



## ***Countries in Brief – on assignment in Dubai***

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Sending an assignee abroad? Then the IGM country profiles should be of interest to you. This month we feature Dubai.

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*"The emirate is both a dynamic international business centre and a laid-back tourist escape; a city where the sophistication of the 21st century walks hand in hand with the simplicity of a bygone era."* Attributed to the Department of Tourism & Commerce Marketing, 2004.

**The capital** of the UAE is Abu Dhabi, the largest of seven emirates. Abu Dhabi commands the majority of the country's oil and financial wealth. Although only the second largest state in physical size, Dubai is a major centre for global commerce, not only for the UAE, but for the entire Gulf region. During the last 40 years, this port has developed into one of the most economically vibrant and tolerant locations to live in the Gulf. As a result of international trade, Dubai maintains a cosmopolitan atmosphere where many people coexist amicably.

Any business or leisure trip is best taken when well prepared. Basic information about the culture, customs, language and religion of the city or country you are traveling to is most helpful.

Dubaians subscribe to Islamic codes of modesty and restraint. It is best if men wear long trousers and women are covered up, so as not to offend locals.

Foreigners should also be aware that eating, drinking or smoking in public should not be done during the Islamic fasting month of Ramadan. This should be done along with an overall respect for the religion of UAE nationals. However, some restaurants do stay open during the holiday for the benefit of non Muslims. Regardless of the holiday, be very respectful when Muslims are praying and take care not to make noise, stare, walk in front of or step on the carpet of anyone praying.

There are a few rules of etiquette observed in the UAE that may be unusual for new arrivals to the UAE. For example, it is considered offensive to sit down with the soles of your feet facing anyone. You should also never use your left hand to greet someone, eat food or pass objects. It is polite to refrain from smoking unless the host does so first. Foreign nationals should also avoid taking photographs of Arab women or girls.

Women in the UAE are treated differently than elsewhere in the Gulf region; in general, their lives are less restricted. There is even a UAE Women's Federation that sponsors educational, counseling and occupational training opportunities. However, few Arabic women drive, although it is permitted.

The official language in Dubai, and the other emirates, is Arabic. In addition to Arabic, English is the commercial language, with Arabic predominantly used in official documents.

Islam is the official religion of the UAE. Most of the Arabs living in the emirates are Muslims of the Sunni sect. Other religions practised in the UAE include Christianity and Hinduism

Dubaians are usually very open in communicating their wishes. They will look you in the eye when speaking and expect you to do the same. Looking down and away is viewed as being dishonest. Although it is important to establish a good personal relationship in business meetings, do not ask questions related to family or children, as this is considered private information. Politics should also not be discussed.

Gift giving is more complicated in Dubai and the rest of the emirates, because of the number of nationalities you are likely to be dealing with. For example, since it might be impossible for you to distinguish between the different dialects of Arabic, you might be confusing a Dubaiian with an Egyptian that may find one gift more precious than the other.

The UAE provides limited means of public transportation for moderate prices. This is mostly because automobiles are so easy to rent or buy and maintain. Those who would prefer not to drive can easily take taxis, which are numerous and cheap throughout the Emirates.

The Creek, a natural inlet, runs through the city of Dubai, dividing it into the main districts of Deira and Dubai. These two areas are connected by two bridges and a tunnel, as well as water taxis running all day. The roadways of Dubai are divided into long-used routes in the city centre and the newer, more spacious roads extending outward. The old narrow streets of the centre create congested traffic conditions as all the traffic is funnelled through dense neighborhoods.

Traveling in and out of Dubai is convenient via Dubai International Airport. Over fifty airlines service this destination. Also, traveling in and out of Abu Dhabi is accessible through Abu Dhabi International Airport. Rental car agencies such as Avis, Budget, Eurocar and InterRent operate from both airports. Buses are also available. There is no airport tax in the UAE.

Camels can be a problem when driving highways at night, as they break through fences and are almost invisible until it is too late.

International certificates of vaccination against yellow fever and cholera are no longer required for entry to the UAE. However, restrictions may be imposed at short notice on visitors travelling from an affected area.

Tap water in hotels is safe to drink, but foreign nationals should otherwise drink only bottled water.

Credit cards are accepted widely throughout the UAE, although one should not expect to be able to use them at local outdoor markets. It is no surprise, however, that Dubai has access to advanced electronic banking systems, which can explain why ATMs are relatively easy to find in any of the Emirates.

Crime is not a major problem in Dubai. You should keep in mind that penalties for what may be considered minor crimes in your home country may be dealt with more harshly in this nation. For example, drug and alcohol control is taken very seriously. Certain medications considered legal in your home country could be classified as a narcotic in the UAE, so bring along your doctor's prescriptions or some other kind of substance verification to this country. Note that convicted drug traffickers may be given the death sentence.

Remember that most expatriates or business travelers do not have diplomatic immunity, and thus are subject to all laws of the host country. It is your responsibility to discover what those laws are by consulting the country's embassy in your home country before you leave. At the very least, err on the side of caution.