

# Heriot Watt University Dubai Pre-Visiting Awareness

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## Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is in the Middle East consisting of [seven emirates](#). Each with its unique culture, lifestyle and attractions. The UAE is known for its luxurious lifestyle, very modern infrastructure, and diverse workforce.

The UAE is an Islamic country, and it is crucial to respect their religion and traditions. Although the UAE is relatively liberal, there are still strict laws and regulations that you need to follow.

Dubai is located on the Persian Gulf coast of the UAE, right in the middle of the Arabian Desert and is increasingly becoming a hub for service industries such as Technology and Finance. In the past few years, the UAE has become a preferred hub for international travel, with Dubai International Airport being one of the busiest airports in the world. The UAE remains an attractive place with Tax Free salaries attracting many from all over the world.

To learn more about Dubai visit this page [All You Need to Know Before Traveling to Dubai | Visit Dubai](#)

## Time Zone

The time zone in the United Arab Emirates is Gulf Standard Time (GST), which is UTC+4 hours. There is no daylight-saving time in the UAE, so this time difference remains constant throughout the year. To convert GST to GMT (Greenwich Mean Time), you would subtract 4 hours. For example, if it is 12:00 PM (noon) GST, it is 8:00 AM GMT (note British Summer Time +1 hour).

## United Arab Emirates Currency

The currency of the United Arab Emirates is the UAE Dirham, abbreviated as AED.

## Visas

All visitors, except nationals of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Saudi Arabia) will need a visa to come to the UAE. Some nationalities qualify for automatic 30-day visa on arrival. It's important to verify regulations before travel. Have a look in this page to find out if you need to apply for a visa before you travel.

<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/visa-and-emirates-id/do-you-need-an-entry-permit-or-a-visa-to-enter-the-uae>

Heriot-Watt University Dubai sponsors Employment Visas for employees only, family members' visas are sponsored by the employees themselves. For visa assistance, contact the in-house visa team at [dubaivisa@hw.ac.uk](mailto:dubaivisa@hw.ac.uk)

Once all required documents are submitted to the visa team, the university will process your Employment Visa. Usually, an entry permit will be emailed to you prior to departure and upon arrival in the UAE, your Residence Visa application will begin and is managed by the in-house visa team, this takes approximately three weeks. The Residence Visa is valid for two years and allows you to sponsor your dependents.

Family members can enter the UAE on a Visit Visa and convert that to a Residence Visa, this process could take up to five weeks. It is recommended that the family arrive after you receive your Residence Visa to avoid additional steps and costs. Documents in other languages must be translated into English or Arabic before arrival.

For detailed information on Residence Visas for family members, please visit:

<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/visa-and-emirates-id/residence-visas/residence-visa-for-family-members>

## **Population**

Dubai has the largest population of the seven emirates. Most people in Dubai are expatriates, with UAE nationals being the minority. According to statistics, more than 80% of the population in Dubai is expatriates. See more stats on population on this portal

<https://www.dsc.gov.ae/en-us/Themes/Pages/Population-and-Vital-Statistics.aspx?Theme=42>

## **Climate**

The best time to visit is from October to April, with ideal temperatures for long, comfortable days at the beach and pleasant evenings outside. Temperatures range from a nighttime low of around 10°C in winter (Dec-Mar) to a daytime high of 49°C in the height of summer (Jun-Aug).

## **Language**

Dubai is a bilingual city, with road signs and building labels displayed in both Arabic and English. With over 80% of its population being expatriates from diverse backgrounds, communication

can sometimes require patience and understanding when interacting with residents from various cultures.

