

Open doors. Open minds.

الأبواب مفتوحة. العقول متفتحة.

Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum
Centre for Cultural Understanding



مركز الشيخ محمد بن راشد آل مكتوم
للتواصل الحضاري

UAE Cultural Intelligence

ذكاء الإمارات الحضاري

SMCCU Cultural Training

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Our Country

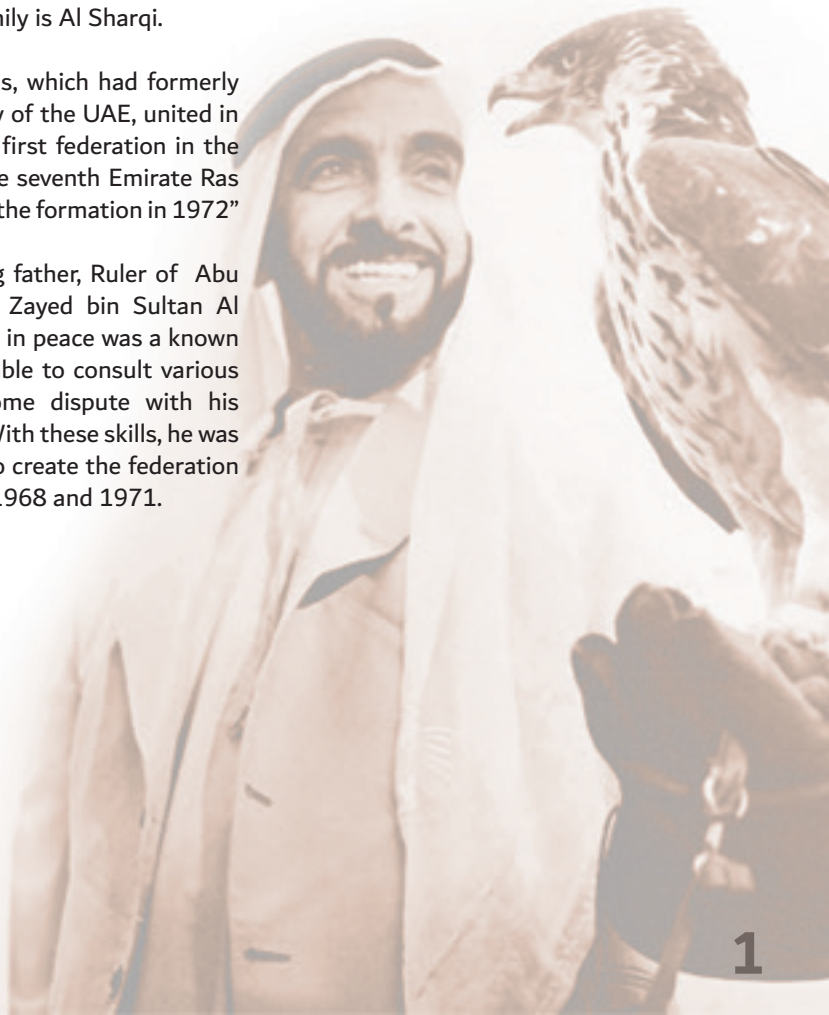
The United Arab Emirates is a constitutional federation of seven emirates, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Qaiwain, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah.

Abu Dhabi's ruling family is Al Nahyan, Dubai's ruling family is Al Maktoum, Sharjah's ruling family is Al Qasimi, Ajman's ruling family is Al Nuaimi, Umm al-Qaiwain's ruling family is Al Mualla, Ras Al Khaimah's ruling family is Al Qasimi, Fujairah's ruling family is Al Sharqi.

"The six sheikhdoms, which had formerly divided the territory of the UAE, united in 1971 to create the first federation in the Arab world, with the seventh Emirate Ras Al-Khaimah joining the formation in 1972"

The UAE's founding father, Ruler of Abu Dhabi H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan may he rest in peace was a known mediator and was able to consult various parties and overcome dispute with his negotiation skills. With these skills, he was able to work hard to create the federation between the years 1968 and 1971.

Upon federation, he was elected the first President and was continuously elected to be the president by the six other Emirates until he passed away in 2004, when his son HH Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, became president.



Who are the People of the Emirates?

The social structure of the Emirates has gone through enormous changes over the last thirty to forty years. Dubai, geographically the second largest Emirate, has made a staggering transformation from a small Arab tribal society to a dynamic, sophisticated city. Dubai is recognized as the commercial capital of the Emirates, flourishing in a diverse range of industries including tourism, manufacturing, trading, media and e-commerce. Other Emirates include; Abu Dhabi (capital), Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain and Ajman.

