

## Overview, Habitat Compensation Island

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is situated on the Arabian Peninsula which forms the Arabian Gulf, a region comprised of islands and dunes, oil, and oases. It is a spatially compressed region, in which mountains, cement factories, deserts, skyscrapers, and wetlands are all within a three-hour coastal drive. The Arabian Gulf is home to important commercial fisheries, oil, and gas reserves.

Abu Dhabi, the capital of the seven Emirates, is a natural archipelago of over 200 islands of varying sizes and states: some are home to rare species of flora; some are densely developed. Many are human-made islands—including Habitat Compensation Island.

Habitat Compensation Island is a geographic fact on navigational charts, but can't be found with a Google Search. It is a 15-minute boat ride from Emirates Palace Marina, sited between Umm al Dalkh—an offshore oil field—and the edge of the shipping channel that serves the Mussafah Industrial Zone. It was created between 2009-2011 from the new channel's marine dredge. Initiated by Abu Dhabi's Department of Urban Planning and Municipalities (DPM), and realized by the National Marine Dredging Company (NMDC), the island was conceived as ecological compensation for damage that may have been caused by channel dredging. The island's location was chosen specifically to minimize further environmental disturbance.

Made from the bottom of the sea, this island was designed in a C-shape, creating a shallow, interior lagoon intended as habitat for local marine flora and fauna. To encourage a new community of non-humans, it was seeded with 350,000 mangroves. DPM also designed a vision plan to transform Habitat Compensation Island into an ecological preserve and education-focused destination.

An ambitious experimental project of marine engineering and environmental problem-solving, Habitat Compensation Island itself is a monument to ecological optimism. At the moment it remains an enigma on the seascape, and cargo ship workers might wonder in passing about the little island with its bleached, blank billboards, and accumulating marine plastic debris.

*Postscript:* We, like this island, are recontoured by natural, economic and political forces at increasing speeds. In our fact-checking ventures, we learned that Habitat Compensation Island has been renamed North Halat Al Bahraini Island. Monuments in the expanded field include palimpsests and spectral names, as mutable as sands and dredge, affected by both human and greater-than human forces.