

# New Sheikh Zayed Mosque to change Fujairah's skyline

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FUJAIRAH // The first stage of a Dh190 million mosque that will serve 28,000 worshippers is almost complete, the Ministry of Public Works has announced.

The Sheikh Zayed Mosque, a Ministry of Public Works project, will be the second largest mosque in the country when completed in July 2012; its final size is yet to be determined. The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, which encompasses 22,412 square metres, is the largest.

"We finished about 80 per cent of the foundation, and the foundation may be finished after two months," said Haleema al Shahi, the ministry engineer responsible for the project. "It will be a landmark. As a mosque it brings people

together in prayer, and relationships will become stronger. It must be open for everyone in the city and they will come, especially in Ramadan."

Set amid fountains and palm-dotted gardens on a large property in the heart of Fujairah city, the mosque will be roughly the size of three football pitches and hold 13,500 people in its prayer hall.

Worshippers will be called to prayer from six minarets rising 100 metres above 65 cascading domes.

They will enter a 5,124 square metre marble courtyard framed by 35 domes, a courtyard that can hold 12,000 people. Two large wooden doors open onto the main prayer hall, which will be capped by a dome 20 metres in height and 44 metres in diameter.

The mosque's exterior will be constructed of stone, while the building will boast an interior of marble and granite.

"The decorations are not yet decided upon. As the project develops we will choose which materials will be used," said Ms al Shahi.

The mosque will house a religious school, a basement prayer area for 2,500 women and 205 stations for ablution. Visitors will be welcome.

The mosque will likely have its own imam and mullah, rather than using a satellite broadcast call to prayer, as many mosques in the emirate do.

The towering minarets of the mosque are "a testimony to urbanisation", said Dr Ronald Hawker, an associate professor of art and design at Zayed University.

Mullahs in the region would traditionally perform the call to prayer while standing on a platform in the forecourt of the mosque, instead of at the top of a minaret.

"It's not like somewhere like Damascus or Cairo, where you have this very, very dense urban fabric and you have to cry out over the surrounding city," said Dr Hawker.

"Here it's a very quiet surrounding, so you don't need that minaret."

Mosques were traditionally built by a senior member of the lineage group around tribal quarters in the community.

"They tended to be really small," said Dr Hawker. "One of the things about that is they're not really astonishing buildings. They tend to emphasise modesty before God."

It is no surprise that the story of UAE mosque architecture parallels the country's economic standing. Minarets appeared in the UAE in the early 1900s, when the pearl industry brought wealth and trade. Minarets became less common following the collapse of the pearling industry in the 1930s.

"In the 1940s you get a reconstruction of mosques, and that's part of this urbanisation that ultimately leads to things like the Sheikh Zayed Mosque," said Dr Hawker.

"The sheikhs were starting to find oil concessions, so the first thing they did was fund new mosques."

Fujairah's new mosque will be a contrast to the small neighbourhood mosques that characterise the northern emirates. It is likely to change community relations, said Dr Hawker.

"I can't see how it wouldn't affect people, but to what degree and what extent I'm not sure," said Dr Hawker.

Of course, said Ms al Shahi, it is the purpose of the mosque that is most important.

"The mosque is not measured by its size," she said. "The religion is between Allah and Muslims, it is the same anywhere. A Muslim can pray anywhere, he doesn't need a mosque to pray. Sometimes if you pray in the open air, even at the side of the road, it can be more spiritual."

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