



United Arab Emirates

الإمارات العربية المتحدة

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Best Places for Culture

- ➔ Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque (p351)
- ➔ Sharjah Heritage Museum (p332)
- ➔ Sheikh Mohammed Centre for Cultural Understanding (p313)
- ➔ Deira Souqs (p311)
- ➔ Sharjah Museum of Islamic Civilisation (p333)

Best Places for Nature

- ➔ Liwa Oasis (p370)
- ➔ Sir Bani Yas Island (p372)
- ➔ Al Ain Zoo (p366)
- ➔ East Coast (p375)
- ➔ Jebel Jais Mountain Road (p342)

Why Go?

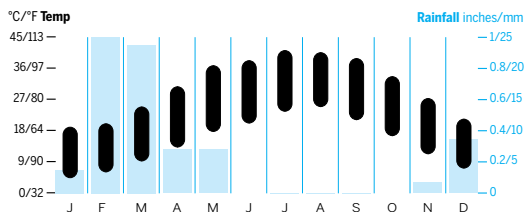
For most people, the United Arab Emirates means just one place: Dubai, the sci-fi-esque city of iconic skyscrapers, palm-shaped islands, city-sized malls, indoor ski slopes and palatial beach resorts. But beyond the glitter awaits a diverse mosaic of six more emirates, each with its own character and allure.

An hour's drive south, oil-rich Abu Dhabi, the UAE capital, is positioning itself as a hub of culture, sport and leisure. Beyond looms the vast Al Gharbia region, which is dominated by the northern reaches of the Rub' Al Khali desert. Its magical silence is interrupted only by the whisper of shifting dunes rolling towards Saudi Arabia.

North of Dubai, Sharjah does art and heritage best, while tiny Ajman and Umm Al Quwain provide glimpses of life in the pre-oil days, and Ras Al Khaimah snuggles against the mighty Hajar Mountains. For the best swimming and diving, though, head across the range to Fujairah to frolic in the clear waters of the Gulf of Oman.

When to Go

UAE



Nov–Mar Moderate temps, higher room rates, major festivals and events; good for outdoor activities.

Mar–May & Oct Hot days, balmy nights, good for beach vacations; desert camping still OK.

Jun–Sep Hot and humid, steep hotel discounts; life moves indoors; summer sales; good for diving.

Daily Costs

The sky's the limit when it comes to spending money in the UAE, but it's possible to keep expenses down, for example by forgoing the glitzy five-stars for a midrange hotel, where standard doubles can be had for Dh400 to Dh600. A glass of beer or wine will cost around Dh30 or Dh50, respectively, but if you stick to water, you can get a nice two-course meal for around Dh70, and a shwarma to go costs just Dh4. Museums are free or cheap, but expect to pay Dh200 and up for guided tours and admission to water parks and other big attractions.

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Two Days

If you're in the UAE just on a short layover, base yourself in the Downtown Dubai area. Spend day one checking off the iconic sights on a **Big Bus tour**, then head up to the **Burj Khalifa** at sunset (book ahead), take a spin around **Dubai Mall** and have dinner in **Souk Al Bahar**, with a view of the **Dubai Fountain**. The next day, take a cab to Sharjah for a glimpse into the past in the **Heritage Area**, stocking up on souvenirs at the **Central Souq** and enjoying dinner in bubbly **Al Qasba**.

One Week

Spend two days in futuristic Dubai and one in retro Sharjah before heading south to Abu Dhabi to marvel at the **Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque**, zoom around **Ferrari World** and learn about the new Cultural District on **Saadiyat Island**. For total contrast, dip into the desert next to face a huge dune, magical silence and plenty of camels, preferably on an overnight trip. Wrap up with a day in Al Ain and its Unesco-recognised heritage sites.

Essential Food & Drink

Restaurants serving Emirati food used to be rare but, thankfully, this is changing. If you do get a chance, try these typical dishes, and don't miss out on the succulent local dates!

- ➔ **Balaleet** Vermicelli blends with sugar syrup, saffron, rosewater and sauteed onions in this rich breakfast staple.
- ➔ **Fareed** Mutton-flavoured broth with bread; popular at Ramadan.
- ➔ **Hareis** Ground wheat and lamb slow cooked until creamy (a bit like porridge); sometimes called the 'national dish'.
- ➔ **Khuzi** Stuffed whole roasted lamb on a bed of spiced rice.
- ➔ **Madrooba** Salt-cured fish (*maleh*) or chicken mixed with raw bread dough until thick.
- ➔ **Makbous** A casserole of spice-laced rice and boiled meat (usually lamb) or fish garnished with nuts, raisins and fried onions.

At a Glance

- ➔ **Currency** UAE dirham (Dh)
- ➔ **Mobile phones** GSM network is widespread
- ➔ **Money** ATMs are common in urban areas
- ➔ **Visas** None required for 45 nationalities

Fast Facts

- ➔ **Capital** Abu Dhabi
- ➔ **Country Code** 971
- ➔ **Language** Arabic
- ➔ **Population** 9.5 million

Exchange Rates

Australia	A\$1	Dh2.62
Bahrain	BD1	Dh9.74
Euro zone	€1	Dh3.95
Kuwait	KD1	Dh12.10
Oman	OR1	Dh9.53
Qatar	QR1	Dh1
Saudi Arabia	SR1	Dh0.97
UK	£1	Dh5.59
USA	US\$1	Dh3.67

For current exchange rates see www.xe.com.

Resources

- ➔ **UAE Ministry of Information & Culture** (www.uaeinteract.com) Covers just about every aspect of life in the UAE.
- ➔ **Lonely Planet** (www.lonelyplanet.com/uae) Destination info, hotel booking and forum.
- ➔ **Zomato** (www.zomato.com) User-generated restaurant reviews around the UAE.