Emirates 101
Your ultimate guide to everything Emirati

WELCOME

AIR MAIL
Emirates 101 is a reference guide created specifically for tourists and expatriates who come to the UAE and have no, or very little knowledge of the UAE, culture, customs, and lifestyle.

Emirates 101 handbook includes details, facts and information about the Emirates: Emirati traditions, Emirati customs, and Emirati lifestyle.

The name *Emirates 101* was chosen as it best represents the contents of the publication. The word *Emirates* was chosen because the handbook focuses on the UAE and its culture and lifestyle. *101* was added to portray to the tourists and expatriates that all the basic information that they need could be in the handbook.

For further information about *Emirates 101* join our Facebook group *Emirates 101* and share your thoughts with everyone, or send an email to: *Emirates.101.feedback@gmail.com*

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Culture

1. **Fact Sheet**

- The UAE consists of seven emirates: Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ajman, Ra’s Al-Khaimah, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain.
- These emirates united in the year 1971.
- Population: 4.4 million (recorded in 2007)
- Official languages: Arabic and English.
- Other spoken languages: Urdu, Hindi, Persian
- Religion: Islam (96%), Hinduism, Christianity
- Ethnic groups: Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Egyptian, Jordanian, Iranian, Filipino, other Arabs
- Climate: hot, humid and low annual rainfall
- Flag colors: red, green white and black
- Note: Nationals make up only 15-20% of the total population.

2. **How do people greet each other?**

Foreigners may notice that sometimes Emirati men greet each other by touching their noses to one another. This is the traditional way of greeting among Emirati men, which usually takes place between Emiratis only.

However, the mainstream greeting in the UAE is the handshake. If you are a man who is introduced to an Arab woman, it’s advisable not to shake hands with her unless she extends her hand for a handshake; this also applies for a woman meeting a man.

3. **Why do women in the UAE wear black abayas and men wear white kandooras?**

This is a cultural practice. Wearing black or white for men or women is not part of the Islamic religion and is not obligatory. Originally men wore white because it reflected heat as they spent a lot of
4. **Can we visit a mosque?**
Visitors including non-Muslims are allowed to visit mosques via tour operators that can organize such visits. Random visits to mosques especially during prayer time are inappropriate.

5. **Why are restaurants and bars closed during the month of Ramadan?**
Ramadan is the holy month for Muslims. During this month, Muslims refrain from eating or drinking from dawn to dusk. Thus, as a sign of respect, some restaurants remain closed during daylight. However, other restaurants stay open, but provide only takeout food. Some hotels provide meals during daylight hours in places that are not exposed to the public.

Non-Muslims are advised to avoid eating, drinking, and smoking in public places.
6. **Concept of Time:**
When meeting with an Emirati, the concept of time might differ. If you set up a meeting at 2 p.m., do not feel offended if your Emirati guest arrives late, such as 2:30 p.m. The Emirati lifestyle is much more relaxed and uses time more flexibly.

7. **What are wind towers and what are they used for?**
Wind towers are traditional air-conditioners. They are architectural elements that are mainly found in traditional houses. They catch the cool breeze above the ground level and direct it downward into the building.

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**Windtower**

Photo Credit: by www.ksenyaprekovic.com
8. **Emirati Food:**

Harees can be considered the national dish of the UAE. Ground wheat and meat (goat or mutton) are cooked together over a low fire. The creamy mixture is “beaten” with a piece of wood called a “midrib.”

Madhroobah is a dish named after the Arabic word for “beaten.” It consists of fish/chicken mixed with raw bread dough to thicken the mixture of the dish.

Machbous consists of meat and rice, which is cooked with onions and spices specific to the Middle East region called biz’aar. It consists of loomi (dried lime) and other spices such as cardamom, turmeric, clove and nutmeg.

Khanfaroush is a yeast dish made from dried ground rice or flour and is mixed with cardamom, saffron, rosewater, eggs and sugar. After the batter rises, it is dipped in oil to fry.

Fareed (or thareed) is moist flat bread that is soaked in a mutton-flavored broth. Meat stew and vegetables are usually added on top of the bread.

Khameer is a yeasted flatbread that contains sugar and date paste and is baked over burning coals.

Luqaimat is derived from the Arabic word “luqma” which means “mouthfuls”. They are considered as national doughnuts that are covered with honey.

Chabab is a sweet pancake that can be topped with almost anything.
9. **Emirati Handicrafts:**

**Telli**
Telli is a form of embroidery that is used with twisting colored threads. It is usually used to decorate the bodice and sleeves of the Emirati traditional dress.

