# Expeditionary Culture Field Guide

# UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

U.S. AIR FORCE

# About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of 2 parts:

**Part 1** is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Arab Gulf States.

NOTE: While the term Persian Gulf is common in the US, this guide uses the name preferred in the region, the Arabian Gulf.

**Part 2** is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of United Arab Emirates (UAE) society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: Air Expeditionary Wing Commander Brig Gen Dan Orcutt – 6th from left – and staff pose with Emirati Fighter Group Leaders).

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at http://culture.af.mil/ or contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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# PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

## What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value—freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity (Photo: US and Royal Oman Air Force personnel following a training flight).

## Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

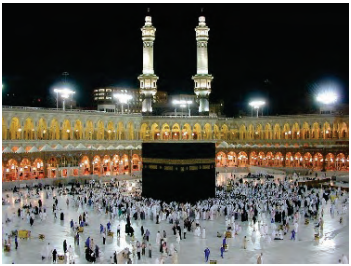
We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local

nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

## Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.



We can organize behaviors and systems into categories—what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains"—in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains–which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page)—as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture (Photo: Muslim pilgrims visit Ka'aba, Islam's holiest site, in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).

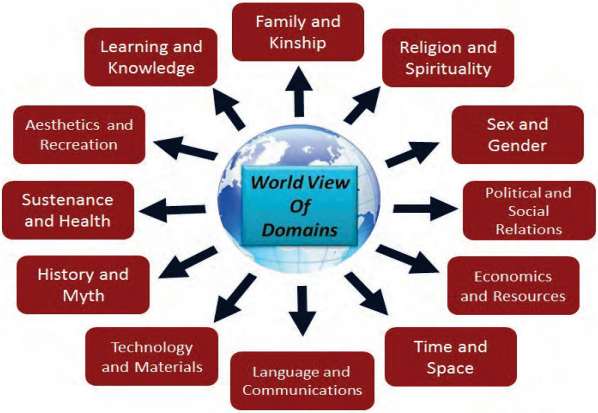
## Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

## Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.



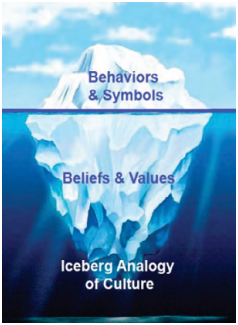

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the

world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

### Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true—regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.




### Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are

not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success (Photo: US and Kuwait Navy personnel).

As you travel through the Arab Gulf States, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

## CULTURAL DOMAINS

### 1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

The Arab Gulf States comprise 7 countries that border the Arabian Gulf: Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Oman. Scientists believe that the southern Gulf region was once home to early humans who established permanent settlements as many as 125,000 years

ago. In the region's north, the favorable soil and climate conditions of Mesopotamia (present day Syria and Iraq) allowed people to settle, farm the land, create irrigation systems, build structures, and establish towns beginning around 6200 BC (Photo: Mask from an ancient Mesopotamian civilization).

A unique culture emerged between 3000 and 2500 BC at Dilmun in present-day Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. As a regional hub, Dilmun played an important role in trade between the Arabian Peninsula and the Indus River valley (located in present-day Pakistan and India) as well as along longer routes to East Africa, Southeast Asia, and China. While the Arab Gulf was an important trading hub for centuries, the region never saw the birth of its own empire nor were its inhabitants ever united under a single local power. Instead, each of the region's port cities was autonomous, with its own local economy and social organization. The cities' dispersed power prevented their unification and also made the region a target for incursions from beyond the Gulf.

The first external force to exert power and influence over the region was the Achaemenid Empire (pictured) which controlled parts of the Gulf starting in 550 BC from its center in Pasargadae (Iran). It was followed by the Parthian (140 BC) and Sassanian (226 AD) Empires centered in Iran and the Umayyad Caliphate (661 AD) centered in Syria and Turkey. The period marked by the birth of the Prophet Muhammad (570 AD) in present-day Saudi Arabia and the subsequent emergence and establishment of Islam as the region's predominant religion was a defining era in the Gulf's history.

In the 16th century, Portugal established control over Bahrain and parts of the southern Gulf, a move that ushered in an era of European struggle for supremacy in the region. In the late 16th century, the Safavid Dynasty of Iran allied with England to expel Portugal. At the same time, Iraq came under control of the Ottoman Empire (centered in present-day Istanbul) whose rule lasted until World War I, when the British assumed control.

England became active in the southern Gulf in the late 18th century then solidified its dominance in the 19th century through agreements with local rulers in present-day Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE. Unlike in Africa and Asia, the British never established formal colonies in the region and left local ruling families largely in place.

The discovery of oil in the 1930s had a profound impact on the Gulf States' economies and politics. While English and US companies initially owned and managed the Gulf oil industry, local rulers confirmed their control of the industry following their countries' full independence (Saudi Arabia, 1932; Oman, 1951, Kuwait, 1961; then Bahrain, Qatar, and UAE in 1971). Of note, Iraq like Saudi Arabia achieved independence in 1932, but was occupied by Britain during World War II. Following the monarchy's overthrow in 1958, Iraq became a republic (Photo: Kuwaiti troops commemorate the First Gulf War in 2011).

Under the leadership of royal dynasties since independence, 6 of the Gulf States have remained stable. By contrast, Iraq has been enmeshed in several conflicts that have contributed to regional instability. Under the autocratic rule of Saddam Hussein, Iraq engaged in the bloody Iran-Iraq War from 1980-1986, then invaded and annexed neighboring Kuwait 4 years later, inciting the First Gulf War. Since its 2003 invasion of Iraq and subsequent collapse of the Hussein regime, the US has engaged in security cooperation activities in Iraq. In reaction to the 2011 Arab Spring, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Kuwait have suppressed protests and calls for reform.

## 2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

The Arab Gulf's position at a crossroads for international trade has greatly influenced its ethnic makeup, politics, and social structures. The diversity of people passing through and residing in the region as part of its trade-based economy persists today—foreign non-citizen workers make up sizable portions of the populations in each of the Gulf States with the exception of Iraq (Photo: An Iraqi voter in 2005).

Today, the Gulf States minus Iraq are governed by monarchy, though several have introduced political and institutional reforms since independence. While Kuwait, Bahrain, and Qatar have each adopted a constitution, the Saudi Arabian government considers the Qur'an, the primary religious text of Islam, its constitution. In 1996, Oman established the Basic Law of the State, which introduced a new system of government that includes a 2-chamber legislature that meets at the request of the sultan (ruler). The 2005 Iraqi constitution established an Islamic, democratic, federal parliamentary republic led by an elected Prime Minister, President, and legislature. Unlike the region's other monarchies, the UAE's government is comprised of the hereditary leaders of each of its 7 emirates.

While the legal systems of the Gulf States have incorporated many aspects of English, French, and Egyptian law, ***Sharia*** (Islamic) law continues to play a central role, particularly in criminal and family matters. In recent years, the Gulf States have undertaken efforts to create formalized legal systems that combine *Sharia* and civil systems.

Despite some political tensions, relations among most of the Gulf States are largely amicable. Their good relations are primarily a result of their participation in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—a political, economic, and military alliance uniting Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, and Oman. Since the organization's inception in 1981, member states have undertaken efforts to integrate their economies, militaries, and other social and political structures (Photo: US Secretary of State Kerry and GCC leaders in Saudi Arabia in 2014).

Iraq's role in fomenting regional instability has affected its relations with the other Gulf States. While the UAE, Qatar, and Oman have strong trade and diplomatic relations with Iraq, Saudi Arabia and its close ally Bahrain frequently clash with Iraq. Disagreements center on Iran's role in the region fueled by ideological differences between Saudi Arabia and Bahrain's Sunni Islam leadership and Iran's Shiite Islam leadership. While Iraq and Kuwait have taken steps to repair their relationship, tensions continue to linger from Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

Due to their significant sizes, populations, and resources, Iraq and Iran compete for influence in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia with its large oil reserves is also a powerful regional player even though its military forces are significantly smaller than those of either Iraq or Iran.

Most of the Gulf States rely on the US to augment their military capabilities. With some 35,000 US troops stationed at several military installations throughout the region, the US has entered into agreements to sell or transfer arms and defense services to most of the States. The US remains in Iraq to train, support, and advise Iraqi security forces. Bahrain is the site of the longest-serving permanent US military presence in the Gulf, while Kuwait, the UAE, and Qatar also host large numbers of US military personnel.

While Gulf States citizens are predominantly Arabs, the region is also home to several ethnic minorities—Persians in the UAE and Kuwait; Palestinians in Qatar; and Baloch and Persians in Oman. In Iraq, strong tensions exist between the country's 2 primary ethnic groups, the Arabs and the Kurds. In each of the States, except Iraq, significant portions of the population are foreign non-citizens—about 25% in Saudi Arabia, 50 in Bahrain and Oman, 65 in Kuwait, 85 in the UAE, and 90 in Qatar.

Of note, the Gulf's tribal networks were historically a fundamental element of social relations. While the region's governments have attempted to supplant tribal allegiances with national identity in recent decades, the tribe continues to play an important role in social life in most States.

## 3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Early regional inhabitants worshipped various gods and objects, such as the sun, moon, animals, and tribal heroes. Between 500 BC and the 5th century, Zoroastrianism, one of the world's first monotheistic religions, gained followers in the region. Although Christianity arrived in the Arab Gulf in the 1st century, most of the region's Christians fled or converted following the arrival of Islam.

In 610 AD, a merchant from Mecca (in present-day Saudi Arabia), Muhammad ibn Abdullah, began preaching the worship of 1 God, Allah, marking the founding of Islam. Through conquest and proselytization Muhammad and his followers had united the entire Arabian Peninsula under Islam by the time of his death in 632 AD (Painting: A 1307 depiction of Muhammad receiving his first revelation from the angel Gabriel).

Without a chosen successor to Muhammad, his death ushered in an era of infighting that eventually split Islam into 2 sects, Shias and Sunnis. This divide persists and occasionally causes conflict in the region today. Sunni Muslims began moving beyond Arabia shortly after Muhammad's death, making their way to Iraq in 638.

Since its introduction, Islam has been a defining factor in shaping the region's cultures, societies, and political systems. Today, Islam is the official religion of each of the Gulf States. Further, the majority of the region's non-citizen residents are also Muslim. While the Arab Gulf is also home to some religious minorities—primarily Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Baha'is—these non-Muslims are largely non-citizen foreign residents.

The Gulf States governments exhibit varying levels of religious freedom. For example, Saudi Arabian law does not recognize or protect religious freedom. While conversion from Islam is punishable by death, Saudi courts rarely inflict this sentence and instead issue lengthy prison sentences and lashings as punishment. Although the Iraqi constitution guarantees religious freedom, the government has been unable to stop recent acts of violence against Shia Muslims, Christians, and others (Photo: The Prophet Muhammad's burial site at Al-Masjid an-Nabawi in Saudi Arabia).

## 4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

A fundamental element of Gulf society, family may refer to a person's household and extended family, clan (a group of families), or tribe. Family, clan, and tribal connections typically play an important role in an individual's life—they may determine a person's social status, potential marriage partners,

business opportunities, and inheritance rights. While residence patterns differ slightly among the States, multiple generations typically reside together in 1 household (Photo: Iraqi mother with her children).

Historically, marriage was an arranged union intended to bring both families social and economic advantages. Although arranged marriages are still common across the region, many regional residents now choose their own spouse, particularly in urban areas. Married couples typically live with the man's family. While divorce was traditionally uncommon in the Gulf States, divorce rates have increased in some of the Gulf States yet remained steady in others. Of note, polygyny, the practice of a man having multiple wives, is legal in the Gulf States.

The urbanization of Gulf society has changed family life in recent years. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available primarily in urban areas, family structures have become much more diverse.

## 5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Arab Gulf States' cultures and religions (primarily Islam) traditionally privilege the male's role as leader and provider. For example, Sharia law grants men privileges in inheritance and other family matters. While most of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional gender roles—men as breadwinners and guardians and women as mothers and companions—recent influences from external and internal sources have introduced some changes.

Women, like most men, were largely uneducated for much of the Gulf's history. In recent decades, literacy rates for women have increased significantly across the Gulf. Further, women now make up more than 50% of the university student population in all States, although they often face challenges to getting their education. For example, women are often encouraged to pursue traditional "female" disciplines such as education and healthcare. In Kuwait, they are required to score higher than men on entrance exams for traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering.

Because the Gulf States' legal systems permit gender-based discrimination, women are far less likely to participate in politics than men. Some progress has occurred: Saudi Arabia became the last Arab Gulf State to extend the right to vote to women in 2015. Although women may serve in prominent diplomatic and judicial posts, the number of women serving in elected political office across the region remains very low (Photo: US Department of Commerce officials with students from Sultan Qaboos University in Oman and the University of Bahrain).

Historically, Gulf women rarely worked outside the home, a tradition that has changed over the past decades. For example, female participation in the workforce has increased 3-fold in Qatar and nearly 4 times in the UAE since 2003. Despite steps towards gender equality, women still face barriers to their full participation in society. For example, it remains traditional for male guardians to accompany women to events outside of the home, while many workplaces and schools continue to practice gender segregation.

Homosexuality is illegal in all of the Gulf States except Iraq, where it was decriminalized in 2003. Most Gulf residents consider homosexuality, bisexuality, and transgender issues inappropriate topics of conversation.

## 6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Arabic is the official language of each of the Arab Gulf States. Most residents regularly use 2 Arabic varieties—Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), derived from the classical Arabic of the Qur'an and used in school, the media, and in official government proceedings, and Gulf Arabic or Khaleeji Arabic, a widely spoken dialect. The residents of some States speak additional languages and dialects. For example, Iraq names Kurdish as its 2nd official language, and most Iraqis speak a unique dialect of Arabic called Mesopotamian Arabic. Some residents of Oman speak other Arabic dialects.

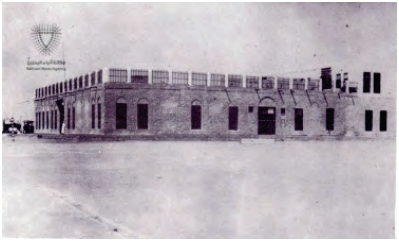
The Arab Gulf nations are also home to millions of non-citizens who speak their own native languages. These include Farsi (spoken in Iran); Malayalam, Tamil, Hindi, Balochi, Bengali, Pashto, and Urdu (spoken in South Asia); African languages such as Somali and Swahili; and Asian languages such as Thai, Tagalog, and Korean. English is also widely spoken in business and by the expatriate communities of the Gulf (Photo: Computer keyboard with Arabic script).

Generally, Gulf residents demonstrate respect, generosity, and hospitality in their communication practices. Residents tend to share information about themselves and expect Westerners to do the same: they may ask personal questions about salary, marital status (particularly of unmarried people of a certain age), and family. Regional residents commonly use gestures when they speak, particularly if they are passionate about the topic of conversation.

## 7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the 20th century, formal education in most Arab Gulf States was limited to ***madrasas***, religious schools that taught memorization of Qur'anic verses and the fundamentals of Islamic beliefs and practice, primarily to males. Following the 20th-century discovery of oil, educational opportunities expanded greatly. Bahrain became the first Gulf State to establish a public educational system in 1932. In the mid-1950s, governments began to establish departments of education and allocate funds for schools and other resources. An exception was Oman, where educational offerings until 1970 consisted solely of 3 primary schools reserved for 900 boys hand-selected by the Omani sultan (Photo: Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifia Boys school, the first public school in Bahrain).



Today, most of the Gulf States invest heavily in education, often at rates higher than many other developed nations. Consequently, adult literacy is over 90% in all States except Iraq where it is a low 80%. Further, the past several decades have witnessed a significant growth in the number of higher education institutions across the region.

Due to years of conflict, Iraq continues to have inadequate education facilities and a shortage of teachers and resources. Because many students are displaced, their education is often incomplete.

## 8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in the Arab Gulf States, establishing and maintaining relationships with others often takes precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner.

As in other Islamic societies, men and women in the Arab Gulf region often interact differently than Americans are used to. For example, in many parts of the Gulf unrelated women and men seldom interact, and when they do, it is only in group settings.

Concepts of personal space also differ from those in the US. For example, Gulf State residents of the same sex commonly sit and stand closer to each other than Westerners do. They may also touch more often during conversations than Westerners (Photo: Former US President George W. Bush and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia holding hands, a sign of close friendship among men).

Residents of the Arab Gulf States also tend to manage time differently. While residents typically agree in advance on scheduled start times, meetings frequently begin late. Further, Gulf residents may prefer to deliberate for an extended period before making final decisions.

The Arab Gulf States use both the Islamic and Western calendars. Because Friday is considered a holy day in Islam, most Arab Gulf States observe a Sunday-Thursday workweek, except for Oman, which observes a Saturday-Wednesday workweek.