### **Laws and cultural restrictions**

Dubai's laws are a unique blend of Islamic law (Sharia) and civil law, reflecting the city's cultural and religious values. The legal framework emphasizes respect for religion, with strict regulations against actions deemed disrespectful to Islam, such as blasphemy or public displays of affection. Public behaviour is closely monitored. While alcohol is available in licensed venues, it is illegal to drink in public places. Dress codes are enforced in public areas, requiring modest attire, and traffic laws are rigorously upheld, with severe penalties for violations. Find out more about the Dubai Legislation in this page <https://dlp.dubai.gov.ae/en/Pages/default.aspx>

**Important:** National laws and practices relating to culture differ from those in place at HWU Scotland campuses. The following UK Government guidance is available to inform a visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/united-arab-emirates>

There are also strict legal restrictions impacting LGBT+ people in UAE, please refer to:

<https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice/united-arab-emirates/safety-and-security>

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/lesbian-gay-bisexual-and-transgender-foreign-travel-advice>

Please also refer to sections on Attire; Culture; Religion; and Public Behaviour within this guide.

### **Religion**

Islam plays a significant role in daily life in Dubai, with the call to prayer heard from mosques five times a day. Public places often have prayer rooms, and it's common to see people praying in various locations. Respectful behavior, such as avoiding walking in front of those praying, is important. The UAE is tolerant of other religions, with diverse places of worship present (e.g. Churches, Gurdwaras, Temples etc.).

### **Culture**

Dubai's culture is a dynamic fusion of traditional Emirati heritage and modern cosmopolitan influences, shaped by its rich Islamic roots and a diverse expatriate population. The city is also known for its tolerance of various cultures and religions. This diversity is reflected in its culinary scene, vibrant arts community, and numerous cultural festivals that celebrate both local and international traditions.

Modesty in dress is encouraged, particularly in public spaces, and Emirati hospitality is highly valued, with locals often welcoming guests with Arabic coffee and dates. To learn more about the Dubai culture, visit this page [Home | Dubai Culture](#)

## **Attire**

While the city is relatively liberal, modesty is generally encouraged out of respect for locals. In public places such as malls, souks, or government buildings, it's recommended to dress modestly, with women avoiding revealing outfits like short skirts or low-cut tops, and men wearing shirts and trousers. Swimwear is acceptable at pools and beaches, but it's important to cover up when leaving these areas. Women are advised to carry a shawl or pashmina for covering up when needed, which also provides protection from the desert sun. For business settings, conservative and professional clothing is advised. Traditional Emirati attire is commonly worn by locals, with men wearing kanduras (long white robes) and women in abayas (long black cloaks), though these are not required for expatriates or visitors.

## **Public Behaviour**

Behaviour like drunkenness and open displays of affection are considered offensive in Muslim culture. Being intoxicated and causing disorder in public is strictly prohibited and may lead to fines or more severe consequences. The UAE enforces a zero-tolerance policy on drunk driving. Additionally, noise disturbances, offensive language, obscene gestures, and any form of disrespect are strictly forbidden and may result in legal action.

## **Safety**

Dubai is known as one of the safest cities in the world, with very low crime rates, making traveling around the city very safe. Common-sense should however still be observed. Women should have little trouble exploring the city alone, but dressing modestly will ensure less unwanted attention especially in the more traditional parts of the city.

Please refer to the Laws and cultural restrictions section.

## **Finding a place to live in the UAE**

This is relatively straightforward, thanks to a range of online resources and real estate agencies. When searching for accommodation, consider your budget, proximity to work, and desired amenities. Websites such as Property Finder ([www.propertyfinder.ae](http://www.propertyfinder.ae)), Bayut ([www.bayut.com](http://www.bayut.com)), and Dubizzle ([www.dubizzle.com](http://www.dubizzle.com)) are excellent starting points for browsing listings of apartments, villas, and houses across various emirates. These platforms provide detailed information, including photos, prices, and contact details for landlords or real estate agents. Additionally, expatriate forums and social media groups can offer valuable insights and recommendations based on personal experiences

## Education

Due to Dubai's large expatriate population, the education system is highly diverse, with English being the primary language of instruction. British curriculum schools are particularly popular, often having waiting lists, while availability at other schools varies depending on the time of year. The academic calendar for most schools follows three terms: Autumn (mid-September to mid-December), Spring (early January to early April), and Summer (mid-April to early July). The links below will provide guidance as you explore schools in the UAE.

