UAE RULES · BEFORE-YOU-GO GUIDE

Behaviour, dress code and Ramadan

What to wear, how to behave in public and in mosques, Ramadan, alcohol, photos and drones, and which medicines you can bring.

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Dress code and etiquette

Every day

- Swimwear is fine at the beach and the pool, but not in malls or business districts.
- Dress more modestly for historical and cultural sites.
- In government offices in Abu Dhabi it's best to cover your shoulders and legs.

Mosques

- Non-Muslims can visit the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi, Jumeirah Mosque in Dubai and Al Bidya Mosque in Fujairah.
- Clothes must cover shoulders, arms and knees. Women cover their hair.

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

- Long, loose clothes down to the ankles for men and women. Women: sleeves to the wrist and a headscarf; nothing see-through, tight or sleeveless.
- Entry for visitors from abroad is AED 10. Book an online access pass in advance.
- Open daily 09:00–20:30 (last entry 20:00). On Friday it's closed from 11:30 to 14:30.
- Photos only at the marked photo spots. No food (water is fine), no smoking or vaping, no displays of affection.

Book a visit: szgmc.gov.ae

Jumeirah Mosque, Dubai

Guided visits every day except Friday at 10:00 and 14:00, AED 45 per person. No booking needed: register 30 minutes before.

In public

- Holding hands is fine. Avoid more intimate displays of affection in public.
- Ask before you photograph people, especially women.
- UAE cybercrime law (Federal Decree-Law No. 34 of 2021) also covers what you post online.

Ramadan

When

Ramadan starts when the new crescent moon is sighted and lasts 29–30 days. Each year it begins about 11 days earlier than the year before, so check the dates before your trip.

What changes

- Non-Muslims don't have to fast.
- Parks, attractions, cultural sites and restaurants stay open. Some restaurants change their hours or close during the day, but all open at iftar, the evening meal after sunset.
- Rules differ between emirates. In Abu Dhabi visitors are asked not to eat, drink or smoke in public during daylight. To be safe, do the same anywhere in the UAE.
- Dress more modestly than usual.
- Working hours are cut by two hours a day. The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque has special Ramadan hours.

A greeting you'll hear: “Ramadan kareem”.

Alcohol and the law

Alcohol

- Non-Muslim adults aged 21 and over can drink in licensed hotels, bars and restaurants. In Abu Dhabi 21 is also the age to buy alcohol.
- In Abu Dhabi drinking in public places outside licensed venues is prohibited.
- Never drive after drinking: driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs is a serious offence under UAE traffic law.
- Duty-free on arrival: up to 4 litres of alcohol or 2 cartons of beer, and 200 cigarettes.

Drugs and vapes

- The UAE has zero tolerance for recreational drugs. Bringing in narcotics is banned.
- Importing e-cigarettes and electronic shisha is restricted.
- Smoking is banned in closed public places and in a car with a child under 12.

Some medicines also count as controlled: see “Medicines”.

Photos and drones

Photos

- Normal tourist photos are fine. Ask before photographing people, especially women.
- Don't photograph government buildings, military sites, ports and airports.
- Cameras may be banned in areas for women and children only.
- In the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque take photos only at the marked photo spots.

Drones

- Under federal rules (GCAA) a recreational drone pilot must be registered, 18+ and a UAE resident, and recreational drones may not carry cameras.
- Dubai has its own rules (DCAA): tourists can fly only after registering with DCAA, with a drone under 2.5 kg, in approved zones only.
- Flying without registration is not allowed. For aerial shots, book a helicopter or balloon flight instead.

Medicines

- Prescribed medicines for your own use are allowed. Bring your doctor's note.
- Some medicines (narcotic and psychotropic, and other controlled ones) can't be brought in freely: they need a permit.
- The permit is issued online by the Emirates Drug Establishment (EDE). For visitors it's optional, free and takes 1 working day.
- Controlled medicines: no more than a 3-month supply, with a prescription issued within the last 3 months and a medical report from the last year, both stamped by the clinic.
- Ordinary personal medicines: up to a 6-month supply.
- Transit passengers who don't leave the airport don't need approval.

Apply for a permit (EDE) · List of controlled medicines (PDF)

Not sure about a medicine? Check the list before you fly: the rules are strict.

Also good to know

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- During Ramadan, non-Muslims can eat in shopping malls, where restaurants and food courts set aside areas away from people who are fasting. [1]
- In Dubai during Ramadan you can go to the beach and to restaurants, which stay open all day for those not fasting. Beachwear is fine at hotel beaches and pools. [2]
- Abu Dhabi during Ramadan: no live music or dancing (nightclubs usually close for the month), alcohol is sold only after dusk. Eating or drinking in public in daytime may lead to an official complaint. [3]
- Abu Dhabi in Ramadan: covering shoulders and knees in the city, especially in malls, is respectful but not mandatory. At the beach or pool dress as usual. [4]
- Dubai: holding hands is fine, but kissing and hugging in public areas is not permitted. [5]
- Dubai Tourism Police advise against public displays of affection such as kissing, as they may be considered socially inappropriate. [6]
- Dubai has no strict dress code. Swimwear suits beaches, waterparks and pools, but not malls or business districts; dress modestly in museums, government buildings and heritage areas. [7]
- Dubai: alcohol is served only in licensed venues to over-21s. Drunk and disorderly behaviour and drink driving are not acceptable; illegal drugs are strictly prohibited. [5]
- Insulting someone is a criminal offence: in front of others, by phone and even in a private message. Online and on social media the penalty is harsher (see Fines). [8]
- Indecent acts in public and anything 'against public morals' are punishable. The law expressly counts gestures and movements in a public place as public acts. [9]
- Photographing other people without consent, posting their photos, or filming accident victims or the dead breaks the cybercrime law. [10]
- Smoking is banned in enclosed public places, places of worship, schools and universities, health and sports facilities. In Dubai, shisha is banned in parks, on beaches and in public recreational areas. [11]
- Dubai Tourism Police: go hiking or into the desert in groups and always pack a first-aid kit. [6]

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SOS

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999, 998 and 997 work across all seven emirates.

This is reference information, not legal advice. Rules and fines can change: check the linked official source before you travel.