

FAQs

AFTM Lawrence Dudley answers some of your questions...

What are our rights/what are the laws that will affect me?

This is a big topic. Most of the normal conduct we expect of our DT's will be appropriate with Alshaya. The laws will differ by country and sometimes even by area. For example, the UAE is made up of 7 emirates or states. Dubai is the most liberal, socially, but Sharja, which is 20 minutes north of the Dubai Mall, is very conservative and traditional with their laws and customs. The thing to always remember is that they realize you are from another country and you are not expected to completely conform to their customs. However, they do expect you to be respectful of their rights and do nothing outwardly offensive in nature. Things like public displays of affection, revealing clothing, swearing, or offensive gestures are all examples of things that would be disrespectful. If you have a specific concern, please bring it up and we can address it.

How safe will I be?

Very safe! You'll be as safe as you would be traveling in any major city in the USA or Europe. Take the usual precautions, of course. Don't wander off into unknown parts of town and don't walk alone at night in sketchy areas (dark streets, alleyways, non-public areas). Remember, the laws are very strict for bad behavior. Everyone here knows that if they steal (muggings, robbery, etc.) or create any kind of mischief, they will be punished. This of course applies to you, too! A single offense of drinking and driving will send you to prison for many years...like 30! So, it just doesn't happen here. Tourism is a big part of the economy and the work force is almost all from other countries. They need us and therefore don't target expats or foreigners. As always, if you cause trouble or go looking for it, you WILL find it.

What kind of clothing can I wear (male/female)?

Western attire is perfectly acceptable. It's acceptable for men to be wearing casual clothing. Women can wear shorts and t-shirts, but only in the appropriate places. In public places, like the mall, you would not want to be wearing a sleeveless shirt or short skirt, etc. Jeans, a t-shirt, and sandals are just fine.

What are the laws regarding alcohol?

What are the laws regarding drugs?

How tolerant of other religions are people in the Middle East?

They are quite tolerant, but don't go on a crusade, hand out literature, or stand on the street corner preaching and condemning others to eternal damnation! You are a guest in their country, and they do not have separation of church and state. Most of their laws and customs are based on their religion. They realize that not all of the people working here have the same religion. You may practice in the privacy of your home and some religions do have churches or places of worship here. It is tolerated but not encouraged and it's definitely not evangelical in any way. Do NOT engage in conversation about religion or politics.

Will it be important for us to understand the language?

Not really. If you are interested, it's a great opportunity to immerse yourself and pick up some basic words and phrases. There are free video lessons on YouTube if you want to learn some basic phrases. Arabic is quite complicated and anything written is usually in English as well. I have watched a few videos online and have 10-12 common expressions memorized. It's a fun way to engage people, as they will probably have a few English phrases to exchange with you.

What are signs of disrespect that we should avoid?

Staring at people, pointing, or drawing attention to people that do not want your attention is the number one thing NOT to do. Otherwise, imagine that you are spending the day out with your new boyfriend/girlfriend's parents and you want to make a good impression but still be yourself. You wouldn't wear anything inappropriate or possibly offensive (including alcohol references or advertisements), you wouldn't cuss or use profane language, and wouldn't start off with deep conversations about your religion, politics or beliefs. Another big one is taking photos. You should not just take photos of people without asking. You can take pictures of places, but if there are people present, you need to ask permission. The more conservative the country, the less they like you invading their privacy. If you follow this every day you're here, you'll have no problems.

What kind of transportation is available and safe?

Taxis are everywhere, everyone uses them, and they are very safe (local cash only!).

What are the laws regarding sex?

What are the laws regarding LGBT?

What are the laws regarding tattoos?

Can men and women socialize in public?

There will almost always be a "mixed" area and that is the norm. But there may be a few designated places where only women and children are allowed for their privacy.

What about people with different sexual preferences?

