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Roads and driving in Dubai: a practical operating guide

Before buying or leasing a car, confirm licence eligibility, insurance, registration, tolls, parking and the true annual cost of mobility.

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> Dubai’s road network is extensive, but driving is a regulated activity. Licence conversion eligibility depends on the issuing country and current RTA rules; other applicants may need training and testing. Never assume that an overseas licence remains sufficient after becoming resident.

The Roads and Transport Authority (RTA) publishes service requirements and the Light Motor Vehicle Handbook. Use these official resources for current procedures, road signs, safe-driving principles and service channels.

Key facts

LICENCE FIRST	Exchange and testing eligibility depends on current RTA rules and the issuing jurisdiction.
FULL ANNUAL COST	Include insurance, registration, tolls, parking, maintenance and depreciation.
EMERGENCY NUMBERS	Police 999, ambulance 998 and fire 997 are listed by the UAE Government.

Resolve the licence before the vehicle

Check whether your existing licence is recognised for exchange and what documents, eye tests, translations or residence evidence are required. If testing is necessary, use an RTA-approved driving institute. Requirements can vary with nationality, licence status and personal circumstances.

Tourist and resident rules are not interchangeable. Confirm your status, the vehicle’s insurance conditions and rental-company requirements. Driving without the correct authority or cover can have serious financial and legal consequences.

Understand the ownership stack

A vehicle decision includes purchase or lease cost, finance, registration, inspection where applicable, comprehensive or third-party insurance, parking, tolls, fuel, tyres, maintenance and depreciation. Compare this with public transport and taxi use for your actual routine.

Before buying used, verify the vehicle and seller records through official channels, inspect the car independently and clarify finance settlement. Do not treat a clean appearance as evidence of mechanical condition or ownership status.

Plan tolls, parking and daily routes

Salik is Dubai’s electronic road-toll system. Parking zones, operating hours and payment methods vary; check signs and RTA information at the location. Navigation estimates can change sharply at school, office and event peaks, so test recurring journeys.

Keep registration, insurance, toll and maintenance records organised. Set renewal reminders and update contact information so official notices reach you. If another person regularly drives the vehicle, confirm licence and insurance permissions.

Drive for the conditions

Maintain safe distance, observe lane discipline and speed limits, and avoid mobile-phone distraction. Weather can reduce visibility or create standing water. Do not enter flooded roads or drive beyond the conditions; follow official alerts during unusual weather.

In a collision or emergency, use the correct police and emergency process. The UAE Government lists 999 for police, 998 for ambulance and 997 for fire. Move or remain in place according to safety needs and official instructions.

Practical checklist

- Check resident licence pathway
- Confirm insurance before driving
- Inspect and verify a used vehicle
- Budget tolls and parking
- Set registration and service reminders
- Save official emergency numbers

Official sources

SOURCE CHECK Official UAE government references. Links verified 4 August 2026.

1. **RTA service portal**
2. **RTA Light Motor Vehicle Handbook**
3. **RTA Salik**
4. **UAE Government: Handling emergencies**

Online edition: **https://iraaglobal.com/insights/dubai-driving/**

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Tax-readiness quick check

1. Confirm the responsible legal entity and registration position.
2. Reconcile the accounts, tax adjustments and supporting evidence.
3. Document ownership, review and approval before filing.

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Insight beyond numbers.

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