



## **1.0 THE UAE**

Many will find the United Arab Emirates (UAE) a country of contrasts between the modern and the traditional. Visitors to the country will find many large shopping malls with many retail establishments from the West; movie theaters showing current releases; restaurants with delicious foods from around the world; markets with produce from countries of the region and Asia; and popular 5-star hotels. Modern highway systems have been built with many more in development. Public transportation is available with affordable taxi services and buses within many towns and between the major cities. The traditional wares can be found in the many little shops located in central areas called souqs selling a variety of house wares, jewelry, fabrics, carpets and rugs, and so much more where bargaining is expected.

In this section of the new Employee Orientation Guide, you will find general information to help you get acquainted with the UAE. You may want to explore other publications and websites to learn more about the UAE before your arrival. Suggested reading materials are available in the last section of this guide.

### **1.1 GENERAL INFORMATION**

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) came into being on December 2, 1971, and was founded by the late His Highness Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahayan. The current president of the UAE is His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zaed Al Nahayan. UAE is a founding a member of the Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC).

The capital of the UAE is Abu Dhabi; its religion is Islam; and Arabic is its official language. The country is made up of seven emirates : Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, and Fujairah.

The UAE is located on the Arabian Gulf with a total area of more than 38,600 square kilometers. It has a population of approximately 3.5 million people with more than 70% of its population made up of expatriates. The majority of 'expats' come from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines but with many others coming from other countries such as Egypt, United Kingdom, Lebanon, and the North America.

### **1.2 CLIMATE**

The UAE has a hot climate with humidity prevalent on the coastal regions while being very dry inland, especially during summer months. On the coast, humidity can be in excess of 90% in the summer.

- May to September: Daytime temperatures range from 30 to 40 degrees centigrade (86-104 degrees Fahrenheit). Oftentimes, the temperatures



exceed 50 degrees centigrade (122 degrees Fahrenheit) in the latter summer months and you may find it uncomfortably warm as you go to sleep. Fortunately, air conditioning is available in all living accommodations.

- October to April: Daytime temperatures range from 20 to 35 degrees centigrade (68-95 degrees Fahrenheit). Oftentimes, evenings are cool and sometimes breezy.

Rainfall is rare. However, there have been exceptions when it has been known to be almost torrential-like with the dry river beds overflowing. Sometimes high winds can create sandstorms that last more than one day. During these times, observe any side effects you may have such as eye irritations and increased allergy and sinus problems. You should be prepared to protect yourself to avoid severe problems and infections.

### **1.3 CLOTHING**

You will see the UAE nationals wearing traditional attire known as khandora or dishdasha. Many Muslim expats will wear the traditional clothing of their native country. Many Muslim women will cover their hair with a scarf and wear a long, black robe over their clothing called an abaya.

Expatriates should be respectful of the other cultures and religion by respecting the unwritten dress code by dressing conservatively. With consideration of the culture and the climate, here are some clothing guidelines for expatriates to follow:

- Men should always wear a shirt in public.
- Women should keep their shoulders covered, preferably wearing long or short-sleeves, and wear either loose fitting slacks, or long skirts or dresses.
- Women usually wear cotton or linen dresses, tops, and skirts and should avoid exposing knees or have low-cut necklines.
- Shorts are generally not acceptable for men or women.
- Preferred clothing should be generally lightweight.
- During the winter months, warmer clothing (long sleeves, sweaters and jackets) is recommended in the cool evenings and early morning hours.
- Professionals are expected to wear slacks or trousers with a short or long-sleeved shirt, depending on the season. Suits or jackets may be worn to work in the business community.
- Leather shoes or sandals are more comfortable than those made from synthetic materials.

You may find the dress code more relaxed in Dubai, at some public and private beaches, and hotels that cater to the westerners. However, you should be aware



you always represent the UAEU wherever you go and should respect the culture and attitudes of the country.

## 1.4 CURRENCY

The unit of currency is the UAE dirham (AED), and is divided into 100 fils. The dirham paper notes come in denominations of 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, and 500. Coins are issued in fils (5, 10, 25, and 50) and 1 dirham. The rate of exchange for US\$1 is approximately AED 3.6. One dirham is equivalent to approximately \$0.27.

Many money exchange businesses are available to change foreign currency to UAE dirham, or vice versa, for a fee. Banks will also exchange money for you. There are UAE banks and many international banks where you can have a bank account. You can also wire money outside of the UAE through many financial institutions.

