

life of luxury.

luxurious living from around the world

by Kunle Falodun

In this brand new column of PraiseReel, we will be featuring the elements of luxurious living from around the world. From the magical to the beautiful to the outrageously luxurious, we shall scour the four corners of the world, seeking to amuse, entertain and enlighten you. Our aim? To challenge your imagination! This edition, we are taking you on a journey to the Middle East

THE WORLD'S ONLY 7 STAR HOTEL

Construction of Burj Al Arab-(Tower Of The Arabs) began in 1994, and was not concluded for 6 years. Architect Tom Wright said "The client wanted a building that would become an iconic or symbolic statement for Dubai; this is very similar to Sydney with its Opera House, or Paris with the Eiffel Tower. It needed to be a building that would become synonymous with the name of the country." The hotel was built by South African construction contractor Murray & Roberts and cost \$650 million to build.

Burj Al Arab characterizes itself as the world's only "7-star" property, a designation considered by travel professionals to be hyperbole. All major travel guides and hotel rating systems have a 5-star maximum, which some hotels attempt to out-do by ascribing themselves "6-star" status. Yet according to the Burj Al Arab's official site, the hotel is a "7-star deluxe hotel".

Near the top of the building is a suspended helipad supported by a cantilever. The helipad has featured some of the hotel's notable publicity events. Irish singer Ronan Keating shot his music video Iris on the helipad. In March 2004, professional golfer Tiger Woods hit several golf balls from the helipad into the Persian Gulf, while in February 2005, professional tennis players Roger Federer and Andre Agassi played an unranked game on the helipad, which was temporarily converted into a grass tennis court, at a height of 211 meters. The helipad has no borders or fences on the edges and if a player hit a winner the tennis balls would plunge down to the ground.

The hotel boasts 8,000 square meters of 22-carat gold leaf and 24,000 square meters of 30 different types of marble. Despite its size, the Burj Al Arab holds only 28 double-story floors which accommodate 202 bedroom suites. The smallest suite occupies an area of 169 square meters (1,819 square ft), the largest covers 780 square meters (8,396 square ft).

It is one of the most expensive hotels in the world. The cost of staying in a suite begins at \$1,000 per night and increases to over \$15,000 per night; the Royal Suite is the most expensive, at \$28,000 per night. There is reportedly a fee of about \$100 payable, just to look around the hotel.

The marketing technique of self-declaring the "7 star" title has worked very well. Burj al-Arab became one of the most sought after destinations, and not only in the United Arab Emirates. The service and the unseen luxury definitely make it stand out of the other 5 star hotels. The service includes private chauffeur with Rolls Royce or BMW 7series, private reception desk on every floor, helicopter trips to the centre of Dubai or to the Dubai International Airport). One of its restaurants, is located 200 meters above the Persian Gulf, offering a view of Dubai. Another restaurant, which is accessed via a simulated submarine voyage, features a large seawater aquarium.

The Burj Al Arab has attracted criticism as well as praise, and the major criticism almost always states the fact that the hotel is a triumph of money over practicality.

