

DO'S AND DON'TS - LIVING / TRAVELLING IN THE UAE

- **Alcohol Consumption** is allowed only by Non-Muslims in licensed restaurants, bars, clubs, private venues and at home (for residents who have acquired an alcohol licence). It was recently announced that tourists older than 21 years can obtain a free one-month license to use during their stay in Dubai. In order to get their license, tourists must visit an African + Eastern or MMI liquor store with their original passport, fill out a short form and sign an official declaration to state that they are not a UAE resident, and will obey the UAE's rules and regulations. It is against the law to drink alcohol whilst walking in the street or to be drunk in a public place. For those living in the UAE a special licence must be obtained before purchasing alcohol from the exclusive, specialised and licensed stores. This licence is only a permit for buying alcohol NOT for consuming in public or improper behaviour when drinking. It does not give any immunity for alcohol related criminal offences. It is an offence to carry alcohol in your car if you do not hold the special alcohol licence. If you come to the attention of the police you may be arrested, even though you may have purchased the alcohol legally. Alcohol can only be consumed by over 21's. Alcohol is not available in all Emirates.
- **Bouncing a Cheque** is illegal in the UAE. If a cheque is presented without adequate funds to cover the amount, you will face criminal and civil charges. After you have served your jail sentence you will not be able to leave the country until the funds have been paid in full.
- **Dancing** is allowed in the privacy of your home or at licensed clubs and events. But dancing in public is classed as indecent and provocative.
- **Dress Code** - Emirati dress conservatively in traditional dress and can be offended when people dress inappropriately or not in accordance with Islamic values. In public places such as shopping malls, restaurants and parks, you are encouraged to dress appropriately. Clothing should NOT be transparent, indecently expose parts of the body or display offensive pictures or slogans. Be careful as well if you are tattooed with what could be deemed offensive images or slogans, if in doubt cover up. Be aware that if you enter one of these areas dressed inappropriately you could albeit unlikely be asked to leave (most of the larger shopping malls display signs warning respectable clothing should be worn). Any form of nudity is strictly forbidden, including topless sunbathing. Swimwear should not be worn in any other area outside the beach, water parks or swimming pools. Bear in mind that just because you see someone else doing something such as topless bathing does not mean that it is right. It is preferable for both men and women to have their shoulders and knees covered and for women not to reveal too much décolletage when not on the beach or at a hotel. It is not appropriate for men to walk along the street or malls bare-chested. Use main beaches that are supervised and avoid isolated beaches.
- **Driving** - the UAE has a zero-tolerance policy towards drinking and driving. You can be charged and imprisoned if you are caught with even the smallest amount of alcohol in your system - if you are going to drink walk or get a taxi. Tailgating, speeding, racing, lane jumping and using a mobile phone while driving are all against the law. There are numerous speed cameras on the roads and motorways. Fines in the UAE are heavy. If you are caught you may also face the possibility of having your car impounded. Wearing a seatbelt is mandatory (including all passengers). Crossing the road in a non-designated area / crossing is also illegal and the police have launched a campaign against illegal crossing. If you are caught committing this offence you could be subject to a fine.
- **Drugs** are strictly forbidden, even a residual amount. Consuming or carrying drugs, even if you are transiting through the airports from one country to another, can result in a standard 4-year imprisonment and deportation (this can even include what is in your blood / urine). Buying or selling narcotics is considered a serious crime which can result in life-imprisonment. Some medicines (accepted in other countries / bought over the counter) containing psychotropic substances are also forbidden, so check out the UAE Customs website for further information.
- **Expatriate Community** - in the last 30 years, Abu Dhabi, Dubai and the other Emirates have gone through a total transformation from small Arab trading ports into modern cities. Over 150 nationalities contribute to the UAE's modern society. The streets, shopping malls and business areas are alive with numerous languages and cultures. Do keep in mind that you will probably meet many people with different values and opinions.
- **Holding Hands** for married couples is tolerated but kissing and hugging are considered offences against public decency. Open displays of affection are generally not tolerated.
- **Offensive language**, spitting and aggressive behaviour (including hand gestures) are viewed very seriously and can result in imprisonment and deportation. This includes "road rage".
- **Over the Counter or Doctor Prescribed Medications** - the UAE has very strict drug / medication laws and even certain over the counter medicines especially those with codeine are forbidden, even for personal use and a specific doctor's prescription about the purpose and period of use. Checking the banned substances list from the UAE Customs is also helpful for peace of mind. If you are using doctor prescribed drugs such as painkillers or anti-depressants it is advisable to carry a doctor's note and to confirm the admittance of the specific medication (a general open letter is NOT sufficient, the letter must cover the period of travel