To give you an idea of what you can buy with UAE currency, here are a few common purchases you may make:

### ***AED 10 will buy you***

10 cans of soda

4 large loaves of bread

***AED 50 will get you*** a meal for two at a typical family Arabic restaurant

***AED 100 will*** usually buy you a buffet/main course for two at hotels

## 1.5 FOOD AND BEVERAGES

There is a variety of food available in the UAE in both restaurants and supermarkets. Delicious entrees and ingredients are readily available for Arabic, Indian, Iranian, Filipino, European, American foods, and many others. You will find a wide assortment of fresh, frozen, canned, and packaged foods and meats. More popular soft drinks are sold everywhere. Fruit juices, milk, and soy milk, among many other beverages, are available in the UAE markets and restaurants.

Cafes or coffee establishments are commonplace with some popular chains in local malls such as Starbucks; Coffee, Bean and Tea Leaf; and Gloria Jean's. Some western fast food chains are easily available such as Burger King, McDonald's, Hardee's, Pizza Hut, Baskin Robbins, and Kentucky Fried Chicken. In Dubai, you will find some of the popular western restaurants in the malls.



Although Muslims do not eat pork, a few markets have permission to sell pork products in separate stores.

## **1.6 LANGUAGES**

Arabic is the official language of the country. You will find varying levels of the English language spoken from not-at-all, to a little bit, to extensive. However, in most modern establishments such as hotels, shopping malls, markets, and many restaurants, you will find English a common language. In urban areas, such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, taxi drivers speak English. However, in many rural areas, such as Al Ain, not many taxi drivers speak English while many at least understand simple directions such as 'left' and 'right.' You will probably need to learn some basic Arabic directions if you want to use the public transportation. For those who are interested, classes in Arabic are available at affordable costs.

## **1.7 RELIGION, RAMADAN AND RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS (EIDS)**

The UAE is a Muslim-based country; most nationals are Sunni Muslims. The UAE is a country tolerant of other religions. Therefore, there are some Christian churches, Hindu Temples and other worship places.

An abundance of mosques can be found everywhere in the UAE. However, you may observe Muslims praying anywhere when it is prayer time. There are five prayer times during the day based on the cycles of the sun. You will hear the public call to Muslims for prayer-time over public announcement systems from the mosques as early as about 4 a.m. and until the last prayer-time which may be as late as about 8:30 p.m. You may hear the call for prayer from more than one mosque.

Ramadan is a very special time for Muslims, one of the five pillars serving the purpose of a renewal of their faith. The holy month starts and ends with the sighting of a new moon. The exact day for the start and end of Ramadan cannot be determined because if it is a cloudy night and the new moon cannot be sighted, then Ramadan cannot begin or end, until it is seen. Therefore, the start of Ramadan may differ from one country to another. Each year, Ramadan varies about 10 days earlier from the prior year. In the Gregorian calendar for 2005, Ramadan may start on 4th of October depending on the sighting of the moon. By 2006, Ramadan will begin in September.

Practices during Ramadan:

- Fasting is compulsory for Muslims who are mentally and physically fit, over the age of puberty, in a settled situation (i.e. not traveling). Fasting is



refraining from eating, drinking, and smoking as well as life's sensual pleasures from sunrise to sunset.

- - Exempted from fasting are:
    - Children under the age of puberty though young children are encouraged to fast as much as they can without any pressure from parents.
    - People who are mentally incapacitated or not responsible for their actions.
    - Sick people.
    - Traveling people (for journeys over 50 miles).
    - Pregnant women, nursing mothers, and women during menstruation.
      - Those who are unable to fast during Ramadan make up the missed days at a later date.
      - The daily fast breaks at sunset with a beverage and dates; it is called Iftar.
      - The entire Quran must be read during Ramadan.
      - Social visits are encouraged.

After Iftar, activities in towns are increased in comparison to non-Ramadan months and may last into the very late evening hours or early morning hours.

Modification and observances during Ramadan:

- Non-Muslims are expected to respect the Muslim Ramadan practices by not eating, drinking, or smoking in front of Muslims or in any public place in the UAE during daylight hours.
- All eating establishments will not open until sunset; many stay open into the early morning hours.
- Most hotels will serve food in a location not in the public view during the daylight hours.
- Many hotels will not serve liquor during the month of Ramadan.
- Business hours will be adjusted in consideration of Ramadan and the work hours are typically reduced. If you need to conduct any business during Ramadan, it would be wise to call in advance to verify the adjusted business hours. In the work environment, you may find it more difficult to schedule meetings, workshops, or seminars.



There are two religious holidays (Eids) celebrated by Muslims when one can expect to have approximately three days off from working as a holiday. The government will announce the holiday and your organization decides which days will be the non-working holiday, paid or non-paid. **Eid al-Fitr** is at the end of Ramadan with a lot of last minute shopping for new clothes, gifts, and celebratory foods. **Eid al-Adha** is the larger festival with similar celebratory activities as the other, smaller Eid.

