

Qatar's new island features open-air "forest" cooled for summer strolls

- A Monitor Special

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Dhaka : In Qatar, summer temperatures routinely push people indoors. Daily life during the hottest months revolves around air-conditioned homes, offices, and shopping malls, with even short car journeys undertaken in heavily chilled vehicles. Spending time outside is usually something to tolerate, not enjoy.

That dynamic is beginning to shift on Gewan Island, a recently developed man-made island off the coast of Doha. There, visitors can walk outdoors in peak summer heat thanks to an ambitious engineering concept: a fully air-conditioned open-air promenade designed to feel like a forest.

At the heart of the island lies the Crystal Walk, a 450-meter-long pedestrian avenue where temperatures are maintained at a steady 21-23°C (70-73°F) year-round. Although the walkway is exposed to the

sky, a canopy of sculptural, tree-like structures provides shade while helping retain cooled air that rises from vents built into the ground.

Cooling the outdoors

Outdoor cooling systems are not entirely new to Qatar. Joggers in Doha's Al Gharrafa and Umm Al Seneem parks already use shaded, temperature-controlled tracks, and open-air shopping areas such as Al Hazm Mall and West Walk are fitted with similar cooling technology.

However, Gewan Island elevates the concept both technically and visually. The "trees" lining the Crystal Walk are adorned with around 10 tons of crystals, which shimmer in the sunlight and give the promenade its name. Integrated solar panels harness Qatar's intense sun to generate electricity that partially powers the cooling system. Small water features add another layer of refreshment for visitors.

Locals say the island has quickly become a highlight of her city tours. Tour guides now bring visitors several times a week and describe their reactions as consistently astonished - both by the comfortable temperatures and by the futuristic aesthetic.

Immersive crystal experience



The Crystal Walk promenade on Qatar's Gwanan Island offers a novel way to escape the searing heat of summer _Photo: Mohamed Abdelrazek/Alamy Stock Photo

Beyond climate control, the walkway offers interactive design features. About 180 illuminated crystal panels are embedded in the ground beneath reinforced glass. Each display showcases miniature artistic scenes - from deserts and oceans to snowy landscapes, wildlife, and industrial motifs. Visitors encounter everything from penguins and crocodiles to camel caravans and musical instruments.

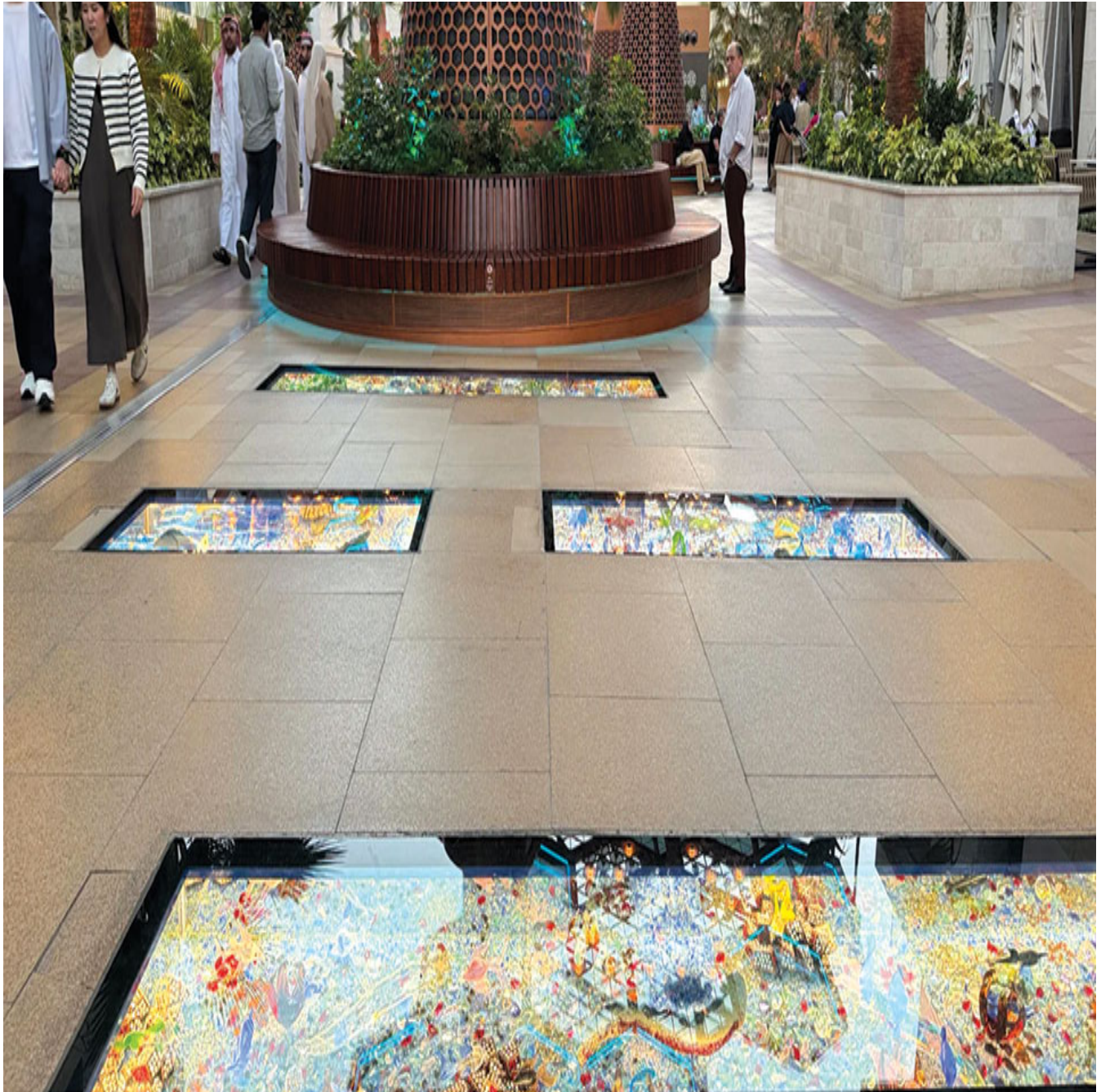
For residents, the attraction is both recreational and architectural. While their children are captivated by the glowing installations, they appreciate the island's modern design, upscale restaurants, and boutique shops.