## 9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Most of the Arab Gulf's forms of artistic expression, including its art, architecture, dance, music, and theater, reflect the region's Arabic and Islamic influences. Gulf artists historically favored geometric designs and patterns to depict plants, flowers, and animals on buildings, jewelry, and household items.

Due to historic trade relationships and intermingling of cultures, music and dance in the Arab Gulf States reflect Persian, Indian, and east African influences. Popular throughout the region, Khaleeji music combines local Bedouin (Arab seminomadic group) music with styles from Africa, India, and Iran.

For some regional residents, dance forms are an integral part of Islamic worship. Others perform dances only in same-sex settings. Many of the region's dances are done in line, circle, square, or semicircle formations with participants moving in tandem. Dances in the Arab Gulf are generally grouped by type, including warfare, work-related, "foreign," women's, weddings, healing, and Sufi religious dances (Photo: Iraqi National Folk Dance Troupe performs a traditional dance).

Regional residents practice a variety of arts and crafts including weaving (typically using camel or goat hair) and calligraphy—the art of handwriting in which artists transform letters and words into intricate designs. While soccer is the most widely followed sport in the region, wealthier residents also enjoy falconry, horse racing, and camel racing.

## 10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease

and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region, residents throughout the Arab Gulf use many common staple ingredients and spices such as mutton, lamb, and fish prepared with cardamom, turmeric, saffron, and dried limes. Fruits, yogurt, various salads, and rice are common accompaniments to meals. The most popular drink, tea is served sweetened and prepared either with or without milk. Observant Muslims in the Arab Gulf consume neither pork nor alcohol.

Health in most of the Arab Gulf countries has improved significantly in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant and maternal mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents in all States except Iraq have access to quality healthcare that is largely subsidized by governments (Photo: Machbūs, a spiced meat dish enjoyed throughout the Gulf).

Years of conflict and the Saddam regime's defunding of public healthcare by 90% created significant problems in the Iraqi healthcare system. In 2009, with funding from the World Health Organization, the Iraqi Ministry of Health introduced a plan to reform and decentralize the country's healthcare system. Additionally, international humanitarian organizations have expanded their efforts in Iraq to provide healthcare to both the local population as well as those fleeing conflict areas.

The region's healthcare systems face several challenges, particularly rapidly growing healthcare expenditures associated with a large, aging population and lifestyle changes that have negative health implications. For example, fewer residents adhere to the region's traditional diet and instead have increased their consumption of pre-packaged and fast foods. Simultaneously, rapid urbanization, the increased use of

mechanized transportation, and a lack of dedicated green spaces for physical activities have led to an increasingly sedentary lifestyle for many residents. As a result, obesity rates have increased and noncommunicable diseases (such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease) now cause more than 60% of all deaths in all of the Arab Gulf States, except Iraq (Photo: King Saud Medical Complex, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia).

Communicable diseases remain a concern in Iraq, where contaminated water supplies, inadequate sanitation, and poor hygienic practices contribute to the spread of typhoid, cholera, and tuberculosis.

## 11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Besides fishing and agriculture, the Gulf States' economies have been enmeshed with local and international trade since ancient times. During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Arab Gulf's port cities were integral elements of the trade routes connecting India, Europe, and East Africa.

In the late 19th century, the region began exporting dates and pearls to new markets in Europe and North America. After global demand for pearls grew significantly around the turn of the 20th century, pearl diving became a major contributor to the economies of the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain before the industry collapsed in the 1930s. The region then entered a period of socioeconomic hardship until the discovery of oil.

The growth of the oil industry in in the 1950s-60s significantly changed the region. Within a few decades the States had transformed from some of the world's poorest countries to some of the wealthiest. This wealth has facilitated investment in infrastructure, enhanced the quality of life, and encouraged

rapid urbanization throughout the region with the exception of Iraq.

Prior to 1980, Iraq had one of the most advanced economies of all Arab Gulf States. Years of conflict, however, have had a profound effect on Iraq's economy. In late 2015, Iraq implemented an economic reform proposal intended to cut excess government spending and crackdown on corruption (Photo: The Abraj Al Bait Towers complex in Mecca, Saudi Arabia).

Oil remains an important part of the region's economies today—in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, oil exports make up over 90% of government revenues. Over the past several decades, the Gulf States collectively have taken steps to reduce their economic dependence on oil through diversification efforts. For example, Bahrain has worked to develop its banking sector; Kuwait produces cement and ships and specializes in food-processing; Qatar is expanding its agricultural sector; and the UAE is investing in tourism, airport and aviation services, and facilities management services.

Despite these efforts, the region remains dependent on oil: all of the region's economies were adversely affected by the decline in oil prices and a reduced demand for oil during the 2008 global financial crisis. The States are currently exploring ways to adapt to the decline in oil prices that began in 2015.

## 12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology.

Most of the Arab Gulf States have invested heavily into extensive road networks. The governments of Oman and Saudi Arabia, for example, have put significant sums of funding towards building large freeways and roads that extend to

remote areas. Despite years of conflict, Iraq's 24,000 miles of roads remain in relatively good condition. In 2015, 6 of the region's governments allocated $200 billion for the construction of a regional rail network which will link Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar when completed in 2018.

Information technology is spreading rapidly throughout the Arab Gulf. Between 2000 and 2014, Internet usage grew from between 2 and 23 users per 100 people to between 63 and 91 users. The exception is Iraq where just 11 out of every 100 people are Internet users. Cell phones are extremely popular—the States report between 95 and 218 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people (Photo: Freeway in Dubai, UAE).

As the destination of 11% of all GCC exports, the European Union (EU) is the region's largest trading partner. Of note, the EU and the GCC States (with the exception of Iraq) are pursuing a free trade agreement. The Gulf States also maintain important trade relationships with several Asian nations. For example, China depends on the Arab Gulf for 35% of its oil imports, India for 45%, and South Korea and Japan for 70%.

The Arab Gulf faces challenges in meeting its growing energy needs. As a result of the region's rapid urbanization and population growth, the Gulf States are shifting from being energy suppliers to major energy consumers. Energy consumption grew by about 8% annually since 1972 (compared to 2% globally). While the UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia have less than 1% of the world's population, these countries now use more than 5% of the world's oil. Iraq has had difficulty meeting its own power needs, relying on imported electricity and petroleum products.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Arab Gulf society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in the United Arab Emirates.

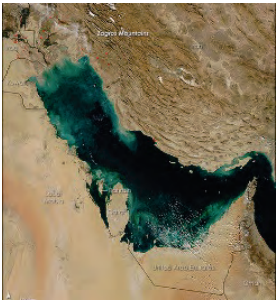
# PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

## 1. HISTORY AND MYTH

### Overview

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) has experienced tremendous societal and economic changes since its formation in 1971. While oil revenues improved healthcare, education, and the nation's infrastructure, economic growth required a large influx of foreign workers who now make up a majority of the population. Recent efforts to diversify the UAE's oil-based economy have fueled a boom in business, tourism, and construction. The UAE today is a blend of ancient traditions and modern technology, and of conservatism and tolerance.

NOTE: While readers may know the body of water to the UAE's north by its more common name, the Persian Gulf, this guide uses the Arabian Gulf, the name preferred in the UAE (Photo: Satellite photo of the Arabian Gulf).




### Early History

Archaeological findings suggest that humans have inhabited the Gulf States region for millennia. The UAE's oldest artifacts include hand-axes and other tools found at Jebel Faya archaeological site in Sharjah emirate (principality). Since these tools are similar to those used by early modern humans in East Africa, scientists believe these artifacts are at least 100,000 years old. This finding suggests that humans arrived on the Arabian Peninsula directly from Africa as early as 125,000 years ago.

Around the 5th millennium BC, people began to congregate in coastal settlements where they engaged in trade with Mesopotamia (present-day Syria, Iraq, and Kuwait).

Archaeological finds in Sharjah indicate that inhabitants also began to harvest pearls from Gulf oysters at this time.

Between about 2600 and 2000 BC, a settlement arose on the island of Umm al-Nar off the coast of Abu Dhabi. Ancient structures visible today include buildings constructed of marine rocks from nearby beaches as well as large, multi-room circular tombs, some decorated with carved camels. Artifacts indicate that inhabitants participated in a vast trading network that included Mesopotamia, Balochistan (in present-day Pakistan), and the Indus Valley (in present-day Pakistan and India).

While much of the Gulf region was under the domination of various foreign empires through subsequent centuries, the region of the present-day UAE remained largely untouched due primarily to its lack of water and small population.

### The Arrival of Islam

In 630, envoys of the Prophet Muhammad arrived in the region from present-day Saudi Arabia, bringing with them a new religion, Islam (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Islam spread rapidly through proselytization and Arabian Muslim invasions. In 632, the year of Muhammad's death, Arabian Muslims defeated local tribesmen in a major battle in the present-day emirate of Fujairah. Just 2 years later, Arabian Muslims staged their conquest of Iran from present-day Ras al Khaimah (Pictured: A 1595 depiction of Muhammad leading his army into battle).

While the Gulf region as a whole experienced social and political upheaval as Islamic dynasties and sects competed for supremacy over the next 900 years, the UAE region as a frontier zone was largely uninvolved in this scrimmage for power.

### The Activities of Foreign Powers

Beginning in the early 1500s, Gulf frontiers to include the present-day UAE caught the attention of certain foreign

powers. First, the Portuguese, the Ottomans (centered in present-day Turkey), and the Safavids (from modern-day Iran) began to compete for regional political and economic dominance, struggling for strategic ports and settlements. When Portugal used territories in the present-day UAE as a base in its fight against Persia (Iran), the English and Dutch assisted Persia in its defeat of the Portuguese. These events attracted more European attention to the region, along with occasional incursions into present-day UAE from neighboring Oman until the mid-18th century (Pictured: Late 17th century map of the Arabian Peninsula).

### The Emergence of the Ruling Families

Many of the UAE's citizens today trace their lineage to tribal groupings that coalesced in the 18th century. Primarily land and sea traders, the Al Qasimi had lived along the coast in current-day emirates of Ras al Khaimah and Sharjah since pre-Islamic times, often engaging in pearl harvesting and piracy. Today, descendants of the Al Qasimi continue to rule these 2 emirates.

By contrast, the Bani Yas originated in a band of interior oases where they cultivated date palms and engaged in nomadic pastoralism (animal herding). In the 1700s, Bani Yas groups began to move to the coast where they engaged in fishing and pearling, constructing a watchtower on Abu Dhabi Island in the late 1700s. A prominent Bani Yas family, the Al Nahayan, today rules Abu Dhabi. Following dynastic strife within the Bani Yas, tribal members founded Dubai in 1833. Today, their descendants, the Al Maktoum family, are the rulers of Dubai (Photo: An 18th century watchtower in Hatta, Dubai emirate).

**The Pirate Coast:** In the 1770s, the Al Quwasim (the tribe led by the Al Qasimi family) increasingly attacked passing British merchant ships. Such piracy on the part of both Europeans and Arabs prompted the English to call the region the "Pirate Coast." Eventually, the Al Qasimi assembled their forces to include 60 ships and 20,000 sailors (Pictured: An 1837 sketch of an infamous local pirate).

**The Rise of the Pearling Industry:** With easy access to India, a major market for pearls, merchants in Ras al Khaimah began organizing a commercial pearl harvest. Over the next century, pearling expanded greatly, providing significant income to the region and attracting more settlers from the interior.

## The Arrival of the British

As part of its competition with France to control Indian Ocean trade, Great Britain signed a treaty with neighboring Oman in 1798. With this act, Britain became a major power in the Arabian Gulf, a role it would play for the next 170 years.

Commercial competition between British and Al Qasimi merchants to control trade between India and the Arabian Gulf intensified in the early 19th century. In 1809, British merchants enlisted the support of the British navy to launch attacks again Al Qasimi strongholds. Despite this resistance, Al Qasimi attacks against British ships continued for the next decade.

The pacification of the southern Arabian Gulf region began with an 1819 British naval expedition against the Al Qasimi rulers in Ras al Khaimah and other ports. Comprising 11 warships and 3,500 sailors, the expedition resulted in the destruction of the Al Quwasim as a sea power.

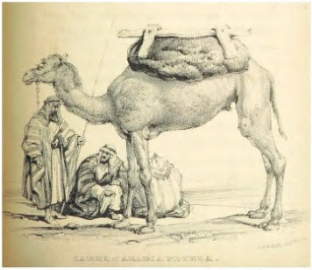
Meanwhile, the region's tribes engaged in other armed struggles. While the Bani Yas experienced significant dynastic strife, Saudi tribes moved in from the Arabian interior and allied with the Al Quwasim against forces from neighboring Oman.

For several years, the region saw an almost constant state of war between equally matched foes.

### The Trucial States

With their own military activities in the region, the British sought to protect their trade interests and to exclude rival European powers from the Gulf. Significantly, they did not want to politically administer the region or rule its inhabitants. Instead, they constructed a network of alliances by signing a series of treaties and truces with local tribal rulers who remained in power. Because of these truces, the area became known as the "Trucial States," with the region as a whole, including Bahrain and Qatar, known as the "Trucial Coast" (Pictured: Stamps from the British Post Office in Dubai in 1961).

In 1820, the British and several ***sheikhs*** (Arab tribal leaders) signed a treaty which required the Arabs to refrain from piracy and register their ships with British authorities. Following an outbreak of maritime violence in 1835, the British and local rulers agreed to a series of truces that culminated in the 1853 Treaty of Perpetual Maritime Peace signed by Britain and 6 of the 7 present-day UAE emirates: AbuDhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Ajman, and Um al Quwain (Pictured: 1838 British drawing of Arabian Peninsula inhabitants).



Over the next decades, the British established similar arrangements with other regional powers, including the local leaders of Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and Iraq. In 1882, British

signed a treaty with these nations giving Britain full power over their international affairs in exchange for military protection.

Significantly, the treaty also recognized the sovereignty of local rulers over certain areas and specified that borders could not be changed without British consent. Consequently, the treaty buttressed the authority of a handful of ruling families by giving them ownership of vast tracts of land. For example, the Al Nahayan family of Abu Dhabi came to rule over several other groups while acquiring about 28,000 sq mi of land.

### The Rise and Fall of the Pearl Industry

During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the pearling industry provided employment and income to the majority of the region's inhabitants, fueling the growth of both Dubai and Abu Dhabi. By 1909, Abu Dhabi, with its population of 15,000, became the southern Gulf's most important pearling site (Photo: Pearl divers in the early 20th century).

The region's economy began a dramatic shift in the 1930s. Not only did the worldwide Great Depression significantly reduce demand for pearls, the Japanese developed a cheaper way to breed oysters and make "cultured" pearls. These events signaled the beginning of the end of the Gulf's pearl industry. This shift resulted in a significant loss to the region since fully 1/4 of the workforce labored in the pearling industry. The industry eventually faded completely in the 1940s, when newly-independent India imposed a heavy tax on pearls from the Arabian Gulf.

### The Discovery of Oil

About the same time the pearl industry was declining in the 1930s, Western oil companies began surveying for oil. The fact that just a few ruling families owned and controlled great tracts of land became very important when oil was discovered in 1958. As defined by treaty, the heads of these families would directly receive all oil revenues. Not surprisingly, some ensuing disagreements over boundaries resulted in armed conflict.

As the significance of the oil discoveries became apparent, both the tribal boundaries and the authority of the ruling families became permanent. Socially, differences between tribes became significant sources of identity (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*). Residents began to see themselves as members of a distinct emirate or sheikhdom (territory under the control of a sheikh) with certain rights and obligations.

Initially, most sheikhs passed on their oil revenues in the traditional way – as gifts to their tribesmen. As revenues grew, sheiks began bestowing gifts that would benefit the entire community, such as schools, hospitals, and roads.

**The Trucial States Council:** While still somewhat hampered by rivalry and conflict, the sheikhs formed their first collaborative political organization, the Trucial States Council, in 1952. In 1956, the Council implemented a 5-year plan to develop educational and medical services and in 1965 founded a Development Office that oversaw road construction and agricultural improvement projects (Photo: Dubai in the mid-1950s).

Because these projects relied on donations from the sheikhdoms, development across the emirates was uneven. Dubai experienced rapid improvements in social services first under the leadership of Sheikh Said bin Al Maktoum until his death in 1958 and then under his son Sheikh Rashid bin Said Al Maktoum (known as Sheikh Rashid).

By contrast, Abu Dhabi's leader, Sheikh Shakhbut, refused to spend early oil revenues on education or medical services. Although Abu Dhabi's population was about 20,000 when it began exporting oil in 1962, it had just 1 school and 1 paved road.

