



A business traveller's guide to explore, invest,
and thrive in Dubai this 2025

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By continually anticipating the needs of travellers and exceeding their expectations, we are strengthening Dubai's position as the world's best city to visit, live, and work in.

His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum,
Crown Prince of Dubai, UAE Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Defence,
and Chairman of The Executive Council of Dubai





Dubai is a top destination for global travellers. Its skyline glistens with world-class architecture, its beaches welcome sun-lovers all year, and its souks and malls offer a wide range of products — from economical to luxury items. Undeniably, it is a city where tradition is preserved, innovation is fostered, and economic progress is accelerated.

In addition to luxury and experiential travel, the city's thriving tourism industry presents lucrative commercial opportunities. Thus, visitors with an entrepreneurial mindset can find it especially rewarding to do business in Dubai. This solid commercial impact is supported by an exceptional economic performance.

A report from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) shows that the [UAE's travel and tourism sector](#) added AED257 billion to the

national GDP in 2024, accounting for 13% of the of the total economy. Of this, international visitor spending amounted to AED217 billion. Dubai alone welcomed [9.88 million guests](#) from all over the world from January to June 2025. The largest percentage of these guests came from Western Europe, which accounted for 22% of the total. South Asia, the CIS and Eastern Europe, and the GCC each contributed 15% of the visitors.

This e-book offers a curated exploration of how the emirate's top tourism assets (i.e., culinary offerings, retail destinations, and cultural landmarks) generate commercial value across multiple sectors. The following sections also list down and provide strategic insights for entrepreneurs interested in doing business in Dubai's high-value travel and hospitality market.

Part I

The top 8 reasons to enter Dubai's food market





People from all over the world, with a wide range of backgrounds and culinary tastes, call Dubai home. As per the 3rd annual Dubai Gastronomy Industry Report, the emirate surpasses well-known culinary areas like London, New York, and Tokyo to become the 2nd largest gastronomy city in the world, right behind Paris.

The uprise helped drive the development of the food and beverage industry, which accounted for [3.4% of Dubai's GDP](#) from Q1 to Q3 2024. Currently contributing significantly to the city's economic diversification, the sector is one of its profit-generating industries.

Truly, opportunities abound for individuals seeking to do business in Dubai's food and beverage industry. The following eight advantages make the city's culinary industry an excellent resource for international entrepreneurs:

1. MICHELIN Guide spotlights Dubai's global food reputation

The publication of the MICHELIN Guide Dubai 2025, the fourth edition since its debut in 2022, solidifies the city's position as a world destination for exquisite culinary experiences. There are now 106 restaurants from 35 different cuisines in the guide. There are two 3-star, three 2-star restaurants, 14 1-star restaurants, 22 Bib Gourmand restaurants, 3 Green-starred restaurants, and 78 MICHELIN-selected restaurants.

Undeniably, internationally acclaimed chefs and culinary investors are drawn to this esteemed recognition. The expanding presence of MICHELIN confirms the strong consumer demand for fine dining, providing a compelling case for starting a luxury dining business in Dubai.

2. Residents and visitors alike are drawn to international cuisines

With residents from around 200 different countries, the emirate's dining scene offers some of the most popular cuisines in the world. African-Eurasian fusion concepts, Middle Eastern skewered meats, American smokehouses, and East Asian ramen are all flourishing. Pan-African brunch cafes and Korean-Mexican tacos are two popular examples. These diverse choices make Dubai a perfect place for launching a regional or hybrid cuisine-focused enterprise.

3. Home of the trending Dubai chocolate

F&B in Dubai is a fully immersive experience. The city displays its love of decadence with gold-dusted sweets, handmade gelato carts, and opulent afternoon teas. The Can't Get Knafeh of It chocolate bar from the local company FIX Dessert Chocolatier is a particularly noteworthy invention. This extraordinary dessert, which has become popular on TikTok, combines pistachio cream, tahini, and knafeh pastry in a chocolate shell.

Unquestionably, its popularity has prompted well-known worldwide corporations to produce mass-market versions. The phenomenon demonstrates the potency of the emirate's F&B innovation, resulting in worldwide stockouts and even a pistachio shortage.

4. More people are using food delivery services

The city's food delivery industry has quickly evolved into a gourmet experience thanks to modern platforms that link upscale and reasonably priced food establishments with a wide range of people who value convenience. Popular local platforms are growing up to 75% a year at a compound annual growth rate of

5–8%. As a result, the emirate has one of the highest rates of meal delivery penetration worldwide.

