

Toronto Ismaili centre to showcase Islamic culture

BY DON CAYO, VANCOUVER SUN MAY 28, 2010



Artist's rendering of the Ismaili Centre, the Aga Khan Museum and Park to be built in Toronto. The groundbreaking ceremony for the project is on Friday.

Photograph by: Vancouver Sun, Handout

It's hard to imagine a more truly international community than the world's 15 million Ismaili Muslims.

They're a people without a territory and they've made their homes in more than 25 countries on five continents. The Aga Khan, their hereditary imam (or spiritual leader), lives in France.

But it's no coincidence that it's Canada that was chosen for the Ismailis' \$300-million investment in a new site where adherents can practise their religion and where the world at large can contemplate and celebrate Islamic culture.

The Aga Khan himself is to turn the sod today to start construction on a seven-hectare site in Toronto that will be home to not only a spiritual centre and park, but also a museum -- the first in North America devoted entirely to Islamic art. It will showcase the products of more than 1,000 years of artistry and craftsmanship, with priceless artifacts created in places from China to the Iberian Peninsula.

The project includes two 10,000-square-metre buildings -- an Ismaili Centre and Jamatkhana, a little smaller than the Ismailis' elegant structure for worship and community events in Burnaby, and a similar-sized museum. Between them will be a series of landscaped gardens and more than two kilometres of walking paths.

