

The Dubai Code of Conduct

The aim of this document:

This guide aims at setting the standards for social ethics and mutual respect that shall be followed by all of Dubai's citizens, residents and visitors in respect of the Emirate's culture, religion and habits.

Traditional:

Dubai's culture is rooted in Arabic and Islamic tradition

Dubai is built on foundations that are rich in history and tradition. Dubai is a forward-looking society that is equally bound to its culture and heritage. Its religion is Islam, the timeless values of which lie at the heart of Dubai's living heritage, providing strength and inspiration that touch all aspects of everyday life. Dubai holds the family as the most important institution in society and the cornerstone of societal life.

Dubai is a city that is proud and rich in its tradition, with its remarkable combination of the traditional values of the East, in terms of modesty, and the technologies of the West, in terms of development.

Dubai is keen on protecting and promoting its traditions as conveyed by Islam, as well as its Arab identity and culture. This makes Dubai a traditional and socially conservative yet progressive, open and tolerant city.

Tolerant:

Dubai has always been renowned for its tolerant outlook

Dubai has built a reputation for being open to new ideas and ways of doing things. This has enabled Dubai to become a global centre for innovation, tourism and business.

Living and working in an environment of open-mindedness and tolerance has encouraged many to have the confidence to discover their true calling in life, knowing that they will be supported and nurtured in their endeavours. This has enriched life in Dubai, just as Dubai's spirit of freedom has enriched the lives of so many individuals.

From a business point of view, the reason why so many international companies have chosen to invest in Dubai is again Dubai's pragmatic, open attitude. Thousands of companies have flourished in the Emirate's free zones and commercial centres operating to global standards of governance and efficiency.

In line with Islam's tradition of tolerance and openness, freedom of faith and practice is a reality in Dubai. This has allowed other belief systems to flourish in Dubai, a demonstration of Dubai's respect for diversity.

Sophisticated:

Dubai is a city with style and charisma

Dubai has successfully fused sophistication with charm. It has redefined the meaning of luxury with its stunning hotels, award-winning restaurants and its position as an international shopping destination.

Dubai provides an open environment where talented professionals can build their careers and entrepreneurs can create exciting opportunities on the back of world-class infrastructure and continuous government-led innovation. Tourists and residents alike can experience the finest service, state-of-the-art technology and exquisite luxury.

Dubai has also brought the meaning of sophistication to life by attracting worldwide media attention and high society, in addition to an ever-expanding list of sophisticated and stylish cultural, social, economic and sports events.

Energetic:

Dubai has an aura of vitality and a get-up-and-go spirit

Visitors are struck by the ingrained optimism and spirit of adventure and innovation that permeates through all layers of the community. To a holidaymaker, a business traveler or a resident, Dubai is a place where there is always something exciting to see and do.

This energy gives people from around the world the opportunity to make their ambitions a reality. Many artists, entrepreneurs and engineers come to Dubai to seek inspiration and new ways of looking at things.

They are also attracted by Dubai's unique entrepreneurial spirit. Since the days of the pearl diving industry, Dubai has been a place of successful trade. Traders have therefore learnt to be skilful and shrewd, to anticipate global changes and use them to their local advantage. This can-do spirit is an important driving force that filters through the 'open for business' culture.

Embracing:

Dubai aims to bring together the best in people

Dubai's success is based on the vision and commitment of its leadership, the generosity and aspirations of its people and the contribution of many people from different parts of the world, many of whom have chosen to make Dubai their permanent home. This creates a blend of many cultures that coexist peacefully.

With over 150 nationalities, Dubai is a rich melting pot that provides opportunities for people to meet, discuss ideas, innovate and forge new business relationships. Dubai's streets and shopping malls are alive with numerous languages, customs and cultures.

Dubai also brings together tradition and modernity, as the past, present and future live harmoniously together, each drawing strength from the other. As such, Dubai is an international symbol of how different cultures can achieve mutual enrichment through sharing their ideas and experiences.

Therefore respect for one another's values and cultures is intrinsic to Dubai's residents who assimilate courteously into the community by adopting a spirit of tolerance.

