

Now it's viva Las Dubai

A government-owned investment group based in Dubai has announced plans to build a 10 kilometre strip of 31 themed hotels in the Persian Gulf emirate at a cost of \$US27 billion (\$35 billion).

The group, Tatweer, would spend \$US11 billion to build infrastructure and 12 hotels in a desert project called Bawadi outside the city of Dubai, chief executive Saeed al-Muntafiq said.

The project included the 6500-room Asia-Asia hotel, which would be the biggest hotel ever built, he said. External investors would build the other 19 hotels at a cost of \$US16 billion.

"We expect Bawadi will appeal to investors familiar with the region's hotel industry and we are in discussions with several," Mr al-Muntafiq said.

"We are perfecting our model now as to whether we will manage our own hotels or seek partners, and will have made that decision by the second quarter of 2007."

Dubai, the second biggest emirate of the United Arab Emirates, attracted 6 million tourists last year, according to government figures.

Mr al-Muntafiq said it wanted to increase that to 15 million a year by 2010 and needed up to 80,000 more hotel rooms. Bawadi's 31 hotels would contain 29,200 rooms, of which 12,450 would be owned by Tatweer.

Hotel operators managing properties in Dubai include Intercontinental Hotels, Hyatt, Hilton



A Disneyland-style theme park will be three times the size of Manhattan. Photo: AFP

Hotels and Marriott International.

Tatweer is a unit of Dubai Holding, a state-owned group that owns Jumeirah, which is the

"Dubai wants to attract 15 million tourists a year by 2010."

operator of six Dubai hotels, the Lowndes and Carlton Towers hotels in London and the Essex House hotel in New York.

"We hope to have first refusal" on the new hotels, Jumeirah chief executive Gerald Lawless said.

Bawadi is scheduled to open in phases between 2010 and 2014.

It will be similar to the hotels of Las Vegas, and will be themed with designs from Arabia, Africa, Europe, America and Asia. Asia-Asia's design closely resembles Kuala Lumpur's Petronas Towers. One hotel will be styled on Hollywood legends and another will offer a "zero-gravity weightlessness experience".

Tatweer's other development projects include Dubailand, a Disneyland-style leisure park on the outskirts of the emirate's main city designed to be three times the size of Manhattan.

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