Dissatisfied with Sheikh Shakhbut's handling of oil revenues, members of Abu Dhabi's ruling family ousted him from office in 1966 and installed his brother, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahayan (known as Sheikh Zayed). The new leader soon made a very large donation to the development fund. In this way, Sheikh Zayed set a precedent for Abu Dhabi's significant financial support to public works projects.

### The British Withdraw

In 1968, fearing that continued support to the Trucial States would severely tax its overextended military, Britain suddenly announced that in 3 years it would discontinue its protectorate commitments on the Trucial Coast. The rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai invited the other 5 local rulers of the Trucial States plus the leaders of Bahrain and Qatar to join them in a confederation of Arab emirates. Despite disagreements on the details, including the location of the capital of the proposed federation and the content of its constitution, the rulers initially accepted the proposal. Eventually unable to resolve certain issues, Bahrain and Qatar withdrew from negotiations, each declaring independence in late summer 1971 (Photo: Dubai's leaders confer in 1968).

Because their oil reserves provided them an economic foundation, Abu Dhabi and Dubai believed their future without Britain was secure. By contrast, because the other 5 sheikdoms had no mineral resources, small populations, and little development, Abu Dhabi and Dubai considered them unprepared for independence. Further, none of the sheikdoms had any military defense capability. Consequently, Abu Dhabi and Dubai offered to pay Britain to maintain military forces in the region. Although Britain rejected this arrangement, it did support the development of a provisional federal constitution.

## Independence

The British-Trucial States treaty expired on December 1, 1971. A day later, the 6 former Trucial States of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Fujairah, Dubai, Sharjah, and Um al Quwain joined to form the United Arab Emirates. The 7th emirate, Ras al Khaimah, joined the federation in early 1972. As leader of the largest and wealthiest emirate, Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed (pictured in 1988) became the UAE's first President. Sheikh Rashid, the ruler of Dubai, became the Vice-President, while his son, Sheikh Maktoum bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Dubai's crown prince, became the UAE's first Prime Minister (PM).

The newly-independent UAE faced several challenges, including Iran's immediate occupation and annexation of 3 Gulf islands whose ownership is still disputed today (see p. 10-11 of *Political and Social Relations*). In addition, many observers doubted that the new, rather loose confederation could successfully bind the UAE's tribes and clans. When dynastic strife within Sharjah's ruling family threatened the new country's stability just weeks after independence, the UAE government successfully stepped in to restore order.

With its accumulation of oil wealth, Abu Dhabi quickly proved to be the tie that binds. By distributing oil earnings to the poorer emirates, Abu Dhabi alleviated economic tensions within all the UAE's ruling families and provided an equal foundation for development across the country. With its own revenues from more modest oil reserves and economic diversification programs (see p. 1-2 of *Economics and Resources*), Dubai resented Abu Dhabi's domination. Consequently, Dubai argued for increased emirate autonomy and even threatened secession over the issue in the mid-1970s.

## The Modern UAE

Despite this and other internal conflicts since independence, the UAE's oil revenues have enabled massive development

projects that brought about economic and political stability and one of the world's highest standards of living for its citizenry. New roads, housing, and communications systems transformed daily life (see p. 1-2 of *Family and Kinship*); improved medical care extended life expectancy and decreased infant mortality (see p. 10 of *Sustenance and Health*); and an expanded education system increased literacy rates (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Lacking a skilled labor force to support these construction, transportation, communications, health, and education projects, the UAE turned to foreign laborers to fill the gap. Today, non-citizen foreign workers make up more than 3/4 of the UAE's total population (see p. 1 and 12-14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

**Gulf Cooperation Council:** Since independence, the UAE has become an important actor within regional affairs. In 1981, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the UAE formed the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to provide for regional defense and to coordinate policy on trade and economic issues (see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Following the 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, the UAE and other GCC states entered into a closer security relationship with the US (see p. 11-12 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: US Secretary of State Kerry meets with GCC members in 2015).

**Leadership Transitions:** In 1990, following his father's death, Sheikh Maktoum became ruler of Dubai and Vice-President and PM of the UAE. In 2004, UAE President Sheikh Zayed died and was succeeded by his eldest son, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan (known as Sheikh Khalifa) as ruler of Abu Dhabi. Following the custom that Abu Dhabi's ruler should also be the UAE's leader, the Federal Supreme Council then elected Sheikh Khalifa President.

Upon the 2006 death of Sheikh Maktoum, his younger brother, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum (known as Sheikh Mohammad) assumed the roles of leader of Dubai and Vice-President and PM of the UAE (Photo: US Secretary of the Navy Mabus greets Sheikh Mohammad in 2012).

Joining other regional states in their efforts to provide their citizens a more representative government, the UAE held its first elections in 2006, when 7,000 Emirati citizens (out of a population of 400,000 citizens) were chosen to comprise an electoral college to indirectly elect 20 members of the UAE's Federal National Council (FNC-see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*).

During the 2011 "Arab Spring," when pro-democracy movements swept North Africa and the Middle East, the UAE saw relatively little unrest. While 5 protestors were found guilty of insulting the President in a trial widely condemned by outside observers, the President quickly pardoned them. In the FNC elections that fall, the government expanded the electoral college to include 129,000 voters. While some 468 candidates ran for 20 seats, there was little active campaigning and turnout on election day was only 25%.

Beneath the UAE's political calm and economic success lie potential causes of instability. These include lax immigration and financial controls, regional terrorist activity (see p. 9 of *Political and Social Relations*), and the economy's reliance on non-citizen foreign workers (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Of note, in recent years the UAE has strived to suppress social dissent through laws that ban criticism of the government and restrict use of the Internet (see p. 3 of *Technology and Material*).

Since suffering a stroke in early 2014, President Sheikh Khalifa has delegated many governing responsibilities to his younger brother, Sheikh Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahayan.

## Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Story-telling historically played a very important role among Arab tribespeople. Both the desert and the sea inspired many tales, which people often shared while sitting around the campfire (see p. 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*). Many stories tell of the exploits of heroes who were particularly charitable, clever, or able, providing models of proper behavior. Others tell of evil spirits or ***djinn*** (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Still others relate the adventures of mystical creatures.

## Tale of the Girl and the Henna Tree

"*Kan fi qadeem al zaman*…" or once upon a time, a henna tree (a flowering plant containing a dye) flirted with young girls as they passed on their way to draw water from a well. Emiratis traditionally use henna to color hair, fingernails, silk, wool or leather. Women also use it to draw temporary tattoos (pictured – see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*).

Most of the girls ignored the henna tree when it said things like, "Hello beautiful. Come over here and sit and talk to me." One girl responded, asking him why he said such ridiculous things. The tree told her, "I love you. If you marry me, all your dreams will come true." The girl agreed to marry the tree. Although her parents thought the arrangement strange, they gave the couple their blessing. On the wedding day, the tree demanded that the girl kiss him. She did, and he immediately turned into a prince.

An expert in UAE tales and legends recently related this story to school girls in Sharjah. He noted that this traditional story has a strong moral message: that people should not be judged on their appearance and that women should be able to tell their parents who they want to marry.

# 2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

## Official Name

United Arab Emirates

***Dawlat al-Imārāt al-'Arabīyah al-Muttaḥidah***

الإمارات العربية المتحدة (Arabic)

## Political Borders

Oman: 378 mi
Saudi Arabia: 284 mi
Coastline: 819 mi

## Capital

Abu Dhabi

## Demographics

Due to large fluctuations among non-citizen foreign workers, population estimates for the UAE diverge greatly. While the US estimated the UAE's population at 5.8 million in 2015, the UN estimate was 9.4 million in 2014. Estimates of the non-citizens' proportion of the total population also vary, ranging from 76% - 89%. Regardless of the exact figures, Emirati citizens ("Emiratis") make up a minority of the population, between 11% and 24%. While about 50% of non-citizens are from South Asia, significant numbers also come Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. Almost 86% of residents live in urban areas, and over 80% reside in the 3 major metropolitan areas of Dubai, Sharjah, and Abu Dhabi.

## Flag

Officially adopted in 1971, the UAE flag consists of 3 equal horizontal stripes of green, white, and black, with a wider red band perpendicular and to the left of the stripes. While the red band represents the unification of the 7 emirates (see p. 9 in *History and Myth*),

green represents fertility, white denotes neutrality, and black symbolizes petroleum resources. Of note, 6 of the 7 emirates also use distinct state flags whose designs were used by each of the sheikhdoms prior to the UAE's founding.

## Geography

Situated on the southeastern shore of the Arabian Peninsula, the UAE borders the Arabian Gulf to the north, Oman and the Gulf of Oman to the east, and Saudi Arabia to the south and west. The UAE's total land area is about 52,000 sq mi, making it slightly larger than South Carolina. Each of UAE's 7 emirates is named after its principal city. Abu Dhabi is the largest emirate, constituting nearly 87% of the UAE's total territory.

Flat, coastal plains extend along the coastlines of the Arabian Gulf and Gulf of Oman, eventually becoming the vast Arabian Desert of rolling sand dunes and salt flats. The desert contains occasional oases, the largest of which are Al Ain, located on the southeastern border with Oman, and Liwa, situated in the South.

South of Liwa, stretching into Saudi Arabia and encompassing almost 1/3rd of the Arabian Peninsula, is the ***Rub' al Khali*** ("Empty Quarter" - pictured), the largest sand desert in the world. In the East, the al-Hajar Mountains stretch north-south along the UAE border with Oman.

## Climate

Located in an arid, tropical zone that stretches from North Africa to East Asia, the UAE experiences a temperate climate with little precipitation that divides into 2 seasons: a summer or hot season and a winter or cool season. Between May and September it is extremely hot, with temperatures as high as 122°F in mountain and inland desert areas and 115°F along the coast.

Temperatures are more moderate in the winter months, averaging around 75°F during the day and 55°F at night from November - February. While humidity can be heavy near the coast, rains are infrequent. December is the wettest month, with rainfall reaching about 1.4 in. Desert winds from the north and northwest generate powerful sandstorms throughout the year.

### Natural Hazards

The UAE is vulnerable to frequent sand and dust storms which severely reduce visibility and regularly force city closures. Abundant coral reefs and frequently shifting sandbars make maritime navigation in the Arabian Gulf difficult. Strong wind gusts and powerful tides can further complicate ship movements near the shore.

### Environmental Issues

Despite improved recycling and wastewater treatment programs, waste disposal remains a problem, particularly in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Because the UAE lacks both natural freshwater resources and adequate desalination facilities to process seawater, the government has implemented strict water conservation measures. Oil spills, sewage runoff, and other human activity create marine and coastal pollution, while urban areas suffer from air and noise pollution. Recently, climate-change scientists predicted that the region may suffer temperature levels intolerable to humans by 2100 (Photo: The desert outside Dubai).

### Government

The UAE is a federation of 7 emirates, each one a patriarchal (male-controlled) monarchy led by a hereditary ruler who administers a local government. Adopted provisionally in 1971 and permanently in 1996, the constitution grants the federal government responsibility for defense, foreign affairs, and national economic policy. It also grants the emirates

considerable autonomy in running their economies and social systems. Of note, Abu Dhabi and Dubai are the largest, wealthiest, and most politically predominant emirates (Photo: Sheikh Mohammad, ruler of Dubai).

### Executive Branch

The highest constitutional authority is the Federal Supreme Council (FSC), composed of the 7 emirate rulers. Acting as the UAE's top policy-making entity, the FSC has both executive and legislative powers, including the authority to ratify federal laws and decrees. The FSC meets formally 4 times a year to establish policy, although leaders of the 7 emirates meet more frequently to consult on relevant matters. Of note, the rulers of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have veto power within the FSC.

The FSC elects both the President and Vice President from among its members for unlimited 5-year terms. The President acts as chief-of-state and personally selects the Prime Minister, who is head-of-government and leads the Council of Ministers (CM). The CM, with roughly 20 members, initiates all legislation to be ratified by the FSC and effectively guides the nation in education, health, religious, agriculture, and energy policy.

The FSC customarily elects Abu Dhabi's ruler as President, currently Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan. The ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum, is currently Vice President and Prime Minister.

### The 7 Emirates and their Rulers

- **Abu Dhabi** - Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan
- **Dubai** - Sheikh Mohammad bin Rashid Al Maktoum
- **Ajman** - Sheikh Humaid bin Rashid Al Nuaimi
- **Fujairah** - Sheikh Hamad bin Mohammed Al Sharqi
- **Ras al Khaimah** - Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi
- **Sharjah** - Sheikh Sultan bin Muhammed Al Qasimi
- **Um al Quwain** – Sheikh Saud bin Rashid Al Mu'alla

## Legislative Branch

The UAE's legislature is a one-chamber parliament called the Federal National Council (FNC), an advisory body of 40 members. Of note, the distribution of seats reflects the emirates' relative wealth, not their populations. The emirate rulers choose 20 FNC members, while an electoral college indirectly elects the other half (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*).

Because it cannot enact or veto legislation, the FNC's primary function is to advise the CM and the FSC, review constitutional amendments, appraise national budgets, and debate international conventions and treaties. Few Emiratis express dissatisfaction with a lack of representation in the legislative branch, noting that traditional, local-level ***majlis*** (councils) also provide a channel for Emiratis to express their concerns (Photo: UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed greets US Secretary of State Kerry in 2015).

## Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes a dual system of both ***Sharia*** (Islamic) and civil courts. The legal environment varies by emirate. While some emirates, like Dubai, tend to be more liberal, others are more conservative. The highest federal institution is the Supreme Court, which handles both inter-emirate issues and disputes between emirates and the federal government. The Courts of First Instance oversee all administrative, commercial, and civil disputes arising between government and individuals. Locally, secular courts handle civil cases, while *Sharia* courts oversee criminal and personal matters.

## Political Climate

The UAE has a closed political system dominated by a powerful federal government. Political parties are outlawed and participation in FNC elections is severely restricted, open only

to electoral-college members hand-selected by the 7 emirate rulers (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*).

While their political system is not a democracy, many Emiratis are satisfied with it due to the country's perceived social tolerance and distribution of wealth. Some Emiratis advocate having an elected parliament with more legislative power to better represent the interests of UAE citizens. Generally, though, there has been little public support for political reform.

Politically, each emirate is controlled by its most prominent tribe (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), whose hereditary leader rules the emirate. Because of its large size and substantial oil wealth, Abu Dhabi and its royal family have historically been the dominant force in UAE politics (see p. 7-9 of *History and Myth*) (Photo: Sheikh Khalifa, ruler of Abu Dhabi). With its large population and substantial wealth generated from economic diversification programs (see p. X of *Economics and Resources*), Dubai is the second most powerful emirate. Together, the 2 emirates generate over 80% of the UAE's income, while the remaining 5 emirates are substantially less developed and consequently less politically influential.

### Defense

The UAE's Union Defense Force (UDF) is a unified federal military force consisting of ground, maritime, air, and Presidential Guard branches. Although the UDF is among the smaller militaries of the region with just 63,000 active duty troops, it comprises a relatively large percentage of the population and its components maintain an extensive array of high quality equipment.

Challenges in recruiting Emiratis have led the UDF to absorb a large number on non-citizens, including Pakistani and Jordanian nationals. Further, some of the UDF's higher ranks

are held by foreign nationals from Western countries who seek careers after retirement or as temporary duty. Although the UDF currently does not maintain reserves, the introduction of conscription in 2014 could lead to the creation of a reserve force and increased military participation by Emiratis.

**Army:** The UAE's Army is composed of 44,000 active-duty troops and has 5 maneuver divisions and brigades (including armored, mechanized, and light) and 2 combat support brigades (Photo: UAE soldiers participating in a US Coast Guard search and seizure course).

**Navy:** Consisting of 2,500 active-duty personnel, the UAE's Navy is a well-equipped force organized into 29 patrol and coastal combatants, 10 submarine units, 2 mine warfare and countermeasures units, 29 amphibious ships and craft, and 5 logistics and support units.

**Air Force:** Composed of 4,500 active-duty personnel, the UAE's Air Force has 157 fighter aircraft and 18 squadrons and fleets.

**The Presidential Guard:** Responsible for the security of the UAE's 7 royal families, the Presidential Guard consists of 12,000 active-duty personnel dispersed across 3 maneuver squadrons and brigades (reconnaissance, mechanized, and amphibious). It also encompasses royal protection and dedicated aviation units with 18 helicopters and light-attack aircraft (Photo: UAE Honor Guard members).

# UAE Air Force Rank Insignia

PRIVATE 1ST CLASS

CORPORAL

SERGEANT

SGT 1ST CLASS

MASTER SGT

2ND LT

1ST LT

CAPTAIN

MAJOR

LT COLONEL

COLONEL

BRIG GENERAL

MAJ GENERAL

LT GENERAL

GENERAL

## Security Issues

Following the "Arab Spring" protests that took place across the Middle East in 2011, some pro-democracy groups attempted to challenge the UAE's monarchy. While the protests were short-lived and the UAE successfully preserved political stability, some tensions persist, especially after the government heavily restricted the media (see p. 3 of *Technology and Material*).

