



THE BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
ABU DHABI  
A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL

# WELCOME TO ABU DHABI

2023-2024



# WELCOME TO THE BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL ABU DHABI

This book has been developed by parents and staff from our school.

We have put together a broad range of information to support both planning for your arrival in Abu Dhabi and for the early months as you settle in, so you and your family can start enjoying living here as soon as possible.

We have also included a section entitled “Transitions, what is the fuss about?”, which will help you understand the emotional stress associated with moving overseas. We do hope it helps!

The guide is divided into four sections:

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## PART ONE:

# INFORMATION ABOUT ABU DHABI

# PART ONE: INFORMATION ABOUT ABU DHABI

## A BRIEF GUIDE TO ABU DHABI

Abu Dhabi is the capital and the second most populous city of the United Arab Emirates. It is the largest of the UAE's seven emirates. Abu Dhabi City is situated on an island in the Arabian Gulf off the central western coast, while the majority of the city and Emirate reside on the mainland connected to the rest of the country.

Meaning 'Land of the Gazelle' in Arabic, Abu Dhabi was founded when a young antelope led a wandering tribe to fresh water, on an island with no more than 300 palm ('barasti') huts, a few coral buildings and the Ruler's fort. This simple island settlement has since been transformed into the modern, cosmopolitan city of Abu Dhabi and the high-rise capital of the United Arab Emirates. It is now a vibrant Middle Eastern city, and is wealthy, modern, safe and welcoming to expat residents and tourists.

It has a large expatriate population and a growing tourism industry, catering to mainly western visitors.

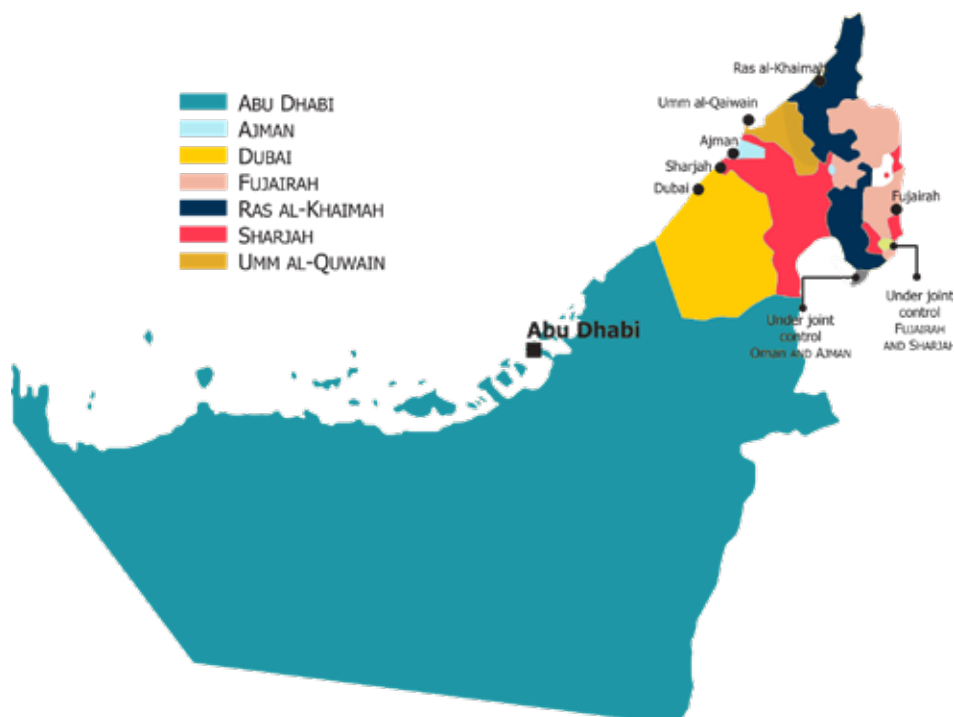
As a major transport hub, travel all over the world is convenient and relatively inexpensive.

## POPULATION

In 2023 Abu Dhabi had an estimated resident population of 1,566,999.

The working population consists of many different nationalities from all over the globe, including Asians, Africans, Europeans, and North and Latin Americans and workers from neighbouring Arab countries.