**Khoos** (*The weaving of palm fronds*)
Woven palm fronds were used to make various items such as baskets, fans and floor coverings.

Examples:
A **makabbah**, once was considered essential in the Emirati households, is a woven cone used to cover food from insects.

A **suroud** is a round mat on which food dishes are placed.

An **arish** is a simple house built from palm trunks and fronds. It remained relatively cool during the heat of the day and provided basic shelter.
Lifestyle

10. **Is there a code for dressing in public?**

The UAE is a cosmopolitan country where people from all walks of life are welcome to visit. However, it’s advisable for visitors to dress modestly in public places. Revealing clothing such as mini skirts, shorts and skimpy shirts are frowned upon and are considered offensive. Certain body parts should be covered, such as shoulders, midriff, cleavage, and thighs.

In places such as spas and gyms, visitors are also expected to wear proper clothing, and change their clothes in designated changing rooms.

11. **What exactly is the stance on unmarried couples living together in Dubai?**

The UAE law forbids unmarried people from living together. Doing so could lead to dealing with the authorities. This is considered illegal and may result in a jail sentence followed by deportation.

12. **Are Public Displays of Affection (PDAs) acceptable?**

No. Due to the UAE being an Islamic country, PDAs are socially unacceptable and if caught doing so could lead to dealing with the authorities. This could include being fined and in extreme cases given a jail sentence and/or deportation.

13. **Is sunbathing allowed on public beaches?**

Yes, as long as they do not violate any laws, such as being topless or fully nude.
14. **What kind of clothing is considered revealing, and should be avoided?**

Shoulders are preferred to be covered. Midriffs, cleavage and full legs are to be avoided in public places. All type of beachwear including bikinis is acceptable, but only on the beach or by the pool, and not in public places such as shopping malls or restaurants and cafés.

Note that women in Sharjah are not allowed to wear swimsuits on public beaches.

15. **Does making obscene hand signs to others acceptable?**

No, they are not and anyone caught doing so may have to deal with the authorities. This is considered illegal and may result in a jail sentence followed by deportation.

16. **Where can I buy pork?**

The most common place to buy pork is in Spinney’s supermarkets. A counter is clearly marked in a certain designated area that is separate from the main butcher counter.

17. **Can I buy Alcohol?**

Yes, alcohol can be purchased after filling out a form for obtaining alcohol license through one of the local alcohol shops in the UAE. A yearly fee of AED 200 is required.

18. **Are there rules regarding alcohol in the UAE?**

Alcohol consumption is strictly forbidden in unauthorized places, such as malls, and streets. Also, driving under the influence of alcohol is a breach of the UAE law.
19. **If I have a friend that lives in Dubai, can I use their alcohol license?**
No, you should have your own alcohol license.

20. **Where can I drink alcohol in public?**
Alcohol can be consumed at bars, nightclubs, hotels and certain restaurants that offer them. You can also drink in the privacy of your home. The consumption of alcohol on public property (i.e. public parks, streets and shopping malls) is illegal.

21. **What can I expect if I was invited to an Emirati wedding?**
Emiratis have separate weddings for ladies and men. The ladies wedding reception usually starts at 8:30 p.m., but guests start arriving at around 9 p.m. Dinner is then served between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m.

The ladies wedding can last till 1 a.m. but guests can leave anytime after dinner is served.

The men’s weddings are slightly different. The reception usually starts at 8:30 p.m. and that is when the guests start arriving. Dinner is then served at around 9:30 p.m. and 10 p.m. The wedding lasts till 11 p.m. but guests are not obliged to stay till then.

Note that you should also avoid taking photographs as it is strictly forbidden especially at the ladies weddings.

22. **Where can I get my driver’s license?**
If you wish to get your UAE driver’s license, contact and visit the following driving schools:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institute</th>
<th>Website</th>
<th>Telephone Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emirates Driving Institute</td>
<td><a href="http://www.edi-uae.com">www.edi-uae.com</a></td>
<td>+971 4-263-1100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belhasa Driving Center</td>
<td><a href="http://www.bdc.ae">www.bdc.ae</a></td>
<td>+971 4-324-3535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Galadari Motor Driving Centre</td>
<td><a href="http://www.fndi.ae">http://www.fndi.ae</a></td>
<td>+971-9-2222333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To apply for a driving license you should have:
• Original Passport (valid UAE residence visa)
• 2 Passport Copies
• Eye Test Receipt
• 7 Photographs (passport size)
• No Objection Letter from Sponsor

Some nationalities may use their international driving license in the UAE. For more information please contact any of the driving institutes mentioned above.