Although the UAE has not experienced acts of domestic terrorism, the volatility of the Gulf region and the activities of regional militant Islamist groups, including the Muslim Brotherhood organization, concern the UAE government. The UAE considers Islah, an affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood based largely in the poorer and more religiously conservative northern emirates, a security threat. Although Islah does not have a history of violent acts, the UAE fears its own pro-Western policies and long-standing alliance with the US could incite future attacks from similar organizations. Consequently, the UAE has taken an assertive stand against regional Islamist movements, including targeting and diffusing domestic supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood.

Despite concerns of retaliation, the UAE participated in international air strikes against Islamist militants in Libya, Syria, and Iraq in 2014. Although the UAE briefly ceased participation in the air strikes, citing fears for the safety of its pilots, it resumed air operations in early 2015 after the US stationed additional forces in the region (Photo: Sheikh Mohammad, ruler of Dubai and Vice President and PM of the UAE, shakes hand with US Airmen during the Dubai Air Show).

The UAE continues to participate in joint operations against militant Islamist groups, frequently hosting forces from other nations participating in such efforts, including French, Australian, German, and US personnel.

## Foreign Relations

Two factors shape the UAE's foreign relations: its desire to augment the limited strength of its armed forces through diplomatic ties and its goal of industrial and economic advancement. Consequently, over the last decade, the UAE has strengthened existing military and economic ties with the US, France, the UK, and Australia and cultivated new relations with South Africa and South Korea. The UAE is also an active member the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), an economic and political union composed of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). A significant regional force, the GCC strengthens the security of partner countries and promotes military and economic cooperation

(Photo: UAE aircraft fly in formation during a joint training exercise).

**Relations with Oman:** The UAE has a strong, stable relationship with neighboring Oman. Both countries are active members of the GCC, linking them economically and politically. The UAE also has provided Oman with financial assistance to help quell opposition movements related to the "Arab Spring." Of note, Oman is geographically intertwined with the UAE - its northernmost territory lies entirely within the borders of the UAE, completely separated from the rest of the country.

**Relations with Saudi Arabia:** Despite maintaining strong trade and political ties, unresolved border disputes have clouded relations between the UAE and Saudi Arabia. The 2 nations have yet to agree on an official border, primarily because of the potential for oil deposits within the disputed area.

**Relations with Iran:** The UAE views Iran's ongoing religious fundamentalism and suppression of protest movements as threats both to the UAE and the entire Arabian Gulf region. Further, although Iran accepted a long-term nuclear deal in 2015 that heavily restricts its nuclear program, Iran's nuclear activities have long strained the UAE-Iran relationship. Still

wary of Iran's intentions in the Gulf, the UAE works closely with its allies to counter Iranian power and capabilities.

Further destabilizing relations is Iran's claim to disputed islands in the Strait of Hormuz between the UAE and Iran (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). The dispute escalated in 2008 when Iran deployed intermediate-range ballistic weaponry on the island of Abu Musa, posing a threat to both maritime transport and the UAE's coastline. The UAE continues to dispute the claim and objects to Iran's development activities on the islands. Although the 2 nations have not reached a resolution, they have engaged in dialogue since 2013. Experts believe Iran may cede control of the islands in exchange for maritime rights around them.

Despite strained relations, the UAE is Iran's largest non-oil trading partner and its largest source of imported goods. Consequently, Iran's reintegration into the global economy following the 2015 nuclear deal will likely have far-reaching economic implications for the UAE. Specifically, while the removal of economic sanctions against Iran could significantly stimulate investment opportunities for the UAE, lingering military and political tensions could still hamper their profitable economic relationships.

**Relations with the US:** The UAE has maintained a strong diplomatic relationship with the US since its independence in 1971. The 2 countries cooperate on a range of bilateral issues including defense, trade, non-proliferation, energy policy, and law enforcement. The US and the UAE are strategic partners who work jointly to promote regional peace and security in the Middle East. For example, the UAE supported US-led efforts to pressure Iran into restricting its nuclear program, even imposing economic sanctions against Iran despite their adverse effect on UAE industries (Photo: US Secretary of State Kerry greets UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahayan).

In addition to its recent support to US operations against Islamist military movements, the UAE also has participated in other US-led military operations, including in Somalia (1992), the Balkans (late 1990s), and Afghanistan (since 2003). The UAE maintains that sustained US military involvement is vital to its national and regional security. Recently, both nations established a Joint Strategic Military Dialogue to better integrate UAE and US military capabilities, as well as facilitate cooperation in case of an attack on the UAE.

The UAE provides the US access to strategic military facilities, enabling tactical and logistical support for US operations in the Arabian Gulf. Of note, UAE ports hold more US Navy ships than any other facility outside of the US. About 5,000 US military personnel are stationed on UAE bases.

## Ethnic Groups

Because of its large proportion of non-citizen foreign workers, the UAE's population is much more diverse than other Gulf countries. Called ***muwatineen*** (citizens) in Emirati Arabic, Emirati citizens are primarily Arabs, although some have Persian (Iranian) ancestry. Arab Emiratis typically identify with one of the UAE's native tribes (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*). A few Emirati identify as Bedouin, Arabian tribes whose members traditionally lived in the desert where they herded camels and other animals. The UAE's arts reflect significant Bedouin influence (see p. 3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) (Photo: A non-citizen labors at Dubai's port).

Foreign non-citizens are known as ***wafideen*** (expatriates) and comprise between 76% and 89% of the UAE's total population. About half of the UAE's non-citizen population is from South Asia, primarily Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh. The UAE also has a large non-citizen Iranian community as well as significant numbers of Palestinians, Egyptians, Jordanians, Yemenis, and Omanis. Finally, *wafideen* also include people from China, Southeast Asia, North America, and Europe.

## Social Relations

Kinship is the governing principle of Emirati social relations. Emiratis trace their identity first to their household and family, then to a clan (groups of families), and finally to a tribe having its geographical home in a particular emirate. Family and clan connections are important in almost all political and economic activities, and Emiratis typically share all their resources with their extended family (see p. 2-3 of *Family and Kinship*).

The chief of a tribe is typically a sheikh (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*) who derives his authority from the power and connections of his extended family. Of note, succession within the tribe does not always pass from 1 generation to the next. Instead, it often passes laterally to a brother, nephew, uncle or cousin. Significantly, a sheikh does not wield power but influence. Instead of issuing decrees or laws, a sheikh traditionally mediates disputes based on custom. Further, to justify his claim to rule, a sheikh is bound to demonstrate deep generosity to his tribal members (see p. 7 of *History and Myth* and p. 5 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*) (Photo: Emiratis enjoy American entertainment).

With its vast oil reserves, the UAE developed a unique economy (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*). Fulfilling their roles as sheikhs, the UAE's leaders have distributed oil revenues, ensuring a high standard of living for all citizens (see p. 9-10 of *History and Myth*). Because it grants the holder the right to claim a share of this national wealth, citizenship in the UAE has become an economic asset. This right to claim a share of oil wealth is one reason the UAE rarely grants citizenship to outsiders. Another reason is the tribal basis of Emirati identity. A tribe typically traces its lineage to a (perhaps mythic) ancestor; all members must prove their connection to that figure or to other tribal members. Accordingly, tribes rarely admit new members who can show no such connection.

This separation between Emirati citizen and non-citizen is the UAE's most significant social division. Citizens are eligible for an array of free or subsidized services, including free health care (see p. 4 of *Sustenance and Health*), free education through college (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*), and housing and land grant programs (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). These benefits are not open to non-citizens.

There are also significant social divisions within the non-citizen population. UAE businesses tend to recruit foreign workers based on their ethnicity. For example, they may engage South Asians for construction jobs while hiring other Arabs or Europeans for managerial or technical positions. Emiratis tend to view North American and European non-citizens more favorably than workers from Asia. Because they usually labor as domestic workers or in other low status roles, non-citizen women receive little or no respect. Sometimes their Emirati employers even abuse or mistreat them (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) (Photo: Abu Dhabi).

Within the Emirati population, divisions exist between members of more or less influential tribes (see "Political Climate" above), or residents of richer or poorer emirates. In the past, economic inequality spurred internal labor migration as Emiratis from poorer Ras al Khaimah and Fujairah moved to Abu Dhabi and Dubai for work. Despite efforts to level opportunities across the UAE, inequalities persist. For example, instead of developing their own economies, Sharjah and Ajman emirates have essentially become commuter satellites of Dubai. Generally, social class and family background tend to be more significant factors than individual character and achievement in defining an individual's social status.

The UAE government centered in Abu Dhabi tends to view the Iranian community in Dubai as a potential threat to UAE stability. Similarly, because of the Shi'a Muslim community's religious and cultural ties to Iran, the government views Shi'a Muslims with suspicion (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

# 3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

## Overview

According to a 2010 UAE government estimate, 85% of UAE citizens are Sunni Muslims and 15% Sh'ia Muslims. The majority of the UAE's non-citizen residents are also Muslim: a 2005 UAE census found that 76% of the total population (both citizens and non-citizens) are Muslim, 9% Christian, and 15% follow other traditions, primarily Hinduism or Buddhism. Followers of other traditions, including Judaism, Sikhism, the Baha'i faith, Zoroastrianism (Parsis), and other forms of Islam comprise less than 5% of the population (Photo: The Sheikh Zayed mosque in Abu Dhabi).

The UAE's constitution establishes Islam as the country's official religion but also includes a provision guaranteeing freedom of religion while outlawing discrimination based on religion. The UAE automatically classifies its citizens as Muslim and denies them the freedom to change religion. Consequently, while the government supports Muslim efforts to convert non-Muslims to Islam, UAE laws forbid proselytization by non-Muslims.

***Sharia*** or Islamic law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) forms the country's legal foundation, particularly on family-related matters. Further, the government expects non-Muslims to respect Islamic sensibilities although they are not subject to all prohibitions. The government encourages the practice of moderate Islam and publicly condemns violent extremism as anti-Islamic.

The government exerts control over religious activities. For example, the government appoints most Sunni clerics and oversees their weekly sermon topics. Despite a general policy of tolerance toward the activities of non-Muslims, the

government may grant or withhold plots of land for all religious (including non-Muslim) buildings. It also restricts interfaith marriages, and it may limit access to religious information.

### Early Spiritual Landscape

Many early inhabitants of what is now the UAE followed a faith that included many gods and objects of worship. The sun, moon, some animals, and important tribal heroes were revered and often depicted as idols. These early inhabitants also often believed in ***djinn***, supernatural spirits that could bring good or bad fortune.

Between 500 BC and the 5th century, Zoroastrianism gained popularity on the Arabian Peninsula. Founded by Persian (Iranian) prophet Zarathustra between 1500-1200 BC, Zoroastrianism is a monotheistic religion that focuses on the divide between good and evil and uses fire as a form of worship.

Christianity arrived in the region in the early 3rd century. Living on islands near Abu Dhabi, Christians built several churches and monasteries over the next several centuries. Following the 7th century introduction of Islam, most members of Christian communities fled or converted to Islam (Photo: Late 7th century Arabian Qur'an).

## Islam

### Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values.

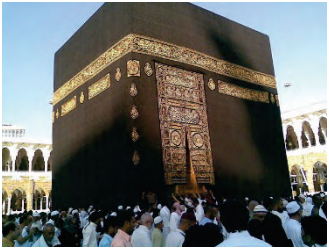
### Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

### Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into 2 sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

### Five Pillars of Islam



There are 5 basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray 5 times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba (pictured) is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.
- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.

### Shared Perspectives

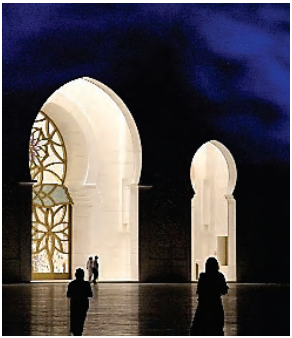
Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

**Abraham:** All 3 faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

**Scriptures**: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

**Jesus:** The 3 religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

**View of Death:** Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven (Photo: Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Zayed mosque at night).



### Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

### Ramadan

Observed during the 9th month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time

for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life.

During Ramadan, UAE leaders may forgive some debts and pardon criminals. Of note, UAE law requires Muslims and non-Muslims to refrain from eating, drinking, and smoking in public during daylight at this time (Photo: ***Sahoor***, a pre-dawn meal enjoyed during Ramadan, celebrated at the US embassy in 2014).

UAE Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as ***iftar***. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This "Night of Power" marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrates Ramadan's end and is a national holiday in the UAE.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God.

### The Arrival of Islam in UAE

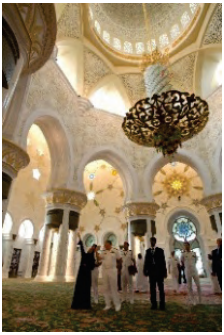
The UAE's proximity to Islam's birthplace in Saudi Arabia led to its exposure to the new religion even before Muhammad's death (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). Following the defeat of local tribesmen by Arabian Muslims in 632 and widespread proselytization, Islam spread rapidly.

## Religion Today

### Islam

The Islamic faith is an important part of most Emiratis' identity and frames many aspects of daily life, ethics, and culture. It defines socially acceptable public behavior for Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Further, its frequent calls to prayer shape the rhythm of daily life. Islam also permeates the Arabic language: the common use of the phrase ***insha'allah*** ("if God wills") reveals the shared belief that God directly and ultimately controls all events (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*) (Photo: US Secretary of State Kerry visits the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque).

**Sunni Islam:** Most of the UAE's Sunni Muslims, including the country's leadership, are followers of the Maliki school, a generally tolerant school of Islamic thought that preaches the primacy of the Qur'an over later teachings. Some Emiratis living along the al-Batinah coast and in the al-Buraimi oasis adhere to more conservative forms of Sunni Islam.



The UAE government provides funding, support, and direction to about 95% of the country's 5,000 Sunni mosques. Almost all Sunni imams (worship leaders) are employees of the state, giving the government substantial control over mosques' religious activities. Only the most senior imams choose their own sermon topics: the rest must follow the government's guidance. The remaining 5% of Sunni mosques are private (Photo: US Navy Admiral tours the Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque).

**Shi'a Islam:** About 15% of Emiratis are Shi'a Muslim, residing mostly in Dubai and Sharjah. The UAE's Shi'a Muslims tend to have a lower social status than Sunni Muslims (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Unlike most Sunni mosques, Shi'a mosques are private organizations that receive no governmental support or oversight. Although the government allows Shi'a-specific calls to prayer and religious practices, Shi'a Muslims must observe some Shi'a holidays privately to avoid offending public assembly restrictions. In addition to its citizen Shi'a population, many non-citizens are also Shi'a Muslims, primarily from Iran. The UAE government at times views the Shi'a community with suspicion due to its religious and cultural ties to Iran (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Sharjah city).

## Christianity

About 9% of UAE residents practice some form of Christianity, including Catholicism, forms of Protestantism, and Coptic Orthodoxy, among others. Christians residing in the UAE typically come from many different countries, including India, the Philippines, Egypt, and the US. The UAE has about 35 churches. Some of them house multiple Christian communities, where prayers, worship, and Bible studies are conducted in a variety of languages. Four emirates house Christian schools.

## Hinduism

Most of the UAE's Hindus are ethnically Indian. Based on ancient scriptures, Hindu worship focuses on a Supreme Being with many forms and natures, including Brahma, the creator, Shiva, the destroyer, and Vishnu, the preserver. While Hindus in Dubai may pray and worship at 2 Hindu temples, Hindus in other emirates hold their religious activities in homes or rented spaces. Four emirates offer Hindus cremation facilities and cemeteries to carry out their funerary customs.

### Buddhism

Many Asian non-citizens in the UAE are Buddhists. Although Buddhism is based on a voluminous set of scriptures, it does not focus on the worship of a god or gods. Instead, it emphasizes ethical and moral instruction to help people follow a spiritual path.

Buddhists in the UAE tend to follow either the Theravada school common in Southeast Asia or Mahayana school popular in East Asia depending on their nationality. While there is no Buddhist temple in the UAE, Sri Lanka's embassy in Abu Dhabi hosts Buddhist services on a monthly basis. Most meditation and observances occur in private homes.

### Sikhism

Dubai has a Sikh temple that serves 50,000 Sikh non-citizens primarily from India. A monotheistic religion based on the teachings of a 16th century poet-philosopher, Sikhism emphasizes doing good works and keeping God in mind for virtuous living. Observant male Sikhs do not cut their hair and wear 4 symbols, including a ceremonial sword.

### Religion and the Law

While some aspects of *sharia* law apply to all UAE residents regardless of their religious affiliation, non-Muslims typically receive civil rather than Qur'anic punishments.