The project has already earned two Guinness World Records: one for the

largest outdoor air-conditioned shopping mall and another for the largest outdoor interactive light canopy.

From construction yard to lifestyle destination

Gewan Island was not always intended as a leisure hotspot. The 400,000-square-meter site originally functioned as a construction staging area during the development of The Pearl, Doha's well-known luxury residential district built on reclaimed land.



Named after a rare pearl, the island has since undergone a dramatic transformation. Its eastern section is reserved for private villas and residences, while the central zone features retail, dining and pedestrian pathways anchored by the Crystal Walk. The western portion is slated for further hospitality developments.

Unlike much of car-oriented Doha, Gwan has been designed with walkability in mind. Three bridges connect it to The Pearl, but within the island, pedestrian spaces take priority.

John C Kim, Design Director at AE7 and lead on the master plan, described the central promenade as a social spine intended to foster community interaction, while perimeter areas provide sweeping views of the Gulf and neighboring Pearl Islands.

Expanding hospitality, leisure

Along the waterfront facing The Pearl, a restaurant-lined promenade features glass installations inspired by the organic forms of American glass artist Dale Chihuly. A nearby water taxi station offers 20-minute canal rides to Porto Arabia Marina, giving visitors a scenic alternative to road travel.

At the island's southwestern corner, construction is underway on the Corinthia Gwan Island development - a five-star hotel and residential complex spanning 13,000 square meters. The project will include 110 rooms and suites, a nine-hole golf course and a private beach club, with phased openings planned between 2026 and 2027.



Crystal panels in the walkway act as a showcase for artworks and cultural displays (top and bottom) Along Gewan Island's coastline facing The Pearl runs a promenade lined with restaurants. The walkway is framed by glass trees inspired by the distinctive shapes of American glass artist Dale Chihuly - Photo: Ulrike Lemmin-Woolfrey

Developers see the resort as a key step in positioning Gewan as part of Doha's growing tourism and lifestyle portfolio. Whether it can distinguish itself in a competitive luxury market remains to be seen.

Shift in Doha's social landscape

Restaurants and cafés continue to open along the island's promenades, ranging from casual coffee shops to themed dining concepts. Some venues incorporate family play areas, while others highlight luxury automotive displays.

Even with cooled walkways, evenings remain the busiest time - reflecting Doha's late-night social culture. Still, projects like Gewan

Island could gradually expand the city's year-round outdoor offerings and reduce its heavy reliance on the winter tourism season.

If the concept proves sustainable beyond its novelty, Qatar may have found a way to redefine outdoor life in one of the world's hottest climates.