*Source: worldpopulationreview.com*



## TRANSPORTATION

### Driving

Driving in the UAE can be a little daunting at first. With many different nationalities on the roads, with varying driving standards and practices, it is advisable to be vigilant and expect the unexpected.

Many nationalities (see <https://tinyurl.com/chmette7> for a full list) can automatically transfer their driving license and obtain a UAE license by applying to the Drivers' License Department online at <https://tinyurl.com/y3jsepwj> with the following documents:

- Original driving licence (Holders of paper driving licenses must submit a letter from the consulate)
- Electronic eye test
- Original valid Emirates ID
- Legalised translation of the licence if it was not in English or Arabic

The cost of obtaining a UAE driving license is approximately AED 870.

If you do not have a driving license, or if your nationality is not one of those approved for a direct transfer, you will need to pass a local driving test (theory and practical).

### Rental cars

There are a lot of rent-a-car companies in Abu Dhabi, including some of the larger international companies such as Hertz, Dollar, Avis, Thrifty. They all provide long-term as well as short-term rentals.

### Dubai Toll System: Salik

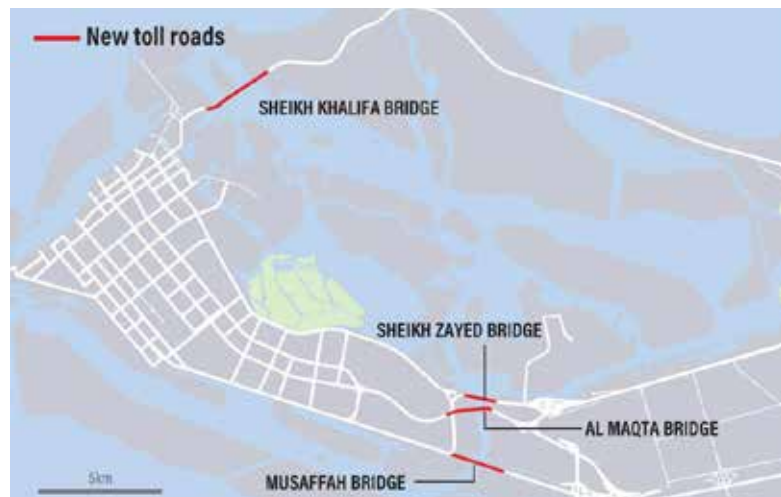
Salik is the automatic toll collection system for Dubai. If you are planning to visit Dubai in your own vehicle, you must ensure you have a Salik tag in your car. These can be purchased quite easily, either online or at main petrol stations on the way to Dubai. For more information visit: [www.customers.salik.ae/en](http://www.customers.salik.ae/en)

### Abu Dhabi Toll System

Abu Dhabi has a Toll Gate System. There are four toll gates in Abu Dhabi and they are located on the main bridges leading to Abu Dhabi City.

Peak hours are from Saturday to Thursday (7.00am – 9.00am and 5.00pm – 7.00pm).

No fees will be levied during off-peak hours, and on Fridays and official holidays.



### Traffic rules for drivers

Please see the main traffic offenses and their corresponding fines on the right.

Please note that the authorities have zero tolerance for drinking and driving, and the smallest level of alcohol in a person's bloodstream can result in jail time. Expats who have committed road offenses will also be unable to leave the UAE before they have paid their traffic fines.

Even though expats are likely to see other drivers ignore red lights and speed limits, there are cameras at many intersections and fines are high.

For a full list of fines go to: <https://tinyurl.com/2sa8jrpm>



# PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN ABU DHABI

## Buses

The Department of Transport offers modern buses with air-conditioning and disabled access. The buses serve the city of Abu Dhabi and its suburbs. Fares vary, depending on frequency and distance of travel. Passengers must purchase a bus pass before boarding. Buses to Dubai and Sharjah are also available.

## Taxis

A very popular way to get around in Abu Dhabi is by taxi. You can flag a taxi at the roadside or make an advance booking by phone or app.

Passengers can also order pink taxis or family taxis,

which come with a female driver.

