

ASIA · CITY BREAKS · DESERT · ARCHITECTURE · BEACHES



United Arab Emirates

The UAE turns superlatives into sightseeing: the world's tallest building in Dubai, the white marble Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque and Jean Nouvel's Louvre in Abu Dhabi, and desert dunes that rise hundreds of metres near Liwa. Winter brings warm beach weather and a packed events calendar; summer heat is brutal, though hotel prices fall sharply.

 Before you go, read the UK government's travel advice for United Arab Emirates and entry requirements (visas, passport validity). Last updated by FCDO 24 July 2026.

 CAPITAL Abu Dhabi	 CURRENCY UAE dirham (AED) £1 ≈ AED 4.91	 LANGUAGE Arabic, English Hindi, Urdu	 BEST TIME Nov–Mar
 DAILY BUDGET £75–£400 £££ Expensive	 PLUGS Type C, D, G 230V · UK plugs fit	 FLIGHT FROM LONDON 7h direct ~£400–£800 return	 TIME ZONE UTC+4 standard time

The federation of seven emirates is dominated by two very different cities: Dubai, built on trade, tourism and spectacle, and Abu Dhabi, the wealthier, calmer capital that has poured money into culture. Most visitors split a week between them, about 90 minutes apart by motorway, with a night in the desert. Sharjah, next door to Dubai, has the best museums of Islamic and Emirati heritage, while Jebel Jais in Ras Al Khaimah and the Hajar Mountains around Hatta offer hiking and cooler air. Al Ain's oasis and the dunes of Liwa reward a longer trip.

Prices span every level: luxury hotels and Friday brunches can be eye-watering, but the metro, taxis and Indian and Pakistani canteens are cheap. Around nine in ten residents are expatriates, so English works everywhere and the food scene is excellent. Rules on alcohol, dress and public behaviour are more conservative than in Europe, so it pays to know them before you go. From November to March days are warm and dry; from June to September temperatures pass 40°C with high humidity, and life moves indoors. Many visitors are surprised by how much of the old trading city survives along Dubai Creek.

Top 5 highlights

- 1

SACRED SITE

Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque

Completed in 2007, this vast white marble mosque has 82 domes, one of the world's largest hand-knotted carpets and chandeliers glittering with Swarovski crystals. Entry is free with an online time slot; go late afternoon to see it glow at sunset and lit after dark.
- 2

ARCHITECTURE

Burj Khalifa

At 828 metres, the world's tallest building since 2010. Book a sunset slot on the observation decks at levels 124 and 125, then watch the Dubai Fountain show on the lake below.

3

CULTURE

Louvre Abu Dhabi

Jean Nouvel's museum on Saadiyat Island sits beneath a vast latticed dome that scatters a 'rain of light' over galleries tracing human history through shared themes rather than by nation. Allow at least half a day.

4

HISTORY

Al Fahidi and Dubai Creek

The restored wind-tower houses and lanes of Al Fahidi recall Dubai before oil. Cross the Creek by wooden abra for small change to the gold, spice and textile souks of Deira.

5

NATURE

Liwa Oasis and Moreeb Dune

On the edge of the Empty Quarter, about three hours' drive from Abu Dhabi, Liwa's date-palm oases give way to some of the world's highest dunes. Moreeb Dune, around 300 metres tall, hosts hill-climb and camel events in winter.

Biggest cities

LARGEST CITY

Dubai

≈ 4 million people

Ride the metro past the Burj Khalifa, take an abra across the Creek to the gold and spice souks, and spend an evening on the beach at Jumeirah or the Marina.

2ND LARGEST CITY

Abu Dhabi

≈ 2.8 million people

The capital spreads across islands linked by bridges; Saadiyat Island's museums, the Grand Mosque and the Corniche beaches make it a calmer, more cultured counterpart to Dubai.

3RD LARGEST CITY

Sharjah

≈ 1.9 million people

Dubai's conservative neighbour has an outstanding Museum of Islamic Civilization, a restored heritage area and lower hotel prices; alcohol is banned throughout the emirate.

Abu Dhabi's figure covers the capital region around the city; the built-up areas of Dubai and Sharjah run into each other.

When to go to United Arab Emirates

Best time: **Nov–Mar.**

Jan

Feb

Mar

Apr

May

Jun

Jul

Aug

Sep

Oct

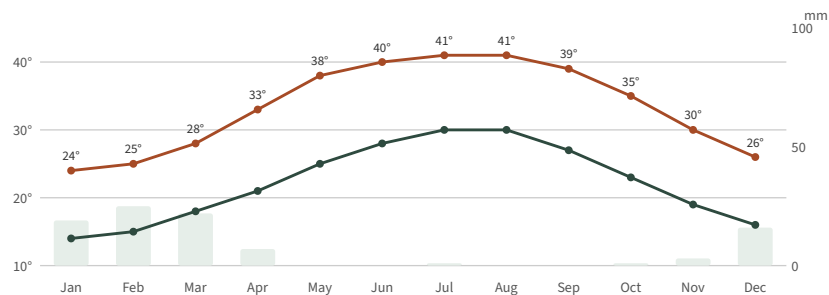
Nov

Dec

■ Best ■ Good ■ Mixed ■ Poor

Average climate in Dubai

— High °C — Low °C ■ Rain (mm)



Festivals & events

Jan, Dec	Dubai Shopping Festival For about five weeks from early or mid-December into January, sales across the city's malls come with nightly fireworks, drone shows, concerts and raffles; hotel prices rise accordingly.
Nov-Dec	Abu Dhabi Grand Prix The Formula 1 season finale at Yas Marina Circuit in late November or early December, a twilight race followed by big-name concerts; book hotels months ahead.
Dec	UAE National Day On 2 December the country marks the founding of the federation in 1971 with fireworks, concerts, heritage events and buildings lit in the national colours.