## 1.8 SIGHTSEEING IN THE UAE

There is much to explore in the UAE among its seven Emirates with each Emirate offering something unique. There are many archaeological, historical, cultural, and recreational sites. You will want to buy one or more of the many tourist guides to discover all the UAE has to offer you as a tourist. There are also many tourist organizations in the UAE. Contact any hotel to get information about camel rides, off-road safaris, sand-boarding, and city tours of museums. Some of the popular places to visit include:

- Dubai, a modern city full of shopping venues
- Abu Dhabi, capital of the UAE, also a modern city
- Hatta Water Pools
- Masafi Friday Market (on the way to Fujairah)
- Jebel Ali with its white, sandy beaches and camping shelters
- Jebel Hafeet, the highest peak in the UAE in Al Ain
- Khorfakkan in Sharjah
- Beaches in almost every Emirate

### **Abu Dhabi**

Abu Dhabi is the largest emirate in the UAE and is the home of the President of the UAE, His Highness His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahayan , who is also ruler of Abu Dhabi. The city Abu Dhabi is the capital of the emirate. The birthplace of H.H. Sheikh Zayed is the inland city Al Ain.

Some places of interest in the city of Abu Dhabi include:

- Marina Mall
- The Corniche
- Al-Hosn Palace
- Dhow or Al-Dhafra Wharf
- Iranian Souk
- Breakwater Beach

### **Dubai**



Dubai is a growing city and been referred to as the Paris of the Middle East. You can find much to do in the city such as shopping (modern and traditional), entertainment (cinemas, discos, and concerts of world-known entertainers), conferences for all purposes (IT, management, communications, jewellery, and many other industries), history and culture, beaches and water sports, and more. If you plan to visit Dubai overnight or for several days, reserve your hotel room in advance as there are many conferences and conventions in this popular, international city.

Some places of interest in the city of Dubai include:

- Dubai Museum
- Sheikh Saeed Al Maktoum House
- Heritage Village
- Diving Village
- The Gold Souq
- The Spice Souq
- Jumeira Beach and Wild Wadi Park
- Deira City Centre Mall
- Ibn Battuta Mall
- Emirates Mall

Please visit [www.dubaicityguide.com](http://www.dubaicityguide.com) for more information.

Each year, Dubai hosts the month-long Dubai Shopping Festival offering shopping and entertainment venues throughout the city showcasing 30 or more countries from around the world. Visitors from all over the world make it an annual vacation to attend this festival. It is the event for the Global Village and the Carpet Oasis. For more on this annual event, visit the DSF website at [www.mydsf.com](http://www.mydsf.com) .

## **1.9 TIME**

Time is Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) plus 4 hours. Daylight savings time is not observed in the UAE. An online World Clock can tell you what time it is anywhere in the world and may be useful in determining time while in the UAE when



contacting your relatives and friends in your home country:  
<http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/>.

## 1.10 WORK WEEK

The work week begins on Saturday and ends on Wednesday. The weekend is Thursday and Friday.

Most business establishments are closed by 1:00 or 2:00 p.m. daily and most retail businesses re-open about 4:00 or 5:00 p.m., usually closing about 11:00 p.m., or later. The majority of government agencies and banks do not re-open for the evening and will often be closed on Fridays.

During Ramadan\*, a Muslim month of fasting, many retail businesses are closed during daylight hours, open after sundown, and may not close until after midnight.

\*Learn more about Ramadan in the section 'Religion and Ramadan,' section 1.7.

## 1.11 OTHER RESOURCES ABOUT THE UAE

You may want to explore the many aspects of the UAE in preparation for your relocation to this country, from different perspectives. There are many resources available to you. Some such resources include:

### **Books**

*Oman & the United Arab Emirates.* Lou Callan and Gordon Robison, 2000, Victoria, Australia, Lonely Planet.

*Don't They Know it's Friday?* Jeremy Williams, 2003, Dubai, UAE, Motivate Publishing.

*Mother Without a Mask: A Westerner's Story of her Arab Family.* Patricia Holton, 1992, London, UK, Motivate Publishing.

### **The Internet**

General Guide: [www.uae.org.ae/general/contents.htm](http://www.uae.org.ae/general/contents.htm)

UAE Interact, UAE Ministry of Information and Culture: [www.uaeinteract.com](http://www.uaeinteract.com)

Abu Dhabi Police, Traffic Rules and General Advice: [www.adpolice.gov.ae/en/](http://www.adpolice.gov.ae/en/)