Of note, the law prohibits blasphemy, swearing, and profanities (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*), as well as use of the Internet to preach against Islam. To deter proselytization efforts by non-Muslims, the government prohibits the distribution of non-Islamic religious literature and threatens to revoke the residence permits of persons suspected of proselytization (Photo: A ***minaret*** or tower in Abu Dhabi from which a cleric calls Muslims to pray).

# 4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

## Overview

While rapid urbanization and a decrease in birthrates have altered housing patterns and family structures in recent decades, traditional values such as regard for community, loyalty, and respect for elders are still the basis of family life.

## Residence

Over 85% of the population resides in urban areas located primarily along the coast. Cities like Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah feature high-rise apartment buildings and condominiums which primarily house non-citizens (Photo: High-rises in Dubai).

As UAE citizens, Emiratis may claim free land within their home emirate and enjoy access to subsidized housing and interest-free home loans. Consequently, Emiratis typically live in more spacious accommodations than non-citizens, usually detached houses in urban and suburban neighborhoods.

Larger homes often have separate ***majlis*** (living rooms) for entertaining guests that feature thick carpets, coffee tables, and plush sofas. While most modern brick and cement homes exhibit Western-style architecture, many also incorporate traditional Arabic elements, such as a small dome over the main entrance. Homes are painted in brown and yellow tones to mimic the natural landscape.

Many Emiratis live in communal homes or compounds that house multiple generations of an extended family. A home or compound may also provide separate quarters for staff and servants. Constructed of modern materials, compounds typically contain several buildings that serve various purposes, including a kitchen, a men's *majlis*, and a large 2-story building

which contains bedrooms and a women's *majlis*. Depending on family size, a compound can contain over 100 housing units and include shopping, recreational, and community facilities.

**Rural:** Some Emiratis occasionally retreat to the desert where they recreate a Bedouin lifestyle (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) with modern amenities. Historically, Bedouin homes were portable tents made of palm fronds and blankets of black goat hair. Open on one side, tents were divided into a ***haram*** (forbidden area) reserved for women and a separate "public" section for men, where the family also received guests.

### *Islamic Tradition and Physical Space*

With the intention of protecting the chastity, purity, and honor of women, Islamic societies tend to limit interaction between unrelated members of the opposite sex. Physical separation of women and men during social gatherings is common.

Traditionally, Emirati society also follows these conventions. Consequently, most Emirati homes include separate dining and sitting areas, as well as separate bathrooms for men and women. While small families may dine together, large families commonly segregate by gender for social gatherings, especially when guests are present. Further, houses and compounds are typically surrounded by tall walls, meant to further shield women from public view.

## Family Structure

Family is at the center of Emirati social life and forms the backbone of society. Generally, extended family members are expected to help each other, avoid actions that may bring shame to the family, and value the needs of the family over individual desires. Of note, even though some younger Emiratis place a greater emphasis on their personal careers, education,

and social status than older generations, they still feel a strong obligation to their kin.

While urban households increasingly comprise small nuclear families, consisting of parents and their children, households in rural areas may comprise an extended family of 10 people or more including parents, children, grandparents, and even great-grandparents. Children typically remain in the family residence as young adults and only move into their own quarters after marriage.

Many Emirati families employ domestic servants to perform daily household chores, while married women commonly hire a nurse to help in child rearing. Traditionally, Emirati women manage all domestic affairs, including household budgets and supervising servants (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*).



### Children

Traditionally, families in rural regions had as many as 12 children and relied on their offspring to fulfill household labor needs. Today, Emirati women typically have 3-4 children (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*). Extended family members help raise children, serving as mentors and supporting the parents as needed. Allowed by ***sharia*** (Islamic) law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*), physical discipline or corporal punishment for disobedience is common (Photo: UAE schoolgirls receive a basketball lesson from an American player).

**Birth:** It is an Islamic tradition for the father to whisper an ***adhan*** (call to prayer) into a baby's ear immediately following his birth. Once home, newborns are wrapped in a ***gumat***, a thin white blanket. In the first weeks after birth, guests visit the mother and child, tucking money into the *gumat* for luck. Meanwhile, the father plans an ***aqiqa***, a ceremony involving the slaughter of an animal to provide a feast for guests, neighbors, and the poor. When the infant is 40 days old, male family members may gather to shave the baby's head as a

cleansing ritual. Guests and family members then donate a sum of money equivalent to the weight of the hair to charity.

**Circumcision:** Emirati boys traditionally underwent circumcision between ages 5-6, signifying their passage into adulthood and membership in the Islamic community. Today, most newborn males are circumcised at the hospital immediately following birth.

### Marriage

Marriage in the UAE is an important rite that grants prestige, social status, and greater economic opportunity to both spouses. Traditionally, a marriage was an arranged union among families, typically between first cousins or other distant relatives. It was often used to strengthen and extend alliances among the region's royal families and ruling tribes (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*).

While arranged marriages still occur, some Emiratis choose their own spouse based upon mutual attraction. While casual dating is socially unacceptable, Emirati youth regularly interact at educational gatherings, through social media, or by phone and may encourage family members to contact potential mates on their behalf. In judging a suitable spouse, families consider education, social status, and wealth. Families generally do not force arranged matches and either marriage prospect can reject a proposed mate (Photo: An Emirati with his camels).

Emirati women rarely marry non-Emirati men. If they do, their families may shun them or force them to leave the UAE. Although it is more acceptable for Emirati men to marry non-Emiratis, there is a societal concern that such non-traditional marriages dilute Emirati culture. Consequently, the government has considered restricting the practice.

To encourage marriage between citizens, the government provides cash incentives to Emirati couples. Of note, many women are postponing marriage or even choosing to remain unmarried. For example, in 2012 about 60% of Emirati women in their early-30s were unmarried, up from 20% in the 1990s.

**Bridewealth:** Upon marriage, Emirati men traditionally pay ***mahr*** or a so-called bridewealth to the bride which becomes her sole property. A legal requirement for Islamic marriages, the *mahr* symbolizes the bride's financial independence. Further, some women may rely on the payment in the event of a husband's death or after divorce. While the bridewealth can be as high as $100,000, some families agree to set the amount at a symbolic $1 to ease the young groom's financial burden.

**Weddings:** Segregated by gender, wedding festivities typically last between 3 days and a week and consist of a series of family-sponsored celebrations. At the ***Laylat al Henna*** (henna party), the bride receives intricate temporary henna tattoos (pictured - see p. 12 of *History and Myth*). She then receives gold jewelry from the groom during her "gold night" party.

The actual wedding occurs on the last night of celebrations and is usually held at a wedding hall or hotel. To officially seal the marriage, couples sign a ***nikah*** (wedding contract). Afterwards, feasting and dancing are held for hundreds of family and friends. The festivities conclude when the groom enters the women's party to claim his bride.

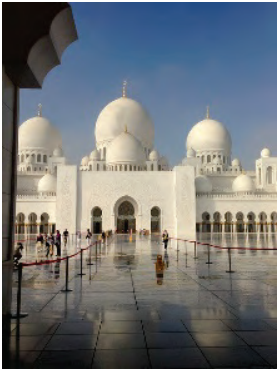
The families typically split the high wedding costs, which can reach $100,000. To help relieve this financial burden and discourage young couples from delaying marriage, the government has set up a national wedding fund for couples needing assistance. Further, some emirates host group weddings, during which 20 or 30 couples marry at once.

**Polygyny:** Polygyny is the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with *sharia* law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) Emirati men may have up to 4 wives if they can financially support them all. In practice, only a few men have 2 or more.

**Divorce:** With about 1/3 of all marriages ending in divorce in the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah, the UAE has one of the highest divorce rates in the Arabian Gulf. Although the majority of those divorces occur among non-citizen couples, divorce rates among Emiratis are also relatively high. While slightly lower than in the US, Emirati divorce rates have increased in recent years. Experts suggest that the increase is largely due to changing expectations of married life and financial strain.

### Death

According to Islamic tradition, Emiratis bury their loved ones as soon as possible after death, usually within 24 hours. The deceased is bathed, dried, perfumed, and wrapped in a ***kafan*** (clean white cloth). Male relatives and friends transport the deceased to a mosque where a cleric offers prayers. Next, relatives deliver the deceased to a cemetery where the body is buried (Photo: The Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque in Abu Dhabi)



Family members and friends gather for the graveside funeral service, during which they pray for the deceased and offer condolences to the family. Of note, while female relatives may attend the ceremony, they must remain separated from the men. For 3 days following the funeral, the family receives mourners who offer further condolences and read prayers from the Qur'an in gender-separate *majlis* within the family residence. On the final day, the family hosts a large dinner to honor the deceased.

# 5. SEX AND GENDER



## Overview

Although traditional UAE society privileged men over women, this trend is slowly changing. The UAE's growing economy and resulting need for workers since independence have created education and employment opportunities for women. Besides comprising over 70% of all university students, Emirati women are gaining employment in government and business. Despite this progress, gender inequity persists in the workplace, and women face barriers to equal treatment before the law.

## Gender Roles and Work

**Domestic Labor:** Although many Emirati women work outside the home, most continue to hold responsibility for household affairs. Women manage the family budget and usually the household duties of domestic servants (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*).

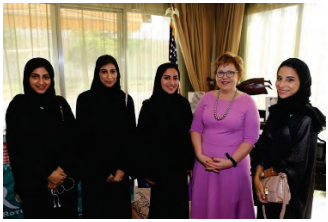
**Labor Force:** In 2013, about 47% of Emirati women worked outside the home, a significantly higher rate than neighboring Saudi Arabia (20%) and Oman (29%), but lower than regional neighbor Qatar (51%) and the US (56%). Emirati women tend to be highly educated and hold positions in education, healthcare, government, and business, including high-paying service industries such as banking and finance (Photo: Former US First Lady Laura Bush greets Emirati women).

Despite women's growing participation in the work force, men typically receive preferential job placement and earn higher wages than women. Of note, many non-citizen women hold domestic service jobs where they must work extremely long hours and suffer physical abuse (p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations* and "Gender Based Violence" below).

## Gender and the Law

Although the UAE's constitution guarantees equal rights to women in education, healthcare, employment, and social welfare, gender discrimination persists. Further, the implementation of ***sharia*** (Islamic) law (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) restricts women's rights while certain cultural traditions hinder women's full participation in society.

While it is relatively easy for men to divorce under *sharia* law, women may petition for divorce only under exceptional circumstances, including instances of physical harm, abandonment, or if the husband has neglected his financial obligations to his wife or children, and only through an official judicial arbitration process. In the absence of exceptional circumstances, women may choose to file a ***khula*** divorce (results in a monetary payment to the husband) but risk losing certain rights. Further, *sharia* law grants men privileged status in inheritance and child custody matters, such as granting only fathers legal guardianship of children and assigning them sole custody following divorce. Emirati women do not automatically pass on their UAE citizenship to their children if the father is a non-citizen. Instead, these children must apply for citizenship once they reach age 18.



Other examples of unequal treatment are rooted in tradition. While the constitution recognizes equal property rights, Emirati do not consider it culturally appropriate for women to own property or live alone. Consequently, Emirati women rarely take advantage of the subsidized housing programs open to citizens (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*) (Photo: Students with US Ambassador Leaf).

Husbands or male guardians typically must grant permission before women can receive bank loans or engage in business activities. Although women are legally permitted to move freely within and outside the UAE, Emirati men commonly prohibit their wives and daughters from leaving home without a male

guardian. Emirati society typically faults women for failed marriages. Consequently, divorced women may be stigmatized, have difficulty remarrying, and even disowned by their families and excluded from inheritances.

### Gender and Politics

When the UAE held its first election in 2006 (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*), women comprised less than 20% of the hand-picked electorate. By the next election in 2011, women made up nearly half of the 129,000 electors. As of 2015, women held 4 of 20 seats in the Council of Ministers and 7 seats in the 40-seat Federal National Council (FNC - see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*).

A female FNC member acts as speaker, the highest position held by a woman in any equivalent Arabian Gulf governing body. About 10% of UAE diplomats are female, and in 2013 the government selected a woman to serve as the UAE's Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) (Photo: US Secretary of State Kerry confers with a UAE representative at a UN assembly).

### Gender Based Violence (GBV)

Rape is a criminal offense under both civil and *sharia* law and carries severe penalties, though many victims do not report these crimes to avoid an accusation of adultery or bringing shame to their families. Excluded from legal protection and often denied any legal recourse, female non-citizens are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

### Female Circumcision

Commonly referred to as female genital mutilation (FGM), female circumcision is intended to modify the sex organ in order to decrease sexual desire and promote virginity. Although FGM is not explicitly outlawed, the Ministry of Health prohibits the practice in government hospitals and clinics. Nevertheless, some Emirati families employ private doctors to conduct the

procedure. According to a 1990s study, as many as 31% of Emirati girls ages 1-5 have undergone some form of FGM.

### Sex and Procreation

Emiratis consider sexual intimacy a private matter. Public displays of affection, including kissing and holding hands, are socially unacceptable and forbidden by law. Further, all sexual relations outside marriage are illegal. This means it is unlawful for unmarried couples to live together or share a hotel room. While this law also applies to UAE residents, visitors, and tourists, it is rarely enforced against foreign nationals.

The UAE's birthrate has dropped dramatically in recent decades, from 6.9 children per woman in 1960 to 1.8 in 2013. This drop is primarily due to the large influx of non-citizens, many of whom do not have children while living temporarily in the UAE (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). While the birthrate among Emiratis has decreased in recent decades, it is still significantly higher than that of non-citizens. For example, in 2012, non-citizens in Abu Dhabi averaged just 1.6 births per woman while Emiratis averaged 3.4 children per woman (Photo: UAE students).

While not as dramatic as it appears, the decrease in birth rates among Emiratis has been significant and is primarily due to changes in women's place in society. As more Emirati women become better educated, work outside the home, and marry later, they have fewer children. Besides encouraging marriage, the government's wedding assistance programs (see p. 4-5 of *Family and Kinship*) are also intended to encourage couples to have children. Of note, UAE government employees receive a "child allowance" meant to alleviate the costs of child rearing.

**Homosexuality:** Strictly enforced civil and *sharia* laws prohibit homosexual acts. Punishment includes fines, deportation (of non-citizens), and prison time. Although the federal penal code includes a death penalty for offenses, there are no recorded cases of its application.

# 6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION



## Language Overview

The official language of the UAE is Arabic, the native language of Emirati citizens. While well-educated Emiratis tend to speak both Arabic and English fluently, less educated Emiratis living in rural areas may speak only Arabic.

Due to the large influx of non-citizen foreign workers from a variety of countries over the last 50 years (see p. 10 of *History and Myth* and p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), many other languages are spoken today in the UAE. Non-citizens speak a variety of languages, including English; other Arabic dialects such as Egyptian and Omani; South Asian varieties such as Hindi and Urdu; and Southeast Asian and African varieties (Photo: UAE stop sign in Arabic and English).

## Arabic

Most Emiratis speak a local dialect of Arabic known as Gulf Arabic or ***Khaleeji*** as their first language. In school, Emiratis learn to read and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a standardized variety used across Arabic-speaking countries. Emiratis use MSA for writing, formal discussions, speeches, and in many national news broadcasts. With a 28-character alphabet, Arabic is written horizontally from right to left.

Khaleeji differs from MSA in several ways, including vocabulary and pronunciation. For example, Khaleeji speakers may replace a “q” sound with a “g” or “j” sound. Similarly, they may replace the “k” sound with a “ch” sound, pronouncing the word ***kalb*** (“dog”) like “chalb”. Further, Khaleeji speakers often pronounce a “j” sound as “y.” Of note, Khaleeji is mutually intelligible with most other regional Arabic dialects except for certain local varieties from Iraq and North Africa.

## English

Among the UAE's total population, consisting of both Emiratis and non-citizens, English is the most commonly shared language. English has played a role in the region since the formation of the Trucial States under the protection of the British in the 19th century (see p. 4 of *History and Myth*). English is currently an important part of the national education curriculum, with English instruction beginning in kindergarten (see p. 2-3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). English also plays a significant role in post-secondary education, where remedial English courses constituted 30% of university budgets in 2011.

Emiratis' English skills are often dependent on a speaker's age and location of residence. In general, younger Emiratis in urban areas are much more likely to speak English than older Emiratis or inhabitants of rural areas. Many Emiratis alternate between Arabic and English with ease, often mixing the 2 languages in the same sentence or conversation. Many foreign businesses use English. Similarly, most non-citizen employees, regardless of their native language, conduct business dealings and negotiations in English (Photo: Dubai road sign in Arabic and English).

