RAPHAEL
HOMES

Jake Nazer Analysis

Abu Dhabi Area Guide

Abu Dhabi is over 15 times bigger than Dubai by land size, but for lifestyle, business, and property investment, the city area is more important to understand.

This guide explains the core zones that matter most for living, investing, and understanding where the city is going next.

---

1) ADGM The Financial District (Al Maryah + Al Reem)

ADGM (Abu Dhabi Global Market) is Abu Dhabi's international financial centre and free zone, which is concentrated on Al Maryah Island but also covers all of Al Reem Island. Its legal system is based on English Common Law and is administered through ADGM Courts, which gives multinationals a familiar rule of law, clearer legal predictability, and easier cross-border contracting and dispute resolution. Put simply, big multinational companies, asset managers, and hedge funds need to be in this location.

Major firms have established or expanded a presence tied to ADGM, including BlackRock, Brevan Howard, Goldman Sachs, and PGIM. In 2025 alone, KKR, Cantor Fitzgerald, Davidson Kempner, HarbourVest and Fortress all set up offices.

In 2025, ADGM's tenth year, the workforce rose 51% to 44,339, active licences reached 12,671 (up 30%), assets under management grew 36%, and operational entities rose almost 40% to 3,495. There are now 347 financial institutions based there, 80 licensed last year, and 171 asset and fund managers running 244 funds. (ADGM full year 2025 results, March 2026) Anyone working in finance will tell you that trend is compounding.

ADGM is now the largest financial centre in MENA by market capitalisation of listed entities, with registered firms worth over AED 500 billion on the Abu Dhabi Securities Exchange.

The Galleria Al Maryah Island is in ADGM. Currently, the most premium fashion brands and Apple are in this mall and not others in Abu Dhabi.

Why did I start with ADGM? Because when a financial district is established like Wall Street or the City of London, it stays central and permanently important. For a few reasons:

1. High-income earners work in finance, and they want to live within a reasonable commute, which increases demand and value in nearby communities.
2. Premium retail, restaurants, and hotels naturally cluster around financial districts because that's where the spending power is.
3. Infrastructure gets prioritised — roads, and the Etihad high-speed rail station planned for Reem Island, one of fix on the entire Abu Dhabi to Dubai line.

4. Once a financial hub is set up, it doesn't get moved. That's why ADGM is my core focus point, more than anything else.

2) Al Lulu Island and The Corniche (City coastline, hotels, and landmarks)

The Corniche is an 8 km coastline with turquoise clear water and a clean beach, with several landmarks including Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental. Next to this is Qasr Al Watan, the Presidential Palace. Other premium hotels include The St. Regis and Rixos Marina, along with government buildings like ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company), with the main concentration of government buildings and palaces within a short drive of here.

This leads to a high concentration of premium restaurants, including Sushisamba and Hakkasan, and other premium hotels within the area.

Importantly, it's also 10 minutes to ADGM, the financial district. With these places so close, they elevate the importance of each other because if you're flying in for business, these areas are where you will stay and will always be a desired place for tourists.

AL LULU ISLAND

Currently, there is no freehold property to buy here — but Al Lulu Island is opposite the Corniche and will forever be a premium location. The land was reclaimed back in 1992 and designated for freehold a long time ago, yet for years nothing happened on it. Drive past recently and there is a lot of construction activity. If and when it's sold freehold, this land will always be unique and hold premium value.

---

3) New Bvlgari Mansions and Resort

Abu Dhabi is moving further into ultra-luxury branded real estate. Eagle Hills, Mohamed Alabbar's developer, announced Bvlgari Resort & Mansions Abu Dhabi for 2030. It sits on a private horseshoe-shaped island with 60 rooms and suites, 30 villas, and 90 mansions ranging from 1,650 to 2,500 sqm. Some mansions have their own docks for boats up to 25 metres, and there are eight estates each with a private beach. Access is by bridge or boat from the marina, with easy reach of Abu Dhabi's cultural and institutional areas.

In my view this will be the most premium freehold beachfront mansion product Abu Dhabi has ever built. I haven't seen the designs, but I trust Abu Dhabi's planning process, ACPV of Milan as architects, and Bvlgari to deliver what you would expect. Bvlgari describes the concept as a "visionary landscape," designed around Italian artistry and Arabian tradition, surrounded by dunes, gardens, and sculpted natural structures.

For anyone familiar with Bvlgari Hotels and Resorts globally, it brings the same signature experiences to Abu Dhabi — Il Ristorante – Niko Romito, Hōseki, La Spiaggia, the Bvlgari Bar, and the Yacht Club, plus Il Caffè, the Bvlgari Dolci boutique, and La Galleria.

This elevates the area further because it's next to the Corniche and the Presidential Palace, adding another ultra-prime anchor to the most established premium section of the city.

4) Hudayriyat Island

This isn't just a beachfront project. It's a purpose-built coastal community that cannot be replicated. The interactive map is here and the location is here.