It is accepted, but not spoken about. Based on the number of people from other countries (there are more foreigners than locals in many of these places) it is tolerated to a degree. You will see people who appear obvious in their lifestyle, but they're not being flamboyant or trying to make a statement. It is not discussed or addressed in most situations. It is against the religion and therefore against the law to practice this. Remember, public displays of affection are not acceptable for anyone, not even married couples. There is NO kissing or hand holding in public by law. Family men may hold hands and walk, or kiss on the cheek during greetings, and hugs when greeting are acceptable, but it's not in an intimate manner. In Dubai, it's more open and tolerated, but it's a crime and you will be punished if you're caught doing something inappropriate. Wearing a shirt pronouncing that you're proud to be gay would not be advisable. Please ask if you have more concerns or specific questions. The service industry is a big part of the economy and, just like in the States: there are lots of different types of people. They just don't wear it on their sleeve here.

Will I be allowed to bring my prescription medicine or do I need to get and fill my prescriptions there?

You will need to verify any medications with the immigration policy online for each country. For the most part, you can bring prescription drugs in their original bottles with your name on it, along with the prescription or a letter from your doctor stating it is for you and is necessary. Some medicines that would be available in the States are not allowed in some of the countries. Heavy pain killers, some strong muscle relaxers, and any narcotics are deemed a controlled substance and are not allowed. But regular meds like asthma, diabetic aids, blood regulators, etc. should be fine. Again, I would check with the country's specific consulate or immigration websites to validate.

What are the laws regarding firearms?

What are the laws regarding weapons?

What kind of food is typically eaten there?

Pork is not eaten in the region. There is an international mix of people. So, most foods are available. They love American brands, so you will see all of the fast food places and most of the bigger chain restaurants. Arabic or Lebanese is very popular, and that usually includes grilled meats with various sauces and naan (like pita). Italian is abundant, British, some French, German, lots of Indian, Chinese....pretty much everything. There are a few Spanish/Mexican restaurants but they're not really popular except with us expats. Pork is available at some restaurants in Dubai, but not many. Pork is not available in Kuwait or other more traditional Islamic countries.

Should we only drink bottled water?

This depends on where you are. Not just the country, but also the area, the hotel you are staying in, etc. For the most part, the water will be safe. The reason is because they don't have water that's pumped out of the ground, like in Mexico. ALL water must be processed before it is consumed, as it's usually coming from the sea or ocean. It goes through a desalinization process to remove the salt and the sea minerals and it is purified. Bottled water is everywhere, and it's reasonably priced.

What are the liquor laws?

For the most part, alcohol is not permitted. It is not allowed in Islamic culture. However, there are a lot of foreigners in each of these countries, so there are exceptions. Dubai is the most liberal country and there is alcohol available at most hotels. So, if the restaurant or bar is in the hotel or attached to the hotel, they probably will serve alcohol. Alcohol is VERY expensive in comparison to most of the US, but not out of line with an upscale bar or tourist location in New York City. Drinks will cost \$12-20 dollars, whether it's a beer, a glass of wine, or a martini. It doesn't really matter what it is because it's all imported and has a lot of government red tape to get through, so it's going to be pricey. Remember that you must be responsible. Falling out of a cab, getting sick on the side of the road, or fighting are all big red flags and will get you a lot of unwanted attention! If you can't handle it at home, you should avoid it all together here. If you can go out and have a drink or TWO with friends, then you'll be just fine. Take a taxi and have a good time. In Kuwait and many of the other nearby countries, alcohol is not available at all.

What are the laws regarding gambling?

What are the laws regarding prostitution?

What are the laws regarding pornography?

Will I need to bring converters for my electronic devices?

Absolutely! Or you can get them here. They are cheap and sold in almost every store, grocery, gas station, just about everywhere. You might bring one with you to get you through the first few days, but I wouldn't load your suitcase up with too much extra weight. Items that pull a lot of energy and things that heat up (blow dryers, curling irons, electric shavers, etc.) will often stop working after a few uses with a converter. They will either burn out the converter, or they themselves will burn out. The electricity is double here, 220V vs. 110V, and these items pull the maximum electricity to heat up, which oftentimes is too much for them to handle. We will try to let you know if blow dryers are available in the accommodations, but be wary of packing 5-6 different items and lugging them across the globe only to have them burn out the second day you're here. You may want to consider buying a curling/flat iron locally or maybe going in on some items with the other DTs once you arrive. They are not very expensive and it will save you room and weight in your luggage.

