

Nada, our guide in Dubai, has provided a lot of great information to ease our entry into what will be a very different travel experience for most of us. Here's a sample of our tour program, followed by a helpful list of dos and don'ts for our brief time in the United Arab Emirates.

I plan to add to this letter with a few more details once I hear from Nada again tomorrow.

Tour Details

- Meeting time: 9:20AM. Please ensure that all guests are on time and have all their belongings.
- Meeting point: Our meeting point will be in the lobby of the Sheraton Deira Creek Hotel.
- Tour start time: 9:30AM. We will be departing from the hotel at 9:30AM.
- Itinerary: Old town Dubai, Downtown Dubai's Dubai Mall/see Burj Khalifa (excl. observation decks), Dubai Miracle Garden.
- No. of guests: 14.
- Inclusions: spice souq presentation, private abra wooden boat ride across Dubai Creek, pre-ordered lunch, lunch gratuity, admission tickets to Dubai Miracle Garden, private hired transportation with chauffeur (22-seater bus), transportation gratuity, and bottled water aboard bus.
- Exclusions: admission tickets to Burj Khalifa – At the Top Observation decks, soft drinks and any other food additionally ordered, and expenses not listed.
- Lunch: Guests will feast on a 3-course delicious traditional lunch, which is pre-ordered, and is served on a sharing basis. Additional items can be ordered at the guests' expense (incl. soft drinks).

What you may need for the tour:

- Change (20 and 10 DHS bills) if you wish to buy any souvenirs. Credit cards are also accepted.
- Charged cameras.
- Sunglasses, hat, sunscreen, comfy flat shoes, and light fabric clothing during summer (recommended not to wear jeans).
- An appetite for our meal!

Adapter / Converter

Make sure to bring along an adapter and a converter when visiting Dubai for recharging devices which require electricity (phone charger, laptops, hair styling tools etc). The adapter refers to the shape of the plug, whereas the converter refers to the voltage of the current.



European style 2 pin wall socket

The wall sockets in most Dubai hotels are usually European style 2 pin wall sockets. So if you're from Europe, you're all set.

Everyone else will need to bring along an adapter. If you forget to do so, don't fret! Hotels here usually carry a supply of extras for guests to either borrow or rent.

Converters: if your device has a different voltage than Dubai's which is 220/240V - 50Hz, then you'll definitely need a good converter or if you have a dual-voltage device, make sure to flip the voltage switch. This is crucial if you want to avoid a potentially explosive mistake.

This information doesn't jibe with the information I found online, which suggests a UK-style format. Bring both to be safe!

Extension Cord

Many hotels in Dubai (and around the world) have few and inconveniently located electrical outlets far away from the beds. Guests who may wish to plug in their laptops or phones from the comfort of their beds, will only be able to do so with an extension cord! So although this may take up some luggage real estate, investing in an extension cord will allow you to charge multiple devices

comfortably. Also, by using your adapter to plug your extension cord into the wall, you can charge or utilize all of your devices simultaneously.

Local SIM - Etisalat Visitor Line

Using your mobile phone internationally to make roaming calls and/or use data can be incredibly expensive. Many travelers visiting Dubai may be surprised to discover that free WIFI is not easily available in hotels, malls and restaurants. I've also witnessed many travelers paying extortionate fees to call their banks back home and solve other crises. My recommendation would be to buy an Etisalat Visitor Line upon arrival to Dubai. The 'talk, text & surf' package offers 40 local/int'l minutes, 40 local/int'l SMS and 700MB mobile data for just AED 100 (approx. USD 27). Subscribers also receive one free Careem taxi ride anywhere in the UAE worth AED 100 so you can cruise the Dubai streets for free (just the one-way!). Better yet, Etisalat has outlets as soon as you arrive in Dubai Airports so you can be online pretty much as soon as you land. For more info, please visit their website here.

Portable External Battery Charger

Many tourists to Dubai stay for an average of 4 days and often find their schedules to be jampacked with fantastic activities from tours to safaris and waterparks. It's inevitable that phone batteries will run low, particularly after snapping so many pictures around the city. Also, the city sights are well spread out, so it may be difficult to return to your hotel just for a recharge. I would definitely recommend carrying around a light portable charger to aid with some extra juice to see you through the rest of the day. This is particularly important for guests who have scheduled activities and may hear from the service providers regarding any updates.