Most drivers in Abu Dhabi speak good English. They are, however, more familiar with landmarks than addresses so, it always helps to mention nearby parks, banks, shopping malls or hotels when giving directions to your desired destination.

Although taxi fares have recently increased, it remains a reasonably cheap way of getting around the city.

You can estimate taxi fares using the following link:

<https://www.gobytaxi.com/asia/united-arab-emirates/abu-dhabi>

Note: Uber and Careem are not a cheaper alternative to standard taxis.

Taxi Service Operators	Contact Number
TransAD	600-535353
Al Ghazal Taxi	+971 2 444 7787
Al Arabia Taxi	+971 2 558 8099
Careem	via smartphone app
Uber	via smartphone app



## CLIMATE

Abu Dhabi has a hot desert climate. Sunny blue skies can be expected throughout the year. The months of June through September are generally extremely hot and humid with maximum temperatures averaging above 41 °C (106 °F). During this time, sandstorms occur intermittently, in some cases reducing visibility to a few metres.

The cooler season is from November to March, which ranges between moderately hot to mild. This period also sees dense fog on some days and a few days of rain. On average, January is the coolest month in the year, while August is the hottest. Since the Tropic of Cancer passes through the emirate, the southern part falls within the Tropics. However, despite the coolest month having a 18.8 °C (65.8 °F) average, its climate is far too dry to be classed as tropical.

Humidity can also be an issue, particularly in the evenings. The UAE is designed with all of this in mind though, and powerful air conditioning is everywhere – even cars have special 'gulf spec' a/c, to cope with the extreme heat. However, during the cooler months (November to April), an outdoor lifestyle can be enjoyed, and occasionally people even need to wear a jacket!

## LANGUAGE

Abu Dhabi is a melting pot of cultures. Around 80% of all residents are expats. As well as western expats, a large proportion of the population comes from the sub-continent and Asian countries. Therefore, as you would expect, while walking around the capital, you hear many different languages being spoken.

Arabic is of course the official language of the UAE, however English is widely spoken and understood. Signs and labels are generally printed in both Arabic and English.

Most Emirates speak English well, and communication is rarely an issue for English-speakers.

Making an effort to learn some Arabic phrases and greetings is always very well-received and comes as a surprise to locals. Here are some examples of useful Arabic words and phrases to get you started:

English Words and Phrases	Arabic
Hello	Salam or Marhaba
How are you?	Kaif al hal
Greetings	Assalam' alaykum
Goodbye	Ma'assalama
Yes	Na'am
No	La
Thank you	Shukran
Excuse me	Law samaht (to a man)
Excuse me	Law samahti (to a woman)
Do you speak English?	Hal tatakalam al Engleziah?
Please	Min fadlak
I don't know	La aaref



## RELIGION

Islam is the official religion in the United Arab Emirates and the basis of the country's culture, custom and lifestyle including the constitution and political system. All locals are Muslim, and it is also the most prevalent religion among the general population. The country's constitution has always supported freedom of religion which means the country generally respects and accepts religions other than Islam.

The call to prayer (Adan) can be heard across the UAE five times a day. It is common to see people praying in public, even by the side of the road sometimes. Mosques can be found almost everywhere, and prayer rooms are provided in most establishments (schools, shopping malls, airports, hospitals etc.).

Friday is the sixth day of the Islamic week and the first day of the weekend. It is the day Muslims (particularly men) gather for special prayers in the early afternoon.

All residents (whatever their religion) enjoy the benefit of several Islamic public holidays during the year, commemorating aspects of the religion. Please note these are subject to moon sightings and as such may be advised last minute.

Although the active promotion of other religions is not allowed, you will see temples, churches and chapels around Abu Dhabi.

## RAMADAN

The Holy Month of Ramadan is a very special time for Muslims. During this time (which is during March/April in 2024), Muslims are required to abstain from eating, drinking and smoking during daylight hours. Live music and dancing are also forbidden.

As a gesture of courtesy and respect, non-Muslims are expected to refrain from eating, drinking and smoking in public. This applies to everyone with the exception of pregnant and nursing women and young children.

Many food and drink outlets are closed completely during the day but come alive at night and then stay open until the early hours of the morning. Those that remain open during the day may be screened off from public view.