More than 228,000 delivery orders were completed by UAE restaurants in 2024 alone, indicating a robust demand driven by high disposable incomes and shifting consumer tastes that place a premium on variety, affordability, and health. Furthermore, technical advancements (such as AI customisation and autonomous delivery robots) and subscription models and loyalty programs are propelling the broader regional market forward.

5. Pop-ups and cloud kitchens draw new businesses

Cloud kitchens, pop-ups, and creative food concepts have become more popular due to seasonal demand at major events like Expo City Dubai and the Dubai Food Festival. The emirate has developed into a versatile, low-risk trial ground where chefs and global brands, including home-based cooks who collaborate with delivery platforms, can open temporary residency kitchens or delivery-only cooking areas before expanding.

6. Middle Eastern and Emirati culinary programs drive food tourism

Culinary tourism is now a major draw in the emirate, with fine-dining tours, desert meals under the stars, and Emirati cooking workshops featured in travel packages. Pairing food with travel creates new revenue streams and adds an upscale touch for tour operators and restaurateurs.

7. Influencer marketing boosts revenue and brand awareness

Social media has had a big impact on how customers behave in the city's F&B landscape.



When deciding where to eat, 70% of UAE diners look through social media, according to DET. In order to increase visibility, restaurants are working with local influencers, food bloggers, and tourism content producers.

8. Robust F&B logistics facilitate effective operations

Strong supply chains are becoming more and more necessary as the number of restaurants rises — 1,200 new licenses were granted in 2024 alone. Entities such as Gulfood, Transmed, and IFFCO provide the industry with tech-integrated operations, cold storage logistics, and imported commodities. For manufacturers, suppliers, and agri-tech start-ups exploring the Dubai business environment, this offers a plethora of prospects.

8 competitive advantages F&B entrepreneurs find compelling in Dubai's culinary scene



Read the accompanying article for more information.

Part II

Where do business travellers shop
and unwind in the city?





Recognised as both the world's premier shopping hub and a leading global exhibition centre, Dubai welcomed more than [18 million visitors](#) in 2024. Its retail destinations appeal not only to tourists but also provide valuable platforms for brands and entrepreneurs aiming to expand their reach.

The following spotlights ten retail and leisure hotspots that attract international visitors while offering strong potential for ventures in retail, hospitality, and related industries.

1. Dubai Mall

Holding the title of the most-visited destination globally, Dubai Mall attracts over [100 million guests](#) annually. Spanning more than 1.1 million square metres, it's less a "mall" and more, arguably, a self-contained city. One will find an entire world of flagship luxury boutiques sitting alongside global high-street brands, making it a retail playground for every budget.

Besides that, families flock to the Dubai Aquarium & Underwater Zoo, where a 10-million-litre tank teems with sharks, rays, and

10-million-litre tank teems with sharks, rays, and thousands of fish. Just a few steps away, the VR Park delivers immersive, adrenaline-pumping experiences that blend gaming with futuristic tech. Even the walkways are an attraction, offering direct access to the Burj Khalifa, the world's tallest building, and views of the famous Dubai Fountain's evening water shows.

For entrepreneurs exploring how to start a business in Dubai, the mall's steady, year-round footfall is a serious commercial advantage. It's a place where a short-term pop-up can generate international buzz, and a long-term store can reach customers from every continent in a single day. Whether a business leans toward luxury retail, experiential services, or innovative food concepts, Dubai Mall offers a ready-made stage with a truly global audience.

2. Mall of the Emirates

Home to Ski Dubai and a broad spectrum of fashion brands, this mall draws both residents and tourists seeking upscale experiences. SMEs planning a business setup in Dubai will find it a

prime location for targeting consumers with significant spending power. The blend of leisure attractions and high-end retail offers an effective base for establishing market presence.

3. Global Village

Seasonally open, Global Village offers a mix of shopping, cultural performances, and food from more than 90 nations in 30 pavilions. The theme park, which is ranked in the top [10% of tourist destinations worldwide](#), draws sizeable audiences every year. In fact, its [Season 29](#), which ended last May, saw 10.5 million visitors.

With pop-up retail and multicultural commerce, this location is great for SMEs looking to test new products, increase brand exposure, and take advantage of business incentives geared to assist projects related to [Dubai's tourism sector](#).

