



Al Noor Mosque

The Mosque (Masjid in Arabic, which means prostration) is a place for worship.

Muslims gather everyday from all across the globe united in their faith Islam, to pray their obligatory daily prayers. Since the days of the Prophet Mohammed (PBUH), the Mosque was not only a place to worship in, but it was also the centre of the community.

‘For the one who builds a mosque for Allah, the Exalted, Allah will build for him a house in Paradise’ (Muslim 1084) –

Sharjah the capital of Islamic Culture 2014 has over 300 Mosques, but the Al Noor Mosque is often regarded as the most famous. The word Noor In Arabic means “light”. The Al Noor Mosque stands majestically beside the Khalid Lagoon on Buhaira Corniche facing the Majaz district, which makes a picturesque landscape. The area which encompasses both residential and commercial is actually one of the earliest known Gulf settlements and some of the current residents of Sharjah can trace their ancestry here.

The Al Noor Mosque was built by order of the wife of the ruler of Sharjah, her Highness Sheikha Jawaher bint Mohammed al Qassimi. Construction of the Mosque started on the 6th April 2003 and was completed 2 years later in 2005.

It can house 2,200 people in total for prayer which includes 400 in the ladies section and 1,800 in the men’s section.

From the beginning of Islam to the present day, Islamic architecture encompasses a wide range of both secular and religious styles, which have influenced the design and construction of many buildings and structures in Islamic culture.

The architectural design of Al Noor Mosque has influences of classical Turkish Ottoman architecture, and there are elements of the Mosque that are similar to the exceptional Sultan Ahmed Mosque (also famously known as the Blue Mosque in Turkey).

One of the eye catching features of the exterior of the Al Noor Mosque is the elegant cascading domes, of which there are 34 in total. The central dome is surrounded by several half domes and finally at each corner by four small cupola domes. The Ottomans

craftsmen mastered the technique of building vast inner spaces seemingly confined by weightless yet massive domes, which manage to achieve perfect harmony between inner and outer spaces, as well as light and shadow.

The role of domes in Islamic architecture has been considerable, particularly in the Middle East. Its usage spans centuries. The dome not only serves as a roof but its design also aids the acoustics within the mosque so that the voice of the imam (prayer leader) may be heard. The domes at Al Noor Mosque are constructed from concrete cladding which is called GRC (glass fibre reinforced concrete). The domes were made in segments and decorated prior to being assembled on the site. Each of these segments in its singular form is very light in weight.

However the central dome of the mosque, in its completion, weighs approximately 100 tones and is supported by 4 main marble pillars. The interior of the dome is beautifully lit with stained glass windows.

The main entrance to the Al Noor Mosque is flanked on both sides by 2 graceful minarets which soar into the sky at a height of 52 meters. The minaret has become an essential feature of Muslim religious architecture. Minaret comes from the Arabic word “Manarah” which means lighthouse. The Al Noor Mosque minarets are fluted, cylindrical and pencil like in shape with no balconies and are typical of the Ottoman design; each is delicately decorated with geometric designs and crowned with a conical peak. The implementation of minarets was both for embellishment of the mosques, and for functionality. In ancient times, high up in the minaret, the Muezzin (prayer caller) called the Adhan, (call to prayer) which could be heard across the cities clearer than if it were performed from the roof of the Mosque. Today however, the muezzin does not always climb the minaret to call for the prayers; the minarets are often generally equipped with a modern sound system.

The exterior of the mosque is complemented with ornamental repetitive floral cornices around the edge of the roof and the arched doorways and windows. The area of the Mosque has 4 surrounding buildings which are the accommodation for the Imam, Watchman and Muezzin and finally 2 buildings one each for the men and women to make their Wudu (ablutions) before their prayer. These are basically bathrooms where all Muslims ritually wash before their worship.

Granite steps lead inside to the 3 iwan entrances (which are domed spaces, walled on three sides, with one side entirely open) into the Mosque including the ladies section. At each entrance rather uninspiring and purely practical, there are shoe shelves, which are a feature of many mosques worldwide. All Muslims remove their shoes prior to entering a mosque, to preserve the cleanliness of the prayer space. Rather than leaving piles of shoes near the door, shelves are strategically placed near the Mosque entrance, so that visitors may neatly organize their shoes.

