

### **Top tips for travelling to Dubai**

This document has been produced and will be maintained by and on behalf of members of the University of Birmingham Rainbow Network. It is for guidance only and should not be considered to constitute formal legal advice.

These top tips are based on information from organisations such as Stonewall, as well as conversations with colleagues and staff from other organisations who have visited Dubai. The Rainbow Network committee have interpreted and collated all of this accordingly.

The top priority of the Rainbow Network committee, and the reason for producing this list of top tips, is to support the safety and wellbeing of University of Birmingham staff and PhD students, and this is our goal in providing this advice. This does not compromise our overarching objective of creating a workplace where everybody is free to express their identity freely without fear of consequence.

This document may change as new tips or information come to light, so people are encouraged to read through it each time that they travel to Dubai. If you would like to add to it, confidentially contact the Rainbow Network committee at [lgbtq@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:lgbtq@contacts.bham.ac.uk). You can also confidentially contact us for informal support during your stay if any issues arise.

The word “trans” is used throughout this document as an umbrella term to include people who identify as transgender and non-binary.

### **Introduction**

The legal and social environment in Dubai is significantly different to the UK, and there are a lot of activities and behaviours considered socially and culturally acceptable in the UK that could get individuals into serious trouble if undertaken in Dubai. As a Rainbow Network document, this will not include a comprehensive list of cultural differences, although anybody considering travelling to Dubai is encouraged to undertake significant research to understand these differences. The following top tips focus on cultural differences relating to attitudes towards LGBTQ people, and associated laws.

The University has outlined information about the laws relating to equality and diversity at <https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/dubai/study/Equality-and-diversity/Living-in-Dubai.aspx> (click on the Equality and Diversity tab).

Further information about the University’s approach to equality and diversity in Dubai is available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/dubai/staff/hr/Staff-Resources/Working-in-Dubai/Equality-and-Diversity.aspx>.

## Top tips

- Familiarise yourself with Stonewall's Global Workplace Briefing on the United Arab Emirates:  
[https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/uae\\_global\\_workplace\\_briefing\\_2016.pdf](https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/uae_global_workplace_briefing_2016.pdf). This gives an up to date overview of the laws (and absence of laws) impacting LGBTQ equality in Dubai, although it does not constitute formal legal advice.
- Familiarise yourself with the University's statement on equality and diversity in Dubai:  
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/documents/public/dubai/Guidance-policy/Equality-and-Diversity-Dubai.pdf>. This document makes it clear that, for UK-based staff, it is your decision whether to accept an offer to travel to Dubai and you will not face any detriment if you decline such an offer. If you accept an offer but change your mind, speak to your line manager as a matter of priority.
- Familiarise yourself with the Dubai Staff Handbook:  
<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/hr/documents/public/dubai/UoB-Dubai-Staff-Handbook.pdf>. This gives information about your entitlements and benefits (section "Your Employment") and what to do if you experience discrimination or harassment on campus (appendices 3, 11, 17).
- Consider that laws relating to LGBTQ people can cause problems for anybody who is perceived to be LGBTQ, whether or not they actually identify this way. Bear in mind if taking friends, partners, family members, dependants, or anybody else with you to Dubai that they may also identify, or be perceived as identifying as LGBTQ, either now or in the future.
- If you are trans or have previously transitioned, it is inadvisable to travel to Dubai unless your legal documentation (including passport) matches your (perceived) gender, as you may be denied access to the country, deported, or arrested if you are discovered to be trans. Consider that some types of healthcare, even if they are not related to transitioning, may also result in the discovery that you are trans.
- If your next of kin is registered as a same sex partner, consider changing this to another family member for the duration of your trip to Dubai and changing it back when you return. You can do this at [https://universityofbirmingham.service-now.com/hr/hr\\_login.do](https://universityofbirmingham.service-now.com/hr/hr_login.do) by clicking "Here for you" then "Change your information". Do this at least a month before travelling to Dubai.
- If you identify as LGBTQ, try to avoid making this publicly available knowledge on the internet. For example, if you have a University of Birmingham LGBTQ staff profile on the University intranet, ask for it to be uploaded to a restricted webpage.
- Make your social media profiles as private as possible. Avoid disclosing your or your family's LGBTQ identities, or displaying advocacy for LGBTQ equality, in any parts of your social media profiles which may remain publically visible.
- Do not include any explicit LGBTQ advocacy in your professional email signatures when corresponding with people in Dubai.
- Do not take any electronic devices which contain LGBTQ content (e.g. e-readers with same-sex literature downloaded). Dubai authorities are entitled to access files on electronic devices of people entering the country.

- Do not wear any clothes or accessories which could be considered to be a form of LGBTQ advocacy, and do not take any possessions with an explicit LGBTQ theme which may be discovered at customs.
- Do not wear LGBTQ lanyards or pin badges (e.g. Rainbow Network or LGBTQ Ally Network) at any time, and do not display any other associated merchandise such as mugs or postcards in your workplace.
- If you decide not to disclose your or your family's LGBTQ identities to anybody in Dubai, ensure that any colleagues, students, and dependants who are aware of these identities are aware of this decision. Be prepared to answer questions about your relationship status, especially if you travel with a same sex partner.
- Ensure that you keep information secure (e.g. do not leave University computers unlocked with Rainbow Network emails visible).
- Try to avoid dressing in a way which is not traditionally associated with your (perceived) gender if you are in public.
- Do not do anything that may be perceived as a public display of affection, either same sex or opposite sex, even if it is intended to be innocent. See <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/jamie-harron-dubai-touching-mans-hip-detained-in-dubai-stirling-electrician-sheikh-mohammed-bin-a8025831.html> for an example.
- If undertaking research, hosting academic discussions, or offering welfare support related to LGBTQ issues and identities, consider carefully whether this may be interpreted as a form of LGBTQ advocacy.
- If you need to leave Dubai urgently e.g. because you have been outed as LGBTQ or reported to the authorities because you or a family member have been perceived to be LGBTQ, speak to the Dubai Provost or Director of Operations as soon as possible to discuss any advice or assistance that the University may be able to offer.