4. DIFC and City Walk

Professionals, families, and visitors seeking art galleries, good food, and upscale shopping are drawn to DIFC and City Walk. Given their prime location, consistent corporate foot traffic, and easy access to affluent residents, these places may be ideal for company owners who want to open a business in Dubai. In a crowded market, firms can also stand out by combining contemporary shopping with lively public areas.

5. Expo City Dubai

Rising from the legacy of Expo 2020, Expo City is now a vibrant district for innovation, events, and culture. Its striking architecture and landscaped public spaces host everything from international exhibitions to family-friendly festivals, making it a year-round destination for both leisure and business. Walking through its themed zones, one will find interactive pavilions, pop-up dining concepts, and cutting-edge showcases from global brands. For those setting

up a business in Dubai in sectors like event management, F&B, or experiential retail, Expo City offers a ready-made platform with an international audience and a reputation for forward-thinking ideas.

6. Dubai Marina

This waterfront lifestyle hub combines residential living with upscale shopping, yacht tours, and dining experiences. With a high level of tourist engagement, Dubai Marina has become a popular destination for restaurateurs and retailers. The business environment fosters experiential models and unique retail concepts.

7. The Outlet Village

Offering seasonal discounts on luxury brands, The Outlet Village draws both budget-conscious tourists and residents. For retail brands, the mall supports high-volume sales strategies and short-term activations. This is ideal for SMEs entering the UAE by capitalising on Dubai business incentives and temporary licenses.

8. Bluewaters Island

Anchored by Ain Dubai, Bluewaters Island combines leisure, entertainment, and premium retail in a compact, walkable space. Its growing status as a day-to-night destination attracts both short-stay tourists and longer-term visitors. For [Dubai SMEs in hospitality](#) and retail, the island's mid- to high-end positioning offers fertile ground for brand launches, seasonal pop-ups, and curated experiences tailored to a globally minded audience.

9. Jumeirah and Atlantis

These areas cater to high-net-worth individuals seeking convenience and exclusive products. As a result, they are well-suited to niche brands, specialty retailers, and service providers interested in starting their businesses in Dubai.

This environment allows entities to engage directly with a premium clientele and build strong brand recognition among international guests.

10. Gold Souk

Dubai's Gold Souk in Deira is one of the world's largest and most established gold markets. The area draws both tourists and professional buyers looking for jewellery, bullion, and precious stones. Retailers and traders doing business in Dubai often choose the Gold Souk for its strong reputation, transparent pricing and steady customer demand. Entrepreneurs exploring precious metals or luxury retail can take advantage of tax benefits and import efficiencies to serve both tourists and residents.

10 shopping and leisure destinations in Dubai for business-minded travellers



Read the accompanying article for more information.



Part III

The 7 must-visit heritage spots with business potential





As Dubai's tourism industry grows, Dubai Sustainable Tourism, an arm of the Department of Economy and Tourism, has placed a higher priority on conserving the city's rich legacy while fostering responsible tourism. With over [8 million visitors](#) in the initial five months of 2025, the field of cultural tourism proves to be both a magnet for travellers and a valuable opportunity for companies doing business in Dubai. The seven notable places listed below allow visitors to immerse themselves in the city's history while also providing SMBs in tourism, events, retail, and the creative industries with abundant opportunities.

1. Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood

One of the city's oldest quarters, Al Fahidi Historical Neighbourhood preserves the city's 19th-century character through its coral-clad walls, traditional wind towers, and narrow, shaded passageways. Strolling here feels like stepping into a living museum, with art galleries, small museums, and intimate cafés providing a calm, authentic counterpoint to the modern city. Cultural foundations and creative studios are increasingly drawn to its slower pace and historic charm.

The location is a real treasure that lets visitors learn about the history of the city. SMBs in design, local retail, and cultural consulting who want to set up a business in Dubai would find it ideal. Additionally, the district is perfect for tailored experience providers, event studios, and boutique hotels.

2. Dubai Creek

Dubai Creek, the city's historic lifeline, is teeming with activity — from traditional abra boat excursions to busy souks offering fabrics, jewellery, and spices. In addition to the immersive cultural shopping and heritage tours



that tourists love, businesses are discovering new opportunities here. Low entrance hurdles and strong tourist interest might be advantageous for operators that provide experiential retail, guided tours, or even small-scale food and beverage pop-ups. For Dubai SMEs in mobile catering, event planning, and travel, the locale has a lot of promise.

