeway is Dubai, with little in oil reserves, but which has used its previous income and massive borrowings to create one of the most spectacular urban environments in the world.

The Dubai Urban Area: The Dubai urban area includes the principal urbanized portion of the Dubai emirate as well as the adjacent urbanization in Sharjah. Between two-thirds and three-quarters of the population is in Dubai. The urban area is one of the least dense in the world outside the United States, with a population density of only 3,300 per square mile (1,300 per square kilometer). There is considerable low-density development, but also considerable high density development. The low density is largely the result of empty and developing lands inside the urban periphery. Should Dubai continue its rapid development pace, it is likely that infill development will raise its density to as much as double the present level. Despite its world significance and grandiose



architecture, Dubai has a relatively small population, little more than that of Sacramento or Portland.

An Architectural Feast: Dubai is a feast of modern high-rise architecture on shore, off shore and in man-made islands shaped like palms and a map of the world. A tour of the world's most spectacular modern high-rise architecture could take many trips to China, including Shanghai's Pudong, the developing western downtown of Beijing, the transforming core of Nanjing, around north station in Shenyang and the world's largest boom-town, Shenzhen. But no-one should despair about not having enough time to visit the many Chinese sites, because Dubai provides nearly as impressive a list of attractions within a comparatively few square miles.

Dubai: Locus of Asia's Skyscraper Central: At this writing, no other urban area in the world has a concentration of tall buildings to compete with Dubai. Out of the approximately 60 towers rising more than 1,000 feet or 300 meters, 11 are in Dubai. Hong Kong, at 7 and Chicago at 6 are well behind. Led by Dubai, Asia has become the skyscraper center of the world, with two-thirds of the tallest buildings. The United States, which used to have a monopoly on such towers, now accounts for only one-quarter, despite having added three towers after the loss of the two World Trade Center towers. Before 1990, only one of the tallest buildings was outside the United States.

The Burj Khalifa: Burj Khalifa, the tallest building in the world, is now open in Dubai. The building had been called Burj Dubai during its construction and was the centerpiece of the huge Downtown Burj Dubai development, just to the west of Sheikh Zayed Boulevard, the main freeway arterial of Dubai. Just before opening, and just after the Abu Dhabi \$10 billion bailout, Burj Dubai was renamed Burj Khalifa, after UAE President Khalifa Bin Zayed. Downtown Burj Dubai was also renamed Downtown Burj Khalifa. The main street in front of Burj Khalifa was renamed Burj Khalifa Boulevard. "The Address," a more than 1,000 foot tall (300 meters) tower that is the second highest in Downtown Burj Khalifa has been renamed "The Address Downtown Khalifa."

The Burj Khalifa has 160 floors and rises 2,717 feet or 828 meters. The Burj is more than twice the height of the Empire State Building and a full 60% higher than the previous world record holder, Taipei 101. It seems likely that this is the largest tallest building jump since the pyramids were built. Dubai Mall is adjacent to the Burj Khalifa and is reputed to be the largest mall in the world. Visits to this mall revealed a serious design flaw in traffic design and management. Even at this point, with the mall not yet completely open, it can take 15 minutes or longer to exit the parking lot.

The Main Street Freeway: Sheikh Zayed Boulevard: The main thoroughfare in Dubai is Sheikh Zayed Road, a 12-14 lane freeway, with additional service lanes on both sides. On either side, there is a row of

some of the world's tallest buildings, often not more than a few feet apart. Except in the Burj area, the tall buildings tend to be in single rows, with low rise development beginning virtually at the rear lot lines. The top of the Rose Tower is pictured in the logo for this *Rental Car Tour*. The Rose Tower is a hotel that is 72 floors, 1,033 feet and 315 meters tall.

Dubai's Upper East and West Sides: Manhattan has its upper east and west sides and so does Dubai (actually they are upper Northwest and Southeast side's). It is an open question which is more impressive, but if all of the planned construction is completed, Dubai's will overshadow New York's. Dubai's Upper East and West Sides are along Sheikh Zayed Road a few miles from the main commercial skyscraper row and Downtown Burj Khalifa. On the East Side is the Dubai Marina, which played prominently in press reports expressing concern about the debt moratorium. Much of the Dubai Marina is still under construction. There are twin towers that appear to be generally modeled on New York's classic Chrysler Building at the northeastern end of the Marina on Sheikh Zayed Road. However, uncharacteristically for Dubai, they are not as tall.

On the West Side of Sheikh Zayed Road there is another development that appears to be at least as large as Dubai Marina, Jumeirah Towers, with many buildings still under construction.

