

# United Arab Emirates

دولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة



NAME:	United Arab Emirates
CAPITAL:	Abu Dhabi
LANGUAGE:	Arabic
RELIGION:	Muslim
CURRENCY:	Dirhams

## Getting Started

### When to Visit

Peak season in the [U.A.E.](#) is December to January and hotel rates reflect this, although two-three months before or after that time doesn't seem to differ much, weather-wise. It's these months (September-November & February-March) that are the best time to visit since hotel prices are lower than during the peak season, the country isn't overwhelmed with tourists, and the weather isn't too hot. Summers offer great hotel discounts (particularly in Abu Dhabi and [Dubai](#)), but it can be excruciatingly hot, reaching highs of 105° F (40° C).

Travel plans can be disrupted if you haven't booked ahead during local holidays, especially during Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar). This month also tends to close shops, restaurants, and coffee shops.

### Weather

Although weather can be generalized based upon years past, for more up to date weather patterns and predicted future weather patterns, visit weather websites like [weather.com](#); many local news sources also have information for international weather forecasts.

### Tours & Cruises

If you're looking for a pre-arranged trip, that involves little effort on your part, then you should consider going on an organized tour or cruise. Organized tours and cruises vary from all expenses included to only daily tours and perhaps hotels included in the price, but all the options below will help you arrange all the details so you don't have to worry about finding the best deal or right hotel.

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[Kensington Tours](#): Only offers personal tours for you and your family/friends, which allows greater flexibility, but also means slightly higher prices.

[Royal Caribbean](#): Cruises for all ages and families.

## Guidebooks

If you are just traveling on business and have little free time or are already familiar with the [United Arab Emirates](#), you may not need anything more than this guide! However, if you need more detailed and up to date information, there are a number of great country-wide, region-wide, and city-wide guidebooks available for travel in the U.A.E.

[Eyewitness Guides](#): Incredible pictures and detailed maps of popular tourist sites including museums. Those living abroad can't put these books down (Dubai Only).

[Fodor's](#): Good maps and information for the major tourist locations, but has little information for anyone heading off the beaten track. Great for those on organized tours (Dubai Only).

[Frommer's](#): Incredible number of lists, which divide travel into various categories based upon your interests. Travelers looking to spend most of their time in a single location or on organized tours enjoy these books (Dubai & Abu Dhabi Only).

[Lonely Planet](#): Great maps and updated often with comprehensive housing information, restaurants, & transportation options. Backpackers and adventurers love these guidebooks.

# Culture

## Personality, Culture, & Identity

The [United Arab Emirates](#) (U.A.E.) is a country that knows what it has and isn't afraid to flaunt it to the world. Like a needy child, the U.A.E. craves attention and easily overshadows Qatar, Bahrain, [Oman](#), and in many respects, even Saudi Arabia. With this constant need for attention, comes a pride, which, at first is only seen in subtle forms like the "national dress."

The pride Emirates share is based on their humble beginnings as nomadic desert dwellers striking it rich with oil. Constantly trying to maintain humbleness, the [U.A.E.](#) bounces between over-spending and material excess with their roots as they're constantly reminded that they are a minority in their own country, making who they are more significant, while also making them almost forgotten. To remedy this and in order to take a shot at another emirate, they swing back to over-spending as they build the world's next architectural icon.

The citizens of the [U.A.E.](#) primarily identify as Emirate, however some claim their ancestral tribe to be more important. For the most part, as a minority in their own country, they stick together and, with the people of Qatar and Bahrain, they often times identify widely as citizens of the gulf coast countries. As liberal Muslims, they view themselves as a part of Arabia and the Islamic world, but tend to separate from this identity due to the extreme social differences between themselves and their neighbor, Saudi Arabia.

## History

The land of the present-day [United Arab Emirates](#) has a long history, but this history is divided between the land the coastal people occupied, and the isolation of the interior desert dwellers. For much of

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history, this region was controlled by Persia and remained so until the arrival of Islam in the 600s.