3. Desert Safaris

The desert safaris offer a blend of adventure and tradition, drawing millions of visitors each year. Beyond the dune bashing, camel rides, and falconry displays, guests enjoy Bedouin-inspired dining under the stars, accompanied by live music and dance performances. The experience showcases the UAE's cultural roots, subsequently delivering high-impact tourism appeal.

Outdoor caterers, cultural event planners, and

experiential tourism operators are seeing the safari landscape as a profitable venture. Photographic and culinary experiences, corporate retreats, and sustainable desert camps are just a few of the cross-sector opportunities available to individuals looking to start a business in Dubai.

4. Madinat Jumeirah

Madinat Jumeirah blends traditional Arabian design with modern luxury. Modelled on an ancient citadel, it features a maze-like souk, picturesque waterways, and premium hotels. Visitors enjoy a mix of cultural discovery and upscale leisure, with views of the iconic Burj Al Arab providing a dramatic backdrop.

Entrepreneurs engaged in boutique travel, event planning, or luxury retail have a captive audience here. This area of Dubai is perfect for setting up a business that focuses on high-end

cultural events or heritage-based retail goods because of the high volume of visitors, residents, and locals.

5. Dubai Opera

Located in Downtown Dubai, Dubai Opera is the city's premier performing arts venue, hosting everything from operas and ballets to concerts and film screenings. The dhow-shaped building is a landmark in itself, attracting both culture enthusiasts and corporate audiences. Its central location makes it a focal point for the city's growing creative scene.

The venue supports steady demand for event production, hospitality services, and stage technology. As the city's cultural calendar expands, it offers opportunities for international and local SMBs involved in creative industries, corporate events, and MICE tourism to establish a strong presence.

6. Museum of the Future

The Museum of the Future stands out for both its striking architecture and forward-looking exhibitions, which explore innovations in science, technology, and sustainability. Operated by the Dubai Future Foundation, it serves as an immersive platform for education and discovery. Since drawing visitors from around the world. Since its inauguration on February 22, 2022, the MOF has seen more than [4 million guests](#) from all over the world.

Apart from the tourism aspect, the museum serves as a catalyst for collaboration between tech start-ups, educators, and creative storytellers. It hosts workshops, innovation labs, and events that create openings for businesses in experience design, educational content, and interactive technology.

7. Hatta Heritage Village

Set in the foothills of the Hajar Mountains, Hatta Heritage Village offers a glimpse into traditional Emirati mountain life. Hiking, kayaking, and mountain biking are possible in the surrounding scenery, and the area's rural heritage is demonstrated by restored stone homes, defensive watchtowers, and agricultural displays.

From guided cultural hikes and glamping resorts to craft fairs and local culinary excursions, entrepreneurs exploring how to start a business in Dubai's outdoor or cultural sectors will find special chances there. The zone is expected to become the go-to spot for experience-driven, nature-focused tourism due to the government's investment in the [Hatta Development Plan](#).

Why Dubai's top cultural, heritage, and iconic attractions are great for business in 2025



Read the accompanying article for more information.

Part IV

The basics of setting up a business in Dubai



It's no news that the UAE is well-known for its unique combination of high visitor volumes, advanced infrastructure, and favourable investment regulations. Dubai, in particular, serves as a major tourism hub, attracting millions of travellers each year. This is supported by world-class airports, a wide range of hotels from budget to ultra-luxury, adventure activities for all ages, and an extensive events calendar.

