

Business etiquette, language & culture

Overview

The UAE has a diverse and multi-cultural society, and 80% of the UAE population are expatriates. As a result the UAE is regarded as relatively liberal within the region and provides schools, cultural centres and restaurants catering for international cultures.

The UAE is a Muslim country. You should respect and be aware of local traditions and sensitivities and always behave and dress modestly, particularly when visiting religious sites. However, although the national culture revolves around the religion of Islam, other religions are also respected and churches and temples can be found alongside mosques.

The Islamic dress code is not compulsory. Most UAE Emirati males wear a kandura, an ankle length white shirt and most Emirati women wear an abaya, a black flowing-over garment covering most of the body.

Language

Arabic is the most commonly spoken language, followed by English, French, Russian, Hindi and more. Almost all official documents, forms, laws and decrees are in Arabic. Therefore, it helps to have a working knowledge of the language.

English is widely spoken throughout the country. Although it is common for written correspondence to be in English, Arabic is often preferred within some public sector organisations. It is preferable to have one side of your business card printed in Arabic. During meetings you should:

- exchange business cards immediately after introductions, presenting with both hands or with the right
- do not offer anything with your left hand, nor receive anything with your left hand
- keep cards on the table, do not put them away immediately

Meetings and presentations

Personal relationships are key to doing business in the UAE. UK exporters are encouraged to have a face-to-face business dialogue with their UAE counterparts. It is essential to obtain legal, financial and taxation advice, along with undertaking necessary research, all of which are critical when considering new markets.

As in other countries, more than anything it is important to target the right person in your contacts, the decision-maker. It is also preferable to establish new business contacts via an introduction by mutual contact, exhibitions, networking receptions or through the Embassy in the form of an Overseas Market Introduction Service (OMIS). Through an OMIS, the Embassy in the UAE can provide a programme-arranging service, whereby your company would be introduced to the most appropriate contact and an appointment can be confirmed on your behalf.

Face-to-face meetings are preferred as phone or emails are sometimes seen as impersonal. Appointments should be made no more than two weeks in advance and confirmed a few days before the actual meeting as priorities may change.

The working week within the private sector is Sunday-Thursday from 9am-5pm and within the public sector Sunday-Thursday from 7:30am-2:30pm (some offices are open until 4pm).

There are many exhibitions that take place in the UAE with some of the largest regional events held in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. This is a good opportunity for companies to meet potential partners, distributors and clients.

Negotiations

Personal contact with potential and existing partners/clients and regular visits to the market are of the utmost importance and it is natural for the business relationship to be built with time. It is advised that you consult a lawyer prior to signing an agreement in the UAE. A list of lawyers is available from the British Embassy. See the 'Resources' section for details.

Understanding the unwritten rules to gain the competitive edge

The working week traditionally starts on Sunday and ends on Thursday. Friday and Saturday are the official days of rest, though in some cases, people will work Saturday.

Meetings should be scheduled in advance with extra time allocated in case it should go on longer or start later than anticipated.

The customary greeting is "As-salam alaikum" (peace be upon you), to which the reply is "Wa alaikum as-salam" (and upon you be peace). When entering a meeting, general introductions will begin with a handshake. You should greet each of your Emirati counterparts individually. Avoid shaking hands with a woman unless they extend their hand }401rst.

When you are in the UAE, especially on business, coffee, as well as tea, will often be offered to you in offices and at Arab's homes. Offering coffee is symbolic of hospitality.

Cultural considerations

The UAE is a considerably modern country in relation to the rest of the Middle East region. As such, many traditional attitudes and business practices are evolving towards a more westernised approach. Nevertheless, it is still important to be aware and respectful of some of the differences that might exist.

UAE public holidays

Visit:

<https://government.ae/en/information-and-services/public-holidays-and-religious-affairs/public-holidays>

2018

Date:

Holiday:

Type:

Tuesday 21st August

Arafat (Haj) Day

National holiday

Wednesday 22nd August

Eid-al-Adha (Feast of Sacrifice)

National holiday

Thursday 23rd August

Eid-al-Adha Holiday 1

National holiday

Friday 24th August

Eid-al-Adha Holiday 2

National holiday

Wednesday 12th September

Al-Hijra (Islamic New Year)

National holiday

Wednesday 21st November

Prophet Mohamed Birthday

National holiday

Friday 30th November

Commemoration Day

National holiday

Sunday 2nd December

National Day

National holiday

Monday 3rd December

National Day

National holiday

Monday 31st December

New Year's Eve

Observance

2019

Date:

Holiday:

Type:

Tuesday 1st January

New Year's Day

National holiday

Wednesday 3rd April

Israa & Miaraaj Night

National holiday

Wednesday 5th June

Eid-al-Fitr (end of Ramadan)

National holiday

(NB some dates subject to change)

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41A Spring Gardens
Buxton
Derbyshire
SK17 6BJ
United Kingdom
Email: info@ima.uk.com
General enquiries switchboard: +44 (0) 1298 79562
Website: www.DoingBusinessGuide.co.uk