## Other Languages

Among the UAE's non-citizens, Hindi and Urdu are the most widely spoken languages. While exact numbers of speakers are unknown due to constant fluctuation in the foreign worker population, there are likely more than 1 million speakers each of both Hindi (an official language of India) and Urdu (Pakistan's national language). In addition to Urdu, large numbers of Pakistanis also speak Northern Pashto and Southern Balochi. Indians living in the UAE often speak Malayalam or other South Asian languages in addition to Hindi and English. Finally, sizeable populations of the UAE's non-citizens speak Persian (the official language of Iran), Somali (spoken in Somalia, Djibouti, and Ethiopia), and Tagalog (the official language of the Philippines).

## Communication Overview

Communicating competently in the UAE requires not only knowledge of Arabic, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends (Photo: Then US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates meets with Crown Prince Muhammad bin Zayed Al Nahayan in 2011).

## Communication Style

Emiratis highly value their families, friends, and elders as well as the traits of generosity and hospitality. Emirati communication patterns reflect these values. In their interactions, Emiratis strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners and their social status while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others. Consequently, Emiratis regard the manner of speech almost as important as the content, viewing the ability to speak eloquently a sign of education and refinement.

Further, politeness demands that Emiratis express goodwill instead of criticizing another person's ideas. Consequently, a foreign national should avoid giving direct criticism, especially in front of others. Instead, he should combine indirect criticism with praise for any positive points while reassuring the individual of his high regard for him personally.

Of note, etiquette also requires that Emiratis always provide a positive response to a request. Usually accompanied by the phrase ***insha'allah*** ("if God wills" – see p. 6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), a "yes" answer is not necessarily a promise of action. Similarly, foreign nationals should not interpret a noncommittal answer to a request as neutral. Instead, such an answer might actually be negative.

Emiratis tend to be talkative, often repeating themselves to make a point or shouting when excited. Emiratis may also punctuate their speech with oaths to emphasize their point and exaggerate for effect. They tend to be tolerant of interruptions during discussions and of several people speaking at once. Emiratis consider the display of emotions during discussions to be indicative of deep and sincere concern for the subject.

Foreign nationals should avoid swearing and making obscene gestures, as Emiratis find this sort of behavior offensive. Further, vulgar language and behavior are prohibited by law, with offenders subject to fines, imprisonment, and deportation.

## Greetings

Emiratis typically extend greetings with great care and respect. Upon entering a room, Emiratis say ***Salaam Aleikum*** ("peace be upon you"), to which all present then respond, ***Wa Aleikum as-Salaam*** ("and upon you be peace"). Emiratis always perform this greeting, even if it interrupts conversations or business negotiations.

Following this verbal exchange, men may shake hands lightly, exchange kisses on the cheek, or touch noses, depending on their familiarity and status of their relationship. To indicate deep respect and sincerity, men may place their right hands to the hearts after shaking hands. Emirati women commonly exchange cheek kisses when they greet each other. If the women are not well acquainted, they may only shake hands (Photo: US Secretary of Defense Ash Carter exchanges greetings with Yousef Al Otaiba, UAE Ambassador to the US in 2015).

Emiratis of the opposite sex do not touch when greeting. Men usually greet women only verbally or with a nod, though some women may extend their hands for a handshake. Foreign nationals should wait for members of the opposite sex to initiate the greeting.

## Names

Arab names for both genders reflect the genealogy of the father's side. The full name consists of a first (given) name, the person's father's (first) name, sometimes the paternal grandfather's name, a family name, and sometimes a tribal name. Emiratis typically include the term ***bin*** (son of) or ***bint*** (daughter of) between a person's given name and his/her father's name. For example, the President's name Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahayan indicates that he is the son of Zayed. An Emirati's family or tribal name indicates membership in an extended family, a relationship with a tribal ancestor (see p. 13 of *Political and Social Relations*), or origins in a particular geographic location. Of note, Emirati women do not take their husband's name upon marriage.

## Forms of Address

Emirati friends and relatives of the same sex usually address one another by first name. Members of the opposite sex typically combine military ranks and professional or personal titles, such as Dr., Engineer, Mr., or Mrs., with the person's first name. Of note, Emiratis may also address foreign nationals in this manner, such as calling Dr. Bill Smith "Dr. Bill" (Photo: UAE and US Air Force Majors converse).

Adult Emiratis may address each other using the titles ***um*** (mother) for women and ***abu*** (father) for men, followed by the name of the addressee's oldest son. Emiratis address members of the nation's ruling families with the title ***Sheikh*** (for males) or ***Sheikha*** (for females) (see p. 5 of *History and Myth*).

## Conversational Topics

Polite conversation following greetings typically involves inquiries about the well-being of each other and extended family members. Of note, Emirati men never inquire directly about another man's female relations, nor should male foreign nationals.

Emiratis are inclined to share more information about themselves than Westerners typically do. For example, they may elaborate on their family's status and social connections while expecting foreign nationals to do the same.

They do, however, tend to withhold less favorable information about themselves, such as their humble origins or family discord. In fact, some Emiratis may avoid speaking directly of all unfortunate occurrences. For example, an Emirati may describe a relative on his deathbed as "a little tired" or use certain euphemisms for "cancer" or "death."

Foreign nationals should avoid certain topics, including drugs and alcohol (see p. 2 of *Sustenance and Health*), colonialism, and the invasion of Iraq. Any current regional conflicts may also be sensitive issues. Generally, foreign nationals should avoid discussing politics and religion, particularly in reference to Israel and its supporters. Of note, the law prohibits speaking ill of Islam and insulting any religion.

### Gestures

Emiratis often use gestures to augment, and sometimes replace, spoken words. To point, an Emirati uses the entire hand (pictured). Moving the head slightly back and raising the eyebrows means "no," as does moving the head back and the chin upwards. Holding the right hand out, palm upward, then touching the thumb and tips of the fingers together and slowly moving the hand up and down means "calm down," "be patient," or "slowly." Holding the right forefinger up and moving it from left to right quickly several times means "no, never." Foreign nationals should avoid showing the soles of feet or shoes to Emiratis, who consider both unclean. Further, foreign nationals should never walk in front of a praying person or making the Western "OK" sign, both of which Emiratis consider offensive.

### Language and Training Sources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at http://culture.af.mil/resources/index.aspx for language training resources.

## Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. The table below shows sounds or letters having no English equivalent or that vary from MSA pronunciations. Of note, when texting or writing informally online in Romanized Arabic, Emiratis frequently replace certain Arabic letters with numbers, also depicted below.

| Arabic Letter | Transliteration and Description | Number (if applicable) | Example |
|---|---|---|---|
| أ | a | 2 | **A**frica |
| ع | ‘a or aa | 3 | sound from deep in the throat as in the name **‘A**li or the instrument **‘ou**d |
| خ | kh; strong “h” | 5 | lo**ch** (as pronounced in Scotland) |
| ط | ṭ or t | 6 | **t**ar |
| ح | ḥ or h; whispered “h” | 7 | **h**oot |
| ق | g | 8 | **g**olf (pronounced like **cou**gh; transliterated q in MSA) |
| ص | ṣ or s | 9 | **sa**w |
| غ | gh; like the guttural French “r” | | Pa**r**is (as pronounced by a French person) |
| ذ | dH; Soft “th” | | **th**is |
| ء | ’ (glottal stop) | | pause in the middle of “uh-oh” |
| ج | y (or j) | | **y**es |
| ك | ch (or k) | | **ch**in |

## Useful Words and Phrases

| English | Emirati Arabic (Romanized) |
|---|---|
| Hello (May peace be upon you) | Salaam Aleikum |
| Response: And upon you be peace | Wa Aleikum as-Salaam |
| Hi | Marhaba |
| Good morning | Sabah el kheer |
| Good afternoon/evening | Masaa el kheer |
| My name is... | Esmee… |
| Yes | N'em |
| No | La |
| Please | Men fedlek |
| Thank you | Shukran |
| You're welcome | 'Afwan |
| Good night (when leaving) | Tosbeho (tosbeheena for female) 'ala khair |
| Where are you from? | Men ayna anta (anti? for female) |
| Where do you live? | Ayna taskun (Ayna taskuneen? for female) |
| I am American | Ana amreeki (amrekiah for female) |
| Do you speak (English/Arabic)? | Hal tatakallamo alloghah al enjleziah/alarabiah? |
| Today/Now | Alyawm/Al aan |
| Tomorrow | Ghadan |
| Yesterday | Albareha |
| The meal was very good | Alwajba tayba waayed |
| Look! | Onzor (Onzori! for female) |
| Excuse me | A 'ederney |
| Pardon? | Al 'efew? |
| I don't understand you | Ana la afhem 'eleyk |
| What? | Shoo? |
| Where? | Ayn? |
| How? | Kaif? |
| Me/you | Ana/anta/anti (you for female) |
| Him/her | Houwa/hiya |
| What time is it now? | Kam assa'a al aan? |

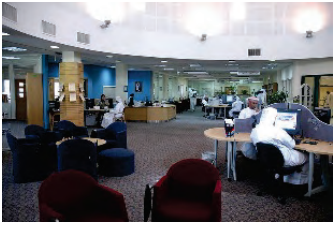
# 7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

## Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 93.8%
- Male: 93.1%
- Female: 95.8% (2005 estimate)

## Early Education

Before the 7th-century arrival of Islam (see p. 2 of *Religion and Spirituality*), inhabitants of the region's desert and coastal communities informally transmitted values, skills, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations. With the spread of Islam, educators developed more formal methods of teaching Qur'an verses, Islamic rituals and duties, and Arabic calligraphy to the children of elite families.



Eventually, schools known as ***madrasas*** began to provide instruction in theology, ethics, and Arabic. In addition, scholars and intellectuals shared their knowledge of history, religion, and grammar in their homes or mosques through what became known as the "scientific circle" form of education (Photo: Students at Al Ain Men's College).

## The Expansion of Educational Options

As the region prospered with the pearling industry boom in the late 19th - early 20th centuries (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), residents sought expanded educational opportunities. Influenced by Arabian reform and nationalist movements, merchants engaged Egyptians, Palestinians, or local residents educated abroad to teach in new schools.

Following the collapse of the pearling industry in the 1930s (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), communities found it increasingly difficult to maintain their schools and pay their teachers. Consequently, locally-administered formal education in the region declined considerably.

The education landscape changed mid-century when foreign governments began to promote education. First, the British government opened the Al Qassemia School in Sharjah in 1953. Then in 1958, Kuwait began to build and fund schools, followed by Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. Because the schools were staffed with teachers who followed the textbooks and curricula from their respective countries, the resulting education system was considerably fragmented.

When Abu Dhabi began exporting oil in 1962, just 20 schools served fewer than 4,000 mostly male students across modern-day UAE. When the UAE declared independence in 1971, there were fewer than 28,000 students. As part of broader development schemes, the government began to focus on improving education, including training and hiring Emirati rather than foreign teachers. Standardization efforts eventually culminated in the development of a national curriculum in 1985.

### Modern Public Education System

The UAE has invested heavily in education in recent decades. Presently, the government allocates more money to education than almost any other country: 21% of its total budget in 2014. The UAE's efforts have largely paid off: the literacy rate has improved from only 54% of men and 31% of women in 1975 to an average of almost 95% for the 2 in 2005 (Photo: Zayed University students).

About 40% of students in the UAE attend public schools. Emiratis may attend all public schools, from pre-school through university, at no cost. In addition, Emiratis receive school-day meals, textbooks, and uniforms for free. While non-citizens may attend public schools, they must pass an entrance exam in Arabic with a 90% score to be admitted. Because most non-citizen children speak languages other than Arabic at home (see p. 2 of *Language and Communication*), this requirement is a significant barrier to their enrollment. Further, to attend public schools, non-citizen students must pay fees.

All public school classes after kindergarten are segregated by sex, with boys receiving instruction from male teachers and girls from female teachers. Public schools employ over 11,000 female Emirati teachers but fewer than 1,000 male Emiratis. Consequently, most male teachers are non-citizen foreigners.

**Pre-Primary:** Public institutions offer 2-year non-compulsory kindergarten programs for children aged 4-5. In 2011, 79% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in such programs.

**Primary:** Consisting of grades 1-6, primary school is compulsory. Since every village in the UAE has at least 1 public primary school, education is accessible and almost all Emirati children complete these grades.

Primary instruction is mainly in Arabic, although some schools teach math and sciences in English. The national primary curriculum includes Islamic education, Arabic, English, math, science, and social studies. Other courses include art, music, physical education, and family education for girls (Photo: US Navy Hospital Corpsman works with a student at the Dubai Center for Special Needs).

**Secondary:** Lower secondary school (grades 7-9) is also compulsory. After 1 year of the general curriculum students choose to specialize in 1 of 2 tracks: humanities/social sciences (economics, geography, history, and sociology), or physical sciences (biology, chemistry, geology, and physics). Upper secondary school (grades 10-12) is not compulsory. After an additional year of general coursework students then deepen their studies in their chosen track.

Alternatives to secondary school include 6-year technical schools where students study agriculture, business, religion, or technical topics. Such schools, including the Petroleum Institute and the Emirates Aviation Academy, focus on specific skills for particular industries or fields.

While 70% of youth in the UAE complete their secondary education, completion rates tend to be higher in urban areas. Of note, about 95% of girls and just 80% of boys who complete secondary school apply for college.

**Post-Secondary:** Every Emirati who completes secondary school and passes all exit exams may attend a UAE public university at no cost. While each emirate has at least 1 university, the UAE also provides scholarships to citizens who wish to pursue mainly applied or technical degrees abroad. Of note, almost 70% of UAE university students are women.

Founded in 1977, United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) is the UAE's flagship public institution of higher learning, serving about 15,000 students on its Al Ain campus. Another prominent public institution is Zayed University, with campuses in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The UAE also is home to several private universities such as the American Universities in the cities of Dubai, Ras al Khaimah, and Sharjah (pictured); and Ajman University and the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi.

### Private Schools

Offering fee-based education that usually follows American or British curricula, private schools were founded primarily to serve the needs of the non-citizen population seeking education in languages other than Arabic. While just 40% of schools in the UAE are private, they serve about 60% of students. Private schools are particularly concentrated in Dubai, which actually has more private than public schools.

### Government Oversight

The government strictly regulates both private and public education. For example, the Ministry of Education (MoE) censors teaching materials and educators' speech. Further, the government closely oversees school events that touch on political issues. Finally, the MoE grants operating approval only to private schools whose classes and curricula are deemed consistent with Emirati culture and values.

# 8. TIME AND SPACE

## Overview

Emiratis believe that trust, respect, and consensus are fundamental to building strong personal and business relationships. In general, public displays of affection are inappropriate and even unlawful, although social touching between same sexes is common, even more-so than in the US.

## Time and Work

The UAE work week runs from Sunday-Thursday, and business hours vary by establishment type. While public sector employees generally work from 7:30am-2:30pm or 3:00pm, private businesses typically open from 9:00am-5:30pm. Some businesses may close for a mid-day break from 1:00pm-4:00pm and consequently open earlier or extend the workday to 7:00pm. During Ramadan (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), the work day is 2 hours shorter.

While some shops are open 9:00am-1:00pm and 4:00pm-9:00pm, others are open all day. Most shopping centers are open 10:00am-10:00pm or later. Many shops also have limited opening hours on Fridays. Most banks are open 8:00am-1:00pm Sunday-Thursday and 8:00am-noon on Saturday (Photo: Dubai gold ***souk***, or open-air market).

**Working Hours:** Labor laws limit the UAE work week to 48 hours, with an 8-hour day/6-day week. Additional work requires overtime pay. Despite these regulations, there are many exceptions to the laws that allow employees to work longer hours. While few Emiratis work on Fridays, the Islamic day of worship, wage laborers – primarily non-citizens (see p. 12-14 of *Political and Social Relations*) often do. International organizations have denounced the UAE's inconsistent enforcement of labor laws as well as human rights violations regarding the UAE's non-citizen workers.

**Time Zone and Date Notation:** The United Arab Emirates Time Zone, or Gulf Time Zone, is 4 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 9 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). The UAE does not observe daylight savings time.

**Lunar Calendar:** Emiratis use the ***Hijiri*** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

**National Holidays**

These holidays occur on fixed dates:

- January 1: New Year's Day
- November 30: Martyrs' Day
- December 2: National Day

These holidays occur on variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- ***Mawlid al-Nabi***: Birth of the Prophet Muhammad
- ***Lailat al-Miraj***: The Ascension of Muhammad
- ***Eid al-Fitr***:: End of Ramadan
- ***Arafat (Haj) Day:*** Second day of the Haj pilgrimage (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*)
- ***Eid al-Adha***: Festival of Sacrifice
- ***Ra's al-Sana:*** Islamic New Year

## Time and Business

Business tends to occur more slowly in the UAE than in the US. Because they view time as flexible, Emiratis consider schedules and deadlines less important than relationships and social obligations. For example, meetings typically begin with an extended period of conversation about family, health, and recent activities (see p. 5-6 of *Language and Communication*).

