

# DUBAI: THE TRANSFORMATION OF A LANDSCAPE

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When the Baker Program visited Dubai for its annual international trek, a sense of welcoming was ever present. This was no surprise as Dubai has sought to open itself up to the world since the 1990s when the ruling Maktoum family made decisions that would chart the future course for the Emirate.

Like many of the Persian Gulf nations, Dubai has oil, though not to extent of its richer neighbors Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia. Because of its lack of substantial oil reserves, the rulers of Dubai made the decision to utilize its revenue from what oil it did have to make sustainable investments in infrastructure. They also focused on emphasizing the city's location along the Gulf Coast to develop it as an international tourist destination (Millington, 2017). Baker students were able to see the result of these decisions first hand as they toured several iconic properties in Dubai.

Baker students' introduction to the Dubai hospitality sector came from a tour of the Jumeirah Beach district and meeting with executives from the Jumeirah Group. They are the hospitality arm of Dubai Holding, the global investment company who's majority stake is owned by Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the ruler of Dubai. It was founded in 1997 with the goal of helping Dubai transform into a major tourist destination (Bush, 2017). They have created iconic properties with first-class service. The first of these properties was the Jumeirah Beach Hotel (JBH), which at the time of its construction was one of the only hotels along Jumeirah Beach. At the time of its development its wave shaped design was seen as revolutionary. The penchant for using avant-garde design would become a mainstay in Dubai's hospitality industry. After establishing itself with the Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Jumeirah developed the Burj Al Arab, who's sail shape would define it as one of the world's most iconic modern structures.

Within just two decades of its founding, the Jumeirah Group has become a major player in the world hospitality industry. With the JBH, the Burj Al Arab and the additions of the Madinat Jumeirah and Wild Wadi Waterpark, all within short distances of each other, they have created a world-class hospitality district along Jumeirah Beach. Today, these properties contribute to Dubai as the world's fourth most



visited city with over 16 million visitors in 2017 (Millington, 2017). Company executives told students that Jumeirah properties account for 10% of Dubai's hotel inventory.

By meeting with executives from Jumeirah, Baker students were able to help define its success. The management team shared some of the building blocks of the Jumeirah DNA. Establishing themselves as a high-end brand competing with brands like Four Seasons and Bulgari, they have made premium service a core value. Ideas such as always greeting guests before they greet you and never letting your first response be a "no" are hallmarks of Jumeirah customer service. These values have contributed to Jumeirah's rapid growth in such a short time. Their portfolio now includes properties in other Gulf states such as Bahrain, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait, and outside of the Gulf in Frankfurt, Shanghai and London. Today the company has 20 properties with over 6,000 keys. Touring the Jumeirah properties (JHR, Burj Al Arab, and Madinat Jumeirah), Baker students were afforded the opportunity to see the inner workings of this major hospitality group, connecting the program with its Hotel School roots.

Another major aspect of Dubai's hospitality industry that Baker students had the opportunity to see was the Dubai Palm Jumeirah Island, a man-made island in the shape of a palm tree that extends into the Persian Gulf. Since its construction, it has become a key location for beachfront hotels and residences. The Baker Program's tour of the island was orchestrated by Kerzner International, the firm behind the Atlantis and One & Only brands. In addition to the One & Only hotel, several other high-end hotels are located around the island including the Waldorf Astoria, Kempinski and W. These are testaments to Dubai's burgeoning tourist industry.

The team from Kernzer welcomed the Baker Program with open arms. Students received a tour of the One & Only





as well as the Royal Atlantis construction site—Kerzner’s newest addition to the Atlantis brand. The Royal Atlantis is an 800-room modernist interpretation of Atlantis’s traditional design but still incorporates hallmark Atlantis elements—namely the signature Bridge Suite. The Atlantis is a massive structure with over 1,500 rooms. It sits at the center of the Palm Crescent almost like a crown jewel and is another example of Dubai being defined by its iconic structures.

Jumeirah and Kerzner are only two examples of the work that is going on in Dubai and what students got to see. Because of the policies enacted by the rulers of Dubai in the 1990s, the sense of welcoming is now deeply rooted in the city’s culture. Over a relatively short period of time, Dubai has transformed itself from a small fishing village along a desert coast into a city that attracts visitors from all over the world. Like the many hospitality companies that do business in Dubai, the city is built on servicing the many needs of its visitors. With this focus, Dubai has been able to expand to include services and activities that do not exist anywhere else in the Gulf, such as indoor skiing, skydiving, and obstacle races.

From this trip, Baker students got to see how the direction of real estate can be charted based on policies enacted by senior leadership. In the case of Dubai, the decisions made by the ruling Maktoum family have allowed Dubai to flourish as a major destination hub. The city is an example of how real estate can transform the landscape of a place.

### 1. WORKS CITED

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