Generous:

Dubai's doors are open to everyone

Hospitality is central to the soul of Arabian culture and is deep rooted in Arabia's history. In the past, desert travellers yearned for areas inhabited by Arabs, because the Arabs' hospitality meant that the travellers could eat and stay with their hosts for as long as they chose to. Hospitality in the desert started as a custom, and has now grown into a social grace.

Dubai has always looked outwards towards the wider world. It has welcomed traders and visitors with tolerance and compassion. In turn, it has adopted an approach to foreign affairs that is compatible with its own identity.

Visionary:

Dubai has always looked towards the future

Dubai has always played a pioneering role in encouraging its people to excel in an environment where the impossible is possible. The wisdom and perseverance of Dubai's leadership and people have transformed what was once a small fishing community into a world-class commercial capital at the heart of the Arabian Gulf.

An early example of Dubai's visionary heritage can be drawn in the 1950s from the late Sheikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum. He recognized then that Dubai's future was firmly linked to trade from overseas and that careful development of its ports would be central to its long-term success.

Today, evidence of this vision can be seen in every aspect of the Emirate's development, from embracing the latest technology, to multi-billion dollar investments in infrastructure, government services and security.

Proud:

Dignity is a cornerstone of Dubai's culture

Based on the philosophy of respecting oneself before expecting others to respect you, Dubai has always encouraged its residents to behave in a humble and courteous manner. Therefore, in every part of life, whether it is the clothes people wear, the way they talk or their general behaviour in public, self-respect is vital.

As the Gulf region and Dubai are borne out of a tribal society, the behaviour of one's friends and companions can also reflect on the way a person's dignity and self-respect are seen by others. It is therefore equally important to treat others outside this circle in a way that honours their sense of dignity and respect. Speaking calmly and courteously to others, behaving in a serious and controlled manner in public places, and always honouring your word, are important examples of demonstrating this respect for others.

It is entrenched in Arabian tradition, passed down from generation to generation, that every human being must be treated with dignity. Dubai's culture and laws are all designed to ensure that the dignity and self-respect of everyone are upheld to the highest standards, regardless of where people come from.

1. Social Ethics:

Dubai is characterised by the interaction of a large number of cultures and nationalities. However, the culture, customs and traditions of the United Arab Emirates and its people shall be respected by adopting courtesy and moderation and avoiding all types of improper behaviour in the Emirate.

1.1. The symbols of the state:

It is the duty of every citizen, resident and visitor to show respect for the symbols of the United Arab Emirates' rulers, flag and national emblem. The abuse of any of those symbols is a crime punishable by law.

1.2. Decency:

An official business or business casual dress code shall be adopted by all visitors of Dubai's official government buildings as well as business buildings and office towers. Access to Dubai's official and business buildings may be denied if dress code is considered inappropriate.

In all other public places such as streets, shopping malls and restaurants, shorts and skirts shall be of appropriate length. Moreover, clothing shall not indecently expose parts of the body, be transparent, or display obscene or offensive pictures and slogans.

1.3. Beaches:

Beachgoers – men and women – shall wear conservative swimwear that is acceptable to Dubai's culture. Swimwear shall not be worn outside the beach, as decent dress is the rule in the rest of the city. Nudity is strictly forbidden in every part of the city and is liable to be punished by imprisonment or deportation.

1.4. Public displays of affection:

Displays of affection among couples – whether married or not – in public places does not fit the local customs and culture. Holding hands for a married couple is tolerated but kissing and petting are considered an offence to public decency.

Public displays of affection, as well as sexual harassment or randomly addressing women in public places is liable to be punished by imprisonment or deportation.

1.5. Dancing and music:

Loud music and dancing are forbidden in public places like parks, beaches or residential areas and must be restricted to licensed venues only.

1.6. Public facilities:

Public facilities (i.e. public parks, benches, bus stops, etc.) shall be kept in good conditions. Concerned authorities must be informed of any damages.

