

# Moving to the UAE? Here's a checklist for your first 3 months



The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a glittering land of possibility. This global business hub rose from the desert and continues to attract people from around the world with its cloud-high skyscrapers, endless opportunities and glamorous lifestyles.

HSBC has been on the ground in the UAE since 1946 - plenty of time for us to develop the expertise and local knowledge to help you make the most of your move.

Whether you're just doing some light research into a move or several steps into your relocation process, this guide will provide you with some of the essential info you need to make a successful start to life in the UAE.

## | Getting set up

### Connectivity

Unless you're heading to a silent meditation retreat or doing a digital detox, you'll probably want to get online as soon as possible. If you've just moved to the UAE, you're in luck - the country leads the world in fiber-to-home penetration and has the fastest mobile network<sup>1</sup> in the world!

For more detailed info on UAE connectivity, visit <https://www.tra.gov.ae/en/home.aspx>.

**Mobile** - There are 2 main telecom companies to choose from in the UAE: du and Etisalat. Both of these companies launched app-based virtual networks in 2017 - Virgin Mobile (du) and Swyp (Etisalat) - which appeal to younger, more tech-savvy audiences. Once you've decided which provider suits your needs, you'll need a valid Emirates ID and UAE visa to register and sign up for a mobile contract.

**Home internet** - Residents in the UAE can choose between Etisalat and du for their home internet services. Unlike mobile connections, you must be 21 years of age or above to set up a home internet account. All internet traffic is monitored in the UAE by the Telecommunications And Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA). Content that does not comply with the country's ethical or moral standards may have restricted access.

**Top tip - When you're ready to sign up with your internet service provider, you'll need to gather together your:**

- **Emirates ID (original and a copy)**
- **passport, including stamped residence visa (original and a copy)**
- **registered tenancy contract**

## Accommodation

Finding a home is a big part of moving to a new country. We know it can be hard to feel truly settled until you've got the keys to your own place. Renting property in the UAE isn't drastically different to any other part of the world, but we've outlined some key points to help the process go smoothly.

For more detailed info on UAE property laws, visit [dubailand.gov.ae/en/#/](https://dubailand.gov.ae/en/#/)

## Renting

There's no shortage of property options in the UAE, but rents can be expensive. When negotiating your employment contract, see if your employer will include your housing. Like any new move, you'll want to consider factors like your commute, proximity to schools and shops, and your budget. You can typically expect to be locked into your tenancy contract for a year.

There's good news for couples. As an effort to improve the living standards of residents, in November 2020 the UAE government announced that unmarried men and women are free to live together.

## Buying

Expat property purchases in the UAE are restricted to designated areas called "freehold areas". There's a range of freehold areas that offer different price points and property types. You can buy properties that are ready to move into, or "off plan", which is property that is marketed but has yet to be constructed. If you're looking to finance a property overseas, you can apply for a mortgage with HSBC in over 10 countries and regions.