16 km of Blue Flag certified beaches — the global gold standard for water quality— the island is not possible to replicate in the UAE, with unique topography: Villas are built on man-made hills with a 15-metre elevation difference per row, with the highest villa sitting over 50 metres above ground level. Views vary, but the majority have either ocean views, city skyline views, or an ocean canal. Several communities have already launched and sold out including Al Naseem, Wadeem, Bashayer, and Nawayef Hills east and west —unique but cohesive, keeping the island's premium positioning consistent. It's not just villas either; premium apartments and townhouses have been sold, with more coming, designed to blend into one central, exclusive ecosystem. In July 2026 Hudayriyat Golf Estates broke the UAE record: 1,700 residences sold within days and over AED 13 billion in sales, the highest publicly recorded value for a single residential launch in the country's history, built around a 95-hectare championship golf course.

Leisure and sports facilities here can't be matched — not just in Abu Dhabi, but across the UAE and the wider Gulf. The difference is it's being done in a way no other developer has managed: the sports side synchronises with the community instead of looking like a random add-on. It improves life for residents on the island, but also people across Abu Dhabi. Only a government with Abu Dhabi's level of sovereign wealth would fund this upfront before villa sales. Profit isn't the main objective — it's building a statement community that can't be replicated.

5-star hotel Bab Al Nojoum is already open on the island, and several others are confirmed to be coming to the island, with the brand names soon to be announced.

Unrivalled Sports Facilities (this can never be beaten in the UAE)

- Surf Abu Dhabi: The world's most advanced wave poo
- Velodrome Abu Dhabi: Olympic-grade, air-conditioned cycling arena
- Dedicated running and cycling tracks better than anywhere in the UAE
- Football pitches, mountain bike trails, climbing walls, skateboard park

What's to come: One more golf course, the third hill an equestrian centre, hiking hill, horse racing track, additional five-star hotels, and boat moorings.

---

5) Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and Canal Area

Sheikh Zayed Mosque is the most iconic mosque in the UAE and one of the largest in the world, a statement piece of architecture, and a must-see for anyone who is in Abu Dhabi and hasn't visited before. It's located here

Along the adjacent canal are more of Abu Dhabi's most premium hotels, including The Ritz-Carlton, Shangri-La, and ERTH Hotel.

This area is accessible within 20 minutes of The Corniche, ADGM, Yas Island, and Hudayriyat.

6) Yas Island The Entertainment Hub

Yas Island is located here, and it's also the closest major community to Dubai, which matters more than people realise, especially if you have friends or work between the two emirates. This is where the city concentrates its big-ticket fun attractions in one location.

The headline is Formula 1. Yas Marina Circuit hosts the season finale in the F1 calendar every year. Importantly, you can pay to hire a car to go around the track, or take your own car on select days. Yas also has Etihad Arena, which is where most major international concerts and events are hosted, Abu Dhabi Comedy Season, which included Dave Chappelle, and then events from UFC to Jennifer Lopez. Premium restaurants on the waterfront here include Bushra and Zeera by Buddha-Bar, Asia Asia, Hunter & Barrel, Paradiso, and Ishtar Yas Marina.

Yas Links Golf Course is the best course in Abu Dhabi. It's been recognised internationally and has recently entered global rankings, which is rare for a course in the region.

Other attractions already open include Warner Brothers, Ferrari World, and SeaWorld, with Harry Potter World, Disneyland, and the Abu Dhabi Sphere announced and on the way.

Within Yas, there are gated communities away from the theme parks developed by the biggest developer in Abu Dhabi, Aldar. There is a mix of villas, townhouses, apartments, and premium apartments. Yas has several hotels, including the most premium being W Hotel, along with Hilton Abu Dhabi Yas Island.

Importantly, Yas isn't isolated. It's around 20 minutes from ADGM, so it works for both tourism and business travel — it's realistic for executives and visitors to stay here and still access the financial district easily.

---

7) Ramhan Island

Ramhan Island is a premium man-made island community located here and is designed around waterfront living, crystal-clear swimmable water, and a quieter island lifestyle that still feels connected to the city. It's planned as a cluster-style community with villas on the water with beach access.

The island is designed so you do not need to leave, with retail, a beach bar, restaurants, schools, running and bike tracks, and green community spaces built into the masterplan. There is also a marina with a waterfront promenade, yacht club, and boat berths. It doesn't stop there, with a luxurious marina hotel.

Location-wise, it sits within short driving distance of Abu Dhabi's main lifestyle and business zones, including Yas, Saadiyat, and the airport, and it's realistically within about 15–20 minutes of ADGM depending on traffic.

This project is designed and perfect for people who want crystal-clear water and a private beach in front of their villa. The location and concept are almost impossible to replicate again. It's been under construction for years, so it is far ahead of any new community that gets announced. This will be the most desirable place to live for a lot of people!

8) Saadiyat Cultural District

To understand who Abu Dhabi is targeting to move there, and why it feels different to Dubai, you need to look at Saadiyat's Cultural District, which is located here.