2. Substance abuse:

The consumption of alcohol as well as any other drug or psychotropic substance is strictly prohibited in Islam and is punishable by law. Due to the large diversity of cultures and nationalities present in Dubai, alcohol consumption is closely regulated.

2.1. Drugs:

Holding, consuming, buying or selling any kind of drug – in any quantity – as well as being tested positive to any drug by the authorities in the UAE is considered a crime.

2.2. Alcohol consumption:

Alcohol consumption shall be confined to designated areas (i.e. licensed restaurants and venues that serve alcohol to their clients). Being caught under the effect of alcohol outside these places (even in light doses) can lead to a fine or incarceration.

2.3. Driving and alcohol:

The UAE has adopted a zero-tolerance policy in terms of driving under the effect of alcohol. Being caught driving with even the smallest dose of alcohol can lead to a fine, incarceration or deportation.

2.4. Purchasing alcohol:

Buying and selling alcohol is controlled by very strict laws. Alcohol is exclusively sold by specialised licensed stores. It can only be bought by holders of an alcohol-purchasing license (this license is only attainable by non-Muslims). Buyers shall respect the local culture by carrying their alcohol in paper bags such that it cannot be seen.

2.5. Smoking:

Smoking is not allowed in government facilities, offices, malls and shops. Smoking outside designated areas is subject to fine.

2.6. Prescriptions for some medicines:

Some medicines containing psychotropic substances are forbidden in the UAE. Their holders must carry a prescription from a UAE-licensed medical doctor. Visitors shall verify that their medicines are allowed in the UAE before entering the country.

3. Driving safely:

Traffic on Dubai roads is increasingly becoming a major issue for commuters. Following simple security and courtesy rules can make the roads safer and more user-friendly. All road users shall demonstrate respect and consideration for one another.

3.1. Speeding:

Speed limits are clearly signposted and must be respected in order to ensure the general safety of all road users. Car racing is extremely dangerous and shall be avoided. Driving below speed on fast lane is also dangerous.

Most of Dubai roads are monitored by radars and fines are high.

3.2. Tailgating and lane discipline:

Driving fast behind other cars and flashing headlights at them as well as jumping from lane to lane and overtaking are dangerous practices that can lead to fines.

3.3. Safety belt:

Drivers and passengers must wear their safety belt. Not buckling up is subject to fine. Children shall be seated in the backseat.

3.4. Mobile phone:

The use of a mobile phone whilst driving is illegal. Phones must be turned off before starting the car or unless a hands-free kit or headset is available.

3.5. Police, fire trucks and ambulances:

When sirens are heard, drivers shall give way as soon as possible.

3.6. Accidents:

Drivers may not stop or reduce speed to look at a traffic accident out of curiosity, which can lead to traffic obstruction. In case of involvement in a light accident, drivers shall clear the way to avoid danger and traffic obstruction.

3.7. Parking:

Drivers shall park their cars considerately in designated areas only and must avoid parking on special needs parking spaces.

3.8. Pedestrians:

Drivers shall stop for pedestrians and respect their rights at pedestrian crossings. On the other hand, pedestrians must use the designated zebra crossings when crossing the road.

3.9. Bicycles and motorbikes:

Motorbike drivers shall carry a special driving license, wear their helmet and remain on car routes. They shall avoid speeding and reckless driving.

Cycling is considered a healthy and green way to circulate. Nevertheless, for their own safety, cyclists must commit to cycling paths. Not committing to cycling paths is subject to fine.

3.10. Weather conditions:

Drivers should be aware of the occurrence of abnormal weather conditions such as thick fogs and sand storms and avoid high speeds.

4. Mutual respect:

Personal freedoms in Dubai are guaranteed to all. However, freedom stops when it endangers people's lives, health, security or liberty. Moreover, the exercise of these freedoms shall be governed by the laws of the UAE.

Islam does not differentiate between nationalities and races. Therefore, respect for cultural differences and equal treatment of people regardless of their origins is the base of the community of Dubai where security and peace prevail.

