

The National



Khalifa City A: where the future is

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It is the beauty of the villas in Khalifa City A that first catches the eye: built in different shapes, in shades of yellow, beige and pink, of varying heights. They seem to be waiting, patiently in the rocky sand, for an appropriate setting to emerge around them.

Say Khalifa City A to outsiders and the response could well be “nothing out there”. That is changing rapidly, but for now first impressions are mainly of newly paved and spacious streets; endless sandy stretches that are a reprieve from the congestion of Abu Dhabi island. The large villas, which rent from Dh380,000 (\$103,400) and sell to Emiratis only for more than Dh8m, are well-spaced. There is little greenery: the terrain is marked by the very occasional dry tree. This neighbourhood is six years old, one of the youngest in the capital. Cheaper rent and bigger living spaces have drawn people, and services are on the way. Abu Dhabi Municipality has approved a Dh5.7 billion (\$1.55bn) project to make Khalifa City the new administrative capital of the UAE.

For now, it is very quiet, the silence interrupted by the occasional passing car. Although there is a lot of construction going on, the sites are scattered, and the open space has the acoustic effect of dampening the noise. Even with all the new development, it does not seem as though the empty land will seem occupied any time soon.

Here there is no parking crisis and no public transport. There are plenty of gold-and-white cabs, but residents need solid negotiating skills to get them where they want to go. The downtown of the neighbourhood is 16th Street, a short strip of low-rise buildings that meets the residents' basic needs: pharmacies, small supermarkets, hair salons, restaurants and abaya shops. The mood is utilitarian, not that of a place for gathering, with residents stopping to pick up basic goods or laundry as they head out or return for the day. However, there are indications this too could be changing: an “opening soon” sign promises the first coffee shop. This will be the only such structure overlooking the city; the rest of the development has been limited to villas.

Without a hypermarket in the immediate vicinity, residents do their major grocery shopping at Carrefour on Airport Road or Lulu Hypermarket at Al Raha Mall, about 15 minutes away. A new Spinneys in Mangrove Village provides a closer option.



Rasef Labo, who works on one of the many construction sites, wheels his bicycle to work. Philip Cheung / The National

The only public health centre in the neighbourhood, Khalifa City Health Centre, sits in a big silver glass building on 16th Street. There are a few schools and nurseries scattered in the area, but no real recreation facilities. The closest is Abu Dhabi Golf Club, in Sas al Nakheel, about 10 minutes away. Many of the neighbourhood's residents frequent the club for its restaurants, gym or to relax by the pool.

Jennifer Jennings, from Scotland, is one such member. She was also one of the first people to move into Khalifa City six years ago, because it was closer to where she worked.

The facts

Schools

"There was nothing," she says. "Only a handful of villas."

She loved the area from the start because it gave her some peace and quiet compared to her previous Khalidiya apartment, and she has enjoyed watching it develop over the years.

"We were very excited when the first petrol station opened," she says. "It was like civilisation coming to us."

Mrs Jennings has made it a weekly ritual to go to Sharanis Spa, the first in the neighbourhood. It opened in Nov 2007 and offers wellness services including manicures, hair styling, massages and yoga classes. "I love it," she says.

Sharon Moore, owner of the spa, knew Khalifa City would be the ideal place for her business.

"The future of Abu Dhabi city is out this way," she says. "This is a booming area."

Mrs Moore also lives in the neighbourhood with her three children, who often use local taxis to get around. Despite the dearth of amenities, she says, there is a strong sense of community and many of the residents know each other. "I wouldn't live anywhere else," she says.

Mrs Moore does worry about what effect future growth will have.

"I hope it doesn't get overcrowded," she says. "But progression is good. We need to get busier."

What residents say

Ezzat Dardir; Egypt

It's calm, quiet, safe and secure. There aren't a lot of cars so it's not very noisy. But it still needs a lot of development. Khalifa City does not have any green areas or parks. It also needs more shops.

Mona Yassin; UAE

What I like about Khalifa City is that it's not busy. I like that my children's school is in the neighbourhood, so all the school events are nearby. But there is a lot that needs to be done. There are no facilities. There is no vegetation, so that when there's a sandstorm a lot of the sand gets into houses, and no plants to block the sand. There are five supermarkets in Khalifa City but they are all side by side. They need to be more spread out. There still aren't any coffee shops. I have to plan ahead when I go to the city because it's a bit of a drive. Lastly, I wish they would build pavements soon because it gets really muddy when it rains.

Sean Casey; South Africa

I've been living in Khalifa City for two years now. It's nice and quiet. There aren't any buildings so it's not over-populated. People around here are very friendly and it's very safe. Much of it is still under construction. In terms of recreation, there isn't much to do here.

The International School of Chouefat, a member of the Sabis School Network, offers an English curriculum to almost 700 students from kindergarten to Grade 10. Nearby schools include Al Yasmina School, Raha International School and the Canadian International School.

Cultural pursuits
There is not much to do in Khalifa City A, and residents list the lack of amenities as the major drawback. There are no parks or recreational facilities. The closest cinema is at Al Raha Mall, which will remain a 15-minute drive away until a promised flyover is complete. Abu Dhabi Golf Course is also in the vicinity, offering restaurants, a gym and pool for members. The Abu Dhabi Harlequins practice and hold matches at the Al Ghazal Golf Club, a 15-minute drive away near the Abu Dhabi International Airport.

Plans
Khalifa City A factors heavily in Abu Dhabi Plan 2030. Under those plans, the neighbourhood is due for footpaths, shaded walking, plots for 20 schools, 24 parks, gardens and medium-density, low-rise housing. Medical facilities

Khalifa City Health
Centre

Transport
There isn't any.
However, when the
Government
announces its
master plans for
transportation in the
emirate this year,
Khalifa City A is
expected to be
linked into the
centre by bus,
metro and tram
service. Local taxis
are available.

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