

## Ramadan – A Guide for Non-Muslim Expats

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Ramadan is often a time of questions for non-Muslim expats, especially for those experiencing the Holy month for the first time in the UAE. During the year, new expats hear all sorts of rumours about what life is like here during Ramadan (“Are the restaurants really closed?”), and many feel a certain degree of anxiousness as we head towards the Holy month.



Eateries in the UAE: Shutters down by day; open after sunset

The most obvious questions centre on personal conduct. In a nutshell, there are just three things non-Muslim expats need to remember in order to avoid getting themselves into trouble:

1

Don't eat or drink anything in public during daylight hours. Yes, that includes swigging from a water bottle. Police take transgressions seriously – at best, even non-Muslims will receive a reprimand; at worst, a fine and/or jail sentence.

2

Cover shoulders and knees when out and about and,

3

avoid all public displays of affection.

But beyond the obvious three things we should all be doing, there are more subtle ways in which non-Muslims could consider behaving:

❖ **Be patient.**

The fasting Muslims you come into contact with – whether as friends, at the office or on the roads – are likely to be feeling tired and suffering the ill effects of low glucose levels.

❖ **Drive defensively.**

While this is true for the entire length of Ramadan – the effects of fasting on concentration are well documented – Dubai Police **advise avoiding the roads altogether, if you can, between 4pm and 7pm**, as most accidents occur when drivers are dashing home to break their fast. “It is dangerous,” admits the Director of Dubai Traffic Police. “Smokers especially get angry easily due to the lack of nicotine.”

❖ **Be aware of beggars and scams.**

Charity is even more important than usual during Ramadan, and you’ll see many people giving food to those in need. Unfortunately, the UAE is also targeted by “professional beggars”, who fly in specifically to cash in on this wave of charitable feeling. Dubai Police warn that “begging to gain sympathy during religious occasions is a criminal offence” and have published details of the top five begging scams, from mothers with sick children to families who have run out of petrol, of which you should be aware this month.

❖ **Be discrete.**

While most bars will serve alcohol after 8pm, it’s a nice gesture for expats to reciprocate this tolerance by not rubbing it in the faces of those observing the fast. Don’t be seen drunk in public, dress appropriately, and keep music down if holding a house party.

❖ **Do your shopping in the morning.**

You won’t believe how quiet the malls are, compared to how congested they are at night.

❖ **Expect to get things done at night.**

Ramadan is a month when time is effectively reversed as **fasting Muslims work shorter hours in the daytime and stay up for much of the night. Less may be achieved during the day but, if you want to stay connected in terms of business, accept invitations to Iftar meals and Suhour gatherings, which take place after sunset.**