In the 1400s the [Europeans](#) arrived by sea and took power in much of the region. By the 1700s the [British](#) held most of this control, which was sought in order to gain control over the Persian Gulf's lucrative trade with [Africa](#) and [India](#). The British forced peace treaties on the local tribes on the coast, but later in their rule the local sheikhs voluntarily agreed to British protection. However, during this time the British never ventured into the nearby desert interior and, other than protecting the waterways, there was no true economic motivation for the British to control the region.

The modern-day [U.A.E.](#)'s only real wealth came from pearl diving, but this industry dried up in the 1900s and the region returned to nomadic Bedouins living in poverty. In the early 20th century this changed again when oil was discovered and export of the good began in the 1960s. Abu Dhabi focused their economy on this good, while [Dubai](#) focused on being a trading center and port city as the rest of the Emirates fell into obscurity.

In 1971, Abu Dhabi's sheikh, Zayed worked with the other gulf coast emirates' sheikhs to create a united nation as the [British](#) discussed giving up control over the region. Most of the emirates along the coast joined (Bahrain and Qatar didn't) with Abu Dhabi acting as the country's capital. Since then, power has been primarily held in the emirates of Abu Dhabi and [Dubai](#), however all the emirates have benefited from this union.

Today the [United Arab Emirates](#) has quickly become one of the most progressive and modern countries in the world as oil money and tax-free trade through [Dubai](#) have made the country a meeting place for the entire Arabic speaking world as it also attracts workers and tourists from nearly every country in the world. Today the country's residents primarily consist of foreign non-citizens (over 80%), but the local population financially benefits from their work.

## Dress & Behavior

As a Muslim country, there are a number of religious laws which should be obeyed by everyone in the [United Arab Emirates](#), although few people seem to actually follow them. Nearly 75% of the country is foreign, many of whom come from [Europe](#), [North America](#), [India](#), and the Far East, to whom local religious dress and dietary restrictions mean little to nothing.

The locals dress one way and most foreigners dress in whatever way they want. The local dress or national uniform is worn with pride by the locals and trying to imitate this dress can actually be more offensive in the [U.A.E.](#) than it is "correct."

Although following local dress isn't necessary, covering up is greatly appreciated and respected by the local population and by visitors from neighboring Muslim countries, who are numerous. Although most foreigners who live in the [U.A.E.](#) and most tourists to the U.A.E. don't follow these guidelines, you should make the effort to do so since all are simple and easy to follow.

Women may cover their hair, although very few do, even Muslim women from other countries tend to ignore this rule as they view the [U.A.E.](#) as a liberal place where they can ignore dress restriction. However, even these Muslims from abroad tend to cover their legs and shoulders. Since the locals are used to foreign tourists, they accept shorts and short sleeve shirts.

It is also improper to touch a woman, even holding your wife's hand or offering to shake a local woman's hand can be considered inappropriate to a strict Muslim, but in the [U.A.E.](#) you'll rarely encounter this issue, especially in most resorts.

Islamic law forbids pork products and alcohol, however the country is aware of foreign interest in these items so they can be found with a bit of searching. Alcohol can be purchased at any "foreigner" hotel restaurant or bar, however outside of hotels there are no bars or pubs

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and alcohol cannot be bought for home consumption unless you are a foreigner residing in the [U.A.E.](#), in which case you can purchase a certain amount of alcohol each month. Pork can also be bought at certain stores by foreign residents, but it is not sold in restaurants, not even in western restaurants. To learn more about dining etiquette in the U.A.E., please continue reading below.

# Food

## Dining Etiquette

Eating in the [United Arab Emirates \(U.A.E.\)](#) is a long and drawn out event during which the goal is to socialize. This trend is apparent both when dining at a local's house in a more informal setting as well as at a formal business dinner at a five star hotel. In addition to long meals, the Emiratis also have a few general dining rules, but they will rarely to never demand you follow these rules.

Locals in the [U.A.E.](#) don't use their left hands to eat; neither touching their food with their left hand, nor even placing their left hand on the table. You will also notice that locals never place their feet on a foot rest or cross their legs since it's considered rude to show the bottom of your foot to another person. Also, many locals won't eat with people of the opposite sex, this is especially true in public restaurants among conservative families. In fact, it is considered improper for a man to even acknowledge or touch a woman unless you are introduced by a man and she offers you her hand.

