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# THE RULE BOOK

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Visiting Dubai



## DO'S AND DONT'S IN DUBAI

### **Being in Dubai.**

Dubai is a fabulous country whose people are some of the most genuine, hospitable and courteous to encounter anywhere in the world. Experience the deep, rich history and traditions on offer.

Always remember that you are in a different country with a different cultural and belief system to most westerners, we can seem as strange to them as they might sometimes appear to us. It's like the old saying "When in Rome" – it is just common courtesy to respect your hosts as we expect visitors to our country to respect our laws and traditions.

### **Do's & Don'ts:**

Statement from the Dubai government: *Dubai is tolerant and cosmopolitan, and all visitors are welcome. However, Islam is a way of life in the city, and therefore tourists should adopt a certain level of cultural and religious sensitivity for the duration of their stay.*

### **Alcohol Consumption:**

Alcohol Consumption is allowed only by **Non-Muslims** in licensed restaurants, bars, clubs, private venues, and at home (*for residents who have acquired an alcohol license*). *Tourists will not be able to purchase alcohol in general stores and supermarkets etc., alcohol in these stores are for residents who have obtained the required liquor license to purchase alcohol for consumption in their own personal use at homes.*

It is against the law to drink alcohol whilst walking in the street or to be drunk in a public place. For those living in the UAE a special license must be obtained before purchasing alcohol from the exclusive, specialized, licensed stores. This license is only a permit for buying alcohol. It does not give any immunity for alcohol related criminal offences. It is an offence to carry alcohol in your car if you do not hold the special alcohol license. If you come to the attention of the police you may be arrested, even though you may have purchased the alcohol legally. **Alcohol can only be consumed by over 21s.** Alcohol is not available in Sharjah.

### **Driving:**

The UAE has a zero-tolerance policy towards **drinking** and **driving**. You can be charged and imprisoned if you are caught with even the smallest amount of alcohol in your system; If you are going to drink walk, get a cab or use the metro. Tailgating, speeding, racing, lane jumping and using a mobile phone while driving is against the law. There are numerous speed cameras on the roads and motorways. Fines in the UAE are heavy. If you are caught you may also face the possibility of having your car impounded. Wearing a seatbelt is mandatory.

Jay walking (Crossing the road in a non-designated area / crossing) is also illegal and the police, particularly in Abu Dhabi, have launched a campaign against jay walking. If you are caught committing this offence you could be subject to a fine.

**Drugs** are strictly forbidden, even a residual amount. Consuming or carrying drugs, even if you are transiting through the airport from one country to another, can result in a standard four-year imprisonment and deportation (This can even include what is in your bloodstream).

Buying or selling narcotics is considered a serious crime which can result in life-imprisonment. Some medicines (accepted in other countries) containing psychotropic substances are also forbidden, so check out the UAE relevant embassy website for further information.

### **Over the Counter or Doctor Prescribed Medications:**

Dubai and the UAE has very strict drug/medication laws and even certain over the counter medicines especially those with codeine are forbidden, even for personal use unless with a specific doctor's prescription about the period of use. Checking the banned substances list from the local consulate or your embassy is also helpful for peace of mind.

If you are using doctor prescribed drugs such as painkillers or antidepressants it is advisable to carry a doctor's note. *(A general open letter is NOT enough, the letter must cover the period of travel, and describe the illness and the relative medicines prescribed for that illness.)* If you are bringing prescription drugs into the UAE, you may need to seek prior agreement from the authorities. You should check with the nearest UAE Embassy or Consulate before you travel. ***(please note that whilst some Control drugs are prescribed as medicines in some***

***countries such as the use of medical Marijuana, controlled drugs such as these as opposed to control Pharmaceutical such as painkillers and antidepressants drugs are still NOT considered to be a Doctor Prescribed Medicine within the UAE)*** If these drugs are for genuine medical use it will not be a problem, even for travelers who need large amounts of medication such as cancer patients. Always check with the Government link below for total clarification. Do not just check with your travel agent or hotel as they may not be totally up to speed with current UAE laws.