and describe the illness and the relative medicines prescribed for that illness as well as the contents of the specific medication). If you are bringing prescription medication into the UAE you may need to seek prior agreement /approval from the UAE authorities. You should check with the UAE Customs before your arrival (please note that whilst some controlled drugs are prescribed as allowed medicines in some countries such as the use of medical Marijuana, controlled drugs such as these as opposed to control pharmaceutical such as painkillers and anti-depressant drugs are still NOT considered to be a allowed Doctor Prescribed Medicine within the UAE). If these drugs are for genuine medical use prior approval should be obtained even for travellers who need large amounts of medication such as cancer patients. Always check with the UAE Customs for total clarification. Do not just check with your travel agent or hotel as they may not be totally up to date with the actual UAE laws. You sometimes read stories of people arrested at the airports for carrying prescribed medicines, what these stories don't tell you are the amount of medication an individual is trying to bring into the UAE under the pretext of personal medical use.

- **Personal Safety** - the UAE is a relatively safe country from a crime perspective. Nevertheless, when you are out and about, take the necessary precautions to stay safe just as you would do if you were in South Africa. If you are going to visit bars and clubs, do not accept drinks from strangers and never leave your drink unattended. While rare, having your drink spiked in the UAE can happen. It is advised to at all times carry identification. Ensure that your vehicle is always locked and that valuables are kept out of the reach of strangers.
- **Photography** – taking photographs of Government buildings, bridges and women are strictly prohibited. Taking photographs of UAE citizens and other residents without permission are not recommended.
- **Pornography and pornographic images** - such media and websites are banned in the UAE both in terms of access and possession.
- **Ramadan** - many other guides will tell you not to visit the UAE during Ramadan. Provided you are willing to follow a few basic rules, 'do' as it is a wonderful time to visit and observe the local culture. During the holy month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Throughout this month eating, drinking, smoking, playing loud music and dancing in public places or whilst driving during daylight hours are strictly forbidden and punishable by law, including for non-Muslims. This consumption ban will include general public indoor areas as well, although many of the larger hotels will have special screened off areas for non-Muslims to eat and drink during these hours freely with the exception of alcohol which will only be served after sundown. Pregnant women and the infirm are excluded from the fast. Every evening during Ramadan, Muslims celebrate the breaking of their fast with an evening meal called Iftar. You will find many hotels and restaurants throughout the UAE who provide Iftar buffets. The golden rule is always being mindful and respectful of locals' traditions and beliefs. Visiting the UAE during Ramadan gives tourists a unique and authentic holiday experience. Based on the lunar calendar, it is the Holy Month of Islam and every year is specifically announced. Ramadan commemorates the time when the Koran was first revealed to the Prophet Mohammed. While international Muslims abstain from all food, drinks, smoking and live music from dawn to dusk throughout the month, international hotels and resorts continue to serve meals to international visitors in screened off areas as its not permissible even for international visitors to eat and drink in public areas; this is also a common courtesy and mark of respect for the UAE. Alcohol can be purchased at licensed bars and restaurants from sunset onwards and most activities such as golf clubs, shopping malls, attractions and spas are open as usual but with altered opening times (most venues that would normally have live music will not during Ramadan). The cities really comes alive at night when visitors can join the Muslim population to break their fast (Iftar) and flock with friends and family to large tents to feast on a mouth-watering array of local dishes, smoke traditional shisha pipes and listen to traditional music such as the famous oud players. One point to note is that visitors should wear respectful clothing during this time. And don't forget Eid Al-Fitr, which is a three day festival for all that marks the end of Ramadan. Families exchange gifts, there are special public events arranged and yet more eating of delicious Arabic cuisine.
- **Respect for religion** - Islamic religious values is greatly respected in the UAE. Showing any disrespect towards religious beliefs or practices is considered deeply offensive and very likely to result in a heavy fine and / or imprisonment. Other religions are respected and can be followed by the expatriate community. Follow a few simple rules of respect : Muslims pray five times a day. You will notice that the Mosques call people to pray through a speaker system. At this time you will also notice public music is turned off as Muslims perform their daily prayers. Be aware that drivers, who are not close to a Mosque, may stop at a convenient lay-by to pray privately.
- **Sexual Harassment** or randomly addressing women in public or taking their photos without permission, is strictly frowned upon.
- **Sexual Relationships / Unmarried Couples Cohabiting** outside of marriage are illegal, irrespective of any relationship you may have with your partner in South Africa. Cohabiting, including in hotels, is also illegal, however most hotels don't enforce "Only Married Couples"