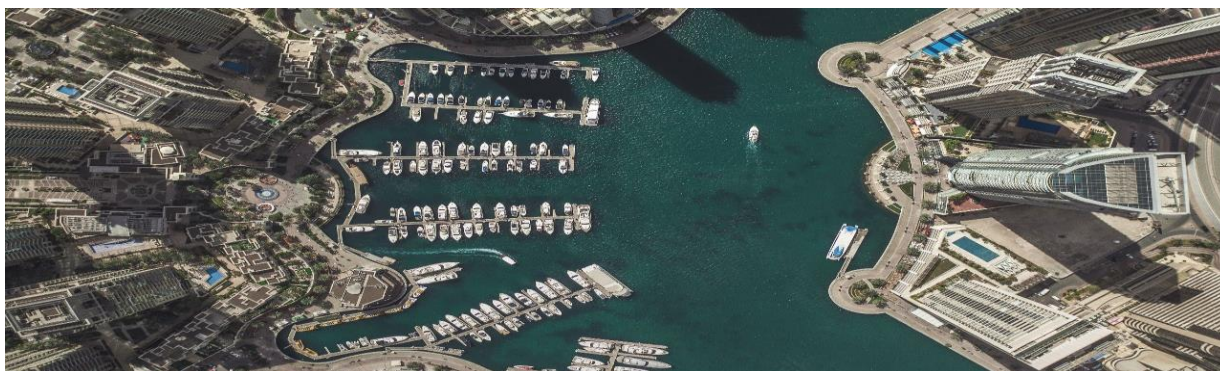
## Documents and registration

To rent in the UAE, you'll have to present your passport as well as a copy of your residence visa. To access utilities in Dubai, for example, you must register with the Dubai Electricity & Water Authority (DEWA) and pay a refundable deposit with setup fees. DEWA also collects an annual housing fee, which is required of every expat who rents a property. This fee is either 5% of your annual rent or 0.5% of the purchase price for those who buy property.

Your tenancy must be registered online with Ejari, the Real Estate Regulatory Agency. This requires a number of documents: a receipt proving your connection with DEWA, copies of both your passport and the landlord's passport, and a copy of your Emirates ID.

It's generally acceptable to negotiate rent with your landlord. One way to potentially reduce the overall rent is to agree to pay your rent in fewer instalments. (i.e. 3 months at a time).

**Top tip - In the UAE, annual increases in rent are subject to regulation. To work out how much extra you are likely to pay each year, check out the [government's rent calculator](#).**



## | Banking and finance

Financial opportunity is often a driving force of emigration to the UAE. But regardless of how much or how little you make, there are some things to keep in mind ahead of your move.

### Day-to-day spending

The UAE dirham, also known as the Emirati dirham, is the official currency of the UAE. The dirham is pegged to the US dollar, which means it has a fixed rate that rises and falls with the dollar. Credit and debit cards are widely accepted in the country, but some smaller shops and restaurants may be cash only.

You won't be able to open a bank account without a residency visa. If you think this may be a problem, consider opening an international account before you move.

### Opening a bank account

The UAE is very familiar with international banking - there are more expats in the country than Emirates nationals! You will need a bank account for your salary deposit, to pay rent, and for day-to-day banking needs. Application requirements may differ slightly, but expect to have on hand your passport, valid visa, Emirates ID and a salary letter from your employer or sponsor.

Some banks may require a substantial minimum deposit or won't process your application until they verify your documents in person. An alternative is to get help opening an account remotely before you leave home.

HSBC offers overseas account openings in over 30 markets around the world. In the UAE, our "meet and greet" airport service ensures all your final paperwork is ready, and your account will be fully activated once you receive your Emirates ID.

### Tax

If you are in the process of moving to the UAE or considering a relocation, you have likely heard about the income tax, or rather lack thereof. It's important to note, however, that if you only take a 6-month contract in the UAE, you're likely to be subject to your home country taxation.

You may not pay federal income tax, but all residents pay 5% VAT on the purchase of all goods and services. And in 2017, the UAE introduced an excise tax - similar to a "sin tax" imposed by Canada, Sweden and the UK - covering products considered to be harmful to consumers and the environment, such as carbonated drinks and tobacco.

For more detailed information on UAE tax obligations, visit [the United Arab Emirates' Government portal](#)

### Money transfers

You might be sending money home, sending it to the UAE or making a transfer within the country. Either way, there are a few things to keep in mind.

Domestic money transfers within the UAE are free, and are a safe, convenient way to pay utilities, bills and credit cards. For international transfers, you can use online services, brokers, wire transfers or bank transfers. Many people choose to send money between their bank accounts. It's safe, reliable and convenient. Depending on who you're banking with, this may be the fastest and cheapest way to send money, too.

An HSBC UAE overseas account allows you to transfer up to AED500,000 per day between eligible accounts, and to make fee-free transfers for a selection of currencies, 24/7, through online banking.

## | Immigration and identification

Expats from around the world call the UAE home, but that doesn't mean you can just show up unannounced. We've outlined a few small but vital things you need to have covered. For more detailed information on immigration visit [the United Arab Emirates' government portal](#).

