



A woman is dwarfed by the huge model of Noah's Ark, whose facilities include a hotel, hostel, restaurant and museum. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Noah's Ark ready to open the floodgates

Amy Nip

A large model of Noah's Ark, described as the world's first "full-size" replica, will open to tourists in Ma Wan Park in January.

Construction of the model will finish by the end of next month and the ark will initially be open to tour groups. After a three-month trial, individual members of the public will be allowed to visit.

There are five levels inside the ark, which will house a restaurant, an exhibition hall, an education centre

and a museum for children. The top floor will have a hotel and a hostel overlooking the sea.

According to the Bible, Noah built the ark and loaded a male and female of every animal species on board to save them from a flood. The replica is on Ma Wan Island and faces the Tsing Ma Bridge. It is part of Ma Wan Park, the first phase of which opened in July last year.

The ark covers an area of 270,000 sq ft. Sculptures of 76 pairs of animals appear to walk out of the ark into a garden.

"We used a material called GRC, which is a mixture of concrete and glass fibre, to build the ark," said Ma Wan Park project manager Angus Cheung Kam-cheung. He said GRC was used instead of real wood because it was more environmentally friendly and durable.

The ark took five years to build.

Five non-governmental organisations will operate the ark's facilities, including the Chinese YMCA of Hong Kong; The Media Evangelism, a Christian charity; Angela Luk's Education Foundation; the Boys' Brigade

Hong Kong; and St James' Settlement.

"Under the financial tsunami, every Hongkonger is facing challenges," said the park's general manager, Spencer Lu Chee-yuen. "The opening of the Noah's Ark is timely, as it serves as a symbol of hope."

Since it opened, Ma Wan Park has attracted 300,000 people. Its management and the tourism industry are still discussing the ark's entrance fees. "We won't link the entrance fees directly to the construction cost," Mr Lu said.