rule. Luxury hotels, which often cater to foreigners, are especially relaxed, so chances are you won't have trouble booking a room. At check-in, you'll be required to show your passport, but having different surnames won't raise any eyebrows. In Dubai, married women often keep their surnames. Once you've checked into a hotel, refer to each other as "husband" and "wife" rather than saying "my boyfriend" or "my fiancé". This could help prevent potential problems. If you become pregnant outside of marriage, both you and your partner face the possibility of imprisonment. There are also legal ramifications when registering the birth with the local authorities. The same rule applies to same sex friends / couples sharing a room. It is often better to book a twin bed room. Gay and Lesbian travellers should be particularly careful, as homosexual behaviour is a criminal offence with the possibility of deportation, you should also avoid any public displays of affection. Cross-dressing is also illegal. Prostitution, begging and vagrancy are against the law and contrary to local values and traditions.

- **Smoking, E-Cigarettes and Vaping** - Smoking is forbidden in government areas, offices and shopping malls. There are however many designated areas where smoking is allowed. E-Cigarettes and Vaping are banned in the UAE, you may well find your devices confiscated at the airports upon arriving.
- **Social Ethics** - the culture and laws in the UAE are designed to ensure that everyone is respectful of each other regardless of their faith and nationality. Visitors and residents alike should avoid types of improper conduct and behaviour which can otherwise lead to fines, imprisonment and deportation.
- **Social Media** - "what may or may not land you in hot water with the UAE authorities".
What specifically does the UAE law say with regards to conduct on social media? Different branches of law in the UAE, such as the Cyber Crimes Law and the Penal Code, protect individuals and entities from conduct on social media that violate their rights. One must be very careful about maintaining the expected conduct under the UAE law on social media, as it can have grave consequences on both the offender and those on the receiving end. A number of legal risks are involved in the use of social media in the UAE, and it is imperative to be aware of all applicable laws and their implications. Below are some of the provisions to be kept in mind by all social media users before posting any content.
Photographs - Federal Law No. 5 of 2012 (the Cyber Crimes Law) states that posting images without permission is an offence. In fact, any use of technology which breaches someone else's privacy comes within the law's influence. Taking a picture, publishing or displaying an image would be an invasion of someone's privacy (Article 21). Additionally, Federal Law No 3 of 1987 (the UAE's Penal Code) states that it is an offence to publish someone's photograph without their prior consent. This is also protected under Federal Law No 7 of 2002, the Copyright Law.
Confidentiality - while invading someone's privacy is liable under both the Cyber Crimes Law and the Penal Code, you are also not allowed to disclose any confidential information that belongs to someone else, such as an employer. There are legal implications that could include temporary imprisonment as well as a fine (Article 4). This would also apply to someone who engages in conversations on social media that would breach another individual or entity's confidential information.
Defamation - defamation comes under the remit of the Penal Code, making it an offence to publish information that exposes another person or entity to contempt or public humiliation. Additionally, making false accusations that discredits or dishonours another person is a form of defamation. Posting defamatory statements on social media platforms will mean the violation of some interconnected laws in the UAE.
Morality - the Cyber Crimes Law makes it illegal to use technology for activities which are in any way inconsistent with good conduct and public morals. To clarify, any behaviour that would come within the purview of this section of the law include, but are not limited to, mocking the representatives of the nation, encouraging sinful activity, making lewd remarks against religion, and remarks aimed at corrupting minors.
Does it apply to Facebook or to messages such as WhatsApp? The Cyber Crimes Law extends to Facebook and WhatsApp, among other social media platforms. While these applications and platforms increase socialisation, the law has been set up with a view of protecting people from those who abuse these platforms for personal or financial gain. It is important to note that WhatsApp chats are admissible in courts as evidence. It should also be noted that the use of illegal channels online is an offence too. Voice of Internet Protocol (VoIP) applications such as Skype, FaceTime, WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger are blocked in the UAE. The use of such applications without a legal right is an offence and is punishable by imprisonment and / or a fine.
If you are outside the country do the rules still apply? Article 47 of the Cyber Crimes Law states that anyone who has committed crimes mentioned in the law, even if outside the country can be prosecuted. This is only the case if the object of the crime is an electronic information system, website or information technology which relates to the federal government or the local governments of the Emirates or any authority or public institution owned by any of them.
Is there a statute of limitations on complaints? In the UAE, the limitation period varies. It is dependent on the type of issues and disputes between the parties. However, limitation periods

