

Burj Khalifa holds the title of the tallest free-standing structure with the highest number of floors, occupied floor space, and outdoor observation deck, with the longest travel distance elevator in the world. Neighbouring Qatar plans to build in the near future an even bigger and taller tower development. **Erika Widén** investigates what it takes to build such large structures.

QATAR'S TECHNOLOGY TOWERS

One year ago, several local newspapers published that Qatar intends to construct the tallest building in the world. Sheikh Thani Bin Abdullah Al Thani, chairman of Ezdan Real Estate stated to the local media at the time, "We have plans in the pipeline to build the tallest tower in Doha, however it is subject to obtaining land from the concerned authorities."

Recently *TheEDGE* contacted Ezdan Real Estate to ask about the progress of the company's earlier announcement, and they reiterated that once they receive the land allocation from the government, they will make a formal announcement.

But it leaves one wondering...what is the obsession with building the "tallest" towers both in the Middle East and elsewhere? And what is really entailed in building these mega tall structures?

STRIKING ARCHITECTURE

Previously known as Aspire Tower, The Torch Doha (left) is the tallest structure and building in Qatar, standing at 300 metres. Shaped to symbolise a colossal torch, which for the duration of the 2006 Asian Games held its symbolic flame within the lattice shell that forms the topmost part of the structure.

The Torch Doha includes 17 floors of luxury accommodation, featuring 167 rooms and suites. A local attraction for the public is its unique Three Sixty revolving restaurant on the 47th floor, which rotates 360 degrees up to one and a half hour, offering panoramic views of the city and the Aspire Zone surroundings.

The main structural elements of the tower were completed within a record time of 21 months in terms of design and construction.

"The tower is the result of a comprehensive architectural, engineering and technical design," says Sherif Sabry, director of sales and marketing of The Torch Doha, "therefore The Torch is Doha's iconic landmark, with a cutting edge structure due to dedicated effort and leading technical expertise of an international design and engineering team."

"The tower housed the Asian Games flame during the games and holds the record for the tallest ever games flame, which was visible

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throughout Doha for the duration of the games," adds Sabry.

Since October 2011, The Torch Doha has been operating as a five star hotel, conveniently located near the main sports facilities. "During the 2022 World Cup The Torch Doha will be the main hub for hosting sports teams and personalities," adds Sabry.

Tornado Tower is another striking structural development in Doha. The 200 metre tower houses 52 floors of office space. The project was completed in 2008 and its planning and construction phase aim was to minimise the effects on the natural environment through proper site utilisation, innovative use of materials, energy reduction, reduced emissions and water consumption.

TheEDGE speaks with one of Tornado Tower's first tenants, Arron Brown, sales and marketing manager of LS: Keep Moving about his perspective of Qatar's trend to develop tall, technology-heavy towers in Doha.



Sherif Sabry, director of sales and marketing of The Torch Doha talks to *TheEDGE* about Qatar's iconic Torch Tower.

Brown tells *TheEDGE* that Qatar has launched itself into the world arena and boasts business tourism as one of its key attractions. As a result, Qatar needs to offer world-class office spaces for all new and existing businesses. As the country's economy grows and expands, so does the number of commercial towers. Therefore, developments must compete to attract small, medium and large business to take up residency in those towers.

"Cutting edge and technology integrated commercial towers have a certain unique selling point (USP) which can attract tenants in a competitive market. This drive to compete for commercial tenants works both within the technical workings of the tower and the façade," says Brown, "Tornado Tower and its surroundings, equally impressive developments, look and operate like a 21st century business hub that would stand out in any other, perhaps more established economy. Qatar's cutting edge developments will be synonymous with the likes of London Gherkin or Canary Wharf and Dubai's Burj Khalifa."

Tornado Tower is a commercial structure and does not have residential units, but it does host some retail spaces such as coffee shops in addition to a state of the art gym and soon to be announced high-end restaurant. Brown explains to *TheEDGE* what makes Tornado Tower unique besides its impressive architecture and exterior colourful night-lights highlighting its façade contour, viewable from as far as the corniche. "The lobby is modern, with large plasma screens showing international news and stock market updates and the elevators are operated from an interactive touch pad. It is little surprise that some of the most renowned business in Qatar have taken up residence in Tornado Tower," adds Brown.

WEST BAY RESIDENCES

Kempinski Residences and Suites Doha tower was introduced to Qatar with the grand



opening on June 2010, nestled in the heart of West Bay, known as the central business district and is considered the tallest standing building in Qatar. "For more than a year and a half we still have the privilege to be the tallest tower of the country, from where all our guests can enjoy panoramic views of the city and the feeling to be on top," says Emel Atikkan, general manager of Kempinski Doha.

Atikkan adds that wherever one may be throughout the city of Doha, there is no chance to miss the distinctive shape in the skyline. "It's the only square-shaped tower in town, reminiscent of the wind towers of bygone days. The distinctive design, with sand and blue colours on the exterior of the building reflects the desert and the crystal clear waters of the Arabian Gulf. The building was constructed with the highest and latest standards in technology, security, finishing and is equipped with the most sophisticated building management system (BMS) system in the city. The interiors bear the signature of the interior architect, Giampiero Peia."

The 62 floor Kempinski Residences and Suites hosts a total of 370 units, broken down into one, two and three bedroom suites and residences. They are all fully furnished and equipped with the intention for the guest and or tenant to simply move in with their suitcase and start enjoying Doha.