Building and maintaining trust is essential to conducting business in the UAE. Emiratis believe that success is more dependent on developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships than adhering to business rules or regulations.

During meetings, advisors and others who are not part of the meeting may enter and exit at will. Emirati businessmen may answer phones or check email during meetings without apology. Emiratis traditionally reach business deals through consensus rather than bargaining or by directive (Photo: A US Navy Admiral meets with UAE Armed Forces media representatives).

While Emirati workplaces typically have a clear hierarchy, work relationships are often less formal than in the US. Emiratis conduct themselves in business settings in a manner that communicates their values: respect for others, generosity, and hospitality (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*). Employees expect direct praise as reassurance of their superior's appreciation for their work. Supervisors typically deliver criticism only indirectly and in private (see p. 3 of *Language and Communication*).

### Personal Space

In the UAE, personal space depends on the context and nature of the relationship. In general, Emiratis maintain slightly more than an arm's length when conversing with strangers and stand closer to family and friends. Friends of the same gender may maintain very little personal space when interacting.

**Touch:** Close friends and family members commonly touch one another while speaking. Friends of the same gender may hold hands in public, signaling their deep platonic friendship.

Because the display of affection between the opposite sexes is prohibited (see p. 4 of *Sex and Gender*), unrelated Emiratis of

the opposite sex do not typically touch, even during greetings (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*).

Emiratis use only the right hand when eating, gesturing, passing and accepting items, and shaking hands because traditionally the left hand is used for personal hygiene and considered unclean. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom to avoid offense.

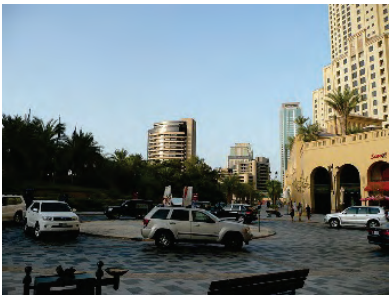
**Eye Contact:** Emiratis generally consider direct eye contact during conversation an indication of sincerity and credibility and may interpret rapid or constant shifts in eye contact as a sign of dishonesty. Nonetheless, men typically avoid extended eye contact when interacting with unrelated women. Likewise, most Emiratis do the same with elders as a sign or respect.

### Photographs

Foreign nationals should always obtain permission before taking an Emirati's picture. Mosques, airports, government offices, and military or industrial areas may prohibit photography.

### Driving

Like Americans, Emiratis drive on the right side of the road. Drivers in the UAE commonly ignore posted speed limits and traffic signals, habits that result in a rate of almost 13 traffic deaths per 100,000 people per year.



This rate is significantly lower than neighboring Saudi Arabia's annual rate of almost 25 deaths per 100,000 people but slightly higher than the US rate of 11. Government efforts to improve traffic safety aim to reduce that rate to 3 by 2021 and 0 by 2030 (Photo: A traffic roundabout in Dubai).

# 9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

## Overview

Emiratis' clothing, sports, music and arts reflect the UAE's place in the modern global economy as well as Emiratis' pride in their Arab and Islamic traditions.

## Dress and Appearance

Standards of dress in the UAE tend to be conservative for both men and women. While people from rural areas typically wear traditional clothing, residents of urban areas may wear Western-style clothes. Both male and female visitors to the UAE should dress conservatively, avoiding shorts, mini-skirts and sleeveless tops.

**Men:** Emirati men traditionally wear a ***kandurah***, a loose white robe designed to keep the wearer cool. This attire is complemented by a ***kaffiyeh*** (cap) underneath a white or checkered ***guthra*** (headscarf) that is held in place by an ***agal*** (black cord). *Guthra* styles vary by wearer's status, tribe, or age. Some Emirati men may wear a ***khanjar***, curved dagger made from bone, wood, and intricate silverwork on a leather or fabric belt, as a traditional accessory. Of note, the *khanjar* is more popular in Oman. Some Emirati men wear Western-style suits for business meetings (Photo: US Secretary of State Kerry meets the UAE Ambassador to the US).

**Women:** Emirati women traditionally wear an ***abaya***, a loose black robe that covers much of the body, accompanied by a ***shayla*** (headscarf). Women from very religious families may wear a ***niqab*** (face veil) that reveals only the eyes or a ***burqa*** (full face mask). Under the *abaya*, women typically wear long skirts with blouses, though young women and urban-dwellers may prefer jeans, colorful designer dresses, and high heels.

Many Emirati women favor gold jewelry and cloth embroidered with gold thread. Common items include ***al-mirtaesha***, a gold necklace that covers the chest and extends to the waist; ***al-tasa***, a golden mesh head covering; and ***al-kaff***, a bracelet that covers much of the hand. For special events such as weddings, Emirati women typically decorate their hands with intricate temporary henna tattoos (see p. 12 of *History and Myth* and p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*)

**Children:** Children typically wear Western-style pants, shirts, and dresses. All government and most private schools require children to wear uniforms. Older children begin to wear traditional adult clothing around puberty, about the time they enter secondary school and when the sexes are segregated in traditional households (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*).

## Recreation and Leisure

Emiratis enjoy spending their leisure time with family and friends. Private and public occasions such as weddings, birthdays, sporting events, and religious holidays (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) are cause for celebration and strengthening of social bonds. International vacations are popular among Emiratis, particularly during the hot summer months.

Modern shopping malls (pictured) have largely replaced traditional ***souks*** (covered open air markets) and coffee houses as Emiratis' preferred leisure destinations. These often enormous and lavish malls provide convenient and accessible common areas for Emiratis to visit, eat, shop, and enjoy entertainment.

**Festivals:** Over the past 2 decades, the UAE has invested significantly in international events, festivals, and business tourism. While Dubai hosts international film, art, and air shows, as well as the Emirates Air Festival of Literature, Abu Dhabi hosts an international book fair, several arts fairs, and a film festival. Other notable events include the Sharjah Biennial

(one of the most important art events in the Arab world) and the Sharjah International Book Fair.

In 2020 Dubai will host the World Expo. Expected to attract 25 million visitors, the Expo will occur from October 2020 - April 2021 under the theme “Connecting Minds, Creating the Future.” A purpose-built 438-hectare site serviced by a world-class transport network will house the event.

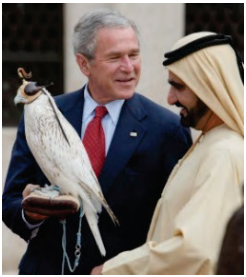
## Sports and Games

**Soccer:** ‘Football,’ as it is known to Emiratis, is the most popular sport in the UAE. Besides following various European leagues, Emiratis enjoy their own domestic league. Part of the Asian Football Confederation, the UAE men’s national team won the Gulf Cup of Nations in 2007 and again in 2013. While few Emirati women traditionally participated in sports after primary school, this tradition has changed in recent years. In 2010, the UAE founded its first national women’s soccer team (Photo: US embassy officials with the UAE women’s soccer team).

Two UAE airlines sponsor international soccer teams. Emirates Air sponsors Arsenal FC, an English team that hosts opponents in its new Emirates Stadium. Etihad Airways sponsors Manchester United, another elite English team.

**Traditional Sports:** For centuries, desert-dwelling Bedouins (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*) raced camels across the desert for sport. Although betting on the outcomes is illegal, camel races take place at several racetracks in the UAE and are often televised. Owners and trainers often use remote-controlled robots as camel jockeys.

A sport popular in Fujairah traces to the 16th-century presence of Portuguese in the region (see p. 2-3 of *History and Myth*). Known as bull-butting, the sport involves handlers leading 2 bulls into an arena where the animals fight. The bull that causes the other to back away in submission is proclaimed the winner.



For centuries, Emirati men trapped peregrine falcons and trained them to hunt and return prey such as other birds, hares, and gazelles. Today, Emirati men practice falconry during a season that lasts from October – March. Because falconry is associated with the sheikhs, leaders of the UAE's ruling families (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*), Emiratis highly respect the sport. Both the sport and the bird are symbols of traditional Emirati culture, and the falcon is the UAE's national emblem (Photo: Former US President Bush holds a falcon next to Sheikh Mohammad).

**Other Sports:** Emiratis enjoy sports such as rugby, sailing in traditional ***dhow*** sailboats, tennis, basketball, golf, cricket, and water sports, as well as outdoor adventure and motor sports. The UAE hosts several important international sporting events such as the Dubai Tennis and Abu Dhabi Golf championships; the Dubai World Cup, the richest horse race in the world; and the Formula 1 Grand Prix motor race in Abu Dhabi.

## Music

**Traditional:** Emiratis historically composed music to accompany certain tasks. For example, captains of pearling ships (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*) would hire a ***naham*** (professional singer) to lead ***fidjeri*** (songs) as their ships sailed into the Gulf. Traditional instruments include drums, ***nayy*** (flute), ***rababa*** (1 or 2-stringed fiddle), ***'oud*** (pear-shaped, fretless, stringed lute), and ***tamboura*** (6-stringed lyre, similar to a harp). With its distinctive 5-tone scale and 6/8 waltz-like rhythms, Emirati ***Khaleeji*** music unites regional Gulf Arabic styles with traditions from Africa, India, and Iran.

**Modern:** While many Emiratis enjoy a modern pop version of *Khaleeji* music, other Arabic and Western genres are also popular. Radio stations broadcast music in a variety of styles and languages, including Arabic, English, Hindi, Urdu, and Malayalam. An underground rock and metal scene has also recently developed among young, urban Emiratis.

## Dance

Dance has been an important part of Emirati culture for centuries. Perhaps the most famous traditional dance, the ***ayyalah al-ardha,*** involves men leaping between swords in a mock battle accompanied by drums or singing. In a dance called ***na'ashat***, young female dancers enter swaying their hair from side-to-side in a gesture intended to remind the men of their duty to protect women. The ***rezeef*** dance features lines of boys who face each other, carrying bamboo canes over their shoulders. While chanting a melodic tune, the boys display an intricate pattern of footwork.

***Yowalah*** is a dance traditionally performed at midnight to celebrate war victories or successful pearl diving (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). While the dance has several varieties, men typically wield sticks, swords, or guns while moving to the music of goatskin bagpipes, flutes, and drums. Emiratis today perform the dance on many different special occasions including religious holidays (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*), festivals, national holidays, and during wedding festivities (see p. 5 of *Family and Kinship*) (Photo: Emirati and Coalition forces perform the *yowalah* at the UAE compound at Bagram Air Field, Afghanistan in 2012).

## Literature

The UAE has a rich tradition of poetry and storytelling. For centuries, men from isolated communities met to exchange news, tell stories, and recite poetry, often while sitting around a desert campfire. Some myths taught moral lessons (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*), while other stories reflected the principles of Islam, defined tribal identities, or promoted certain values such as hospitality, generosity, and endurance.

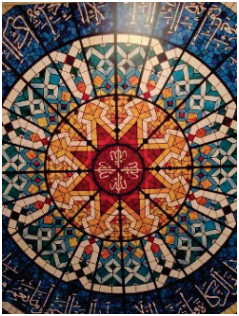
There are 2 styles of Emirati poetry: Classical, based on verses and stories from the Qur'an and written in Modern Standard Arabic, and ***Nabati***, written in the UAE's *Khaleeji* Arabic dialect

(see p. 1 of *Language and Communication*). Meaning "vernacular" or "popular," *nabati* includes a wide range of themes. For example, famous 19th-century *nabati* poet Muhammad ibn Li'bun wrote about the UAE's desert and sea, old age, and love.

Today, televised poetry contests, such as *Prince of Poets* and *Million's Poet*, attract millions of viewers from across the region and require contestants to compose and recite their own poems. A new show, *Al Bayt Nabati*, uses Twitter as a platform for its *nabati* competition. While poetry composition and recitation is traditionally a male pastime, several female poets are now well-known with Hissa Hilal becoming *Million's Poet*'s first female finalist in 2010. Sheikh Mohammad, ruler of Dubai, and Sheikha Maisoon of Sharjah are renowned published poets.

### Arts and Crafts

Traditionally, certain Sunni Islamic teachings (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) have prohibited the lifelike portrayal of humans and animals. Instead, traditional Emirati visual artists have used geometric designs, ornamental, repetitive patterns, and calligraphy to produce highly complex decorative motifs (Photo: Islamic designs in Sharjah).



Emirati women traditionally used looms to weave camel and goat hair to make tents, camel bags, carpets, and other functional textiles that featured simple patterns with elaborate borders. The UAE government has taken steps to preserve weaving and other traditional handicrafts, such as metalwork and pottery.

As part of Abu Dhabi's Vision 2030 development plan, the Emirate's new cultural district on Saadiyat Island eventually will include branches of Paris' Louvre (slated to open in 2016) and New York's Guggenheim art museums, the Zayed National Museum, a maritime museum, and a performing arts center.

# 10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

## Sustenance Overview

Meals are an important social affair in the UAE, providing Emiratis an opportunity to visit with family and friends. Accented by bold and flavorful spices, Emirati dishes typically incorporate fresh, local ingredients.

**Dining Customs:** Most Emiratis augment 3 daily meals with several snacks throughout the day. While women typically prepare all meals, men usually shop for the family's meat in livestock markets. In more traditional households (see p. 2 of *Family and Kinship*), female and male family members eat separately, though this habit is slowly changing among urban and younger Emiratis. Even in households where male and female family members typically eat together, women and children may not join a meal when unrelated male guests are present. To begin a meal, the host gives thanks to ***Allah*** (God) by saying "***Bismillah***" ("In the name of God"), then ends the meal by saying "***Al-hamdu lillah***" ("Praise be to God").

While some Emiratis use Western-style tables and chairs, most Emiratis sit on carpeted floors and pillows during meals. (Photo: Former AEW Commander Brig Gen John Quintas – second left – and staff enjoy a traditional lamb roast dinner on the family farm of an Emirati colleague) Families eat from large, centrally-placed shared dishes, using their right hand to scoop up food. Because they consider the left hand unclean, most Emirati do not use it to eat (see p. 4 of *Time and Space*). To mark the end of a meal, hosts provide a dish of scented water in which diners rinse their hands.

## Diet

Prepared in variety of ways and served with almost every meal, rice is the UAE's most common staple. In addition to rice, most dishes include an animal protein, such as lamb, chicken, or

goat along with fruits and vegetables. Many dishes incorporate fragrant spices, including cardamom, turmeric, cumin, ginger, chili, nutmeg and cinnamon. Residents of coastal communities enjoy fish, which is typically grilled, fried, or dried and served with rice, vegetables, and lemon. Among the Bedouin (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*), goat cheese and camel milk are staples, along with dried meat, bread, and dates.

Bread (***khobz***) is served with most dishes and comes in over 40 varieties. A common form is a flat, unleavened disk about the size of a plate. Emiratis use torn pieces of the flatbread to pinch up morsels of food in place of utensils. Many Emiratis enjoy ***raqaq***, a thin bread spread with dried anchovy sauce or cheese.

Many Emiratis snack on fruit throughout the day. Although dates are the most common, other popular fruits include mango, pomegranate, rambutan (pictured – a small, spine-covered fruit similar to a lychee), and mangosteen (a small, purple fruit with a white edible interior that has a sweet-tart flavor).

Observant Muslims consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they observe particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is ***halal***, allowed by Islamic law. ***Fareed***, a lamb-flavored broth with bread, is a popular dish served during the holy month of Ramadan (see p. 4-5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

### Meals and Popular Dishes

Emiratis often consume eggs for breakfast, pairing them with salty cheese, ***labneh*** (yogurt), sweetened tahini (ground sesame seeds), olives, and lentils. ***Balaleet***, a dish of thin noodles served with date syrup, saffron, rosewater and sautéed onions, is another common breakfast meal.

As the largest meal of the day, lunch typically includes rice flavored with cardamom, saffron, and raisins and served with

seasoned chicken, lamb, or goat. Dinner ranges from a large meal with multiple courses to a light snack of bread, salad, and fruit. Popular entrées include ***hareis,*** slow-cooked lamb and ground wheat stew; ***khuzi***, whole roasted lamb stuffed with rice, nuts, eggs, and spices and served on a bed of rice; ***madrooba***, chicken or salt-cured fish cooked together with raw dough; and ***makbus***, rice casserole with lamb or fish, garnished with fried onions, nuts, and raisins.

Emiratis enjoy their sweets, such as ***baklava*** (a pastry of layered filo dough, nuts, and honey), ice cream, or pudding after lunch or dinner. Dates are also a common treat, which Emiratis enjoy dried, raw, baked into cakes and cookies, or covered in chocolate.

### Beverages

Emiratis typically drink tea (***shai***) and coffee (***qahwa***), both heavily laden with sugar, throughout the day. Traditional Bedouin coffee is spiced with cardamom and poured from ornate, long-spouted pots (***dalla***) into small cups (***finjan***). Hosts or servers continuously provide refills until the guest gently swivels his cup to indicate he has had enough.