You sometimes read stories of people arrested at the airports for carrying prescribed medicines, what these stories don't tell you is the amount of medication an individual is trying to bring into the country under the pretext of personal medical use. Don't be fooled by the horror stories which are editorialized to sell copy.

**Smoking – E Cigarettes and Vaping** - Smoking is forbidden in government areas, offices and shopping malls. There are however many designated areas where smoking is allowed. E Cigarettes and Vaping are banned in Dubai and the UAE, you may well find your devices are confiscated at the airport upon arriving in Dubai.

**Traditions:**

The UAE is built on generations of Islamic traditions which are rooted firmly in its culture and tribal heritage. These traditions have been passed down from generation to generation and form the very cornerstone of everyday life for an Emirati family. The Emirati are friendly people who show tolerance and an open-minded approach to visitors in their country; but their culture and values should always be respected.

### **Expatriate Community:**

In the last 30 years, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and the other Emirates have gone through a total transformation from small Arab trading ports into modern cities. Over 150 nationalities (including an estimated 100,000 British expats) contribute to the UAE's modern society. The streets, shopping malls and business areas are alive with numerous languages and cultures. Do keep in mind that you will probably meet many people with different values and opinions.

### **Social Ethics:**

The culture and laws in the UAE are designed to ensure that everyone is respectful of each other regardless of their faith and nationality. Visitors and residents alike should avoid types of improper conduct and behavior which can otherwise lead to fines, imprisonment and deportation.

**Dress Code:** Emirati dress conservatively in traditional dress and can be offended when people dress inappropriately or not in accordance with Islamic values. In public places such as shopping malls, restaurants and parks, you are encouraged to dress appropriately. Clothing should NOT be transparent, indecently expose parts of the body or display offensive pictures or slogans. **Be careful as well if you are tattooed with what could be deemed offensive images or slogans, if in doubt cover up.** Be aware that if you enter one of these areas dressed inappropriately you could albeit unlikely be asked to leave (most of the larger shopping malls display signs warning respectable clothing should be worn). Any form of nudity is strictly forbidden, including topless sunbathing. Swimwear should not be worn in any other area outside the beach, water parks, or swimming pools. Bear in mind that just because you see someone else doing something such as topless bathing does not mean that it is right.

It is preferable for both men and women to have their shoulders and knees covered and for women not to reveal too much décolletage when not on the beach or at a hotel. It is not appropriate for men to walk along the street or malls bare-chested.

**Dancing** is allowed in the privacy of your home or at licensed clubs and events. But dancing in public is classed as indecent and provocative.

### **Personal**

### **Safety:**

The UAE is a relatively safe country from a crime perspective. Nevertheless, when you are out and about, take the necessary precautions to stay safe just as you would do if you were in your own country. If you are going to visit bars and clubs, do not accept drinks from strangers, and never leave your drink unattended. While rare, having your drink spiked in the UAE can happen.

**Sexual Relationships / Unmarried Couples Cohabiting** outside of marriage are illegal, irrespective of any relationship you may have with your partner in your own country. Cohabiting, including in hotels, is also illegal, however most Dubai hotels don't enforce "Only Married Couples" rule. Luxury hotels, which often cater to foreigners, are especially relaxed, so chances are you won't have trouble booking a room. At check-in, you'll be required to show your passport, but having different surnames won't raise any eyebrows. In Dubai, married women often keep their surnames. Once you've checked into a hotel, refer to each other as "Husband" and "Wife" rather than saying "my boyfriend" or "my fiancé." This could help prevent potential problems.

If you become pregnant outside of marriage, both you and your partner face the possibility of imprisonment. There are also legal ramifications when registering the birth with the local authorities.

The same rule applies to same sex friend/couples sharing a room. It's often better to book a twin bed room. (This is usually at no extra cost)

Gay and Lesbian travelers should be particularly careful, as homosexual behavior is a criminal offence with the possibility of deportation, you should also avoid any public displays of affection. Cross-dressing is also illegal.