23. Can I smoke in a shopping mall?
Smoking is not allowed in shopping malls, however, there are designated smoking areas near the mall entrances as well as in the parking lots.

24. Can I smoke in stand-alone restaurants and cafés?
Yes, as long as you request to be seated in the smoking section.

25. How should I act if I am invited to a UAE national’s home?
Visitors are expected to take their shoes off before entering the house. They should also avoid pointing the soles of their feet in anyone’s direction, as this is considered offensive. One should also use his/her right hand if he/she is handed anything, such as food or coffee.

The host will most likely keep offering more food and drink. It’s ok to have more than one offering. If one is full, it’s acceptable to refuse any more offerings politely, by telling them that you are satisfied.

26. Are the people in the UAE diverse?
Seventy five percent of the population in the UAE consists of expatriates. Differences are widely accepted and people live in harmony despite their differences. Although the UAE is a Muslim country, alcohol is served in many places that are licensed to do so, such as hotels and some restaurants.
27. **What is the official language used in the UAE?**
Arabic is the official language. But, English is widely spoken among nationals and expatriates although in varying degrees. English is also the official language used in private sector companies.

28. **How close can I stand or sit beside a UAE national?**
Personal space is key especially between people of the opposite sex. It’s considered offensive to stand too close or sit next to a person of the opposite sex. However, it’s acceptable for people from the same sex to sit next to each other. In theatres and shows it’s acceptable to sit next to a person from the opposite sex due to the seating arrangements.

29. **How do I get around the UAE?**
The main mode of transportation in the UAE is by car. Taxis, and buses, are also available throughout the Emirates. The metro and the water taxi could also be used if you are staying in Dubai.
30. **What are the car rental prices in the UAE?**
Car rental prices start at around 150 AED for a small manual car, and may vary depending on the car type and rental period. Rates usually fall between AED 107 to AED 232 per day for a week and even more if the car is rented for a month.

To be able to hire a car, one should have an international drivers license and two-passport sized photos.

Some car rental companies are: Hertz Rent a Car, EuropCar, Avis, and Autolease Rent a Car.

31. **Can we take photographs?**
You can take photographs in public places. But, if you wish to take a picture of a UAE national of either a man or a woman you should ask permission before you do so. However, you should also avoid taking pictures of public buildings.

32. **What kinds of drugs are prohibited?**
Expatriates and tourists should take care if they are bringing with them drugs from other countries. Some drugs that are over-the-counter in some countries may be controlled drugs in the UAE.

If you’re bringing drugs with you, you should make sure of having a doctor’s prescription from a licensed doctor in the UAE. For those who received treatment abroad they should bring with them a report that details their illness and the treatment.

For a complete list of the banned drugs log on to the Ministry of Health (MOH) official website: www.moh.gov.ae
33. What are the shops and offices opening hours in the UAE?

Shops
Shops in the UAE are open from 9 a.m.-1 p.m. and 4 p.m.-9 p.m. But, shops in malls are open from 10 a.m. till 10 p.m., except on Fridays where they open at 1:30 p.m. Also, some supermarkets remain open for 24 hours.

Note that in Ras Al Khaima all shops are required to close during prayer time.

Offices
Government offices are open from 7:30 a.m. till 2:30 p.m. Private offices have longer working hours, usually from 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

All governmental offices close on Friday and Saturday, as well as most of the private offices with some exceptions.

34. What are the standards of food hygiene and water in the UAE?

The standards of food and water in the UAE are high especially in the large cities. However, you should take care while checking out smaller coffee shops and restaurants in the remote areas of the UAE. As for water, it’s usually produced by desalination, so it’s safe to drink.

35. How do we, expatriates, get child birth certificates?

On discharge the hospital issues a Birth Notification. The copy is given to the parents and the original is sent to the Ministry of Health (MOH) by the hospital.

The father should then present himself to the Department of Preventive Medicine, in addition to the following documents.
• Copy of the Birth Notification
• Original passports of both parents
• A passport copy of the mother’s and father’s passport
• Marriage certificate in case the father’s name is not mentioned in the mother’s passport.

Note that this should take place within 14 days of the birth.

Another visit is required to collect the original Arabic birth certificate, which should then be translated to English and confirmed by the Department of Preventive Medicine.

Once that is done the Ministry of Foreign Affairs should confirm both Arabic and English certificates.

The birth must then be registered at your embassy and an application for a passport should be done. Within 4 months of the birth, the passport should be delivered to the Department of Naturalization and Immigration to issue a residency visa.