Fasts are broken with Iftar, at sunset. This meal can be enjoyed by all members of the community and is often a time when a Muslim friend or acquaintance may reach out to you and invite you to join them to break their fast. It is polite to always accept these invitations.

The working day is shorter during the month of Ramadan.

## PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

We are accorded a generous number of public holidays every year in the UAE. The following are the UAE's official annual public holidays:

Prophet Muhammad's Birthday - 29th September 2023  
Commemoration Day - 1st December 2023  
UAE National Day - 2nd/3rd December 2023  
Gregorian New Year's Day - 1st January 2024  
Eid Al Fitr\* - 8-9th April 2024  
Arafat Day\* - 15th June 2024  
Eid Al Adha\* - 17-18th June 2024  
Hijri New Year's Day\* - 7th July 2024

*\*The timing of Islamic holidays is subject to moon sighting and may vary, the actual date of the holiday will be confirmed by the school following an official announcement by the government.*

## NATIONAL DRESS

Most Emirates wear their national dress in public, though may, at home, wear western clothes.

### Women

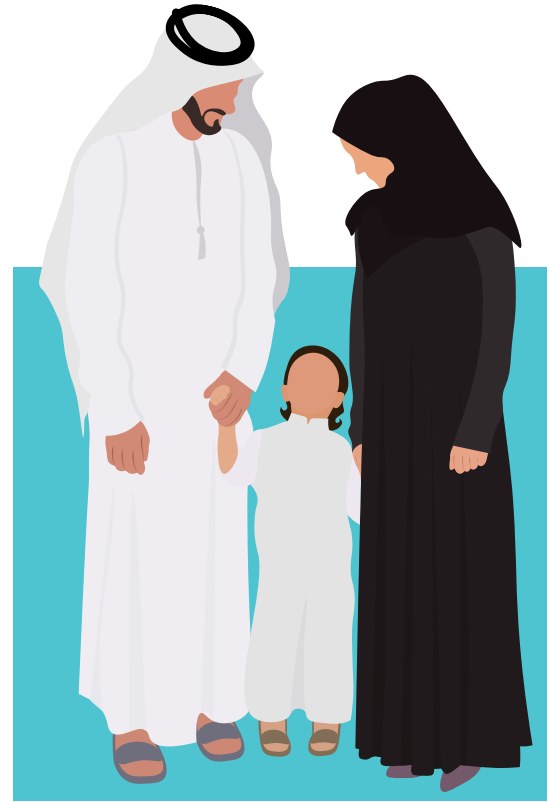
Emirate Women wear a black robe, designed to protect their modesty, called an 'abaya' with a head scarf called a 'shayla'.

Typically, Emirate women are very style-conscious and the abaya has become more than just a plain black robe over the last few years, often embellished with beads or crystals.

Although less common among younger Emirates, some more traditional (and often older) Arab women wear a face covering called a 'burka'.

### Men

Emirate men wear a white, full length robe called a 'kandoura', with a white or white and red headdress called a 'ghutra' and a twisted black rope-like coil, the 'agal'.



## APPROPRIATE ATTIRE FOR EXPATS

Abu Dhabi is generally conservative but tolerant when it comes to dress code. The attitude to clothing is relaxed, but visitors (both men and women) are advised not to wear excessively revealing clothing in public places, as a sign of respect for local culture and customs.

Due to the UAE's climate, lightweight summer clothing is suitable for most of the year (summer, spring and autumn). A light sweater or cardigan is handy when visiting a shopping mall, cinema, hotel or restaurant where the temperature might be kept low to counter the outdoor heat. Slightly warmer clothes or extra layers are needed for the short winter season, especially in the evening and early morning.

Here are some general guidelines:

- Shorts and skirts must be of an appropriate length (avoid mini-skirts and short shorts).
- Shoulders should not be exposed (avoid strapless and sleeveless tops).
- Clothing should also not be transparent, low cut, or display a slogan or image that may be potentially offensive.

The exceptions to these rules are the beach and water parks. Here standard swim wear (including bikinis) is perfectly acceptable. However, you must take care to properly cover up when leaving these places.