[Dubai School Fees by Grade \(2024 Tuition\) \(edarabia.com\)](https://www.edarabia.com/dubai-school-fees-by-grade-2024-tuition)

[Private schools in the UAE | The Official Portal of the UAE Government](#)

[Higher studies for non-UAE nationals | The Official Portal of the UAE Government](#)

## Electricity

In the United Arab Emirates, the standard voltage is 230V, and the frequency is 50 Hz. The power plugs and sockets used are typically of type G (sockets are three-pin), which is the same type used in the United Kingdom.

## Getting Around the City

Dubai offers a variety of convenient transportation options, including the modern and efficient Dubai Metro ([www.rta.ae](http://www.rta.ae)), the Dubai Tram, an extensive bus network, widely available taxis, and ride-hailing services like Uber ([www.uber.com](http://www.uber.com)) and Careem ([www.careem.com](http://www.careem.com)). Water taxis and ferries provide scenic routes, and areas like Downtown Dubai and Dubai Marina are pedestrian-friendly with bike-sharing schemes such as BYKY ([www.bykystations.com](http://www.bykystations.com)). Car rental services are also readily available for those who prefer to drive.

## Driving in the UAE

Roads in the UAE are well-maintained, and signage is in both Arabic and English. Speed limits are strictly enforced with cameras, and fines for violations can be high. While most drivers are experienced, caution is advised, especially on highways. It's important to follow local driving laws, and patience is key during rush hours, when traffic can be heavy. See this link to find out more about converting your driving licence to a UAE one

[Exchange Driving License in Dubai: Fees, Procedure & More | Dubizzle](#)

## Shopping & Grocery

Shopping in Dubai is a world-class experience, offering a blend of luxury, tradition, and modern convenience with malls featuring high-end designer brands, to bustling traditional souks where you can find spices, textiles, and gold, Dubai caters to every shopper's taste and budget. The city is also known for its annual shopping festivals, offering incredible discounts and promotions. In

addition to shopping, many malls offer unique attractions like indoor ski slopes, aquariums, and fine dining, making Dubai a global shopping destination.

[Shopping | Visit Dubai](#)

Dubai is known as a foodie's paradise, offering almost anything you can think of and some of the top restaurants in the world. From authentic street food to celebrity chef curated tasting menus, Dubai has it all. There are plenty of grocery options in Dubai from international supermarket chains to local independent stores, you'll find everything you need to feel at home. Visit this page to find the supermarket closest to you <https://www.dubaitravelguide.info/supermarkets-in-dubai/>

### **Arts and Entertainment**

When in Dubai, you will never be short of things to do. From Desert Safari at sunset, kayaking in mangroves, yoga overlooking the palm, to weekend brunches and beach lounges, there's something for everyone, all the time. There are many publications on the best things to do in Dubai, including [What's On](#) and [Time out Dubai](#).

For regularly updated information on what to do in Dubai You may find guidance on this page <https://www.visitdubai.com/en/things-to-do/arts-and-culture>

### **Accessibility & Disability: People of Determination**

The UAE refers to people with disabilities as 'people of determination' in recognition of their achievements in different fields. The campus is designed to be accessible to all colleagues. Features include wheelchair access to key buildings, meeting rooms, and shared spaces, accessible toilets and parking spaces for individuals with mobility needs.

We recognise that our colleagues may require additional support to thrive in the workplace. Wherever possible, reasonable adjustments will be made to help you remain in gainful employment. Recommendations for reasonable adjustments and support must be guided by medical advice to ensure they are effective for members. We encourage self-declaration for any disability or health condition during the pre-arrival process by informing the HWU Dubai HR Department.