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### A mix of vision and sheer guts

The prospect of visiting the world's highest observation deck (124th floor) is setting up the greatest anticipation

By Carole Spiers, Special to Gulf News

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After the world-acclaimed national achievements of the past few months, with the opening of the Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Metro, I would not be surprised if some Emiratis might be starting to develop a certain blasé attitude towards their examples of technical achievement.

This week I am about to return to UAE for the first time since the opening of Burj Khalifa, and there is no reduction in my expectations for the dynamic world of Dubai.

As 2009 starts to edge away into history, my focus sharpens and my vision of that momentous year is full of eager wonderment. Perhaps as the outsider, I might be the one to remind you all just how much has been achieved.

First inevitably the Burj Khalifa, a soaring statement for which the journalists have understandably run out of superlatives. Praised as the supreme icon of civil engineering achievement, it has also been criticised by others for what they see as excessive luxury.

#### Criticism

Well, it can hardly conceal its luxury characteristics, and nor should it. The Empire State Building in New York originally suffered the same criticism, when it was the tallest building in the world. But now Burj Khalifa is equal to two Empire State buildings — one on top of the other! So no wonder the world is amazed.

For me, it is the prospect of visiting the world's highest observation deck (124th floor) that is setting up the greatest anticipation. The world's highest mosque and swimming pool also strike me as more than just engineering achievements. They somehow lift the mind and make the world nobler and loftier than it was. (But meanwhile, if anyone is thinking of inviting me to view the world's most luxurious apartments or boardrooms, then do contact me!)

From luxury, then, to necessity and to the great Metro, with its fast, air-conditioned driverless trains equipped with in-cab signalling and wi-fi, linking smoothly with water-taxis and light railways, aiming to ease movement around Dubai as its population nears 3 million and its tourist visitors hit an annual 15 million.

Here at least, there is almost unanimous agreement on the benefits for all groups. The only resistance is psychological; people still enjoy the sensation of steering their own little capsule, and so congestion may not disappear as rapidly as we would like.

#### Ambition

As for myself, arriving from London, [the city that is still living with the world's first

underground railway], I look with envy on this wonderfully efficient 21st century, metro network. To turn both of these dreams into reality in the same year, under the demoralising pressure of a savage recession, has taken an unusual mix of ambition, creative vision, persistence and the sheer guts now shown, under economic pressure, to be qualities profoundly symbolic of Dubai and the UAE.

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**Key points**

It is possible to develop a 'blasé attitude' about great triumphs.  
To build the Burj Khalifa and the Dubai Metro in the same year is a unique achievement.  
Dubai has demonstrated a blend of qualities that can build the future.