Most nightclubs require their guests not to wear shorts, caps or sport shoes on their premises. Unless otherwise indicated, official events usually require non-locals to wear formal dress; a suit and tie for men and an evening dress for women.

When visiting an official building (Immigration, driving license offices, hospitals), women are required to dress more conservatively, ensuring that their shoulders and knees are covered.

## WOMEN

Although it may appear from the outside that Emirate women lead restricted lives, in fact the UAE is one of the most liberal and progressive Muslim countries.

In the UAE women are allowed to drive, travel, study, vote and pursue their own interests and hobbies. The UAE has female pilots, scientists and a higher proportion of women in higher education than in the UK, USA and Australia.

It's true that unmarried men and women tend not to mix. Even at weddings, Emirate women hold separate celebrations to men. Also, you may find that Emirate women prefer not to shake the hand of men and vice versa. Do not be offended, as this is part of the Emirate culture.

It is also very common for women to have separate waiting areas (at hospitals, banks, government offices, etc.) and often they are served before men.

However, expatriate women enjoy all of the freedoms that they would back home – although they may need a 'certificate of non-objection' from their husband or father from time to time (i.e. to get a driving license or work).

## CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS

Some aspects of life in the UAE are very different to other parts of the world.

### Greetings

Man greeting man – A handshake is very common. Greetings are often long and enthusiastic. A brief greeting may be seen as dismissive or rude.

Woman greeting woman – A handshake is common, though friends and family usually kiss on the left cheek three times.

Man greeting woman – There is little to no touching between men and women during greetings in public. Women may extend a sleeve-covered wrist or hand to be shaken. Always wait for the woman to initiate physical contact.

### Social Etiquette

Physical interaction between men and women is very conservative, though of course a smile is universally accepted and welcomed.

The amount of physical space between people of the same sex is often less than you may consider to be 'normal' – men embracing and holding hands is a sign of friendship and affection.

Offering objects with the left hand should be avoided as culturally this hand is seen as being impure or unclean.

You should not sit with your legs crossed or showing the sole of your shoe as this is considered to be a derogatory gesture.

### Expressions

The expression 'Insh Allah' (God willing) is very common. It can be used to negate any form of responsibility over the outcome of a situation or can also be used to express hope for a positive outcome.

## Photography

Photos of people must not be taken or posted without the subject's consent.

## Social media:

Posting photographs – you may not post photographs of anyone without their consent.  
Privacy and confidentiality – you may not publicly disclose details about someone's private life, without their consent.

Defamatory statements – any kind of false accusation or criticism (whether overt or implied) of the state, government, religion or another person must be avoided, and may amount to a criminal offence and result in legal action if the complaint is found to be valid and serious.

## Relationships and public displays of affection:

Displays of affection towards someone that you are not married to (apart from children) are illegal. Anything beyond hand-holding is considered to be disrespectful.

## Modesty / decency:

As previously mentioned in this guide, everyone must dress modestly. Strict standards of modesty and decency are also applied to printed and visual media.





PART TWO:

BEFORE YOU LEAVE YOUR HOME  
COUNTRY

## VISAS\*

Visa requirements for expats living and working in Abu Dhabi are considerably less intensive than in some other Middle Eastern countries. The UAE attempts to make the process of getting a visa as simple as possible, and there are plenty of agencies that can help facilitate this.

Most expats will be moving to Abu Dhabi under the condition of an already established residency visa, either through employment sponsorship or family sponsorship. Without this document, it's difficult to accomplish anything in the UAE.

### Tourist visas for Abu Dhabi\*

Before making plans to travel to the UAE, visitors should find out whether they need to arrange a visit visa beforehand. Nationals of countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) or those from a designated list of countries do not need to organise a visa before arriving in the country; the UK, the USA, and most Western European and Pacific Rim countries appear on this list, but India and Pakistan do not.

Those who do need a visit visa will need the sponsorship of a UAE national, resident or a UAE-based company such as a hotel or airline.

Visit visas are granted to those who are coming on holiday, family visits or long-term business and can easily be applied for online through:

[emirates.com](http://emirates.com).