Fresh-squeezed juices from pomegranates, mangos, hibiscus, avocados, mint, and lemons are very popular. Valued for its health benefits, fresh camel milk is another widely available drink. While not offered at most Muslim-owned establishments, alcohol is available in most urban areas but by law can only be sold in restaurants, hotel bars, or members-only clubs. Of note, Sharjah emirate prohibits all alcohol consumption.

### Eating Out

Eating out is a part of everyday life for many Emiratis. Restaurants are popular socializing spots where people may spend hours conversing over a meal. Coffee shops offering ***shisha*** (flavored tobacco smoked through a water pipe—pictured) are also popular gathering spots.

While men and women often eat together in large, modern restaurants and hotel bars, many smaller eateries divide into gender-specific dining rooms. Casual fare includes ***kebabs*** (skewers of meat), ***falafel*** (fried balls of ground chickpeas), and ***shwarma*** (sliced meat served with bread and tomatoes). Restaurants serving Lebanese, Indian, and Iranian fare are very common, and many urban residents enjoy Western-style fast food. Restaurants commonly add a 10% service charge to bills; additional tips are neither required nor expected.

### Health Overview

Emiratis' health has improved significantly over the last decades, largely due to dramatic improvements to the UAE's healthcare system. Emirati life expectancy at birth has increased considerably from 52 years in 1960 to 77 years in 2013, somewhat higher than the global average of 71. Similarly, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) was 6 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2015, the lowest rate in the Arabian Gulf and equal to the US rate. Maternal mortality also dropped significantly in the past 25 years, from 16 deaths per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 6 by 2015. All Emiratis have access to free, publicly funded healthcare. By contrast, non-citizens (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*) are not eligible for free healthcare and must instead pay a part of employer-provided health insurance or out-of-pocket (Photo: Emirati with camel).

### Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Emirati medicine relies on herbal and "hands-on" treatments to identify and cure the causes of illness, both physical and spiritual. Besides herbal remedies, common treatment methods include acupressure (a process in which a practitioner presses firmly on particular body points), ***wasm*** (a method of holding a heated piece of iron over ailing areas), and bloodletting (the removal of blood from a patient for therapeutic purposes).

Traditional medicine has received considerable official support in recent decades. Founded by the UAE's first President, Abu Dhabi's Zayed Complex for Herbal Research and Traditional Medicine supports all types of traditional, complementary, and alternative medicine. In urban areas, clinics offer therapies from many traditions, particularly East and South Asian, to supplement modern treatments for a range of diseases and maladies. Traditional medicine is popular among many non-citizens who cannot afford modern treatments.

### Modern Healthcare System

Since independence in 1971, the UAE has developed a universal healthcare system that is now one of the most modern in the Arabian Gulf. Through numerous general and maternity hospitals, clinics, and specialized health centers, the UAE provides free healthcare to its citizens. In addition, numerous private hospitals and clinics offer high quality services, while mobile clinics provide screenings and specialized care for prevalent diseases like diabetes. Of note, 80% of doctors and over 90% of nurses employed at UAE health institutions are non-citizens (Photo: Downtown Dubai).

Despite the UAE's state-of-the-art healthcare system, some members of its population still lack access to adequate care. While rural dwellers are technically eligible for free services, healthcare facilities are typically concentrated in cities, making access difficult. Although the government is building clinics in the more remote areas of Fujairah, Um al Quwain, and Sharjah emirates, many local facilities remain inadequately staffed or offer substandard care. Further, because non-citizens must pay out-of-pocket or rely on costly insurance, quality healthcare is unaffordable for many of them.

**Medical Tourism in Dubai**

Dubai's world-class healthcare system drew over 260,000 medical tourists in the first half of 2015. Officials expect the industry to grow by about 12% annually, fueled by Dubai's recently constructed Healthcare City - a large medical complex of private hospitals, clinics, and research facilities. Patients from Europe, Asia, and the Arabian Gulf seek a range of services including cosmetic procedures, fertility treatments, dentistry, orthopedics, and cardiac surgery.

## Health Challenges

Rates of communicable and infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, measles, and malaria are low in the UAE due to significant government investment into immunization and post-exposure treatments. While the UAE reports a very low rate of HIV infections, some experts argue that this rate is inaccurate because the UAE does not collect adequate data.

By contrast, the UAE's rapid social and economic changes (see p. 1 of *Economics and Resources*) have caused an increase in chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases. Accounting for about 67% of all deaths, lifestyle diseases are now the leading cause of death. While cardiovascular diseases alone contributed to over 1/3rd of all deaths in 2014, cancer was another prominent cause, accounting for 13% of deaths that year. About 20% of adults suffer from diabetes, while an additional 18% are at risk of developing the disease.

What experts call preventable deaths – those caused by smoking, injury (including traffic accidents, falls, and drowning), and suicides – occur at high rates. For example, injury caused 23% of all deaths in 2014, compared to the US rate of 6%. Also alarming, in 2010 over 89% of children under 14 regularly used tobacco – a significant increase from 39% in 2005.

**Obesity:** About 60% of UAE adults rated as overweight or obese in 2014, twice the world average but still below the US rate of 69%. Increased obesity has resulted in increased rates of associated diseases and is a focus of national concern.

# 11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

## Overview

Prior to the discovery of oil in 1958, the region's economy was based on a small and declining pearling industry, fishing, and small-scale farming (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*). With the development of the oil and gas industries beginning in the 1960s, the UAE gained enormous wealth. Economic growth enabled massive development projects that eventually provided UAE citizens one of the world's highest standards of living.

To diversify the economy and reduce its dependence on oil revenues, the UAE has invested in other industries in recent decades. It has opened several free trade zones where businesses may be 100% foreign owned and avoid UAE taxes in order to attract foreign investment (Photo: US Army Golden Knights above Dubai's Palm Island Resort).

Today, the UAE's economy is the world's 33rd and the region's 2nd largest, behind Saudi Arabia. Average economic growth between 1996 and 2014 was a healthy 4.5%, with the only negative growth occurring in 2009 during the Dubai banking and financial crisis. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita in 2014 was $44,200, the 2nd highest in the region and similar to rates in the UK and France

The UAE economy is heavily dependent on foreign labor (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*). Of the nearly 5 million people in the UAE's labor force, about 85% of them are non-citizens, primarily men from South Asia (see p. 12 of *Political and Social Relations*). Many non-citizens work in the private sector under the Kafala Sponsorship System, a temporary guest worker program that largely segregates workers from Emirati society, often providing poor living and work conditions (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Emiratis fill just 20,000 jobs in the private sector. By contrast, they prefer and historically dominate the public sector where jobs typically offer higher salaries, better benefits, job security, and shorter working hours. Although the UAE's unemployment rate for the entire population was a low 3.7% in 2014, unemployment among Emiratis was over 20%. This high rate is mainly due to limited availability of public sector jobs and Emiratis' unwillingness to consider private sector positions that do not offer the advantages of public sector jobs.

To increase employment among citizens, the government has instituted a quota system that requires some private sector businesses to hire Emiratis. Further, the government has made large investments in public education (see p. 2 of *Learning and Knowledge*) and instituted compulsory military service for young Emirati men (see p. 7 of *Political and Social Relations*).

A potential shortfall in the UAE's future economic sustainment is its dependence on oil exports, especially with a recent slump in oil prices. Other concerns include lack of a large citizen workforce and resulting reliance on non-citizens to perform many jobs and growing inflation pressures, notably in housing.

### Industry

While industrial activity accounts for 59% of GDP in the UAE, it employs just 15% of the labor force. The extraction, processing, and export of oil and gas (commonly called "hydrocarbons") dominate the sector.

**Oil**: The UAE currently has the world's 7th largest oil reserves: 98 million barrels of proven crude oil, with more than 80% in Abu Dhabi. At the current export rate of 2.5-2.7 million barrels per day, experts estimate that reserves will last 100-150 years. Oil accounts for about 69% of export revenues, 77% of the national budget, and 32% of GDP (Photo: Satellite view of oil fields in Abu Dhabi).

To secure its oil from perceived Iranian threats in the Strait of Hormuz (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*), the UAE opened the Abu Dhabi Crude Oil Pipeline in 2012 to transport oil from Abu Dhabi's oilfields directly to the Gulf of Oman.

**Natural Gas:** The UAE also has the 7th largest proven supply of natural gas in the world, most of which is located in Abu Dhabi. Despite this large supply, which experts believe will last some 200 years, the UAE is presently a net importer of natural gas, receiving 19.5 billion cubic meters in 2013, but exporting just 7.4 billion. This imbalance is primarily due to difficulties in processing the highly sulfuric gas. Observers believe that advances in technology and growing domestic demand will resolve this imbalance in the near future.

**Manufacturing:** The UAE primarily manufactures hydrocarbons and petrochemical products, such as fertilizer and plastics, followed by cement, aluminum, and urea, used in fertilizers. Other manufactured products include electronics, machinery, and air conditioners, as well as sporting, security, and medical equipment.

**Construction:** The UAE's infrastructure is the most advanced of the Arabian Gulf countries (see p. 1-2 of *Technology and Material*), largely due to an extended construction boom. With an annual growth close to 10% in recent years, the construction industry alone accounts for more than 11% of GDP. Opened in 2010 and designed for commercial and residential use, Dubai's Burj Khalifa (pictured) is the world's tallest building.

### Services

In contrast to the industrial sector, the services sector employs more people (78% of the labor force) and accounts for less GDP (40%). Banking and financial services, telecommunications, real estate sales, and tourism are all significant components of the economy.

**Tourism**: Tourism is the fastest-growing component of the UAE's economy. In 2014, Dubai was the 5th most-visited city in the world (ahead of New York, the only US city in the top 10) and had an income that surpassed its oil revenue. Abu Dhabi has also launched an ambitious long-term program to develop its tourism industry, including the construction of a new cultural district on Saadiyat Island (see p. 6 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

Popular UAE tourist attractions include beaches, luxury hotels and shopping, first-rate restaurants, theme parks, international events (see p. 2-3 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*), and adventure sports like skydiving and desert safaris (Photo: US marines and sailors ride camels during a sunset safari tour).

## Agriculture

Because less than 1% of the UAE's land is arable, the agriculture sector accounts for just 0.6% of GDP and 7% of employment. With their long tradition of desert and oasis farming, Emiratis dominate the agriculture sector.

To support agriculture, the government provides seeds, pesticides, irrigation systems, and veterinary services to farmers. Major products include dates, tomatoes, citrus, mangoes, dairy, poultry, and eggs. While the UAE imports over 80% of its food, it is nearly self-sufficient in the production of dates, dairy products, and some vegetables.

**Fishing:** The UAE's fishing industry is one of the region's largest, with non-citizens accounting for 71% of employment. While much of the catch is consumed locally, dried fish is one of the UAE's few non-hydrocarbon exports. Over the past decade, the government has sought to protect the industry from overfishing.

## Currency

The UAE's currency is the ***dirham*** (AED), issued in 7 banknote values (5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500, 1,000) and 5 coin values (1, 5, 10, 25, 50). One dirham subdivides into 100 ***fils***, but because there are few 1, 5, and 10 fils coins in circulation, most people quote prices to the nearest 25 fils. The dirham was pegged to the dollar in 1997, and currently $1 is equal to 3.67 dirhams (1 dirham is 27¢). Most businesses accept credit cards, although small vendors may only accept cash (Pictured: 5-dirham banknote).

## Foreign Trade

In 2014, the UAE's exports totaled $405 billion and consisted of crude oil (45%), natural gas, re-exports, dried fish, and dates. The UAE's most important export partners were Japan (15%), Iran (11%), India (10%), South Korea (6%), China (6%), Singapore (5%), and Thailand (5%). In 2014, imports to the UAE totaled $272 billion and included machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, and food purchased from China (16%), India (13%), the US (9%), and Germany (5%).

Of note, the UAE has been a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) since 1967. OPEC is an inter-governmental organization that coordinates petroleum production levels among its 12 members.

## Foreign Aid

The UAE contributes far more aid than it receives and has not received aid from the US since 2011. Notable UAE contributions include $550 million to Palestinian development projects, $14 billion in loans to Egypt, $1.25 billion in aid to the Jordanian government to provide support to Syrian refugees, and forgiveness of $7 billion of Iraqi debt. UAE government and non-governmental organizations have also donated to causes in developed countries, including the US and Australia. The Abu Dhabi Fund for Development is the largest aid contributor, distributing over $4 billion to 207 projects in 53 countries since 1971.

# 12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

## Overview

The UAE has a modern physical infrastructure, including a system of well-maintained roads, public transit systems, and the Gulf region's first automated metro. While UAE residents enjoy an advanced telecommunications network, the government censors the Internet and most media content.

## Transportation

Most Emirati families as well as American and European non-citizens have at least one privately-owned vehicle (POV) and usually travel within the UAE by POV or taxi. By contrast, most other non-citizens use mass transit. Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah have efficient local public transportation systems. While Abu Dhabi residents rely on a 24-hour bus system, residents of Dubai use a metro system. Buses are a common means of transport between emirates (Photo: A street in Khor Fakkan, Sharjah emirate).

Public transit systems typically have separate sections for men and women. Taxis are readily available throughout the country and include special pink taxis with female drivers to offer transport for women. Passengers who chew gum, eat, drink, or smoke in public transport may be subject to fines or detention.

## Roadways

All of the UAE's nearly 3,000 mi of roadways are paved, a result of the country's investment in public infrastructure projects (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*). Further, the country has 1 of the region's best highway networks, with well-lit, multi-lane highways connecting major cities. The UAE's longest and most important road, Highway E-11, is known as Sheikh Maktoum Road in Abu Dhabi and Sheikh Zayed Road in Dubai. It extends 347 mi from Al-Silah in Abu Dhabi emirate along the Gulf coast to Ras al Khaimah emirate on the Omani border.

## Railways

The Dubai Metro (pictured), inaugurated in 2010, includes 2 lines that serve 450,000 people daily and plans to add 3 lines by 2030. A transit system under construction in Abu Dhabi will include an underground metro, 2 light rails, and a rapid bus transit loop by 2017.

The UAE's national railway system, Etihad Rail, is currently under construction, with 1 of 3 stages opened by late 2015. Once complete, the 745 mi railway network will provide freight and passenger service to all the UAE's population and industrial centers. Further, it will link the UAE to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC – see p. 10 of *Political and Social Relations*) railway network that will connect Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, and Kuwait when it is complete in 2018.

## Ports and Waterways

Major Arabian Gulf ports in the UAE include Jebel Ali, Khor Fakkan, Khalifa Port, Mubarraz Island, Mina Rashid, and Mina Saqr. Jebel Ali, located in Dubai, is the largest port in the Middle East and is slated to become the largest port in the world by 2030. ***Abras*** (small wooden motorized boats, pictured), water buses, and water taxis transport passengers along waterways in Abu Dhabi and Dubai.

## Airways

The UAE has 43 airports, of which 25 have paved runways. Dubai International and Abu Dhabi International are the UAE's primary transit hubs, although air traffic through Sharjah has increased. In 2014, Dubai served more international passengers than any other airport. Dubai's Emirates Airlines is the world's largest international carrier. Etihad Airlines, Air Arabia, FlyDubai, and RAK Airways are also based in the UAE.

## Energy

The UAE is the 34th largest energy producer and 35th largest consumer. While the UAE generates 99.8% of its energy from fossil fuels, it is beginning to invest in the development of renewable energy sources (Photo: Traffic in Dubai).

## Media

Although the constitution guarantees freedom of speech and press, the UAE's National Media Council regulates media and restricts content by blocking and filtering websites, monitoring and intimidating users, and denying some foreign journalists entry. Accordingly, many journalists practice self-censorship. Despite these restrictions, publishers print newspapers in Arabic, English, and many other languages. Major English papers include the *Khaleej Times*, *The National*, and *Gulf News*. Of note, these media regulations and restrictions do not apply to foreign-owned media companies in the UAE's free trade zones (see p. 1 of *Economics* and *Resources*).

**Radio and TV:** UAE television and radio offer programs primarily in Arabic and English. Satellite dishes are common primarily because they offer access to regional and international broadcasts that are not always censored.

## Telecommunications

The UAE has the Arab world's most extensive telecommunications network. In addition to its 2.1 million fixed-line fiber-optic telephone subscribers, the UAE has 16.8 million mobile phone subscriptions. The 2 major mobile networks, *Etisalat* and *du*, are both majority-owned by the government.

**Internet:** While 93% of the UAE's population had Internet access in 2013, the high cost of broadband services limits home Internet access for many relatively poor non-citizens. The government monitors the Internet, regularly blocking certain sites deemed offensive or indecent. Of note, the UAE blocked Skype until 2013.

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