

## **Background of Dubai**

Dubai has become known as 'The desert's most exciting city'. Situated on the north-east coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Dubai is the second largest of the seven territories that make up the United Arab Emirates (UAE). As the gateway between Europe and Asia, the city retains a genuine Islamic culture, while successfully embracing the liberal values that characterize the western world. This uniquely multi-cultural society is now home to residents from almost 200 countries across the globe.

### **Culture and Customs**

Cultural practices in Dubai are directly aligned to the Muslim faith, which is the national religion of the UAE. The attire, cuisine and lifestyle of the Emirati people all reflect the influences of the country's Islamic heritage. Nevertheless, Dubai is open and welcoming to other cultures and faiths, and citizens of many nations seamlessly coexist in a trouble free environment.

There are large Christian, Hindi, Sikh, Buddhist and other religious communities practicing openly throughout the UAE. While alcohol and pork products are prohibited in Islam, they are available to non-Muslims in specific outlets across Dubai. The Islamic dress code is practiced by the Emirati population, but Dubai's large expatriate community means that western-style clothing is commonplace.

### **Weather**

With a warm desert climate, the sun shines almost every day of the year in Dubai. Summers can be extremely hot and humid, and temperatures up to 48°C have been recorded in August. However, for the majority of the year the weather is pleasant, with a mean daily temperature of 20 - 25°C between November and April. Rainfall is rare, with only around three inches of precipitation a year, mainly in January and February.

### **Language**

The official language of the UAE is Arabic, although the cultural mix of the expatriate community means that you will also hear English, Hindi, Urdu, Malayalam and Tagalog widely spoken. English is commonplace as a second language and is often used alongside Arabic in official channels of communication. English is also used extensively in the corporate sector and service industries and while some knowledge of Arabic is always appreciated, it is not generally necessary in order to do business.

### **Dress Code**

Local dress is common amongst Emiratis but there is no requirement for expats to follow suit. Some establishments request that guests dress conservatively – generally with shoulders and knees covered – out of respect for local customs. This is a good practice to follow when out in public generally. Bathing suits are acceptable on the beach but beyond that you should always dress with the local culture in mind.

### **Transportation**

Dubai has an efficient and cost-effective public transport system that connects the 4,110 square kilometers of the city. More than 700 scheduled bus services operate across 79 routes serving the main residential and commercial districts of Dubai. Buses run regularly during the day from 6am and night buses operate every 30 minutes from 11.30pm until the morning service resumes.

The Dubai Metro currently operates two lines, with trains running every few minutes between 6am and midnight Saturday – Thursday. The service commences later in the day on Friday but continues until 1am Saturday morning. Feeder buses are available to reach the metro stations from outlying locations.

Taxis are the most frequently used form of transport in Dubai with over 7,500 vehicles operating across the city. The Roads and Transport Authority ensures a fixed fare structure is in place for all government-operated cars and designated 'ladies taxis' are provided for women preferring a female driver service.

Obtaining a driving license of your own is possible but involves a range of different procedures depending upon your visa status and the origin of any home country license you may have.

### **Shopping**

Dubai is becoming known as one of the world's greatest shopping destinations, with a vast range of chain and independent stores offering a diverse collection of consumer products. The city is home to the world's largest shopping centre – the Dubai Mall – where you will find a host of international branded goods at high street prices. For a different shopping experience, a wide range of goods can be found in the marketplace-style souks or the bustling streets of Karama, where bargaining is commonplace.

Dubai hosts two major shopping events each year – the Dubai Shopping Festival (January, February) and the Dubai Summer Surprises (June, July, August). Savings are offered by most stores and there are various competitions and activities throughout.

### **Restaurants and Nightlife**

The restaurants in Dubai are as diverse as the city's cultural fabric. You can dine out on almost any budget and experience an eclectic range of food from across the globe. Outdoor dining is common in the cooler months, providing a pleasant atmosphere to catch up with friends.

Establishments serving alcohol require a special license and for the most part this is restricted to bars and restaurants located in hotels and their associated complexes. Outside of these venues alcohol is not served, although as a permanent resident it is possible to acquire a permit to purchase liquor from licensed shops.

### **Hours of Business**

Businesses are increasingly operating a straight shift, usually starting between 8 and 9am and finishing between 5 and 6pm. If you have to attend to any matters with a Government department or Embassy, you will need to visit them between 7.30am and 2.30pm. Government offices are closed for the weekend on Friday and Saturday and many private companies also observe this two day weekend.

Most shopping malls are open between 10am and 10pm, sometimes later, and there are a number of supermarkets operating 24 hours a day.

### **Public Holidays**

Many of the UAE's public holidays are linked to Muslim festivals, which are determined by the lunar cycle. As the Islamic calendar is slightly different to the Gregorian calendar, with 354 or 355 days rather than 365 or 366, the dates of certain holidays change annually. The fixed public holidays are New Year's Day (1st January) and UAE National Day (2nd December). All other holidays are confirmed by the sighting of the moon and are often announced just a day or two before the event.

While Dubai has developed a reputation for the luxury lifestyle, it is possible to live economically if you shop wisely and budget accordingly. Basic products and services are reasonably priced and there are regular sales and promotions on consumer goods. The average cost of some everyday items and services is provided below.

#### **Food**

Loaf of bread	AED 5
Water (1.5 litre)	AED 1.50
Can of soft drink	AED 1.50
Dozen eggs	AED 10
Milk (1 litre)	AED 7
Rice (1 kg)	AED 10
Breakfast cereal (750g)	AED 15
Takeaway burger	AED 15

#### **Transport**

Taxi (5km trip)	AED 10.50
Metro trip (1 zone, standard fare)	AED 2.50
Car Hire (per week)	AED 600
Petrol (per litre)	AED 1.72

#### **Entertainment**

Cinema Ticket	AED 35
New release DVD	AED 65
International newspaper	AED 10
House wine (per glass)	AED 35
Pint of beer	AED 35

#### **Services**

Dry cleaning (1 shirt/blouse)	AED 8
Domestic cleaner (per hour)	AED 35
Mobile to mobile call (1 minute local)	AED 0.60
Text message (local)	AED 0.18