

UAE Legal Brief

Read before you fly — Zach's Bachelor Trip · Dubai · 3–8 September 2026

Why this matters: The UAE is welcoming, modern, and safe — but the law is strict, the police are professional, and ignorance is not a defense. Tourists are deported, fined, and jailed every year for things that are routine elsewhere. The rules below are the ones most likely to trip you up. Read all of it. Save this PDF on your phone.

If something goes wrong: stay polite, do not argue, do not raise your voice, do not sign anything in Arabic without a translation. Call your embassy and contact the trip concierge immediately — the number is in the group chat pinned message.

1. Drugs — zero tolerance

This is the single biggest risk. The UAE treats drug offenses as among the most serious crimes. Penalties include multi-year prison sentences followed by deportation and a permanent travel ban.

Absolutely illegal — do not bring, carry, or use:

- Cannabis in any form (flower, edibles, gummies, oils, vapes, THC cartridges)
- CBD products — even legal/OTC ones from your home country
- Cocaine, MDMA, ketamine, amphetamines, psychedelics, GHB, poppers
- Any recreational drug, regardless of legality at home

Trace amounts count. Residue on clothing, in a bag, on shoes, or in your bloodstream from use abroad days earlier has resulted in arrests. Empty their pockets and check bags before flying.

2. Medications you might not realize are controlled

Several common prescription and OTC medications are **controlled or restricted** in the UAE. Travelers have been detained for codeine cough syrup and ADHD medication.

Carry original prescription + a doctor's letter (in English) for any of:

- Codeine, tramadol, opioid painkillers (some Tylenol/Panadol formulations contain codeine)
- ADHD medications: Adderall, Ritalin, Concerta, Vyvanse
- Strong benzodiazepines: Xanax, Valium, Ativan (also sleep meds like Ambien)
- Anything with pseudoephedrine, methamphetamine derivatives
- Any CBD or cannabinoid prescription (do not bring at all)

If you're unsure, check the UAE Ministry of Health portal (moh.gov.ae) or apply for a pre-approval before travel. Keep medications in original labeled containers.

3. Alcohol

Alcohol is legal for non-Muslim residents and tourists **in licensed venues** only — hotels, restaurants, bars, clubs, registered brunches.

- **No drinking in public:** streets, beaches (non-licensed), parks, the villa balcony facing public space
- **No public intoxication:** being visibly drunk in a public area is a criminal offense
- **Zero tolerance for drink driving:** any detectable alcohol = arrest, jail, deportation. Use the chauffeured Sprinter or app-based taxis (Careem, Uber) for every move
- **Drinking at the villa is fine** — it's private property

4. Public behavior — PDA, language, gestures

Public morality laws are enforced. Holding hands is fine. Anything more is not.

- **No kissing, groping, or sexual gestures in public** — this includes hotel lobbies, malls, restaurants
- **No swearing in public, no middle fingers, no shouting** — these are arrestable offenses, especially in disputes (taxis, valet, parking)
- **If you get into a heated exchange — walk away.** A complaint from a local against a tourist tends to favor the local
- **Don't insult Islam, the UAE, the rulers, or any religion** — verbally, in writing, online, or in gestures

5. Photography and social media

UAE has aggressive cybercrime and privacy laws.

- **Do not photograph people** — especially women, families, locals in national dress — without explicit consent
- **Do not photograph** government buildings, palaces, police, military, ports, airports
- **Do not post photos of others to social media without their consent** — including group photos with strangers in the background. This is the most common cybercrime charge against tourists
- **Do not post negative content** about the UAE, leaders, religion, or other people. Fines can run into the hundreds of thousands of dirhams
- **Drones:** require a GCAA permit. Assume no, and leave them at home

6. Dress code

Relaxed at hotels, pools, clubs, and the villa. Modest in public spaces.

- **Malls, public areas, restaurants outside hotels:** cover shoulders and knees
- **Religious sites (Sheikh Zayed Mosque):** full cover-up — long pants, long sleeves, and women must cover hair. Robes are provided
- **No offensive slogans, profanity, drug imagery, or political symbols on clothing**
- **Beaches and pools:** swimwear is fine. Topless is not

7. Same-sex relations

Same-sex sexual activity is illegal under UAE law. Public displays of any kind — affection, identification, advocacy — carry serious legal risk. Discretion in public is essential for guests of any orientation. The villa is private.

8. Adult entertainment, sex work, and 'companionship'

Prostitution and procurement are illegal in the UAE. Soliciting an escort — even at high-end hotels where you may be approached — is a criminal offense punishable by prison and deportation. This applies regardless of how the service is presented (massage, companion, model, dancer).

What is legal and what the group has been booked for: high-end nightclubs with dancers and performers (Cavalli, Billionaire Mansion, White Dubai, Soho Garden), party brunches, beach clubs, yacht charters, premium dining. Anything beyond that puts everyone at legal risk including the groom. Do not engage with anyone offering 'extras' at venues or hotels.

9. Vapes, e-cigarettes, shisha

- **Tobacco vapes and e-cigs:** legal. Use only in designated smoking areas (not in malls, taxis, public transport)
- **THC vapes / cannabis cartridges:** illegal — treated as drug possession (see Section 1)
- **Shisha:** legal at licensed lounges only

10. Money, customs, declarations

- **Declare cash over AED 60,000** (\approx USD 16,300) on arrival — multiple currencies are added together
- **Don't bring:** e-cigarettes/vapes designed for illegal substances, weapons of any kind including pocket knives, materials deemed offensive (some books, magazines, religious literature)
- **Bring:** physical passport (6+ months validity from entry), printed travel insurance, prescription documentation, copies of everything to a secure cloud backup

11. Driving

Don't. Use the chauffeured Sprinter (on call all week), Careem, or Uber. If anyone insists on renting a car: international driving permit required, zero alcohol tolerance, fines and speed cameras are aggressive, accidents can be complex for tourists.

12. If you are arrested or detained

1. Stay polite and calm. Do not argue, do not run, do not resist.
2. Ask to call your embassy — you have the right to consular assistance.
3. Do not sign anything in Arabic without an English translation.
4. Contact the trip concierge — emergency legal number is pinned in the WhatsApp group.
5. Notify your emergency contact (saved in the trip portal).

Emergency numbers — save to your phone

Service	Number
Police (UAE)	999
Ambulance	998
Fire	997
Tourist Police (Dubai)	+971 4 608 0000
Trip concierge (24/7)	[ADD NUMBER]
Legal liaison (UAE counsel)	[ADD NUMBER]
US Embassy Abu Dhabi	+971 2 414 2200
UK Embassy Abu Dhabi	+971 2 610 1100
Canadian Embassy Abu Dhabi	+971 2 694 0300
Australian Embassy Abu Dhabi	+971 2 401 7500

Final checklist before you fly

- Passport has 6+ months validity from arrival date
- Travel insurance purchased and policy number saved to phone
- Prescription medications in original packaging, with doctor's letter
- No CBD, no THC, no recreational substances in any bag, pocket, or shoe
- This PDF saved to your phone
- Emergency numbers added to contacts
- Profile completed in the trip portal (passport, allergies, emergency contact)
- WhatsApp group joined and notifications on

This brief is a practical traveler's summary, not legal advice. Laws and enforcement can change. If you have specific concerns about medications, prior offenses, or anything else, consult a qualified UAE attorney before traveling. The trip concierge can recommend one.