

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

A spectacular ceremony in Dubai marked the official opening of the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, *Chelsey Baker* reports



Towering high above the Dubai skyline sits the tallest man-made structure on earth which, after six years in the making, truly stretched the limits of architectural endeavour to record-breaking levels.

The Burj Dubai, as it was formerly known, was renamed the Burj Khalifa at the opening ceremony in honour of the ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalifa who came to Dubai's rescue during its financial crisis. Measuring a staggering 828 metres (the official height kept quiet until the launch) from its base to the tip of its spire, the Burj Khalifa is home to more than 1,000 apartments, 37 floors of office space and a hotel designed by Giorgio Armani which includes a nightclub, two restaurants and a spa.

With more than 200 floors, of which 160 are inhabitable, the concrete, steel and glass structure is officially the world's tallest building, having beaten the previous title holder, Taipei 101 in Taiwan by some 1,000 feet. To put it into perspective, the Burj Khalifa is the height of Taipei 101 plus the Eiffel Tower.

The tower was kept shrouded in darkness until his Highness Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid Al Maktoum put a new spotlight on the world map. To launch the illumination of the tower skydivers carrying UAE flags landed directly in front of Sheikh Mohammed, who was also celebrating his fourth anniversary of becoming the Ruler of Dubai on that very day.

The first act drew prominence to the rare Hymenocallis desert flower, the architect's inspiration for the design of the tower. After projecting the birth of the flower on to a large 1,000sqm screen, a water show from The Dubai Fountain accelerated the event with water shooting 150 metres into the sky.

The second act, 'Heart Beat,' captured the construction of the tower in a dynamic light show with an astonishing example of technological innovation; the display recreated the effect of a beating heart and used 320 space canon projectors to generate a shadow effect on the tower reaching 10km into the sky. The finale featuring an impressive show of 10,000 fireworks effects estimated to be the highest ever, reaching 850m.

Tickets to the 'At the Top' Observation deck are now on sale and access to the triumphant tower begins at ground level in the nearby Dubai Mall, the world's largest shopping centre. Television screens chronicle the history of Dubai and the story of the Burj, whilst high-speed elevators transport tourists to the observation deck on the 124th floor.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM), the Chicago based architects, have long paved the way for modern glass box skyscrapers. SOM has already designed five of the world's tallest buildings including the Sears Tower (a previous holder of World's tallest for over twenty years), a little closer to home they designed the Broadgate Development as well as the master plan for Canary Wharf and many other leading developments in London.

Is it possible that there will be a successor to the Burj Khalifa? Of course, in the UAE anything is possible. ■

www.atthetopburjdubai.com

TOWERING FACTS

- The amount of steel used for the tower is 31,400 metric tons; laid end to end this would extend over a quarter of the way around the world.
- The cladding contains over 24,000 individually cut glass panels.
- The curtain wall area of the building is equivalent to 17 football fields.
- The concrete used is the equivalent to the weight of 100,000 elephants.
- At the peak of construction 12,000 workers were on site every day.
- It is the tallest building and freestanding structure in the world.
- It has the highest outdoor observation deck in the world.
- The tip of the spire can be seen 95 km away.
- The 160th floor is the highest occupied floor of any building in the world.
- The elevator reaches the observation deck in less than 60 seconds.
- It will take a team of 36 window cleaners three months to wash all the windows.

