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Dubai → With the recent announcement of the World Expo 2020, all eyes—even more so than before—are on Dubai. According to the Dubai Tourism & Commerce Marketing, \$8.8 billion of investment is needed to not only build the expo facilities, but also host the event. Hala Matar Choufany, regional managing director of HVS Dubai, says there are roughly 17,000 hotel rooms in the pipeline for the next four years—and that doesn't include hotel rooms on Deira Palm and the mixed-use development Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, which will include some 100 hotels, as well as the largest mall and pool in the world—and expects “there will be some 3,000 to 4,000 rooms built in close proximity of the venue and will primarily look to absorb the immediate demand.”

“Being a multi-discipline design practice, we feel the activity level is back to what it was before the crisis with projects growing at a very fast pace and nearly weekly announcements of larger development,” explains Jesper Godsk, founder and CEO of locally based LWDesign Group, who is working on multiple hotels and restaurants in the city. “We also see a real endeavor from the government to force the projects placed on hold during the crisis to be completed in areas such as the Palm Jumeirah, Dubai Marina, Emirates Hills, and Arabian Ranches, as well as completing the infrastructure which is required to allow the growth planned for the Emirates.”

Luxe Reigns

Luxury is still the major player in the market. The JW Marriott debuted last year as the tallest hotel in the world, measuring in at 1,164 feet. The



Waldorf Astoria Dubai Palm Jumeirah opened its doors in January of this year, offering 319 rooms, various F&B outlets, and heady views of the Arabian Gulf. The Dubai Marriott Hotel Al Jaddaf followed quickly thereafter, adding 352 rooms across eight floors. And the Kleindienst Group is back to work on the Heart of Europe mixed-used development, which includes six hotels on six of the World Islands.

Also planned are a Mandarin Oriental as well as the Four Seasons

Resort Dubai at Jumeirah Beach, which San Francisco-based BAMO principal Michael Booth says he took inspiration from “Dubai’s cosmopolitan allure, vibrant culture, and stunning views of the Persian Gulf. The result is a light, airy, and elegant 5-Star urban resort.” (Architecture is by WATG and DSA.) When it opens later this year, expect a lobby that’s wrapped in honed crema marfil marble and boasts soaring 32-foot-tall ceilings. Arched windows and passageways will juxtapose the large, modern, rectangular main entryway to the lobby lounge, which will

1+2+3. The striking white and gray interiors—the lounge, corridor, and guestroom—of the Vida Downtown Dubai, the flagship of Emaar’s new 4-Star brand.



4. A rendering of the Four Seasons Resort Dubai at Jumeirah Beach’s masculine lobby bar.



5. Blacksheep translated its design of Jamie’s Italian for Dubai.



6. A rendering of the marble-filled lobby of the Four Seasons.



Next Generation

The Expo may be a catalyst for new, more affordable hotels as well. “Dubai is well established in the 5-Star and luxury segment although recently we have seen the entry of more 4-Star and budget hotels,” explains Choufany. “The Expo will prove more financially viable to develop limited-service hotels that typically entail lower development costs and quicker returns.”

Case in point: Five years after launching luxury brand Address Hotels + Resorts, Emaar Hospitality Group introduced Vida Hotels and Resorts, which is the hotel group’s 4-Star offering for the younger generation of travelers. “[We] carried out extensive research in the UAE and the wider GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council] and identified a gap in the region’s hospitality landscape,” explains Philippe Zuber, COO, Emaar Hospitality Group. “While the Middle East region has several 5-Star and luxury hotel chains, there was clear white space for a hospitality concept that caters to the younger generation of savvy entrepreneurs and leisure travelers.” Vida

be defined by eight columns of Kenyan black marble and outfitted in a driftwood ceiling designed in an Arabian geometric pattern. There will be an Italian mosaic marble mural behind the coffee bar at one end of the room, and an impressive sea view beyond the full-height glass wall to the west.

“The World Expos have a long legacy of putting cities on the international map, and the Dubai World Expo 2020 will be a world first in bringing this event to the Middle East region,” says Four Seasons Resort Dubai’s Simon Casson. “Based on its impact on previous host cities, the Expo is expected to offer a huge boost to an already thriving tourism and hospitality industry—it will be an epic moment in the history of this constantly evolving city.”

Dallas-based Design DMU just finished the Mövenpick Hotel Ibn Battuta Gate, with a design that pays tribute to the hotel’s namesake Arabic explorer. The grand hall features a majestic atrium ceiling with 88 cascading lanterns, while the suites each have their own theme around 10 regions visited by the 14th-century adventurer.

is Spanish for life, and the goal, says Zuber, “is to breathe new life into the industry, by reaching out to future leaders and young entrepreneurs, both of whom are looking for the ultimate experience.”

Naturally, the hotel group opened the first and flagship property in Dubai, in the heart of its master-planned downtown community. “It constitutes an important change in direction to the existing hotel market,” explains Godsk, whose firm designed the property. “It is a boutique hotel where the human experience has taken priority over opulence.” Explains LW designer Olivia Howard: “The brief given was to create a hip hotel with a cosmopolitan vibe, focusing on integration of space in a way which is quite new to this region. This meant stepping away from the conventional check-in desks and zoned areas.” That translated into an urban retreat with a neutral backdrop of clean lines and subtle tones (gray, taupe) accented by quirky bespoke furniture and artwork. There’s heavily knotted timber and concrete tiles in the lobby juxtaposed by sheer drapery to create an intimate feel in the double-height space; an illuminated bar leads guests to poolside cabanas outfitted with funky seating; and striking graphic headboards and pure white bathrooms offset with gray mosaics await in the 156 guestrooms.

Dining by Design

With each hotel filled with multiple F&B venues, Dubai has become a food mecca. After four years of working with chef Jamie Oliver, London-based design firm Blacksheep had to export and translate its design for the Jamie’s Italian brand to Dubai. “We had to be conscious of the market as it is very premium and expectations are much higher than that of the UK in terms of comfort levels and finishes,” explains Emma Freed, lead designer for Blacksheep, of the restaurant located in the Jumeirah Beach Hotel. “Taking this on board, we added upholstered pads to all the chairs and interspersed the timber and zinc tables which are commonplace in the UK with marble tables to emphasize a sense of luxury.”