Once you enter the Mosque the simplicity of its exterior is overshadowed by the breathtaking elegantly refined but decorative interior. The eye is drawn to the high ceiling where the light cascades down from its domes, over the central area for prayer which is called a musalla (literally, "place for prayer"). This architectural element holds no spiritual or symbolic significance, and is purely aesthetic. The interior of the domes are highly decorated with a combination of floral, geometric and other interlaced patterns. These arabesque patterns are made up of a number of repeated geometric elements that create a multifaceted imagery. A distinguishing element of Islamic architectural decoration is the tessellation which is repetitive, rhythmic, geometric patterns, which have been made possible by ancient Muslim mathematicians, who developed algebra and trigonometry. Islamic decoration in Mosques does not feature statues or images of the human form and is discouraged. This is because the images could lead to idolatry and would distract the worshipper from prayer and we also believe that Allah, the creator, cannot be created in imagery.

The main area of the mosque is deliberately bare as no furniture is needed, as the Muslim worshippers pray by sitting, kneeling, and bowing directly on the floor in humility before God. There are bookshelves to hold copies of the Qur'an, beyond this; the prayer hall is otherwise a large, but peaceful and serene open space with arches, pillars and collonettes (small columns) which are intricately decorated. This spacious area is carpeted with a rich green carpet which has red lines strategically running through. These red lines in the carpet are quite simply to guide the Muslim worshippers as to where to form neat rows. These rows provide enough space for the bowing and prostrations necessary during the ritual prayers. No one has a special place; all are equal in the sight of Allah.

Marble that was sourced from Italy and India is an aspect on the interior walls and pillars. The complex arabesque decorative patterns on the walls and ceilings were made from gypsum, and the coloring is white to off white with some elements of gold and pale pink. The choices of subtle colours were specifically used so that the worshipper is not distracted from the prayer. When standing beneath the chandeliers, they appear almost floral in their shape, and were personally chosen by her Highness Sheikha Jawaha, they do not detract from the interior decorations but rather compliment the Al Noor Mosque's beautiful interior.

There are three suspended arches at front of the Mosque which are popular in Islamic design as they allow a clear perspective and the open view allows the worshippers to sit and pray without any obstructions in front of them and face the Mihrab. The Mihrab is the indentation in the back wall of the Mosque which is the direction of the qiblah facing Mecca in Saudi Arabia. It is almost shaped like a small doorway and is a notable feature carved in marble with stalactite sculptured design with gold ornamentation. Above the Mihrab are verses from the Holy Quran written in calligraphy. There are several panels located around the Mosque that are adorned with calligraphic inscriptions from the Holy

Quran in the Thuluth style, the panel featured over the suspended arch has verses from Surah 112 Al Ikhlas (Chapter 112 The Purity of Faith).

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful
Say: He is Allah, the One and Only;
Allah, the Eternal, Absolute;
He begetteth not, Nor is He begotten;
And there is none like unto Him.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

Calligraphy in Arabic is “Husn-i-Khatt” which come from “Khatt” which translates into writing, way or path. The use of calligraphy in Islamic architecture can be said to date from the 7th century CE when the Thuluth script was first formulated, during the Umayyad caliphate. But the Thuluth script did not develop fully until the late 9th century CE. The name means 'a third' perhaps because of the proportion of straight lines to curves, or perhaps because the script was a third of the size of another popular contemporary script. Though rarely used for writing the Holy Qur'an, Thuluth has enjoyed enormous popularity as an ornamental script for calligraphic inscriptions, titles, headings and colophons.

The Minbar (pulpit) is the small raised platform with steps, on the front right hand side area of the mosque, next to the Mihrab. This is where the Iman gives the Khutbah (Friday sermon) to the congregation. After the sermon, the worshippers perform Salat –ul-Jumu’ah (the Friday prayer).

It is important to note that any place or building which is specifically set aside for worship is called a masjid or place of prostration.

Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him) said
“Whenever the time of prayer over takes you, pray; that place is a mosque.”

Originally mosques were very simple- in the days of Prophet Mohammed (Peace upon him) they were basic compounds made of mud brick with an available water supply and qiblah. They quickly developed to become amenable and comfortable places, and in this day and age you may see several striking mosques around the globe. The type of mosque building makes no actual difference to the quality of prayer offered by the Muslim

worshipper. As Allah sees in the hearts and knows the intentions of his worshippers, it should be emphasized that any place that is clean can be used to prayer. Muslims can pray at home, in the desert, the city, on a plane or at sea, as Allah has declared the whole earth clean and pure, and a place where prayer should be offered.

Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) said

“The earth is a mosque for you, so wherever you are at the time of prayer, pray there!”

“ Sharjah the city with a window to cultural understanding”