Generally speaking, dining in the [U.A.E.](#) is more formal than in many parts of the world, particularly in business situations and this begins with dress and appearance. Always arrive on time and don't ever order alcoholic beverages since most Muslims don't drink. Dinners are consumed using continental manners, meaning their knife is in the right hand and the fork in the left. Try to avoid the month of Ramadan as well since Muslims don't eat or drink during the sunlight hours during this month and most people prefer dining with family each night when the day's fast has finished.

Although the [Emiratis](#) are masters at adapting to their guest's customs and are used to foreigners in the cities of [Dubai](#) and Abu Dhabi, it is still good manners to adjust to their customs. However, as you will quickly notice, the majority of the people that live in the U.A.E. are not Emiratis. For this reason, the best advice is to follow the lead of

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your host. If you have a [European](#) or [North American](#) host they may follow their local dining customs, which is why the default dining etiquette is to follow formal protocol.

## History & Influences

Before oil was discovered in the [United Arab Emirates](#) the country was viewed by many as little more than a desert with a few sleepy port villages, so the U.A.E. received very little outside influence. During this time the nomadic desert dwellers, the Bedouin, ate little more than camel's milk (and milk byproducts) and dates. Those on the coast ate more breads, rice, fish, and dairy, since some areas supported cultivation.

After the discovery of oil in the mid-1900s the country "opened up" and their food changed dramatically. For the most part, the local population in the [U.A.E.](#) eats a diet similar to the Levantine diet, consisting of meats (but no pork), dairy, and breads in conjunction with fruits or vegetables in various forms, like hummus.

However, the country is an immigrant, or foreign worker destination and each group arrived with their own foods. While few groups arrived in such large numbers to forever alter the diet, the substantial Indian and European populations have created enough demand to make Indian and fusion restaurants very popular, especially in the cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

## Staple Foods

The [United Arab Emirates](#) doesn't have any true staple foods anymore. Historically their staple foods consisted of camel's milk and dates, but as urbanization and immigration occurred this has changed significantly. Today *lavash* (thin bread) and rice tend to be as close as the country comes to a staple.

## Regional Varieties & Specialties

**Falafel:** mashed chickpeas (garbanzo beans) deep fried and served on bread with fresh vegetables like tomatoes and onions

**Hummus:** chickpeas (garbanzo beans) mashed with lemon juice, garlic, and olive oil among other seasonings

**Shwarma:** seasoned meat (usually lamb or chicken) served in *lavash* (thin bread) and at times topped with vegetables or a sauce

## Drinks

Perhaps the most authentic of beverages in the [United Arab Emirates](#) is *Ayranser*, a yogurt-based drink. Coffee, particularly strong coffee is also growing in popularity.

As a primarily Muslim country, alcohol can only be purchased in hotels or at specialty stores by foreigners living in the [United Arab Emirates](#).

# Practical Information

## Visas

Many foreign nationals need a visa to enter the [United Arab Emirates](#), however the requirements for citizens of different nationalities varies. To learn more about who need visas, what type of visa is needed, what requirements are needed to obtain a visa, and visa costs, please visit the [U.A.E.'s Ministry of Foreign Affairs Official Website](#).

## Health & Insurance

Every part of the world has different health concerns and diseases, including the [United Arab Emirates](#). Before traveling, consult with a physician to learn more about your destination and what steps you can take to prevent illness. At the time of writing, the U.A.E. required proof of having received a Yellow Fever vaccination if you are arriving from any Yellow Fever country and this law is strictly enforced due to their large migrant workforce. They require that you show proof of having been vaccinated upon arrive at the airport. Additionally, a number of other immunizations are strongly recommended for travel to the U.A.E.

Many health insurance providers don't cover health care that is provided outside your home country. Before going abroad check with your health insurance to see if they cover international care. If not, consider purchasing an international medical insurance option, preferably from a company that specializes in international medical insurance.

## Transportation

Unless you're on an organized tour or working with a travel agent, you will have to arrange some transportation. The below links can greatly help you start your planning, first by finding a flight to the [U.A.E.](#),

then with domestic airlines and car rental agencies. If you don't know where to begin, try the "Flight & Rental Car Search Sites" to learn competitor's prices during your trip.