How much does United Arab Emirates cost?

SHOESTRING £75 per person / day ≈ AED 368 hostels, street food, buses	MID-RANGE £170 per person / day ≈ AED 834 3-star hotels, restaurants, some taxis	COMFORTABLE £400 per person / day ≈ AED 1,963 4-star+, guided trips, private transfers
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Estimates per person per day, excluding flights. Prices vary by season and city.

Food to try

Machboos

The Emirati national dish: rice cooked with meat or fish, dried lime, onions and baharat spices until fragrant; look for it in Emirati restaurants and heritage cafés.

Luqaimat

Crisp, golden dough balls drizzled with date syrup and sesame, sold at festivals, markets and cafés and especially popular during Ramadan.

Harees

Wheat and meat slow-cooked and beaten into a smooth, savoury porridge, traditionally served at weddings, Eid and Ramadan iftars.

Getting around

Dubai's driverless metro, tram and buses run on a Nol card and are cheap, clean and air-conditioned. Taxis are metered and plentiful across the country, and Careem and Uber both operate. Intercity buses link Dubai with Abu Dhabi, Sharjah and Al Ain. Car hire is straightforward and roads are excellent, but driving is fast and speed cameras are everywhere. In Dubai, abras and water buses cross the Creek.

Practical information

PLUGS & VOLTAGE



230V — UK plugs fit

DIALLING CODE

+971

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

Ambulance: **998**

Fire: **997**

Police: **999**

Source: FCDO “Getting help”

TIME ZONE

UTC+4 (standard time)

TAP WATER

Generally safe to drink

DRIVING

On the right

TIPPING

Service charges are often included; otherwise leave 10–15% in restaurants. Round up taxi fares and tip hotel porters and desert-safari drivers a few dirhams.

ETIQUETTE

Cover shoulders and knees in malls and souks, avoid public displays of affection and drink alcohol only in licensed venues. During Ramadan, be discreet about eating or drinking in public in daylight.

MAIN AIRPORTS

Dubai International Airport (DXB), Dubai; Zayed International Airport (AUH), Abu Dhabi; Sharjah International Airport (SHJ), Sharjah

Visas & entry for United Arab Emirates

Shown for a British passport.

Check the entry requirements

You can get a visitor or tourist visa issued free of charge when you arrive in the UAE. You do not need to apply in advance of travel. Your passport will be stamped with the visa as you go through immigration. It will be valid for up to 90 days over a 180-day period, which will begin from the date of first entry into the UAE. The stay can either be continuous or divided across multiple visits, provided the total duration does not exceed 90 days within the 180-day timeframe.

You could face fines for exceeding your authorised stay which may accumulate for each day of overstay. If you want to extend your stay, contact:

From the UK government's FCDO entry requirements for British passport holders — read the full page for passport validity, permits and exceptions.

Health & vaccinations



See a travel health nurse, GP or travel clinic **6–8 weeks before you go**. Make sure routine UK vaccinations (such as MMR and diphtheria-tetanus-polio) are up to date.

RECOMMENDED FOR MOST TRAVELLERS

Tetanus

SOMETIMES ADVISED — DEPENDS ON YOUR TRIP, ACTIVITIES AND HEALTH

Hepatitis B

Measles

Rabies

Typhoid

YELLOW FEVER CERTIFICATE

No yellow fever certificate is required to enter.

MALARIA

No malaria risk

Source: TravelHealthPro (National Travel Health Network and Centre), checked 21 October 2026. This is a summary, not medical advice.

Public holidays in United Arab Emirates

The next 12 months. Banks, offices and some sights may close, and transport and hotels get busy around these dates.

Wed 2 Dec 2026	National Day
Thu 3 Dec 2026	National Day
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day
Tue 9 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr (date may shift)
Wed 10 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr Holiday (date may shift)
Thu 11 Mar 2027	Eid al-Fitr Holiday (date may shift)
Sat 15 May 2027	Day of Arafah (date may shift)
Sun 16 May 2027	Eid al-Adha (date may shift)
Mon 17 May 2027	Eid al-Adha Holiday (date may shift)
Tue 18 May 2027	Eid al-Adha Holiday (date may shift)
Sun 6 Jun 2027	Islamic New Year (date may shift)
Sat 14 Aug 2027	Prophet's Birthday (date may shift)

National holidays only. Dates based on lunar calendars can move by a day or two depending on official announcements.

Useful phrases in Arabic

ENGLISH	ARABIC	SAY IT
Hello	مرحبا	MAR-ha-ba
Thank you	شكراً	SHOOK-ran
Please	من فضلك	min FAD-lak
Excuse me	لو سمحت	law SAM-aht
How much is this?	بكم هذا؟	bi-KAM HAA-tha?

Know before you go

- Check the rules before packing prescription medicines: some common UK medicines, including codeine-based painkillers, are controlled in the UAE and may need prior approval.
- The working week runs Monday to Friday, with Friday afternoons shortened for prayers; Saturday and Sunday are the weekend, though Sharjah also takes Friday off.
- In summer, plan desert trips and outdoor walks for early morning or evening, and use malls, museums and the metro to escape the midday heat.