It's a long-term government strategy to position Abu Dhabi as the cultural capital of the region and improve quality of life through education, heritage, art, and institutions. They've placed multiple world-class museums next to each other on the ocean next to the financial district, ADGM.

Louvre Abu Dhabi was built through a long-term partnership, including access to expertise, exhibitions, and art loans. Around $500 million was paid to use the Louvre name. The building itself is designed like a museum city under a dome, built around light and shade.

Guggenheim Abu Dhabi, opens December 2026 which will focus on modern and contemporary art. It's not open yet, but construction is well underway. Designed by Frank Gehry

Zayed National Museum, designed by Foster + Partners, is the UAE's national museum and one of the most important cultural projects in the country. It opened in December 2025.

The Natural History Museum is designed to tell the story of Earth and the universe and is planned to operate as both an education and research centre, including advanced labs.

The surrounding development is growing fast. You've already got Louvre Residences, branded and premium residential projects, and new retail and dining infrastructure being built around it.

This also links back to lifestyle. Saadiyat has the most premium beach in the UAE, Blue Flag certified, with incredible sunset views. For apartment living with beachfront access, very few places compete with it. Ten minutes from ADGM. No other financial district in the region has this type of cultural and beachfront lifestyle positioned so close to it.

9) Saadiyat Villa Community

Abu Dhabi has only sold freehold property since 2019, and Saadiyat is the first large-scale beachfront community complete there. The vast majority of the villas are not within walking distance to the cultural district. It is the most desirable beachfront community to live in that is complete because of the location, Cranleigh School is the most popular choice for expats, the beach quality, and the fact that there are complete villas there. Saadiyat Beach Villas and Hidd Al Saadiyat are the main complete clusters. Aldar and Four Seasons have recently launched premium, larger villa clusters and communities that will be superior in quality, position, and design than what is completed now.

Both records in Abu Dhabi were set here. A penthouse at the Four Seasons Private Residences at Saadiyat Beach sold for AED 200 million, the most expensive apartment ever sold in the emirate, at AED 14,000 per sqft and before completion. And an eight-bedroom mansion at Aldar's Faya Al Saadiyat sold for AED 400 million, the most valued home ever sold in Abu Dhabi, almost triple the previous record.

Several premium hotels are on the island, including St Regis, Rixos, Rotana, and Park Hyatt, and one golf course, Saadiyat Beach Golf Club. This island is premium now and the location always will be. The beach is the best in the UAE and it will always remain premium due to proximity to ADGM and the villa community connected to the cultural district. It will always be premium to live no matter what comes after, because location, location, location always matters.

10) Marsa Al Saadiyat

Marsa Al Saadiyat is the final phase of the Saadiyat Island masterplan, and the last large-scale piece of land on the island. It's located here.

Launched in July 2026 by Aldar with a gross development value of AED 100 billion, it was witnessed by His Highness Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, who directed the renaming from Saadiyat Marina District to Marsa Al Saadiyat, a nod to UAE maritime heritage. It spans 6.4 million square metres across 8 km of waterfront and is planned for 58,000 residents.

The residential mix is private mansions, luxury villas, waterfront apartments, branded residences, and a hillside community of standalone villas rising 22.5 metres above the shoreline.

At the centre is Abu Dhabi's largest marina, with berths for around 350 yachts and sailing boats, a private yacht club, a 1 km retail and dining promenade, and two five-star hotels.

For lifestyle there are 5.6 km of beaches, roughly 140 km of walking paths, and a 46 km cycling loop, with every home planned within 150 metres of these routes. There's a landscaped central park, community clubhouses, sports courts, three schools, and healthcare facilities.

The cultural anchor is a dedicated theatre district led by Dar Al Funoon, a performing arts venue for more than 6,000 guests, due to open in 2030 and hosting musicals, live productions and international performances year-round. A landscaped walkway connects the district directly to the Cultural District, so the Louvre, Zayed National Museum, Natural History Museum, teamLab Phenomena and Guggenheim are all within reach on foot.

The connectivity is what matters most long term. An underground Etihad Rail high-speed station is built into the district, one of only six stations on the entire Abu Dhabi to Dubai line, which will run at up to 350 km/h and link the two cities in 30 minutes. New roads and tunnels connect to Umm Yifeenah and Reem Island, the next station along, and a new bridge links to a separate island Aldar is developing off the Saadiyat coast.

Site enabling and primary infrastructure works begin in Q3 2026, with the first residential sales in H2 2026. Prices, unit sizes, payment plans and the branded residence partner have not been announced.

This is the last chapter of a masterplan two decades in the making. Once Marsa Al Saadiyat is built out, there is no more Saadiyat to develop, and it sits on the water with its own marina, its own theatre district, and its own high-speed rail station.

RAPHAEL
HOMES

Jake Nazer Analysis

Enquiry Number: +971 55 694 5440
Office Address: Raphael Homes Real Estate, Marina Plaza, Dubai Marina, Dubai