

QE2 reaches final destination

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DUBAI - The cruise liner Queen Elizabeth 2 (QE2), the world's most famous ocean liner, arrives in Dubai on Wednesday, exactly 40 years to the day from when she first went to sea on her preliminary sea trials on Nov. 26, 1968.

It will be transformed into a luxurious floating hotel in the booming Gulf emirate.

The QE2, which sailed on its last voyage from its former home port of Southampton in England, was greeted by a large flotilla of private craft including the giant yacht My Dubai, owned by the emirate's ruler Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashed Al-Maktoum.

The British-flagged QE2 will now be completely refurbished and turned into a five-star hotel to be moored at the Palm Jumeirah complex, the world's largest man-made palm-shaped island off the coast of Dubai.

Sultan Bin Ahmed Sulayem, chairman of Dubai World, said: "**Nakheel** is proud to be the custodian of such an historic treasure. Dubai, with its wealth of maritime heritage, is providing the warmest of welcomes and a new homecoming for this icon of the seas."

"It is fitting that QE2 will arrive at Mina Rashid, a site that has been pivotal in the growth and development of the emirate and commemorates the memory of His Highness Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, the father of modern-day Dubai. It is also apt that refurbishment work on QE2 will take place within the Dubai Dry Dock, which Her Highness Queen Elizabeth II, escorted by Sheikh Rashid, inaugurated 29 years ago during her first official visit to the UAE."

Manfred Ursprunger, CEO of QE2 Enterprises, said: "We are thrilled to be welcoming QE2 to Dubai today. This is one of the most anticipated events of the year and marks a new and exciting chapter in her life."

"For QE2, we believe that life really does begin at 40. Our plans include her transformation into an ultra-luxury floating hotel, synonymous with her rich heritage, where she'll form the centerpiece of a luxurious residential, entertainment, marina, and hotel development off the trunk of Palm Jumeirah. A heritage museum displaying artifacts from QE2 and of local maritime history as well as a West-end style theatre capable of staging the very best, full-scale West End and Broadway productions will also feature in the precinct."

UAE coast guards and the Royal Navy frigate HMS Lancaster were among those escorting the liner into Mina Rashed port.

An Emirates A380 Airbus, piloted by Captain Abbas Shaban, performed a fly-past in honor of her arrival.

A fireboat hosed water skywards to salute her, and an Emirates superjumbo A380 made a low flypast.

Hundreds of passengers who traveled on the final voyage stood on the deck of the 70,000-ton QE2, cheering and waving British flags. "This is a magnificent tourist attraction," said Johann Schumacher, the managing director of Palm Jumeirah, adding that the refit is expected to take up to three years. The liner will eventually be tugged to a special pier on Palm Jumeirah, about 20 kilometers (12 miles) from Mina Rashed.

US cruise operator Cunard sold the QE2 for about 50 million pounds (67 million euros, \$99 million) in November last year to Istithmar, the investment arm of state-owned company Dubai World.

On Thursday, the ceremonial flag changing will take place, and Cunard will officially hand over the ownership of QE2 to **Nakheel**, a branch of Dubai World.

Before leaving Southampton on Nov. 11, the QE2 took part in commemorations marking the 90th anniversary of the end of World War I.

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