**Pornography and pornographic images:** Such media and websites are banned in the UAE both in terms of access and possession.

**Sexual Harassment** or randomly addressing women in public, or taking their photos without permission, is strictly frowned upon.

**Holding Hands** for married couples is tolerated but kissing and hugging are considered offences against public decency. Open displays of affection are generally not tolerated.

**Bouncing a Cheque** is illegal in the UAE. If a cheque is presented without adequate funds to cover the amount, you will face criminal and civil charges. After you have served your jail sentence you will not be able to leave the country until the funds have been paid in full.

**Offensive language**, spitting and aggressive behaviour (including hand gestures) are viewed very seriously and can result in imprisonment and deportation. This includes “road rage”.

**Working** without the proper visa is illegal. You cannot partake in any kind of paid employment without first obtaining a work visa. If caught, you will face imprisonment.

**Respect for religion:** Islamic religious values are greatly respected in the UAE. Showing any disrespect towards religious beliefs or practices is considered deeply offensive and very likely to result in a heavy fine and/or imprisonment. Other religions are respected and can be followed by the expatriate community.

Follow a few simple rules of respect:

Muslims pray five times a day. You will notice that the Mosques call people to pray through a speaker system. At this time, you will also notice public music is turned off as Muslims perform their daily prayers.

Be aware that drivers who are not close to a Mosque, may stop at a convenient lay-by to pray privately.

## **RAMADAN:**

*MANY OTHER GUIDES WILL TELL YOU NOT TO VISIT THE UAE DURING RAMADAN. WE SAY, PROVIDED YOU WILLING TO FOLLOW A FEW BASIC RULES WE SAY 'DO' AS ITS A WONDERFUL TIME TO VISIT AND OBSERVE THE LOCAL CULTURE.*

During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Throughout this month eating, drinking, smoking, playing loud music and dancing in public places during daylight hours are strictly forbidden and punishable by law, including for non-Muslims.

This consumption ban will include public indoor areas as well, **although many of the larger hotels will have special screened off areas for non-Muslims to eat and drink during these hours freely except for alcohol which will only be served after sundown. pregnant women and the infirm are excluded from the fast.**

Every evening during Ramadan, Muslims celebrate the breaking of their fast with an evening meal called Iftar. You will find many hotels and restaurants throughout the UAE who provide Iftar buffets. The golden rule is always be mindful and respectful of local's traditions and beliefs.

Visiting Dubai during Ramadan gives tourists a unique and authentic holiday experience. Based on the lunar calendar, it is the Holy Month of Islam and this year it runs from 1 – 30 August (approx.).

Ramadan commemorates the time when the Koran was first revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. While international Muslims abstain from all food, drinks, smoking and live music

from dawn to dusk throughout the month, international hotels and resorts in Dubai continue to serve meals to international visitors in screened off areas as it's not permissible even for international visitors to eat & drink in public areas; this is also a common courtesy and mark of respect for the country you are a guest of. Alcohol can be purchased at licensed bars and restaurants from sunset onwards and most activities such as golf clubs, shopping malls, attractions and spas are open as usual but with altered opening times. (Most venues that would normally have live music will not during Ramadan)

The city really comes alive at night when visitors can join the Muslim population to break their fast (Iftar) and flock with friends and family to large tents to feast on a mouth-watering array of local dishes, smoke traditional shisha pipes and listen to traditional music such as the famous oud players. One point to note is that visitors should wear respectful clothing during this time.

And don't forget Eid Al-Fitr, which is a three-day festival for all that marks the end of Ramadan. Families exchange gifts, there are special public events arranged and yet more eating of delicious Arabic cuisine.

*PLEASE NOTE: Information is correct at time of publishing and advice contained within this document should be taken as an example of the types of issues you should consider when in the UAE. It is not an exhaustive list of everything you should be aware of when travelling in the UAE and more widely in the region. The contents of this page are for information purposes only and should not be deemed as Legal Advice in anyway. Legal advice is neither supplied nor inferred. Please click on any relevant UAE governmental links to obtain detailed advice and support.*