4.1. Insults:

Swearing, profanities, insults and all kinds of vulgar language are strictly forbidden in Dubai and are legally reprehensible in case of complaint. All kinds of aggressive or offensive gestures are considered a public offence and are subjected to fines or imprisonment.

4.2. Queuing:

Queuing patiently for one's turn to be served rather than pushing in ahead of others is common courtesy. Queues must be respected patiently and not jumped over. Priority shall be given to the elderly, people with special needs and pregnant women.

4.3. Loudness:

Basic rules of courtesy impose on people to respect public places' calm and quietness by avoiding loud conversations or answering their phones where it might disturb others, e.g. in movie theatres, conference rooms, quiet shops and restaurants, hospitals, etc.

4.4. Rumours:

Spreading false news, statements or rumours and malicious propaganda that disturb public security and harm public interest are serious crimes punishable by law.

4.5. Photography:

Photos of people – and especially photos of women and families – in public places shall not be taken without their permission. Taking photos of people is a sensitive issue in Dubai's local culture.

4.6. Begging and street vendors:

Begging is forbidden in all parts of Dubai. Selling any kind of goods or services without a license from the competent authorities is illegal.

5. Environment:

In the global context of climate change, it is everybody's duty to try their best to protect environment, reducing waste and saving resources.

5.1. Resource consumption:

Considering the desert surrounding cities in the UAE and the lack of natural fresh water sources it is crucial to conserve water and avoid abusing this precious resource. It is also crucial to save energy by avoiding keeping air conditioning or other electrical appliances on when not in use.

5.2. Reducing waste:

Whenever possible, waste should be reduced through recycling. Green behaviour and the use of recycled products is encouraged.

5.3. Respect for nature:

Preservation of the marine environment: All practices that threaten the marine environment or the safety of marine life through any type of pollution are prohibited. Fishing is only allowed with a license from the competent authorities.

Preservation of the desert environment: Hunting all kinds of wild animals or birds or threatening wildlife and biodiversity is prohibited. Camping in the desert is only allowed with a license from the competent authorities.

Throwing waste and causing pollution to the desert or marine environments is subject to fine.

5.4. Pet management:

Pet owners are responsible for fixing any damage caused by their animals. They are also responsible for cleaning up any remnants their animals leave on the pavements or any other public place. Dogs are forbidden in parks and beaches; they must remain on leash in public places.

5.5. Littering and spitting:

Spitting in public and littering waste or cigarette butts in public areas are considered an offence and are subjected to fines.

6. Respect for religion:

In line with Islam's great tradition of tolerance and openness, religious values are widely respected in the UAE. Therefore, committing blasphemy or sacrilege against any religion is considered deeply offensive. Islam being the official religion of the UAE, some simple rules shall be followed in order to show respect and avoid misunderstandings.

6.1. Prayer time:

Muslims pray five times a day. Each prayer is announced from the mosques by a call to prayer. When the call to prayer is heard, music shall be turned off in all public places and cars, and Muslims shall be allowed to perform their prayer duty.

6.2. Ramadan:

During the month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from dawn to sunset. Throughout this month, eating, drinking or smoking in public spaces during daylight is considered a public offence and is punishable by law.

6.3. Religious activities and celebrations:

Any type of religious activity – Islamic or not – is forbidden without a licence from the competent authorities.

Appendices

Appendix I: Offence and penalty table:

Offence	Penalty
Public display of affection	Warning or fine (in case of severe breach can lead to jail and/or deportation)
Alcohol consumption outside designated areas	Fine or jail
Buying alcohol without an alcohol licence	Fine or jail
Drive under the effect of alcohol or any other drug	Fine, jail and/or deportation – car confiscation
Drug consumption or possession	Fine, jail and deportation
Lack of respect for Islam's customs and symbols	Fine, jail and deportation
Lack of respect for other religions' customs and symbols	Fine or jail
Vulgar language	Fine or jail
Littering and spitting	Warning or fine
Pet fouling public areas	Warning or fine
Damaging public facilities	Fine
Respect for environment	Warning or fine (cf. Federal Law No. 24/1999 on the protection and development of environment)