These two developments line the freeway for two miles and stretch at least 0.5 miles in each direction from the freeway.

The Palms and the World: Some of the most spectacular architecture is just to the west of the Marina, in and around the Palm Jumeirah Island (actually four islands). The Palm Jumeirah is home to the Atlantis Hotel, which would be the talk of any town in the world, except Dubai, which has plenty more to talk about. The Jumerirah Palm includes single family housing on its "fronds" and high rise condominiums at the entrance. A monorail operates, largely empty, to the Atlantis Hotel from the mainland, though does not connect to the Dubai Metro.

The developer of the Palms and a group of islands called "The World" (in a shape somewhat like the world) is Nakheel, a subsidiary of Dubai World. This subsidiary was the unit that first indicated it would not be able to meet its financial obligations on time. Construction has been suspended on the World.

In addition, the Palm Jebel Ali has been largely dredged. It is unclear whether further development of this Palm has been suspended. Construction on the much larger Palm Deira has been suspended.

Another large shopping mall, Emirates Mall, has a rather unique feature for the desert, an indoor ski area and is located near the Palm Jumeirah.

Burj Al Arab Hotel: Just to the east of Jumeirah Palm is one of Dubai's oldest and best known architectural masterpieces, the Burj Al Arab Hotel, which sits offshore, though not at the distance many of the publicity photos suggest. This is a prehistoric structure by Dubai standards, having opened in 1999.

Ring Roads and the Silicon Oasis: Dubai has two incomplete ring roads. The inner ring (Route 311 or "Emirates Road"), 12 lanes, runs through partially developed desert. The outer ring (Route 611), which is up to 10 lanes, runs through even less developed desert. There are, nonetheless, interesting projects along both roads. Dubai's Silicon Oasis contains massive commercial buildings,

still under construction, high rise condominium buildings and single family housing, which is behind security. This impressive development would be illegal in virtually all Australian urban areas, all of the UK and some US urban areas, because it would like outside the planning Berlin Walls imposed in those places.

Academic City: On the edge of Silicon Oasis is an Academic City, which contains branches of universities such as Murdoch (Perth, Australia) and Michigan State. Maybe the Emirate should buy the main campuses of Michigan State and Michigan, and switch their annual football game to the new cricket stadium along Emirates Road and miles from the nearest metro station. This could provide badly needed revenue to the basket state (Michigan, not California)

The Urban Area: The Emirate of Sharjah is to the immediate east of Dubai and continues the urbanization for many miles. The urban area (containing both Dubai and Sharaj) has approximately 2 million people. This is a very small population (less than that of Sacramento or Portland) for an urban area of such world significance and monumental architecture.

The Dominant Ethnic Minority: The native or citizen population of “Emiratis” is much smaller, estimated at under 20%. The balance of the population is primarily expatriate workers who are in Dubai on temporary visas. So long as the hundreds of thousands of Indians, Pakistanis and others have employment, they can stay. But not having a job can make staying impossible.

The Future: Dubai is continuing its building binge, though some projects are being placed on hold or being cancelled.

- A huge new international airport is under construction, which will have an annual capacity as much as 50% greater than the world’s largest airport (Atlanta). Unbelievably, the present airport, which has had significant recent expansion, would remain open. The two airports together would provide Dubai with more passenger capacity than the five airports of Los Angeles (with its 18 million consolidated metropolitan area population). There are conflicting reports as to the impact, if any, of the financial crisis on the airport and its eventual completion.
- Many towers are under construction and in some areas make the skyline virtually look under construction. It is unclear how many of these partially finished projects will be expeditiously completed, subjected to premature topping outs or even abandoned.
- The Nakheel Tower, which was to be nearly 4,500 feet tall (1,400 meters), has been cancelled. This building was to have been named after the Dubai World unit Nakheel and would have dwarfed the Burj Khalifa. Nakheel is at the center of the Dubai financial crisis.
- There are plans for a “10-star” luxury hotel under water, the Hydropolis. The project [website](#) indicates that the *website* is under construction though there is no indication that the hotel is under construction. A [related website](#) indicates that the hotel will open in 2009. One can only wonder when an internet reservation can be made at Hotels.
- Construction has apparently stopped on Nakheel’s Deira Palm (the largest of the palms) and the World.

- The “[City of Arabia](#)” is a huge development along Emirates Road, which is intended to include 34 towers, 4 of 60 floors, 20 of 45 floors, and 10 of 30 floors. The project would also include the Mall of Arabia, which would displace Dubai Mall as the largest shopping mall in the world, at 10 million square feet. To put it mildly, viewed from Emirates Road the project appears to be behind schedule. Even when and if the Mall of Arabia opens, Dubai will rank in shopping malls behind Manila, which has 4 of the world’s 12 largest.