Can I use the ATMs there to get money from my bank account? Will my credit/debit cards work there?

For the most part, "yes." ATMs are readily available. Major credit and debit cards will work. The debit cards need to be on one of the main networks, like Cirrus or Maestro. As long as one of the logos on your card matches one of the logos on the ATM, it will work. Some local restaurants and stores will not accept credit or debit cards, and some will only accept them from a local bank. This is due to the higher transaction fees they have to pay. So always check before you sit and dine. You MUST contact each of your banks or credit companies and tell them you are travelling out of the US. They will want to know which countries and for how long. If you do not, they may decline all of the transactions for your security. By the way, dialing a 1-800 number to the US is not free from here and still incurs the international rate. You know how long you can be on hold for one of them, right? So take care of it in advance. Also, it will benefit you greatly to know which of your cards will charge you a foreign transaction fee and how much per transaction or amount. Some of my American cards have NO foreign fees, and some have lots. Call all your credit card companies and see which one is the best.

What are the laws regarding driving?

What are the laws regarding traffic?

Will my cell phone work in the Middle East?

Depends on your provider and plan. For the most part they should work, but it might cost you a lot to use it. Be sure to contact your provider! See what is available for international use and, specifically, for the countries you are visiting. They may have international plans for calls, texts, and data. You should decide what is right for you. I would recommend having as many options available before you leave the US for communication before you leave. Look into free or cheap apps for your phone, laptop or tablets. Things like Skype, Viber, WhatsApp, and Facebook can help you communicate with friends and family. Download them and set them up in advance. The internet is heavily regulated and many of these apps cannot be downloaded here. If you have them before you arrive, though, they will work just fine. If you are on a Wi-Fi connection, you will be able to use any of these apps for free or possibly a low fee. Regular calls internationally can run anywhere from \$2.25 to \$5 a minute. That's a serious bill. A ten minute call to your parents may cost you \$50! Get things set up in advance and set up your contacts. I had to teach my parents how to use Skype (it's still a little rough!). I use WhatsApp to text, as text messages are also expensive. I arranged weekly calls with some family members, which is helpful because the time difference is so big. That way they won't call you in the middle of the night and worry that you are not answering. We are working to make sure that the accommodations in all locations have Wi-Fi connections, so you can stay connected from the apartments. Don't wait to get everything lined up! Practice using these apps before you leave.

Will stores accept US dollars?

Large stores will probably take them. They will also take several other regional currencies. Local or small stores will not. There are money exchanges all over town, in the malls, grocery stores, etc. Using a larger exchange is the best way to get a good exchange rate. The exchanges in the hotels or tourist locations will charge the most and give you the worst conversion rates. Many small stores, restaurants, and all the taxis will only take local currency. Many will struggle making change from large bills, as well, so plan ahead and carry enough cash in small denominations for any outings.

Can I smoke in public?

There are areas posted with "No Smoking" signs, but there will always be an area close by to go for a smoke.

What are the laws regarding public displays of affection?

What are the laws regarding public intoxication?

Arabic	English	Reply
Marhaba	Hello	Ahlan or Hala (welcome)
Ahlan wa Sahlan	Welcome to our place	
Kif (keep) halak	How are you doing?	Hamduillah (good)
Sabah el kheir	Good morning	
Masa' el kheir	Good evening	
Tosbah ala kheir	Good night	
Shukran	Thank you	Tekram (male) Tekrami (female) (you're welcome)
Sahtein	Enjoy your meal	
Ma al salama	Goodbye	
Al salamu alaykum	Peace be upon you	Wa alaykum el salam (peace be upon you as well)

Helpful words and phrases

- “Cradle of civilization”
- Crossroads between Asia, Africa, and Europe
- Birthplace of three of the world's largest religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Estimated population: 80,000,000
- World's largest single source of crude oil
- Arabic is the official language, but most of the population speaks English

Key characteristics of the Gulf Region

Gulf Region Smart Card

Guide for Cultural Awareness



Presented by:




Hajj (Pilgrimage): At least once in their lifetime, every able-bodied Muslim who can afford to do so must make the pilgrimage to Mecca, which is the birthplace of Mohammad in Saudi Arabia.