The Emirati people descended from ancient tribes living simple lives, connected to their land, the desert and the sea. Before the discovery of oil, traditional occupations included the growing of date palms, fishing and pearl diving along the coast. Naturally, with oil, came dramatic changes to the lifestyle and social structure of the Emirates.

Development of the infrastructure of the country; construction of roads, hospitals, schools etc brought a stream of foreign workforce into the country. Now the Emirates, has become home to people of over 200 nationalities. According to The World Bank organization, the population of the United Arab Emirates, is estimated to be around 9,700,000¹.

Certainly, the cultural and religious diversity has made the Emirates probably the most open and tolerant country within the region. Dubai, and the UAE in general, are liberal in allowing foreigners to maintain their own religious practices and lifestyles. One can even find churches and temples for worshippers to practise their faith.

Although there have been some changes with the exposure to new ideas and influences, the Emirati people have successfully retained their social values and beliefs in order not to lose their own cultural identity.

Some tribal values of the past have survived until present times; for example, the importance of strong family ties and the loyalty to members of their own tribe, hospitality and the love of poetry and story telling.

¹ The World Bank. (n.d.). Population, total - United Arab Emirates. Retrieved October 19, 2020, from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=AE>

UAE National Dress

The traditional dress for an Emirati woman consists of wide and long under-trousers (sirwal-bu-badla), which have glittering and colourful embroidery at the end, and an ankle-length dress (thoub), which also has coloured and gold or silver embroidery at the neckline and cuffs. When a male visitor, who is not a close member of her family is in the house, the Emirati woman covers her hair with either a thin coloured scarf or with the traditional black headscarf (shela).

When outside the home, she wears the shela, and over her clothes, a floor length black cloak called an abaya. Older women in particular still wear the traditional gold coloured face mask (burqa), which is made of linen or cotton.

The Emirati men's traditional clothing consists of the white ankle length robe. As well Emirati men often wear a Ghutra on their heads, either wrapped around the head in the Hamdaniyah style which is more casual or worn open with Egal a black ring fitted around the head for a formal look.

The agal was historically used to tie the camels legs, so they could not stray far from the Bedouin camp. For very formal occasions, such as Eid celebrations or weddings, a man will wear a bisht, which is a very thin, light woollen cloak with gold embroidery at the edges. Usually the bisht is a family heirloom, handed down from father to son.

Emirati men and women today still wear the traditional clothes of their culture but new trends alter the traditional styles often.



Emirati Greeting

Greetings in the Emirates are similar to other cultures in the Arabian Peninsula. Emiratis use many phrases to say hello, like saying Marhaba (welcome), Hala (hello) and the most popular Aslam Alykom and Walykom Asalam (peace be upon you and peace be upon you too).

Often people notice that Emirati men greet each other using their noses, in which their faces meet and noses touch each other. On the other hand women kiss cheeks when they greet family and friends. It must be noted that traditionally women and men who are not family members in the Emirates greet each other without shaking hands, hugging, kissing cheeks, ect.



Pearl Diving in the UAE

Pearl diving and the business around it was the most lucrative business for the people of the Emirates and it's even considered to be one of the oldest jobs in the coast of the gulf. Around the beginning of the 20th century pearl farming was discovered in Japan which damaged the business in the coast but it lead people of the gulf to new ventures.

Pearl diving was a huge opportunity for the people of the coast, becoming a member of the crew going on the pearling trips means you'll be able to support your family financially for at least serveal months and that meant a lot of people will try to secure a job for the season often from June until September.

On the other hand, many merchants will take the chance on funding these diving trips because although not all trips had great yealed it still worth trying. Many merchants would take the pearls collected and travel to India to trade them for different goods that people needed, like rice, spices, fabric, wood and much more.