Taxi App - UBER or Careem

If you're visiting Dubai, download UBER or Careem from your phone app store, to ensure hassle-free rides throughout the city. The online app will allow you to make bookings for immediate pick-ups or pre-scheduled bookings. Ordering the private chauffeur driven car is a breeze, and provides an estimated fare with real-time information on the driver and car assigned.

Gorilla Pod Tripod

As a visitor to Dubai, you're very likely to be pulling out your smart phone or photography gear often to shoot the city's incredible sights and skylines. In order to capture those moments without having to ask passer-bys for help, I'd highly recommend packing a GorillaPod tripod. The flexible tripod easily attaches your device to objects so you can shoot from previously unimaginable angles, and is also easily portable. Also, some sights such as the Burj Khalifa only allow tripods in small sizes so the GorillaPod certainly qualifies and can be easily carried in your bag.

Hair Styling Tools

I think many will agree that hotel blow dryers are not very effective, particularly for those who have long or thick hair. While carrying a dryer or curling iron might sound like a nuisance and add unnecessary luggage weight, it is definitely worthwhile for those who wish to style their hair. To ensure your hair styling tools will work in Dubai, I'd recommend only dual-voltage devices, which may have a switch to flip first, and an adapter that accommodates our wall plugs. An alternative would be to invest in travel-size tools that you can grab from the Dubai airport on arrival or one of the supermarket chains such as Carrefour.

Transportation

You can find a taxi in Dubai by flagging one from the street or by calling in advance to arrange a pick-up. Here are the contact numbers to call and order, although many companies have now migrated to apps instead. All public taxis are sand in color, with a different color roof depending on the company they belong to. They are all metered and have starting meter charges which vary between day/night time and location. Please note that the minimum cab fare is 12 DHS. Rides from the airport are more expensive as they have a starting fare of 25 DHS. You can also book your ride via ride-hailing apps such as UBER or Careem.

Dubai Metro Rules

The Dubai Metro has a few rules you should watch out for to avoid fines. 1) Eating and drinking inside the train is expressly forbidden. This includes chewing gum. 2) Entering cabins reserved for certain categories (For ex, women-only

areas, or the Gold Class section) 3) Sleeping is not allowed anywhere in the train stations.

The Light Jacket

Yes. It may be summer and what may seem like 100 degrees celsius. But Dubai malls are oddly freezing.

The Haggle

Before practicing the art of bargaining, scope out the market to see what the going prices are. Also, avoid answering the initial 'how much do you want to pay' question.

The Photography

There are some areas in Dubai where photography is prohibited. Those are usually embassies, airports, or security facilities. Just make sure you look out for signs or ask if in doubt!

Dubai, in my humble opinion, has one of the most easy-to-use, clean, comfortable, and safe metro systems I've seen yet.

Sure, it might not be open 24 hours a day, but what it lacks in after hours service, it makes up for in efficiency. It's also inexpensive and offers breathtaking views of the city. So to aid you in getting around town, I present to you the Super Simple Dubai Metro Guide.

The Basics:

The Dubai Metro has 2 lines: the Red Line and the Green Line. The Tram Line is separate. The Red Line runs from: Centreport to Expo 2020. The Green Line runs from Etisalat to Creek. The 3 transfer stations are Union Square, Burjuman, and Jabal Ali.

The Steps:

Step 1: The first thing to getting around the metro is figuring out which station is closest to your starting point and destination point. This can easily be done by consulting my dear friend, Google Maps, or by asking your hotel concierge. Make

sure you note which color line you're on (Red or Green), and if you need to make a switch at any of the 3 transfer stations.

Step 2: Once you've identified which station you're starting the journey from, and have made your way over there, you will need to purchase a metro card, also referred to here as your NOL ticket or card.

You can easily do so at the metro stations by buying one from the ticket agent at the ticket office or from the machine. My advice is to buy it directly from the ticket office to avoid any confusion. There are 5 different types of NOL cards sold which vary depending on class, frequency and personalization. They're called the Red Ticket, Silver Card, Gold Card, Blue Card, and Personalized Gold Card.