**Largest International Airlines:** [Air France](#), [American Airlines](#); [British Airways](#); [Cathay Pacific](#); [China Southern Airlines](#); [Delta](#); [Emirates](#); [KLM](#); [LAN](#); [Lufthansa](#); [Qantas](#); [Singapore Airlines](#); [United Airlines](#).

**Largest Emirati Airline:** [Emirates](#)

**Largest Rental Car Agencies in the U.A.E.:** [Avis](#); [Budget](#); [Dollar](#); [Europcar](#); [Hertz](#); & [Thrifty](#)

**Flight & Rental Car Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Farecast.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

## Housing

Housing options are numerous in most tourist destinations, but every individual seeks out something different when it comes to housing. The below links should help you get started, with low- to high-end hotels, hostels, and camping options.

**Popular International Hotel Conglomerates:** [Accor Group](#) (various price ranges); [Choice Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range); [Hilton](#) (various price ranges); [Hyatt](#) (high-end to resorts); [InterContinental Group](#) (mid- to high-price range); [Marriott Family](#) (various price ranges); [Starwood Hotels](#) (high-end); [Wyndham Hotels](#) (low- to mid-price range).

**Hotel Search Sites:** [Expedia.com](#); [Kayak.com](#); [Orbitz.com](#); & [Travelocity.com](#).

**Hostels:** Although there are many hostel websites, some of the most popular and reputable include [hostels.com](#), [hostelworld.com](#), & [hostelbookers.com](#).

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**Camping:** Camping is not recommended in the U.A.E., which is primarily either desert or city unless you're on an organized desert trek, where the local guides know which locations are safe to camp at.

## Opening Hours, Expenses, & Tipping

The [U.A.E.](#) is used to tourists and ex-patriots so its open hours are from about 8:00-9:00 am to about 6:00 pm or later, depending on the service. Internet cafes, for example tend to be open until midnight or 24 hours so workers in the country can check it after work. As a Muslim country, the U.A.E.'s weekend falls on Friday and Saturday, but due to the foreign influence this only means hours are shortened on these days (some places will close on Fridays) and most business takes place Sunday-Thursday.

The one time of the year that shops and restaurants are closed more often than not is during Ramadan (ninth month of the Islamic calendar, which rotates every year compared to the Gregorian calendar), when fasting is required from sunrise to sunset. Due to this Islamic requirement, most shops close down and it can be difficult to find an open restaurant anywhere outside major hotels catering to tourists.

The [U.A.E.](#), especially [Dubai](#) and Abu Dhabi is expensive and there is no way around this. Unlike many other countries, the U.A.E.'s tourist sites might be the cheapest part of your trip and places like the Dubai Museum, Dubai's most popular tourist attraction, only costs 3 dirhams (\$1). Transportation costs are also fairly reasonable. Getting to Dubai tends to get cheaper each year as the city has become an international transportation hub, but other destinations are more expensive. Taxis are also at western prices, although negotiating hourly rates can save some money and the public transportation networks in Dubai and Abu Dhabi are very efficient and affordable (average about 5 dirhams (\$1.50) for a one way ticket). However hostels begin at about 150 dirhams (\$45) and most low end hotels are 375 dirhams (\$107). For anything mid-range or higher, prices begin at 500 dirhams (\$150). During the months of December and January this prices jump even

further in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, but in the middle of the summer you'll be able to find deals. Unless you plan on eating from the grocery store, even quick eat restaurants begin at about 30 dirhams (\$12), but again, most restaurants are twice that.

Tipping in the [U.A.E.](#) is common and expected, especially in [Dubai](#) and Abu Dhabi. Rates are roughly equivalent to [Europe](#): 10% for food service, 3-5 Dh (\$1.00-1.50) per bag for a bell hop, and for taxi drivers, round up. Since exchange booths are common in [Dubai](#) and Abu Dhabi, tipping in US dollars or Euros is accepted without any fuss, although tipping in the local currency remains the best option.

## Crime & Safety

The [U.A.E.](#) is arguably the safest Middle Eastern destination and crime in the country is extraordinarily low. The two greatest threats come from traffic (both driving and crossing the roads on foot) and swimming. The currents in the Persian Gulf can be unpredictable and there is rarely a life guard on duty.

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