- At dawn before sunrise
- Just after noon, when the sun begins to set
- During the afternoon
- Just after sunset
- Late at night

Salat (Prayer): Muslims pray five times a day:

Sawn (Fasting): During Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset.

Zakat (Charity): Giving of a fixed portion of one's wealth to charity, generally to the poor.

Shahada (Faith): Muslims believe that “Allah” is the one true God and that Mohammed (PBUH) is the prophet of Allah.

The practice of Islam is based on five beliefs:

Islam

- 95% of the population is Muslim
- A “Muslim” is a follower of Islam
- 3% of the population is Christian
- 2% of the population is Hindu

Religion

Holidays

The Islamic calendar is different from ours. Their calendar has 355 days in a year and it's currently the year 1433 on their calendar. So, a holiday in the Gulf Region isn't always on the same day according to our calendar. Here are some important Islamic holidays and the approximate times of year when they occur:

- **Islamic New Year** (November)
- **Ashura**: Honors Mohammad’s grandsons (November/December)
- **Mawlid an Nabi**: Mohammed’s birthday (January/February)
- **Ramadan**: The holy fasting month in Islam (July)
- **Laylat al-Qadr**: Commemorates the date that the Koran was revealed to Mohammed (August)
- **Eid al-Fitr**: The breaking of the Ramadan fast (August)
- **Eid al-Adha**: Takes place right after Hajj and commemorates the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice his son Ishmael as an act of obedience to God (October)

Currency

Country	Currency	Abbreviation
UAE (Dubai)	Dirham	AED
Kuwait	Dinar	KWD
Saudi Arabia	Riyal	SAR
Qatar	Riyal	QAR
Oman	Riyal	OMR
Bahrain	Dinar	BHD
Egypt	Pound	EGP
Lebanon	Pound	LBP

- Don't discuss women's rights, cultural traits that seem strange, or homosexuality
 - anyone the bottom of your shoe
 - Don't sit and cross your legs or show emotions during any conflict.
 - Don't “lose face.” Stay in control of your you're staying in
 - Don't use Facebook or Twitter to post comments that are critical of the country
 - Don't pet animals, they may carry diseases
 - Don't sit in the front seat of a taxi
 - Don't stare at females
 - Don't refuse a drink or meal
 - Don't be affectionate in public
 - do these things in private.
 - during the month of Ramadan. You should Don't publicly eat, drink, or chew gum
 - during a call to prayer
 - Don't speak loudly or be disrespectful
 - pornography, or weapons with you
 - Don't bring any alcohol, pork, drugs,
- DON'T do this...**

- Be respectful of the culture and traditions
 - Keep tattoos covered
 - Drink bottled water when possible
 - Use insect repellents
 - some cars won't stop
 - Take care when crossing the street as Use sunscreen!
 - Eat and drink using your right hand
 - Learn some Arabic words and phrases
 - take their photo
 - Ask someone's permission before you times, and holidays
 - Show respect for the Islamic faith, prayer
 - Dress and behave modestly
- DO this...**

What to bring...

- Prescription drugs + refills
- NyQuil (not liquid, but gel capsules), Pepto-Bismol (tablets), and melatonin (to help with jet lag)
- If you have diabetes or severe allergies, you might consider wearing an alert bracelet (www.medicalert.org)
- Laptop, iPad, iPod
- Electronic adapter (these are also easy to purchase once you arrive)
- A light jacket and light long sleeve shirts
- Cool, appropriate clothes for when you're outside (it can get up to 120° in summer)
- Health insurance card
- Passport
- Sunscreen and sunglasses

Before you leave...

- Call your bank to tell them you'll be traveling
- Check the foreign transaction fees on your debit/credit cards to see which offer the best rates
- Call your cell phone provider to check their international rates
- Make sure your routine vaccines are up to date. Routine shots are for influenza, chickenpox, polio, measles/mumps/rubella (MMR), and diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus (DPT). It might be a good idea for you to call or visit your doctor to see what shots they recommend.
- Install communications apps on your phone/laptop: Skype, Viber, WhatsApp
- Set up automatic bill payment or forward your mail to a friend/relative for bill payment