The following documents are required by the Department of Naturalization and Immigration:

• Sponsor’s passport; original and copy
• Child’s passport; original and copy
• Child’s Birth Certificate; original and copy
• Photographs of the child
• Employment certificate or salary confirmation letter from employer
• 300 AED for processing the application
36. **What's the reason for highlighting pork items in buffets and menus in restaurants?**

The Islamic religion forbids the consumption of pork products. Thus, since the UAE is a Muslim country, restaurants that serve pork are required to highlight their pork items.

37. **Is the UAE a safe destination for tourists?**

The UAE is one of the safest tourism destinations in the world. However, it’s always a good idea to have travel insurance and to look after your possessions and yourself. The only hazard in the UAE is dangerous driving. Drivers should pay attention while driving, since some drivers tend to cut in front of others without signaling. Pedestrians should also be careful while crossing pedestrian lanes since stopping or slowing down by drivers is not guaranteed.

38. **What is the Dubai Shopping Festival?**

The Dubai Shopping Festival starts in January and lasts till February. It spans 32 days. The Global Village is the highlight of the festival and launches prior to the festival. It is an outdoor shopping and entertainment venue that sells products from around the world and includes amusement park rides and shows.

39. **What is Dubai Summer Surprises and when is it held?**

The Dubai Summer Surprises (DSS) is the main summer event in Dubai that targets children and is held during the summer months. It runs from June to August, spanning 65 days.

40. **Where can I find a UAE guide?**

There are countless city guides that can be found on the Internet. If you wish to have a personal guide or join a group tour, this can be organized via your hotel.
41. **Is there an official source for UAE tourist information?**

Yes, there is. Visitors can log on to any of the Emirates tourism authority websites. For Dubai tourism, tourist information can be obtained from the official website of the Department of Tourism and Commerce Marketing www.dubaitourism.ae. Information about Abu Dhabi tourism can be found in The Abu Dhabi Tourism Authority website www.abudhabitourism.ae, or on www.visitabudhabi.ae. Those interested will find information on culture and heritage, places to go, places to stay, shopping and entertainment and many more.

42. **How many tourists visit every year?**

The UAE has a large influx of tourists. 6.45 million tourists visited the UAE in 2007 alone.

43. **Shopping:**

Shopping is one of the main attractions in the UAE, especially Dubai. Indulge yourself in a shopping spree, where you can choose from a wide variety of glitzy shopping malls and traditional souqs (markets). The mix of old and new will leave you with a truly unforgettable shopping experience.

**Popular examples include:**

**Shopping Malls**
- Dubai Mall
- Mall of the Emirates
- Dubai Festival City
- IbnBattuta Mall

**Souqs (Market)**
- Spice souq
- Fabric souq
- Gold souq
- Plant souq

44. **Heritage Sites:**

**Dubai Museum (04 3531862)**

Al Fahidi fort houses the Dubai Museum. Exhibits of weapons, musical instruments, wooden boats, and ‘arish’ huts are displayed in the museum. The museum also has an underground section that has life-size examples of old souqs, old Arabic households, and a Quran school.
Bastakiya District
The Bastakiya district was originally an important trading location in Dubai. There you can view the famous wind towers that served as air-conditioners in the olden days; and let yourself be transported back in time, as you stroll in the narrow alleys of the district.

Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum House (04 3937139)
This Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum house was built in 1896 as the residence for the ruling family. The traditional building has four wind towers and a large courtyard in the center. This famous building is a living example of Emirati architecture.

45. Security:

Police Headquarters
The following are the police headquarters telephone numbers:

- Abu Dhabi: 02 4461461
- Dubai: 04 2292222
- Sharjah: 06 5631111
- Ajman: 06 7436000
- Umm al-Qaiwain: 06 5656662
- Ra’s al-Khaimah: 07 2333888
- Fujairah: 09 2370000

Dubai Police hotline (Al Ameen service): 8004888,
alalmeen@emirates.net.ae

Emergency Numbers
- Ambulance: 998 or 999
- Fire: 997
- Police: 999
- Coastguard: 04 3450520
- East Coast Coastguard: 09 2380380

Helicopter Service
Dialing 999 or 04 2821111 during an emergency, Dubai Police will send a police helicopter within 8 minutes.
46. *Most Popular Tourist Attractions:*

- Ski Dubai (Mall of the Emirates)
- Atlantis Resort (Palm Jumeirah)
- Burj Al Arab
- Burj Khalifa
- Bastakiya District
- Jumeirah Mosque
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