are not provided for one comprehensive law or legislation, rather, there are limitations to the general rule : Felonies - 20 years (Criminal Procedure Article 20); Misdemeanours - 5 years (Criminal Procedure Article 20); Contraventions - 1 year (UAE Criminal Procedure Article 20). Usually, limitation periods commence either : When a 'cause of action' triggers the justification for the initiation of legal proceedings, for example, a breach of a contract, has occurred. When the injured party becomes conscious of the harm he or she has experienced. In other cases, the limitation period may begin from the end or termination of the related contract in question. How often are the fines / jail terms imposed? The UAE's clear and strict laws against cyber-crimes cover various penalties which include lengthy prison terms and fines of up to AED 3 million. The Cyber Crimes Law constitutes a range of infringements and sentences depending on the severity of the offence. Article No. 26 specifies an arrest period of at least 10 years and not more than 25 years, and a penalty in the form of a fine not less than AED 2 million and not in excess of AED 4 million on anyone who establishes, manages or runs a website or publishes information meant for the purpose of trafficking in humans or human organs or dealing in them illegally. The Article mentions an arrest period for a minimum five years and a fine of at least AED 500,000 and not more than AED 1 million for whoever establishes or publishes information on the computer network intending to incite hate. Additionally, the law specifies various punishments for numerous cyber-crimes which include insulting religions and rituals, slandering public officials and forging official electronic documents, sending or re-publishing pornographic materials or reproducing credit / debit card data, as well as obtaining pin codes or passwords.

- **Traditions** - the UAE is built on generations of Islamic traditions which are rooted firmly in its culture and tribal heritage. These traditions have been passed down from generation to generation and form the very cornerstone of everyday life for an Emirati family. The Emirati are friendly people who show tolerance and an open minded approach to visitors in the UAE but their culture and values should always be respected.
- **Working** without the proper visa is illegal. You cannot partake in any kind of paid employment without first obtaining a work visa. If caught, you will face imprisonment.

Above information is correct at time of publishing and advice contained within the "do's and don'ts" should be taken as an example of the types of issues you should consider when in the UAE. It is not an exhaustive list of everything you should be aware of when travelling in the UAE and more widely in the region. The contents are for information purposes only and should not be deemed as Legal Advice in anyway. Legal advice is neither supplied nor inferred. Please consult any relevant UAE Governmental Web-Sites to obtain detailed advice and support.