

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque (Arabic: **جامع الشيخ زايد الكبير**, romanized: Jāmi‘ Ash-Shaykh Zāyid Al-Kabīr) is located in Abu Dhabi, the capital city of the United Arab Emirates.[1] The largest mosque in the country, it is the key place of worship for daily prayers. During Eid, it was visited by more than 41,000 people.[1]

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History[edit]

The Grand Mosque was constructed between 1996 and 2007.[2] The building complex measures approximately 290 by 420 m (950 by 1,380 ft), covering an area of more than 12 hectares (30 acres), excluding exterior landscaping and vehicle parking. The main axis of the building is rotated about 11° south of true west, aligning it in the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

The project was launched by the late president of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, who wanted to establish a structure that would unite the cultural diversity of the Islamic world with the historical and modern values of architecture and art.[3] In 2004, Sheikh Zayed died and was buried in the courtyard of the mosque.

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque Center (SZGMC) offices are located in the west minarets. SZGMC manages the day-to-day operations and serves as a center of learning and discovery through its educational cultural activities and visitor programs. The library, located in the northeast minaret, serves the community with classic books and publications addressing a range of Islamic subjects: sciences, civilization, calligraphy, the arts, and coins, including some rare publications. The collection comprises material in a broad range of languages, including Arabic, English, French, Italian, Spanish, German, and Korean. For two years running, it was voted the world's second favorite landmark by TripAdvisor.[4]

Design and construction[edit]

The mosque's architect Yusef Abdelki took inspiration from a number of sources: the Abu al-Abbas al-Mursi Mosque in Alexandria, designed by Mario Rossi in the 1920s;[5] the Badshahi Mosque in Lahore, Pakistan;[6] and other references of Persian, Mughal, and Indo-Islamic architecture. The dome layout and floorplan of the mosque was inspired by the Badshahi Mosque. Its archways are quintessentially Moorish, and its minarets classically Arab.

In a joint-venture between Italian contractors Impregilo and Rizzani de Eccher, more than 3,000 workers and 38 sub-contracting companies were conscripted in its construction. The mosque was completed under a second contract by a Joint Venture between ACC and Six Construct (part of Belgian company BESIX Group) between 2004 and 2007.[7][8][9] Natural

materials were chosen for much of its design and construction due to their long-lasting qualities, including marble stone, gold, semi-precious stones, crystals and ceramics. Artisans and materials came from many countries including India, Italy, Germany, Egypt, Turkey, Morocco, Pakistan, Malaysia, Iran, China, United Kingdom, New Zealand, North Macedonia and the UAE.[citation needed]

Dimensions and statistics[edit]

The mosque is large enough to accommodate over 40,000 worshippers, while the main prayer hall can hold over 7,000. There are two smaller prayer halls, with a capacity of 1,500 each, one of which is the women's prayer hall.[1]

There are four minarets on the four corners of the courtyard which rise about 107 m (351 ft) in height. The courtyard, with its floral design, measures about 17,000 m² (180,000 sq ft), and is considered to be the largest example of marble mosaic in the world.[1]

Marble used in the construction included:

Sivec from Prilep, North Macedonia was used on the external cladding (115,119 m² (1,239,130 sq ft) of cladding has been used on the mosque, including the minarets)

Lasa from Laas, South Tyrol, Italy was used in the internal elevations

Makrana from Makrana, India was used in the annexes and offices

Acquabianca and Bianco P from Italy

East White and Ming Green from China[1]

To compare, the King Faisal Mosque of Sharjah, formerly the largest mosque in Sharjah[10] and country, measures 10,000–12,000 m² (110,000–130,000 sq ft).[11][12]

Key architectural[edit]

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque has many special and unique elements: The carpet in the hall is considered[who?] to be the world's largest carpet made by Iran's Carpet Company and designed by Iranian artist Ali Khaliqi.[13] This carpet measures 5,627 m² (60,570 sq ft), and was made by around 1,200-1,300 carpet knotters. The weight of this carpet is 35 ton and is predominantly made from wool (originating from New Zealand and Iran). There are 2,268,000,000 knots within the carpet and it took approximately two years to complete.[1]

The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque has seven imported chandeliers from the company Faustig in Munich, Germany that incorporate millions of Swarovski crystals. The largest chandelier is the second largest known chandelier inside a mosque, the third largest in the world,[clarification needed] and has a 10 m (33 ft) diameter and a 15 m (49 ft) height.[1]

The pools along the arcades reflect the mosque's columns, which become illuminated at night. The unique lighting system was designed by lighting architects Speirs and Major Associates to reflect the phases of the moon. Beautiful bluish gray clouds are projected in lights onto the external walls and get brighter and darker according to the phase of the moon.[citation needed]

The 96 columns in the main prayer hall are clad with marble and inlaid with mother of pearl, one of the few places where one can see this craftsmanship.[citation needed]

The 99 names (qualities or attributes) of God (Allah) are featured on the Qibla wall in traditional Kufic calligraphy, designed by the prominent UAE calligrapher — Mohammed Mandi Al Tamimi. The Qibla wall also features subtle fibre-optic lighting, which is integrated as part of the organic design.

In total, three calligraphy styles — Naskhi, Thuluth and Kufic — are used throughout the mosque and were drafted by Mohammed Mandi Al Tamimi of the UAE, Farouk Haddad of Syria and Mohammed Allam of Jordan.[1]

Controversy[edit]

In 2013, US-based singer Rihanna received negative criticism for taking photographs, with the Mosque in the background, during a private visit. During the incident she was reported to have posed in a manner deemed offensive and provocative. Staff asked her to leave following the incident.[14]

Gallery[edit]

Outer entrance of the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

Water mirror and columns

Inner courtyard with minaret

Interior of the main prayer hall in the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

See also[edit]

Timeline of Muslim history

List of mosques in the United Arab Emirates

List of cultural property of national significance in the United Arab Emirates

Qasr Al Watan

The Founder's Memorial

Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque

Sheikh Zayed Mosque, Fujairah