What are the differences between the cards?

The Red Ticket is best for one-off users, enables you to make single trips and pay only for the ticket issuance fee (AED 2) and the exact trip you travel. Prices depend on the number of zones you transfer through and the cabin class selected.

There are 2 cabin classes: Regular or Gold Class. Assume you're only going to use the metro once, want to go to the Dubai Mall Metro Station and prefer Gold Class, you'd tell the vendor 'I'd like a one-way Red Ticket Gold Class to the Dubai Mall Metro Station'.

Should you decide to ride the metro again, you can afterwards use that same ticket again for another trip (up to 10 trips) by simply topping it up at the station again. However, you will only be able to use it for stations within the Dubai Mall Metro zone in this example. If you buy a 1 zone ticket and then travel across 2 zones, you may get penalized. Also, you can only use the Red Ticket for 1 type of transportation across the city, either the bus or metro or the tram.

The Silver Card and Gold Card are best for frequent users who are likely to use the metro as their main method of transportation across the city. The difference between the 2 cards is the cabin you'll be able to access: Regular or Gold Class. Guests who buy this card should tell the vendor 'I'd like to buy a Silver or Gold

Class card and top it up with 'X' amount'. You'll pay a fee for the issuance of the card (AED 6), and the amount you're topping it up with.

You'll be able to use it across as many zones as need be as long as your card has funds on it. If your trip cost exceeds the existing balance on your card, you can top up your card at any of the info desks who can add the amount for you before you exit, or if it's a small amount, you can try tapping it anyway on the card reader and may get a negative balance which you'll later have to top up again to be able to use the card for a future trip. You can also use the Silver and Gold Cards across all RTA transport options including the bus, metro, and tram.

Tip: Whichever ticket you buy, opt for the gold class! The Blue and Personalized Gold Cards are for UAE residents who want personalized cards and have to apply for those in advance.

Step 3: So now that you know which ticket or card is best suited for you, waltz over to the ticket office, and inform the ticket agent of your requirements. The agent will then calculate the fare, which is payable via cash or credit card. Once you've made the payment, you will receive your ticket/card, which you will now use to enter the metro gate by tapping it on the card reader.

Step 4: Once you enter at this point, put your card back in your bag or wallet, as you will need it later when checking out of your destination stop. From here, you will either go right or left depending on the direction you're headed and head towards your metro.

Now, as you're waiting for your metro to arrive, make sure you are standing in front of the correct entry point, as there are different classes (Gold Section exclusive to Gold Card holders only, and a women only section). When it does arrive and you manage to enter, make sure you keep an eye on the TVs hosted on the poles or listen to the announcements made regarding the station names, so you know when to get off.

Step 5: Once you've arrived at your destination, exit the metro and make your way to the station exit gate. This is when you'll need to bring out your NOL card again and tap it on the card reader so that your fare gets deducted. Now stow it safely again back in your bag or wallet for your next trip, and enjoy wandering in the city!

A few other metro facts:

The metro operating hours are from 5AM to 12AM from Saturday to Wednesday, 5AM to 1AM on Thursday, and 10AM to 1AM on Friday. Hours may change during public holidays. To confirm the operating hours, please contact RTA at 8009090.

The metro is accessible for passengers with special needs. Lift access is available, as well as dedicated spaces for wheelchair users.

For visitors using the metro from Dubai International Airport, you can carry up to 2 suitcases which should be no larger than H58 x W81 x D30 cms. The luggage must be stowed in the dedicated areas, found in each cabin.

The metro has several rules and policies, which users must adhere to, or face various fines. Notable ones include eating and drinking, chewing gum, entering cabins reserved for others (again, Gold Class cabin is only for Gold Card holders), sleeping in any place in the public transport environment, and failing to produce your NOL card.

Please note that the Palm Jumeirah Monorail is operated by another party, and the NOL cards described above are not eligible for use on the monorail.

For alternative methods of transport, you can hail cabs from the street (all cabs here have meters, if one doesn't, get out). You can also book your ride via ride-hailing apps such as UBER or Careem.