

Ramadan in Dubai Guide



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A 30-day period to slow down your life and reflect upon what matters. That is the essence of Ramadan in Dubai, and it's one of the best times to visit the country.

Muslims aren't the only ones who experience Ramadan; non-Muslims are welcome to join as well.

The life-in-the-fast-lane lifestyle changes. The 9:00 am to 6:00 pm workday becomes considerably shorter. The nightlife goes quiet (to the point you'll forget it's the number one destination in the region for partying). Residents relive annual rituals as visitors and newcomers partake in a truly authentic experience.

Fair warning: it can be baffling if you don't know what to expect. That's why it's good to come prepared. Otherwise, you'll miss out on an opportunity to experience the rich culture only seen at this time of the year.

If you're interested in embracing Ramadan, this guide is for you. Read on to discover what Ramadan means to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. You'll also learn about iftar and why Dubai is worth visiting during this period.



What is Ramadan?



You've probably heard about Ramadan. But what does it mean to Muslims? It's important to understand the great significance of this period for two reasons: first, for its cultural significance and second (and more pragmatically), so you know how to act when you arrive. Understanding the daily routines is essential to getting the most out of your trip.

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar. During this month, Muslims commemorate the first revelation of Allah (God) in the Quran (Islamic holy book) to Prophet Mohammed.

During this time, Muslims observe strict fasting (known as "sawm") from dawn to dusk and they abstain from all indulgences. These include eating, drinking, sex, and smoking, along with any negative thoughts, actions, and habits that have crept into your life.

Sawm is among the Five Pillars of Islam which encompass the essence and the doctrine of the Muslim religion. The other four are prayer (salat), pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj), declaration of faith (shahada), and charity (zakat).

Will every Muslim be fasting during Ramadan? No. Children, nursing mothers, pregnant women, the sick and some other groups are exempt for fasting. Everyone else, however, is onboard.

People observing Ramadan will rise early and eat suhur, which is the pre-dawn meal before the dawn prayer (fajr). After sunset, the fast is broken and they say maghrib, the evening prayer and have the evening meal (iftar). Traditionally, iftar starts with dates and a glass of water.

Because Ramadan is based on their lunar calendar, it's still too early to tell the exact date. Right now, the best guess is that this year's Ramadan in 2021 starts April 13 and ends on May 12. In the UAE, the announcement is made after the UAE Moon Sighting Committee--consisting of the government, religious leaders and astronomers--confirms the sighting of the hilal (the crescent moon).

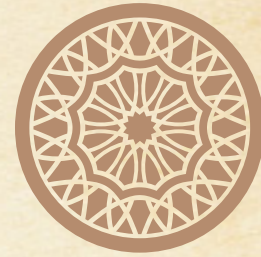
When Ramadan officially starts, Dubai will get noticeably quieter and the pace of life will slow down. "Ramadan Kareem" and "Ramadan Mubarak" will be common phrases as Muslims greet each other.

Don't be afraid to use these phrases yourself. You can use the simple greetings or use "Blessed Ramadan" in place of "Ramadan Mubarak", for instance. Other greetings you could learn include, "As-salamu alaykum" to which the reply is "Wa-Alaikum-Salaam". You can also say, "Happy Ramadan" or "Congratulations, it's Ramadan."



A wide-angle photograph of the Dubai skyline, featuring numerous skyscrapers like the Burj Khalifa, reflected in the calm waters of the Dubai Marina. The sky is a mix of blue and grey, suggesting an overcast day.

Should you visit Dubai during Ramadan?



Absolutely.

It's a common misconception that Muslim countries like the United Arab Emirates are off limits during Ramadan. People get worried their holiday it will “clash” with the holy month. It couldn't be further from the truth. The very essence of Ramadan is to bring people together.

As such, Dubai welcomes everyone with open arms. The holy month is one of the best opportunities to visit the city and witness its tourism hotspots.

Why is this the case? During Ramadan, the city is less congested. This means you'll never have to worry about crowds in the mall or long lines at certain restaurants.

You also have the opportunity to visit the mosques (like Jumeirah Mosque) and get to learn first-hand about the religious importance of Ramadan and what it means to the residents of Dubai.

Also, many high-end hotels offer great Ramadan deals and discounts. That way, you can enjoy the world's best service at a discount or value-added price.

These are just some of the reasons why you should visit Dubai during Ramadan.

As long as you follow etiquette and respect the beliefs, there's no reason to postpone your trip to Dubai. Come. Visit. Have that wonderful holiday you were searching for (with an added cultural experience).

What changes should you be aware of?



During Ramadan, Muslims are required to adhere to strict religious rules and make difficult sacrifices. The authorities are very sympathetic towards non-Muslims during this time. However, you must be sure to adhere to the local Ramadan culture whenever possible (although it's not as strict as you might think).

Don't worry, it's mostly common sense. You'll be surprised the many myths and misconceptions floating around the web concerning Ramadan in Dubai. Your goal should be to treat everyone with consideration and respect. If you can handle that, you'll have a successful Ramadan.

But, for sake of clarity, here are the nuts and bolts about being sensitive to the Muslim Holy month.