Of course, Dubai is not the only place where financial difficulties have put buildings on hold. Chicago’s “[Spire](#)” is little more than a circular hole next to Lake Shore Drive, rather than a rapidly rising tallest tower that would be the tallest in the world after the Burj Khalifa, if it were open today.

Whither Dubai? It seems fair to ask what Dubai was seeking to accomplish. On one hand, there was an interest in developing a strong tourism base, and tourism has increased over the past decade. Yet, Dubai attracts only 1/10th of tourism rate of Las Vegas, while having more than one-half the hotel rooms. Dubai does not have the advantage of a 20 million person market that Las Vegas has close-by (Los Angeles and San Diego). One challenge is that what has been built may already be too large to be supported by the population, the permanent Emirati or the temporary expatriate.

But the real question is where Dubai goes from here. Late reports indicate that Dubai World intends to restructure nearly one-half of its debt. Creditors had hoped that the richer Emirate of Abu Dhabi or the UAE would bail out Dubai, not much different from Texas bailing out a virtually bankrupt California. Neither the UAE nor Abu Dhabi seem in any hurry to provide the blanket relief that would be required to finish what is under construction, much less finance Dubai’s aggressive expansion plans.

<http://www.rentalcartours.net>
<http://www.demographia.com>
<http://www.publicpurpose.com>



Dubai Rental Car Tour



Sharjah

Palm Deira →

Dubai - United Arab Emirates

The
World →

← Sheikh Zayed Rd.

Downtown
Burj Khalifa

← Silicon Oasis

Palm
Jumeirah →

East Side,
West Side

← Palm Jebel Ali



Downtown Burj Khalifa

Burj Khalifa



Burj Khalafa



Burj Khalafa & The Address





Doha Road

A photograph of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper in Dubai, showing its distinctive tiered, pointed top and glass facade. The text "Dubai Rental Car Tour" is overlaid in bold black font.

**Dubai
Rental
Car
Tour**

Sheikh Zayed Road

Rose Tower (Center)







Metro Station



The Index (Left)













A photograph of the top of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper, showing its distinctive tiered, pointed structure and glass facade. The text "Dubai Rental Car Tour" is overlaid in white on the right side of the image.

**Dubai
Rental
Car
Tour**

Palm Jumeirah



Monorail with
Atlantis Hotel in the
Distance



Residences &
Atlantis Hotel





Atlantis Hotel






The logo for 'Dubai Rental Car Tour' features a vertical image of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper against a clear blue sky. The building's distinctive tiered, spire-like top is visible. To the right of the building, the words 'Dubai', 'Rental', 'Car', and 'Tour' are stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

**Dubai
Rental
Car
Tour**

**East Side
West Side**



← The Marina

Jumeirah Towers →

The Marina



The Marina







The Marina

The Marina



The Marina







The Marina



Chrysler Building
Look Alike
Twin Towers





Jumeirah Towers

Jumeirah Towers



Jumeirah Towers



A photograph of the top of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper in Dubai, showing its distinctive tiered, pointed structure against a clear blue sky. The building's glass facade reflects the light, and a small golden orb is visible on one of the lower tiers.

**Dubai
Rental
Car
Tour**

Silicon Oasis













A photograph of the top of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper in Dubai, showing its distinctive tiered, pointed architecture against a clear blue sky. The text "Dubai Rental Car Tour" is overlaid in bold black font on the right side of the image.

**Dubai
Rental
Car
Tour**

**Other
Dubai**

Burj Khalifa &
Sheikh Zayed Road



Burj Al Arab Hotel





Construction along
outer ring road



Residences along outer ring road



Outer ring road





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A photograph of the Burj Khalifa skyscraper in Dubai, showing its distinctive tiered, falcon-like top and glass facade. The image is set against a clear blue sky. The text "Dubai Rental Car Tour" is overlaid in bold black font on the right side of the image.

**Dubai
Rental
Car
Tour**

Sharjah












Sharjah Corniche





Sharjah
Corniche



An aerial photograph showing a large artificial island, Deira Palm, in the foreground. The island is mostly flat and sandy, with some construction equipment and materials visible. In the background, across a body of water, is the dense urban skyline of Sharjah, featuring numerous high-rise buildings. The sky is hazy.

Deira Palm
(Construction Suspended)
Sharjah in distance