"We are ideally positioned to cater to the business people, due to our strategic location in the diplomatic, financial and central business district and the close proximity to the Exhibition Centre...coupled with our business centre, which houses posh boardroom and our sky villas for exclusive launches, press conferences, business meetings and stylish cocktail receptions, Kempinski Residences and Suites is fully geared to address the needs of the discerning business life," says Attikan.

MIXED-USE TOWERS

Mirco Mauer is head of real estate of Engel and Völkers and gives their perspective of the current and future cutting edge towers in the city. Mauer is pleased to see that there is an improvement, and how some Qataris are willing to spend more money on construction to build towers with interesting architecture and new technological developments. "If you look



Mirco Mauer, head of real estate of Engel and Völkers gives his perspective of Qatar's trend in building tower technology developments.

to London, Hong Kong, Singapore and other fully developed cities, we still see that there is much more possible and achievable for Qatar in the future, especially in regard to green building possibilities and automated systems, and we expect to see huge improvements soon with the upcoming developments in Lusail."

Mauer highlights how green buildings are of high interest and even higher construction costs, but those buildings will rent quickly once completed and for higher rents than the towers currently available in the market. "Tenants of certain industries like these kind of buildings because of prestigious reasons. Most international tenants prefer these towers as they are already used to this from their home countries."

According to Mauer, mixed-use towers are very convenient. "Office space combined with a retail area and or a hotel offers many advantages. The office user has short ways to get a coffee or their lunch...as well they can set up meetings with clients in the restaurants offered in the building, accommodate clients in the hotel next to the office and use the offered facilities like the gym or pool after work."

Brown believes there seems to be a kudos attached to being a tenant of an iconic development. "I cannot speak for other organisations, but for LS: Tornado Tower represents the heart of the thriving capital

MUHBULLAH MANI, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER OF ALFARDAN PROPERTIES

Why is there a concept to develop cutting edge and tower technology in Alfardan Properties' constructions?

It has been our mission to develop real estate masterpieces that evoke the warm hospitality and unique character of Qatar, while integrating all the essential amenities of a modern society. This is the kind of luxury concept that has long been associated with the Alfardan Properties brand. We constantly find ways to leverage our technical superiority, creativity and cutting-edge technology for the benefit of the communities we serve.

Is there a demand for such developments in Doha, if so, why?

Qatar is fast emerging as an economic hub in the region as it continues to open exciting possibilities to entrepreneurs and business organisations from around the world, which influences the demand for more sophisticated, luxurious property developments, making Qatar one of the most attractive real estate markets in the world.

What towers and developments does Alfardan Properties currently have?

Porto Arabia, the first property available for lease on "The Pearl Qatar"; Laguna Beach, the exclusive villa compound in the West Bay Lagoon; Kempinski Residences & Suites, which has been credited for establishing new benchmarks for luxury high-rise residences; and the Alfardan Gardens residential villa complex. In addition to several iconic landmarks in Qatar such as the Alfardan Towers, a fusion of residential and commercial amenities in a luxurious development; Alfardan Plaza, located at the heart of Doha City and home to several prominent companies and enterprises; and its flagship project Alfardan Centre, one of the first state-of-the-art buildings to rise in Doha's Bank Street.

What is the unique selling point of Alfardan's Towers?

The Alfardan Properties brand is characterised by world-class workmanship, service excellence and lavish lifestyle. These qualities set the company apart as an innovative leader in Qatar's property and real estate industry, and a driving force in the growth of the luxury property segment.



Emel Atikkan, general manager of Kempinski Doha explains to *TheEDGE* how Kempinski tower is distinct and stands out in the central business district of Doha.

Doha. It is easily recognisable, distinctive and stands out among its neighbours," he adds, "all of these traits echo through our own business practice...leasing a space in a commercial tower gives you the option to transform a 'shell and core' space into something completely unique of your design."

Most commercial towers in Dafna and West Bay area are available for monthly rates between QR180 to QR220 per square metre, while the popular commercial areas such as C-Ring, Al Sadd and Airport Road seem to remain in high demand since they offer space of 200 up to 400 square metres, and available for QR180 per square metre. Another striking tower seen in West Bay Lagoon is the Zig-Zag twin tower, known as the tallest leaning tower in the world. It has a height of 136 metres and it is a mixed use development of residential and commercial. On average rental rates for a one bedroom up to a three bedroom starts at QR7000 up to QR12,500 a month.

DOHA SPACE

There is a great deal of space for cities to develop outwards rather than upwards in Doha says Brown to *TheEDGE*. "But where is the fun in that?," he adds, "Big' projects are something a country can boast about, promote themselves with and compete on a world scale with. If you ask anyone to name the development with the 'biggest square metre footprint in the world', I doubt they would know. If you ask anyone to name the 'tallest tower in the world' that person would likely know what and, more importantly, where it is...because the region is thinking big." ■

TALLEST TOWERS IN DOHA COMPLETED

BUILDING NAME	HEIGHT (METERS)	STORIES	USE	YEAR COMPLETED
ASPIRE TOWER	300	52	Hotel/office	2006
DOHA MEDIA CENTER	286	70	Office	2008
AL FARDAN RESIDENCES	254	64	Residential	2009