Eating, drinking, and smoking



During fasting hours, don't break the fast in front of Muslims. This doesn't mean you have to wait for the sunset to have your meals. You're allowed to eat, drink or smoke in a private place. During work, companies provide eating rooms that are away from the people that are fasting.

You're also allowed to eat in your car as long as it's well screened off from public view. If you need a drink, please be discreet about it.

When in Dubai, know when the fasting begins and when it ends (sunrise and sunset) so you can join your Muslim friends in meals.





Dressing

During Ramadan, both men and women are expected to dress more modestly. Avoid revealing and tight clothes. For women, keep the cleavage, shoulders and knees well covered, out of respect.

The modest clothing also includes people going out at night.

Public beaches, hotel pools and beach parks will remain open. In these places you're allowed to wear swimwear.

Fasting friends



The hardest time for fasters is usually during the first one or two weeks. Going without drinking, eating and smoking (for smokers) can have a huge impact on the fasters. Understand if your friends need to keep a little distance before iftar.



Store Opening Times



Most stores will be open during fasting hours, except for the majority of restaurants, which will remain closed. An hour before and a couple of hours after sunset, most stores will close. Make sure you enquire about the Ramadan hours for your favourite stores.

After iftar, almost every store will be open.

The last few days



The entire holy month is not the same. During the last ten days or so, prayer will intensify and devout Muslims might spend their nights praying to get the most out of the holiest time.

Your Muslim friends might appear tired and/or sleep deprived. This will be coupled with the effects of fasting. So, be mindful of that.



Clubs, music & buying alcohol



Most of the nightclubs will be closed for Ramadan. Those that remain open will generally serve alcohol only after sunset. Until last year, alcohol prior to sunset was strictly off-limits. However, the government has since relaxed the Ramadan alcohol laws to allow non-fasters to access some of these services during the day.

Clubs will not have live music. Any music they do have will be kept low in pubs and bars.

You can play music at home, in your car or at the beach. Just make sure it's not heard outside the home or car and use headphones at the beach.



Accepting iftar invitations



When invited for an iftar meal by a Muslim, feel free to accept. It's nice to bring Arabic desserts, sweets or dates along (it's probably best not to go empty-handed).




Driving at sundown



There's no rule against driving at sundown when fasters are heading to their home to break the fast. However, since roads will be busy, it'd be polite to wait about half an hour before going on the road to give the fasters a chance to reach home.

Also, exercise caution if you have to drive at sundown. You're driving around a lot of hungry and sleep deprived people; the roads are more dangerous than normal.





Public Display of Affection (PDA)



During Ramadan, especially, avoid public displays of affection when in public. This is considered offensive. Keep in mind, this means avoiding kissing (even on the cheek) or hugging your partner or friend, especially if they are of the opposite gender. Of course, this is only true in public places.



Social Media



Be a little extra humble on social media, especially if you have Muslim friends on your social networks. If they are fasting, it would be offensive to use strong language or share images which could be termed inappropriate.

Iftar: What to expect



Sunnah Sunnah is a quick snack, comprised of dates and water (or milk). It might not sound like much now, but when the sun goes down, all fasters will be craving this traditional and humble meal. The sugar in the dates makes them the perfect way to break the fast.

At iftar, many of the eateries will open their doors and offer you lavish cultural feasts. Whether you're with your Muslim or non-Muslim friends, iftar gives you a chance to explore the different kinds of food in Dubai. Dabble in the traditional cuisine of the Emirati people and see the culinary delights that inspired them for ages.



Below are kinds of food to expect if you're invited over by a friend or what to order if you decide to go to a restaurant:

Salads and soups: When breaking the fast, fasters have been known to start light with salad and soups. This is because they are light enough on the stomach and still contain healthy nutrients.

Fish: Considering how deep fishing runs in Dubai's and the UAE's history, it's not surprising that seafood is an important part of the meal. Try Kepsa bel sanak, a traditional local dish consisting of fragrant rice and fish casserole and cumin and peppers for flavouring. Just make sure to have plenty of water around you; the dish can be a little salty.

Meat: Especially lamb. Harees is one of the most common local delicacies during iftar. It's made by slow-cooking shredded lamb or chicken pieces and grinding them with boiled wheat. For extra flavour, cinnamon and cumin are added.

Desserts: Sugary desserts are preferred for giving you that much-needed energy boost. Expect Kunafeh, an Arabic dessert consisting of soft white cheese with cracked semolina topping. It's baked to a hard crust then served with sweet syrup. Another favourite dessert is Katyef. This is a traditional pastry pancake that's filled with cream. It can also contain crushed walnuts and almonds instead of cream.

Drinks: Great for replacing the water lost during the day. Try refreshing drinks like Gamet jallab. Tamer hindi, ayran and laban.

Come taste these and discover more during your favourite part of the day.



Experience an authentic 1950's Bedouin Iftar



Now you have a taste of modern iftar, take a step back in time and experience what it was like more than a half century ago.

Join us daily throughout the Holy Month for our unique iftar experience on our private desert property. Here, our museum-quality 1950s Land Rovers will be waiting to take you on an exciting journey through history. Enjoy your iftar dinner under the stars, as the Bedouin nomads did generations ago. The experience will also include other cultural activities like falconry, bread and Arabic coffee making.





Telephone +971 4 440 9827
www.platinum-heritage.com
events@hero-experiences.com