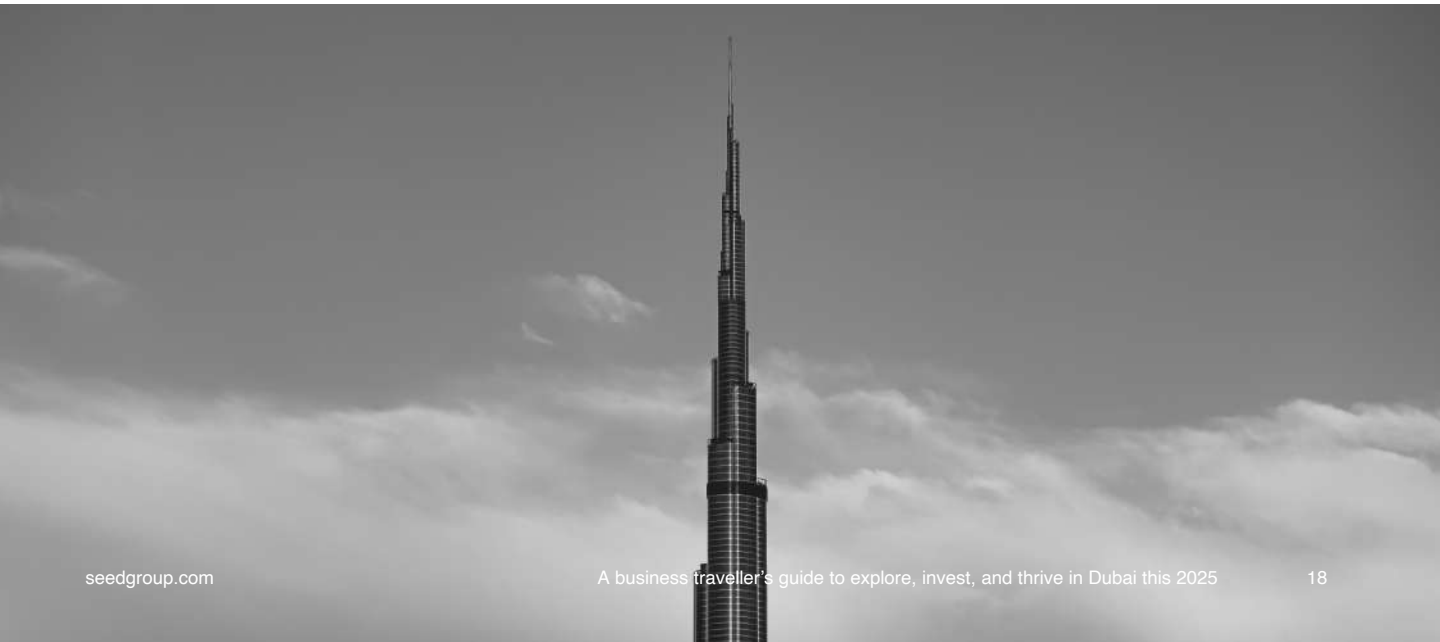
In addition to the attractions mentioned in this e-book, it's important to consider peak seasons such as New Year, Ramadan, Eid festivals, and major business events when entering the UAE's tourism market. These periods drive concentrated consumer activity and spending. Therefore, timing brand launches or promotions around these peak seasons can significantly impact success, turning a slow start into a strong foothold in the market.

That said, entering the UAE market is rarely a one-size-fits-all process. For most tourism-related activities — whether hospitality, retail, attractions, or travel services — free zones like the Dubai Airport Free Zone Authority (DAFZA) and Dubai Design District (d3) offer advantages

such as 100% ownership, zero corporate tax for a specified period, and streamlined licensing. Outside free zones, partnering with an esteemed local company like Seed Group remains a viable option, especially for entrepreneurs who want direct access to the wider domestic market. Understanding business incentives, visa reforms, and infrastructure investments will help you decide between setting up a business in Dubai independently or via collaboration.

Success in emirate's tourism space also relies on localisation. Global entrepreneurs should not simply replicate their home-market model; instead, they should integrate cultural awareness into service design, pricing, and marketing. It's essential to offer experiences that reflect Dubai's cosmopolitan identity while respecting local customs, particularly during Ramadan and other holy observances.

Building ties with hotels, event organisers, and transport operators can embed your business into the tourism value chain. By synchronising your market strategies with the city's Dubai business environment, companies can secure both steady seasonal revenue and long-term brand equity.





Is Dubai the ultimate destination for entrepreneurs?

The travel and tourism industry in the UAE continues to take on an important role in social and economic growth. According to the WTTC, carbon emissions from the sector were capped at 13.3% of total UAE emissions in 2023, confirming adherence to environmental objectives. It also generated AED30 billion in taxes, making up 5.4% of government revenue. Globally, the sector contributed AED40 trillion to GDP in 2024, accounting for 10% of the global economy.

By the end of 2025, a [forecast report by Statista](#) shows that the market will reach AED5 billion, with an annual growth rate of 6.65% until 2030, potentially hitting AED7 billion.

This e-book has explored Dubai as a booming business environment in addition to being a top leisure destination, emphasising its most popular hotels, malls, cultural landmarks, and

each attraction serves as a potential business opportunity. Hence, doing business in Dubai means gaining access to a large, easy-to-navigate, and profitable market, from F&B concepts within heritage sites to tech-run retail and hospitality services.

Additional information and resources



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