

Section 6

# Emirati Hospitality

GRASP | ABSORB | APPRECIATE



## Section 6: Emirati Hospitality

Through your work on this section you will be gaining the following Abu Dhabi knowledge:

- Emirati hospitality

You will also be able to:

LO15 Give details of Emirati hospitality and traditions

### Introduction

The origins of Emirati hospitality lie in Bedouin traditions and the needs of the nomadic tribes who travelled the deserts of the region. Hosting guests was an opportunity to demonstrate your social status in the community and as a sign of warmth and generosity. If strangers arrived at a camp, they had to be provided with food and lodging for at least three days. The warmth of welcome and traditional generosity are very much a part of the Abu Dhabi lifestyle today, whether in a teashop or five-star hotel. It can be seen in every aspect of hospitality from the greeting to the fragrance in the room.

### Communication

Rules of engagement have developed over centuries to avoid conflict and reflect the cultural heritage. Modesty, tolerance and respect are central to this. Here are some examples of behaviour:

- Direct comments are avoided
- Direct eye contact is offensive between a woman and man who are not relatives, but are a sign of trust in a business transaction
- It is disrespectful for a guest to decline hospitality

### Greetings

The way in which people greet each other in the UAE reflects the cultural heritage of the region and is based on respect and moderation.

Key things such as gender, age, social status and your position within the family network will affect the greeting you use. This is very important when interacting with anyone outside of immediate family. There is little to no physical touching between men and women during greetings in public; this is a sign of respect which is strictly observed by people who are unrelated to each other.

When men greet each other, handshakes or nose-rubbing are commonplace. Nose-rubbing is a unique way of greeting, and demonstrates trust, friendship and deep respect. It is actually a traditional code among the Bedouins from the past. The nose, along with the forehead, is the most appealing feature which explains why they have special status. When relatives greet an elderly family member, it is common to kiss the forehead as a sign of respect of their status within the family.

When women greet each other, physical touch such as handshaking and cheek kissing also demonstrate friendship and indicates trust and respect.

### Coffee

The ritual of drinking Arabic coffee (*gahwa*) goes back many centuries and is central to any social or business activity. Hospitality offered to guests always includes coffee, with the cup being refilled until the guest indicates they have had enough.

Traditionally, a guest will have three cups. The coffee is boiled, not filtered, and can be served plain or blended with spices such as cardamom. It can have sugar added but traditionally it is bitter and served in very small amounts.

The tiny, handle-less cups it comes in are called *finjan* and the pot with long spout is called a *dallah*. The *dallah* is such an important symbol in the UAE that a picture of one is on the dirham coin and also features in the iconic Union Square monuments.

The guest shakes the *finjan* side to side when they have had enough. Food such as dates is served at the same time and, later, perfumed incense named *Bukhoor* may be passed around the guests to freshen up.

You will have the opportunity to experience the ritual of drinking *gahwa* in Module Two, day one of your tourist guide training and licensing programme. In the meantime, you may like to find out more by visiting the following websites:

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/arabic-coffee-a-symbol-of-generosity-01074>

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/10.COM/10.B.32>



Arabic coffee - a symbol of generosity

## **Palm dates**

Dates were a vital source of nutrition in desert communities and are still part of the coffee ritual, a treat to be offered to guests and a symbol of Emirati generosity. There are many different varieties of dates and date produce available, such as fresh dates, dried dates, stuffed dates, chocolate dipped dates, sparkling date juice, date jams, dates molasses and balsamic vinegar.

The Liwa Date Festival in July promotes and celebrates the symbolic and historic role that the date palm plays in Emirati culture.

In Section 10: Sites and attractions, you will read about the Al Foah Date Factory and will learn some interesting facts about dates and palms.

## **Majlis**

Listed by UNESCO as intangible cultural heritage, the *majlis* - or 'sitting place' - was traditionally a tented meeting place where hospitality was offered and family and business discussions took place. *Majlis* were an essential method for sharing news and information. Originally, people were seated on mats but as the *majlis* became established in homes, *tekay* (Arabic cushions) were introduced and the room became more formally decorated.

The *majlis* represents a cultural and social space which is an integral part of traditional life and where friends and family gather to talk about daily life, religious topics or reminisce about the past over Arabic coffee. *Majlis* have developed into an important part of the cultural and political heritage of the region.

When you experience the ritual of drinking *gahwa* in module two, day one of your tourist guide training and licensing programme, you will also be immersed in a *majlis* so will have the opportunity to gain first-hand knowledge and experience of such an event. In the meantime, you may like to find out more by visiting the following websites:

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/RL/majlis-a-cultural-and-social-space-01076>

<https://ich.unesco.org/en/decisions/10.COM/10.B.33>

## **Incense**

Another common feature of the *majlis* is the incense used to release a fragrant perfume, such as sandalwood, *oud* and *Bukhoor* into the air. The incense burners are sometimes electric but more traditionally charcoal burners are used. *Oud* comes from the *Aquilaria* trees found in India and South-East Asia and *Bukhoor* comes from woodchips of *Agar* wood which have been scented with fragrant oils. The aroma of *Bukhoor* is used generally in special occasions like weddings.



Traditional incense burner

# Knowledge Bank: Emirati Hospitality

The origins of Emirati hospitality lie in Bedouin traditions and the needs of the nomadic tribes who travelled the deserts of the region.

## Communication

- Direct eye contact is offensive between a woman and man who are not relatives but are a sign of trust in a business transaction
- It is disrespectful for a guest to decline hospitality

## Greetings

- **When men greet each other** – physical touch such as handshake and nose-rubbing demonstrates trust, friendship and respect between men.
- **When women greet each other** – physical touch also demonstrates friendship between women and indicates that trust and respect is offered, so handshaking and cheek kissing are commonplace.
- **The greeting between men and women** - there is little to no touching between men and women during greetings in public.

## Coffee

- Traditionally, a guest will have three cups
- The guest shakes the *finjan* side to side when they have had enough

<i>gahwa</i>	The serving of Arabic coffee on arrival of a guest
<i>finjan</i>	Tiny, handle-less coffee cups
<i>dallah</i>	Large Arabic coffee pot with a long spout
<i>Bukhoor</i>	A perfumed incense passed around the guests to freshen up their hands and face

## Palm dates

- Dates hold an important place in Arabian heritage and provide the main source of nutrition in desert communities
- Dates are part of the coffee ritual as a treat offered to guests and a symbol of Emirati generosity
- The Liwa Date Festival in July promotes and celebrates the symbolic and historic role the date palm plays in Emirati culture

## Majlis

- A tented meeting place where hospitality was offered and family and business discussions took place
- Originally, people were seated on mats but as the *majlis* became established in homes *tekay* (Arabic cushions) were introduced and rooms became more formally decorated

## Incense

- *Oud* and *Bukhoor* are used in the incense burner but can be combined with other ingredients to produce fragrances.
- Arabic perfume uses a range of oils such as rose, jasmine, lilies, sandalwood, musk and citrus fruits. Arabic perfume typically does not contain alcohol