

Award for Outstanding Achievement

Ski Dubai

DESERT SNOW STORM

by Owen Ralph

It's chilly in the desert, you know! Ski Dubai is a new 22,500 square meter indoor ski resort and snow park attached to the third largest mall in the world and it's – brrrr! – minus 2° Celsius inside.

This new family-friendly attraction at the Mall of the Emirates in Dubai is the first of its kind to open anywhere in the world.

Ski Dubai was developed and is co-owned by Majid Al Futtaim Investments, in conjunction with Transmontagne. Opened in November 2005, it combines an 85-meter-high indoor mountain and slopes with fun experiences like a snowy climbing wall, icy mirror maze and snowman-making area. An observation tower overlooks the resort to give Dubai's residents and many visitors a unique glimpse of this winter wonderland in the middle of the desert.

"Many people in the United Arab Emirates have never seen snow before," says Ski Dubai CEO Phil Taylor. "We wanted to give curious adult guests the chance to explore the snow and allow children an opportunity to have some fun in the white stuff too."

Ski Dubai's five slopes vary in difficulty, height and steepness, the longest run being 400 meters long, with a fall of over 60 meters. Visitors can test their skills on the world's first indoor black run or practice their turns on the

gentle beginner slopes. Snowboarders can also practice their stunts on the 90-meter long quarter pipe.

Skis carry guests down the slopes, and a quad chair lift and tow lift carry them promptly back to the top for another run. Those with two left feet, however, can benefit from lessons taught by professional ski instructors – or they can simply retire to the St Moritz or Avalanche cafés to enjoy a hot drink on the snow-side terrace.

Adjoining the slopes is a 3,000-square-meter Snow Park play area, developed by Thinkwell Design and Production (Burbank).

"No one had ever done anything like this before," notes Victor Cavaller, general manager of Thinkwell Europa (Barcelona), adding that

it was a learning curve as steep as the resort's slopes. "In the course of developing this project, however, we have become the world's leading expert in indoor interactive snow play!"

Thinkwell conceptualized the Snow Park as two key areas. The first is a natural-looking "outdoor" snowscape inside the massive Ski Dubai dome. The snow underfoot is 70 cm deep, and just keeps falling. Here activities include multiple toboggan slides, two sled runs, an icy body slide, climbing towers, exploration caves, and what is said to be the world's first snowball shooting gallery (how many do you know of?)

The other half of the attraction is the Ice Cave. Enclosed beneath the ski ramp, it makes great use of an otherwise dead area and is kept at



Now you can hit the slopes - in Dubai! Ski Dubai is a winter wonderland in the middle of the desert. Coats, hats and mittens are provided.



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an even chillier -7° Celsius. An enormous ice dragon (actually, it's made from polyester, so that it doesn't melt) anchors this labyrinth full of icy activities where younger guests can skate on the roller walk, write their name on frost walls, or retreat to the warmth of a 3D theater.

Early attendance figures show that around 70 per cent of Ski Dubai guests include the Snow Park as part of their visit. "It's the first thing people see from the mall and neighbouring hotel," explains Cavaller, "and it's proving very good at attracting people into the ski resort as a whole."

In total, Ski Dubai has capacity for 1,500 guests at any one time. Winter clothing, ski and snowboard equipment are included in the price of admission, which ranges from DHS115-130 (€25-30) for adults, or DHS50 (€12) for just the Snow Park.


Snowbusiness

Project manager for the mammoth undertaking was Mace International. Giles Connor of Holfords was the local architect, and Hyder was the structural services

engineer. And who provided all that snow? Consultant Acersnowmec.

Thinkwell Design's contribution to the Snow Park was comprehensive and included concept design, construction documents and content master planning, with Thinkwell Europa contributing technical and project management. "We brought in the theme park expertise, dealing with capacity, guest flow, budget, schedule, advice on procurement etc," explains Victor Cavaller.

Thinkwell was also asked to provide art direction for the rest of Ski Dubai, so that the mountain village theming extends throughout the entire venue.

Other contractors included the UK's Scenic Route (trees) and DJ Willrich (lighting) and local vendors Amusement White Water (rockwork, rope bridge and cottages), Exclusive Acrylic (pin wall) and Wafi Communications, which provided the ice dragon. 

**A chill dragon lives
in the Ice Cave at Ski
Dubai**