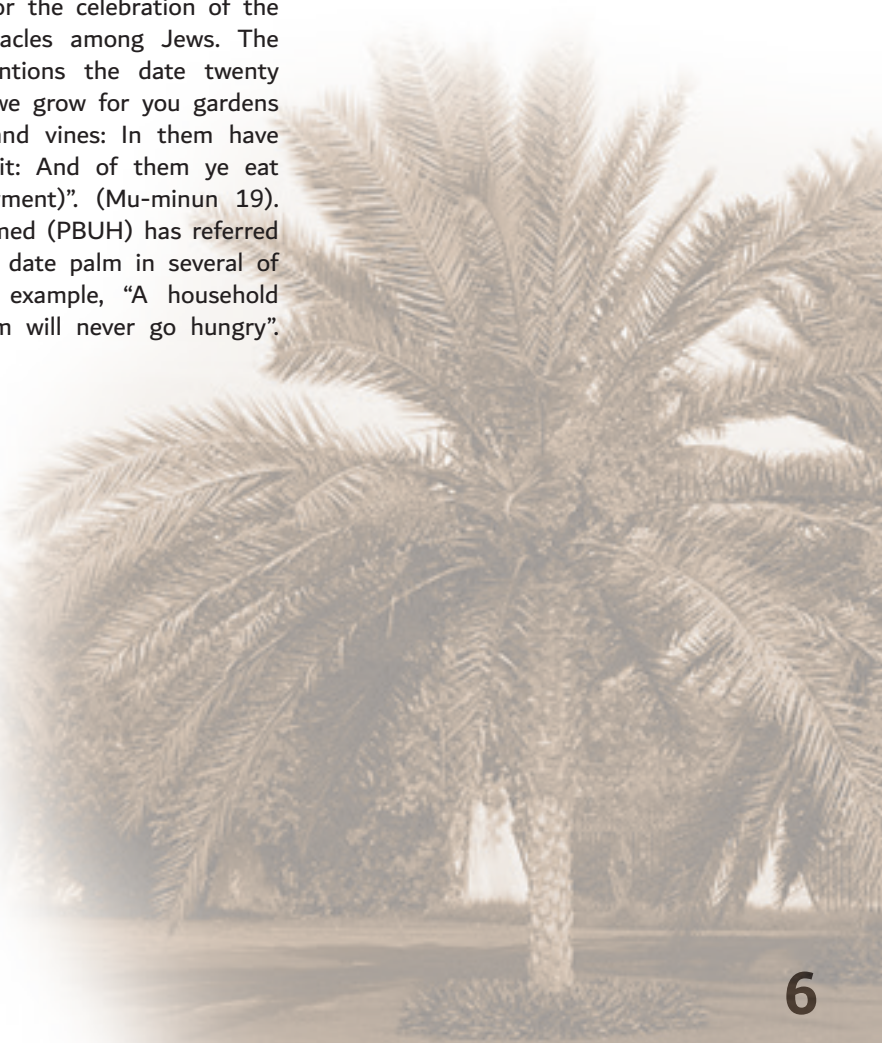


What is the Significance of the Date Palm Tree?

There have always been hundreds of uses for the date palm no better described by an old Arab date farmer: “We shade ourselves with it, we eat its fruit, we feed our animals from its seeds, we make baskets and mats from its leaves, we build ceilings and columns from its trunk and we use it as fuel”. Indeed the date palm played an integral role in the life of people in the region.

Date palm leaves (Al Saafa) are used for the celebration of Palm Sunday among Christians and for the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles among Jews. The Holy Quran mentions the date twenty times; “With it we grow for you gardens of date palms and vines: In them have ye abundant fruit: And of them ye eat (and have enjoyment)”. (Mu-minun 19). Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) has referred to the date and date palm in several of his sayings for example, “A household with a date palm will never go hungry”.

The date can be eaten at various stages: Khalal, the unripe stage when the fruit is hard and yellow; Rutab, the semi-ripe stage which is softer with more moisture and finally Tamr, the very sweet and soft fully ripe stage. Some of the dates varieties grown in the Emirates include; Barhi, Braim, Ikhallas, Sultani, Lou-Lou, Hilalee, and Shi-Shi.



Traditional Food of the Emirates

Influenced by the large expatriate population, the range of foods available and eaten in the Emirates is now very diverse. Food is of very high quality and one can eat traditional foods from just about anywhere around the globe! Most traditional dishes from the Emirates contain rice, fish or meat as the main ingredient.

One of the most popular Emirati dishes is the Harees. It consists of small pieces of meat, cracked wheat and water. Simple to prepare, this meal is made by placing the meat, wheat and water into a large pot and cooking slowly until the meat is tender. The ingredients are then blended together until it has a thick pasty consistency similar to porridge.

Machboos is a dish made of rice, onions and meat, seasoned with spices, salt and dried lemon called loomy. This dish is prepared by boiling all the ingredients in water until very tender. The meat is taken out and the rice is added to the rest of the ingredients and cooked together. The meat is returned again to the pot and cooked for another one to two hours. Both chicken and lamb Machboos are among the most popular dishes eaten at lunchtime.