### ID

All residents of the UAE must apply for an Emirates ID. This is something you must legally keep on your person for identification purposes and, as outlined previously, is required for accessing government services. If you are leaving the country and cancelling your UAE residence visa, you must return your ID card to the relevant authority.

### Visas

Possessing a residence visa is a strict requirement for working in the UAE. You can get this by finding a job and being sponsored by your employer, setting up and registering a business in the UAE, or receiving a family visa on behalf of your husband or parent who is a resident. Students can apply for a 5-year student visa once they've been accepted to study at a higher education institution in the UAE.

In 2019, the UAE changed the provision that only certain workers could sponsor a family visa. Now, regardless of their profession, expats who have a job, residency permit and minimum monthly salary of AED4,000 can apply to bring their families to the UAE on a dependent's visa. Family members can enter the country as "entry permit holders" but the sponsor must complete the sponsorship within 60 days. The Ejari document is also mandatory for a dependent visa sponsorship.

[More information on sponsorship requirements](#)

## | Feeling at home

### Transit

From trams to helicopters, there's no shortage of ways to get around the UAE. A large majority of new arrivals settle in Dubai, so we've outlined some of the basic info you need to get from A to B in the region's major hub.

While your image of transport in Dubai might be futuristic-looking supercars, the city has a vast and well-appointed transport system that includes a metro, buses, trams and water buses. Access to all of these is done through a "nol" smart card, which can be bought from ticket offices and vending machines in metro stations.

If private cars are more your thing, then there are always the main ride-sharing apps. Fancy owning your own car? To drive in the UAE, you'll first need to apply for a temporary driving license, after which you might be able to exchange your own license for a local one, depending on where it was issued. Australia, Canada, Germany, Italy, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Switzerland, the UK, and the US are just a few of the participating countries.

Visit the [Roads and Transport Authority](#) website for more detailed transport information.

### Entertainment

Even if you're moving for work, it's important to make time to play. Thankfully, the UAE is world class when it comes to entertainment options for the whole family. From 5-star golf courses and sports academies for the athletically inclined to amusement parks and desert safaris for the more adventurous, there is no shortage of ways to get a thrill.

More of a spectator? Football is a much-loved sport in the UAE, as are cricket and horse racing. Traditional sports include camel racing, as well as the 4,000-year-old practice of falconry. If you're visiting during the UAE National Day celebrations in December, or any other big holiday, there's a good chance you'll get to see a falconry demonstration in action.

## Education

No matter where you live in the world, ensuring the best education for your kids is a top priority. The UAE has a wealth of options. Many expats choose to educate their children privately because the language of instruction at public schools is usually Arabic. You can expect that all major curriculums will be an option, such as the International Baccalaureate system, the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level (O-levels), Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and the American curriculum.

If you need more information about the school system, at HSBC we partner with education consultants around the world to help you navigate your way around. You can access these and other international banking services through your overseas HSBC UAE account.

For more detailed information on education, visit The Knowledge and Human Development Authority ([KHDA](#)) website.

## Food

For many of us, food is an important part of where we move. No matter what you like, the Emirates' most populous city of Dubai will not disappoint.

It's very difficult to put an average price on meals in Dubai. Like many places, dining can be as affordable or as expensive as you make it. From small delis to Michelin-starred eateries, there's something for all budgets.

Similarly, the amount of money you spend on groceries is really dependent on your lifestyle. There are budget supermarket chains that stock all of the essentials and premium outlets that sell the finest produce from around the world.

What about a glass of wine with dinner, you ask? In 2020, the government loosened its law around the consumption of alcohol. You can now enjoy your favourite tippie at a private residence or a licensed establishment in the UAE, provided you're over the age of 21.



## | Wrapping up your first 3 months

We hope you find this guide useful in getting off to a great start in UAE. At HSBC, we're here to give you the right level of planning and support so you can make a success of the experience. Learn more about our [international services](#) to see how we can help.

### **Ready to open an overseas account?**

We can tell you about the best way for you to apply. Select your current location and where you would like to open an account. We'll walk you through the steps.

[Apply now](#)

1. UAE ranks 1st in global indicators for quality of telecommunications infrastructure. Emirates News Agency, April 2021.