

United Arab Emirates

This guide is compiled from the IAM Country Guide for reference only. Customs regulations change frequently; please consult your Seapoe relocation consultant for the latest requirements before shipping.

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Documents

Documents required for importing used household goods, personal effects, and related shipments.

For All Importers

- Copy of passport
- Copy of residence permit / residency visa on passport, OR employment visa with UAE entry stamp if residence visa is not yet issued
- Emirates ID copy, Emirates ID application form, or applicable visa form (if residence visa not yet issued)
- Bill of lading (express release) / air waybill (AWB)
- Detailed packing list in English
- Letter of authorization / undertaking

For Diplomats

- Letter from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs granting exemption from customs duties
- Copy of diplomatic card

Specific Information

Duties on New Items: Import duty is charged at 5% of the CIF (cost, insurance, freight) value for any new items in the shipment. VAT at 5% applies to the total shipment value.

Free Storage Period: Shipments not cleared within 5 days of arrival at port are not granted a free storage period and attract port charges from day one of arrival. Shipments arriving before the weekend (Friday and Saturday in the UAE) effectively lose two clearing days and are more likely to incur storage charges. Plan arrivals for Sunday through Wednesday.

Customs Inspection: Customs authorities may conduct intensive physical inspections of import shipments. Inspection charges are incurred by the consignee. If prohibited items are found, severe penalties apply, including fines, imprisonment, or both.

GCC Customs Union: The UAE is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Customs Union. Goods destined for UAE mainland are subject to the GCC Common Customs Law. Goods destined for Free Trade Zones (FTZs) — of which there are approximately 45 in the UAE — are exempt from customs duty. Household goods shipments are generally cleared through Jebel Ali Port (Dubai) or Abu Dhabi Port for mainland delivery.

Jebel Ali Congestion: Jebel Ali is one of the busiest ports in the world and experiences periodic congestion. Allow approximately 1 to 2 weeks from arrival date for vehicle and large household goods shipments.

ISPM 15: All wooden packing materials must comply with ISPM 15 phytosanitary treatment standards.

The importation of used household goods and personal effects into the UAE is exempt from customs duties, provided the consignee holds a valid UAE residence visa. Without a residence

visa — or without the passport to which the visa is affixed — no customs clearance or shipping line release will be possible.

All documents must be in place before the shipment arrives at port. Late or incomplete documentation results in storage charges and potential examination fees.

Prohibited & Restricted Items

Prohibited Items

The UAE applies strict customs enforcement with severe penalties including imprisonment for prohibited goods violations. The following items are prohibited from import:

- Weapons and firearms of all kinds (without Ministry of Interior permit) [PERMIT REQUIRED]
- Military uniforms and equipment
- Narcotics, controlled drugs, and all derivatives including poppy seeds, flowers, and leaves
- Banned pharmaceutical substances (verify any medication against UAE Ministry of Health lists before travel)
- Alcohol and spirits (restrictions apply; note: alcohol is legal for licensed outlets and non-Muslim residents, but unlicensed import is prohibited in certain contexts)
- Pornographic materials in any format
- Gambling devices and games
- Statues and figures of animals with religious undertones
- Carvings and statues of humans, particularly nude figures (in large quantities or with commercial intent)
- Controversial political or religious literature and materials contrary to Islamic principles
- Toxic and radioactive materials
- Goods of Israeli origin or manufactured by companies on the UAE's boycott list (note: the UAE normalized relations with Israel in 2020 under the Abraham Accords; the historical boycott list has been substantially modified — confirm current status with the destination agent)
- Food items containing pork (for personal use, limited quantities may be imported into certain contexts; strict prohibition applies in general retail/commercial import)
- Articles made from endangered animals, or made of ivory or rhinoceros horn [CITES]
- E-cigarettes and vaping devices (regulations have changed; confirm current status with the destination agent)
- Counterfeit goods of all kinds

The UAE and Israel signed the Abraham Accords in September 2020 and established full diplomatic and trade relations. The longstanding Arab League boycott of Israel is no longer enforced by the UAE. Agents should confirm the current status of any specific product with the destination agent.

Restricted / Dutiable Items

Tobacco (travelers aged 18 and over): 400 cigarettes, or 50 cigars, or 500 grams of loose tobacco. Only one category may be imported duty-free — not a combination.

Alcohol: Non-Muslim travelers aged 18 and over may bring a limited personal allowance of alcohol into the UAE for personal use. The allowable quantity varies by emirate and is subject to change; confirm current limits with the destination agent. Note: alcohol purchased in UAE duty-free shops at arrival is an additional allowance separate from personal luggage.

Medications: Personal medications may be imported. Prescription medications should be accompanied by a valid prescription or medical report. Controlled substances require prior approval from the Ministry of Health. Quantities should correspond to the expected duration of stay.

Hunting weapons: Prior authorization required. [PERMIT REQUIRED]

Radio transmitters and wireless communication equipment: Subject to approval from the

Telecommunications and Digital Government Regulatory Authority (TDRA). [PERMIT REQUIRED]
Food items: May be subject to inspection and halal certification requirements.

Consignment Instructions

Contact the destination agent to ensure all requirements have been met prior to import, especially for differences between air and sea shipments.

Documents at Port: All documents — passport copy, residence visa, packing list, OBL/AWB, letter of undertaking — must be in place before the shipment arrives. No exceptions are made. Late documentation leads immediately to storage charges and potential customs examination.

Weekend Arrivals: The UAE weekend is Friday and Saturday. Shipments arriving on or just before the weekend lose those days from the clearance window and are at greater risk of incurring port storage charges. Aim for arrivals early in the working week (Sunday through Wednesday).

Free Storage: No free storage period applies if the shipment is not cleared within 5 days of arrival. Port charges begin from day one. Advise clients of this risk and ensure all documents are ready well in advance of the shipment's ETA.

Jebel Ali Port Congestion: Jebel Ali (Dubai) is one of the world's largest and busiest container ports. Congestion periods can significantly extend clearance times. Allow 1 to 2 weeks for vehicle clearance and confirm current port conditions with the destination agent before quoting delivery times.

New Items: Any new items in the shipment attract import duty at 5% of CIF value plus 5% VAT. Advise clients to include purchase invoices for all new goods and to consider whether any new items should be purchased locally instead.

Free Trade Zones: If the client's employer or residential address is within a UAE Free Trade Zone, customs procedures and duty exemptions differ from mainland UAE rules. Confirm the specific customs regime with the destination agent.