Threed is Saloona (a meat and vegetable stew) poured over a bed of Regag pieces (very thin bread) and served immediately. The stew base can be made from chicken or lamb with vegetables such as carrots, potatoes and marrow. This dish is eaten daily during Ramadan.

One of the most popular parts of the Emirati cuisine is the breakfast, with dishes like, Balaleet it is sweet cardamom and saffron flavored Vermicelli served with scrambled eggs or omelet. Another dish is the Mohalla it is the Emirati crepe often infused with cardamom, it can be eaten alone or with cream cheese, honey, date syrup, ghee and sugar. Emirati most popular bread is the Khamir, it is yeast-based bread often infused with cardamom, it can be eaten alone or with cream cheese,

There are other notable dishes eaten as snacks or for breakfast too. Chebab an Emirati version of the pancakes infused with saffron and cardamom. Regag is an Emirati bread often prepared for Threed dish or stuffed with cheese or eggs. Khabeesah is made from roasted flour, water, sugar, and saffron. Lugamat is dough balls, eaten with date syrup. Usually eaten after a meal and eaten daily during Ramadan. Asseada is made from semolina and saffron. Batheeth is freshly ripened dates with sauce.

What is the Arabian Majlis and Hospitality?

One of the most important aspects of the religion and culture is hospitality. In an environment consisting mainly of desert and a few oases, the law of hospitality was essential for survival. Religious and cultural traditions govern that the host is obliged to offer every guest food and shelter for three days and nights, unconditionally, and without even asking the guest's name or where they came from. Although this practice is rare in these modern times, hospitality is still highly valued in Emirati society. To accept guests into your home, even the unexpected visitor, is an honour and they are always welcomed and treated with the greatest respect.

The Majlis is the sitting room where people meet, eat, share ideas, play board games and of course drink gahwa (Arabian coffee). The typical Emirati home will have two majlis', one for the men and one for the ladies. The Emirati family unit is still very strong and it is typical that the family would gather for the lunchtime meal everyday, or a minimum of once a week. Most families will also open their Majlis for their extended family and friends for the lunch meal. In the evenings the men's Majlis is open again and visitors sip gahwa, play board games and chat through the night.

The ceremony surrounding the preparation, serving and drinking of gahwa (Arabian coffee) derived from the traditions of Islamic and Bedouin hospitality.

Unlike the comparatively stronger flavoured 'western' style coffees, the traditional gahwa of the Emirates has a very mild coffee flavour, a distinct cardamom taste with a touch of saffron.

It is the host's privilege to serve his guests. The coffee is poured from the dallah (coffee pot, held in the left hand) into small finjaan (small ceramic cups without handles, held in the right hand). The cups are only filled about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the cup size, but guests may have several refills. When the guest has finished he should shake the empty cup from side to side, indicating to the host that he has had enough. The hired help can do the coffee serving; however, it is customary for the youngest sibling of the family to perform this duty. This demonstrates great respect for the guest.

Gahwa is never sweetened with sugar, instead, fresh dates are offered to accompany the aromatic brew. The dates refresh and sweeten the palate between each sip of gahwa.

The international style coffee shop has become a 'modern day' Majlis or meeting place. The many shopping malls and street cafes are a buzz with groups of friends sharing a conversation and a coffee, while watching the world go by.



Incense and Perfumes

Throughout the ages aromatic oils and perfumes have been used in the Arabian world. Prophet Mohammed peace be upon him also encouraged the use of perfumes before the Friday prayers and in the home. Even with the introduction of modern manufactured perfumes, the tradition of perfumed oils and incense has remained.

Arabian perfumes, are alcohol free and ingredients include: sandalwood, oud, saffron, amber and musk. Different blends are made from these ingredients to create strong oils that give a long lasting aroma. Extracts from plants and flowers such as jasmine, narcissus, and lilies are also commonly used in perfume making.

Oud is perfumed woodchips from the trunks of certain trees and the best quality oud is from the Agarwood, which is grown naturally in India and Bangladesh. The wood pieces are placed on hot coals that sit inside an incense burner called a mad'khan. The perfumed oils burnt and released in smoky fumes, which are spread in the house, through clothes and even through the hair.

Bukhoor is small disc shape incense, which is an infusion of perfumed oils and is burnt in the same way as oud. Bukhoor can be bought at one of the many commercial Arabian perfume houses, but can also be made in the home. Many Emirati women make their own bukhoor using special family recipes. Small jars of bukhoor are given as gifts, to friends and family.

