

A Guide to Local Culture & Customs

A short, practical guide to help you feel at ease and travel respectfully during your stay — prepared as a courtesy for our guests.

Dubai is one of the most welcoming and cosmopolitan cities in the world, home to residents from over 200 nationalities. It is also part of the United Arab Emirates, a country whose customs are rooted in Islamic tradition and Emirati heritage. Visitors are given a great deal of warmth and flexibility here — and a little cultural awareness goes a long way in making your visit even more rewarding, both for you and for the community hosting you.

Core Values & Beliefs

A few underlying values shape most of what follows, and understanding them makes the rest of this guide easier to apply naturally rather than as a list of rules.

- **Faith:** Islam is woven into daily life — prayer times, the Friday holiday, Ramadan, and public conduct standards all stem from it. Treating religion with respect, even in casual conversation, matters a great deal.
- **Family & community:** Family ties and elders are held in high regard. Age and seniority generally earn deference — greet or address the eldest or most senior person in a group first.
- **Hospitality:** Generosity toward guests is a point of pride in Emirati culture. Don't be surprised by warmth, small gestures of welcome, or an invitation to tea or coffee — accepting graciously, even briefly, is appreciated.
- **Honor & modesty:** Public reputation and dignity carry weight, for individuals and families alike. Avoid actions that could embarrass someone in front of others — public criticism, confrontation or raised voices are best handled privately and calmly.
- **Privacy:** Emirati family life is largely private. Personal questions about someone's wife, daughters or home life are best avoided; "how is your family" as a general pleasantry is fine.

Greetings & a Few Words of Arabic

Arabic is the official language, though English is spoken almost everywhere.

A greeting in Arabic is always warmly received.

Marhaba	Hello
Sabah al-khair	Good morning
Shukran	Thank you
Afwan	You're welcome / excuse me
Ma'a salama	Goodbye

A handshake is common, though it's courteous to let the other person offer their hand first, particularly between men and women in more traditional settings.

Verbal Communication

- Conversation tends to be warm, indirect and relationship-first — expect some small talk before business, and don't be surprised if a direct "no" is softened into "maybe" or "I'll try."
- Compliments on hospitality, food or the country are genuinely welcomed; sarcasm or blunt criticism of local customs, religion, the UAE leadership or the royal family is not — and can carry legal consequences, not just social awkwardness.
- Keep humor light around religion, politics and gender roles; jokes that land elsewhere may not translate well here.
- A calm, unhurried tone is valued — raised voices or visible frustration, even when justified, tend to be counterproductive and are seen as a loss of composure.
- Titles matter: using "Sir," "Madam," or an honorific with a name (e.g. "Mr. Ahmed") reads as respectful, especially with elders or officials.

Non-Verbal Behavior & Gestures

- Use the right hand (or both hands) for eating, greeting, handing over money, gifts or business cards — the left hand is traditionally considered unclean for these purposes.
- Avoid pointing the sole of your foot or shoe at someone, and try not to display the soles of your feet when seated — this is considered disrespectful.
- In more traditional or religious settings, physical greetings between men and women are best initiated by the woman, or replaced with a hand-over-heart nod if in doubt.
- Personal space and eye contact norms vary by context and gender; a warm but measured gaze is safest, particularly in mixed-gender interactions.
- The thumbs-up gesture is understood positively here, unlike in some neighboring cultures — but beckoning someone with a single finger, or pointing directly at a person, is considered rude.
- Public displays of affection beyond hand-holding (kissing, prolonged embraces) are inappropriate in public, and always ask before photographing anyone, especially Emirati nationals.

Dress Code

Dubai is fashion-forward and relaxed about clothing in most tourist areas, hotels, beaches and malls — but modesty is appreciated in public spaces, and required in religious and government sites.

- At the beach, pool or spa: swimwear is perfectly fine.
- In malls, restaurants and public areas: shoulders and knees covered is a respectful default; avoid see-through fabric or offensive slogans.
- At mosques or heritage sites: arms, legs and hair (for women) should be fully covered — a light scarf is handy to carry.
- Topless sunbathing is not permitted anywhere, including private beach clubs.

During Ramadan

If your stay falls during the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims across the city fast from sunrise to sunset. As a courtesy, please avoid eating, drinking or smoking in public during daylight hours — hotel restaurants and in-room dining remain available throughout. Evenings come alive with Iftar gatherings, and the atmosphere

is festive rather than restrictive — a wonderful time to experience local hospitality.

A couple of related practicalities: avoid photographing government buildings or official sites, and note that swearing, rude gestures and public intoxication can carry real legal penalties here, not just social disapproval.

Alcohol

Alcohol is served to guests aged 21+ in licensed hotel restaurants, bars and lounges. It should not be consumed in public spaces outside these venues, and driving after drinking carries zero tolerance. A temporary licence is only needed to purchase alcohol for private, off-site consumption — this does not apply to enjoying a drink at a licensed venue during your stay.

Religion in Daily Life

You'll notice five daily call-to-prayer moments broadcast from mosques across the city, and staff or fellow guests may step away briefly for prayer — this is a normal part of the day. Friday is the traditional day of congregational prayer, and some venues adjust their hours around midday.

Dining & Everyday Courtesies

- The right hand is traditionally used for eating, greeting and handing over items.
- Tipping isn't mandatory but is genuinely appreciated — around 10% at restaurants, and small tips for taxi drivers and hotel staff.
- Shoes are typically removed before entering a mosque, and often in private homes.
- Fridays are the weekend equivalent for many local businesses and government offices.

Our team is always delighted to answer any questions about local customs during your stay — please don't hesitate to ask at the front desk or concierge. We hope this guide helps you feel at home while discovering the warmth of Emirati hospitality.

With warm regards, and a wonderful stay ahead.