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Upper Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

From reality to fantasy

There once was a sheikh with big dreams. His land was a sleepy village occupied by pearl divers, fishermen and traders who docked their boats along a small creek through the town. It was here that Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed al Maktoum imagined creating a gateway to the world. It was a dream he could not afford to realise. So in 1959 he asked a neighbour to lend him many millions of dollars. He made the creek wider, built roads, schools and homes. With his young son, Mohammed, by his side, he walked along the empty waterfront and painted his dream with words. And some years later, it was as he had said. He built it, and they came.

Then it was his son’s turn to carry on developing his father’s vision. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum transformed Dubai into an air-conditioned fantasy world of 1.5 million people. No project seemed to be too ambitious for him. He built the world’s tallest high-rise building, the 828 metre Burj Khalifa, the world’s biggest shopping mall and the world’s largest motorway intersection. He helped Little Dubai become the shopping capital of the Middle East. In the last five years, it has attracted more tourists than India. Its most famous landmark, the Palm Jumeirah, an artificial island built in the shape of a palm tree, provides holiday villas for the rich and famous.

But the financial crisis in 2008 made people think again and Dubai failed to sell many of its new luxury apartments. Up to then property in Dubai had been increasing in value and it had been easy to get people to invest. These days, investors risk losing money.

The rest of the world looks on with a mixture of wonder and suspicion. Is this a capitalist model that people want to copy or do they feel that Dubai has decided to abandon its true heritage and become instead the Las Vegas of the Middle East?

creek (n) /kriːk/ a small stream that flows into a river (often they dry up in summer)

dock (v) /dɒk/ to ‘park’ a boat in a harbour or at a sea port

pearl (n) /pɜːl/ a round white jewel found in the sea (in oyster shells)

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