There are many different aromas of oud and bukhoor used depending on the occasion and whether it is for male or female use. Both incense and oils vary in qualities and the best are of course the most expensive. A small 20ml bottle of Dihin oud (oil of oud) can cost up to Dhs 10,000 for a small bottle!.

As a gesture of hospitality, the incense is passed among the guests in the Majlis before they depart.



Islamic Religious Celebrations

There are many significant Islamic religious events including Lailat Al Qadar, Lailat Al Miraj, and Ramadan. There are, however, two main religious festivals or gatherings which are Eid Al Fitr and Eid Al Adha.

The last day of Ramadan, the month of fasting, is signalled by the sighting of the new moon in the evening sky. This indicates that the month of Ramadan has come to an end and that the tenth Shawwal (month) has begun. In Islam, the new day begins at sunset, not at dawn. The morning following the sighting of the new moon marks Eid Al Fitr, a day of feasting and family gatherings, which begins with a mass community prayer. Due to the large numbers of people attending these special prayers, the prayer is held in Eid Al Mussala (a large open air place of prayer) instead of in the mosque.

The end of the Hajj marks the time of Eid Al Adha, the 'great' Eid or 'festival of sacrifice'. This celebration involves the slaughter of animals, such as sheep or veal, and sharing the meat with family and those in need.

Generally, a family would slaughter and cook the meat and then distribute one third to the needy and keep one third for the home. This practice is to commemorate the events that Muslims believed happened to the prophets Ibrahim and his son Ismail peace be upon them, when it was revealed to Ibrahim from Allah that he must sacrifice his son to show his obedience to the Creator.



Can I Visit a Mosque in Dubai?

Mosques are the house of worship for Muslims and it is there that the 5 daily prayers are called for and a group prayer occur. The mosque has strict traditions that are a important for any attendee to follow, for example keeping the shoes outside and covering specific parts of the body.

The Emirates is a diverse country with many tourists visiting annually, and many of them are interested in the religion of the Emirates. Because of this there are many initiatives that host mosque visits. One of the first of these initiatives is SMCCU's Jumerirah Grand Mosque Visits program.

The Jumeirah Mosque Visit offers a tour in the mosque, explanation on the mosque structure and the basics of the religion, as well an open cultural Q&A session.

The visits are daily at 10:00am and 2:00pm except Fridays. Includes light Emirati refreshments. Registration is required prior to the tour in the Majlis of Jumeirah Mosque to be able to enter the mosque. Appropriate dress must be worn and is provided; ladies must cover arms and leg and have a headscarf to cover the hair, and men must cover their legs. Shoes must be removed before entering the mosque.

For large number of groups please contact SMCCU ahead of time before attendance. For media, please contact SMCCU ahead of time before attendance..

The Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Centre for Cultural Understanding

Jumeirah Mosque Visit

The Jumeirah Mosque has been a focal point for our 'Open Doors. Open Minds.' message for over two decades. The visit to the iconic Jumeirah Mosque, offers an opportunity to interact with your guide, ask plenty of questions and take photographs! Modest dress is kindly requested, long sleeves and trousers and a headscarf for ladies.

Cultural Meals

The Cultural Meals programs are hosted in a traditional Emirati house and majlis in Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood, where guests can enjoy Arabic coffee, dates, a cultural meal, and a open Q&A session with an Emirati presenter.

Heritage Tour

A guided tour of the Al Fahidi Historical Neighborhood, one of the oldest residential districts in Dubai. The tour includes a visit to the neighborhood's Mosque.

Creekside Tour

Tour includes Arabic coffee & dates, a short walk through the Al Fahidi historical neighbourhood, a visit to the many souqs, and an abra ride on a traditional water taxi crossing the Dubai creek to Deira.

Corporate Inductions

The corporate programs provide greater understanding of the UAE culture and employee integration, trusted by over 150 companies across the region. Equip your employees with the proper business etiquette and cultural sensitivity in an engaging environment hosted by an Emirati presenters. Learn how to conduct business with Emiratis and enhance the productivity of your organization. The presentation can be customized and topics can be tailored to suit the company's requirements.

Ramadan Cultural Iftar

Every year SMCCU hosts an annual Iftar Dinner program. A unique experience for the guests to embrace the traditions of the month of Ramadan.

Public and corporate bookings available.
Please visit cultures.ae for further
information and new programs.



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For further information, contact 'Open Doors. Open Minds.'

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(04) 353-6666 | smccu@cultures.ae | www.cultures.ae | [@SMCCUDubai](https://www.instagram.com/SMCCUDubai)

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