\* Please note the picture is for reference only - resident visas are now electronic and can be found in the UAE ICP App.

### Residence visas for Abu Dhabi\*

Expats who want to obtain a residence visa for Abu Dhabi will need to either be sponsored by an employer, which allows for the right to work and live in the UAE, or by a family member, which only allows for the right to live in the UAE.

\*Please check government website for latest information regarding entry and exit restrictions.



## WHAT TO BRING

The school does not recommend any one particular shipping company. There are tax and custom responsibilities when moving personal belongings to the UAE. For full details on customs and import tax go to:

<https://u.ae/en/information-and-services/finance-and-investment/clearing-the-customs-and-paying-customs-duty>

Most items can easily be found in the UAE, though you may not find some brands you are used to. The most important things to have with you are personal documentation such as birth certificates, marriage certificates, vaccination records etc. These should be kept with you when you fly to Abu Dhabi.

### Prescription drugs

Some drugs that in other countries are only distributed with a prescription, are freely available over the counter in the UAE. However, there are other medications which may be readily available in some countries but are tightly controlled in the UAE. If you need to bring medicines with you, it is worth checking:

<https://tinyurl.com/5n97jpms>

All 'recreational' drugs and narcotics are strictly forbidden, with a zero-tolerance policy.

### Baggage

Baggage allowances will differ according to the airline and ticket class, so please check before you fly.

## PETS

To minimise red tape and to better acquaint yourself with principles of pet ownership in a foreign country, it is best to hire a pet relocation service. These professionals are prepared to deal with any bureaucracy, as well as to advise you on what to expect after arrival. For more information go to:

[www.expatarrivals.com/article/moving-pets-to-the-uae](http://www.expatarrivals.com/article/moving-pets-to-the-uae)





## PART THREE: SETTLING IN



## CURRENCY

The Dirham (also known as Emirate Dirham) is the official currency of the United Arab Emirates. It is officially abbreviated as AED but other abbreviations also exist (“DH” or “DHS”). Bank notes are available in the following denominations: AED 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1000. They are printed in Arabic on one side, and English on the other.

The UAE coins are called “Fils”. The AED 0.05, 0.10 denominations are very small and are rarely used. The larger denominations of AED 0.25 and 0.50 are commonly used.

There are some limitations on the import of currency into the country. Cash exceeding AED 40,000 or its equivalent in foreign currency must be declared to airport customs control upon entry.

## BANKING

There are several different banks available in Abu Dhabi, each with their rules and characteristics. Your first step should be to decide whether a current, savings or fixed deposit account is required. Current accounts are for everyday banking, savings are for putting money aside and gaining interest on it and fixed deposits are for long-term savings with higher returns. We recommend comparing different banks and what they offer.

A UAE residence visa will allow you to open a personal or business bank account. Expats without a residence visa can only open a saving account, but many banks will issue an ATM card that allows you to withdraw money.

### Currency Transfers and Exchange

#### Transferring money

Most expats plan to benefit from the lack of income tax on their salaries by saving money during their stay in Abu Dhabi and transferring this money back home at regular intervals.

There are no restrictions on the amounts that can be transferred out of the country.

Transfers can be made either via banks or specialised money transfer companies, which can be found throughout Abu Dhabi, in shopping malls and airports. Many transactions can also be done online or over the phone.

It’s worth noting that transfer fees, exchange rates and the length of time the transaction may take can vary enormously depending on which company or bank arranges the transfer for you, so it’s worth shopping around.

International Money Transfer Companies	Locations
Al Ansari Exchange	Available in most malls
Western Union	<a href="http://www.westernunion.com">www.westernunion.com</a>
HiFX Money Transfer	<a href="http://www.hifx.com">www.hifx.com</a>
Money Corp	<a href="http://www.moneycorp.com">www.moneycorp.com</a>

### Currency Exchange

There are also many options for exchanging currencies (essential given the variety of nationalities living in Abu Dhabi). Certain banks also allow you to withdraw USD and GBP bank notes from ATMs.

Credit cards, such as MasterCard, Visa and American Express, are widely accepted in the UAE, as are traveller’s cheques. Travellers are advised to carry traveller’s cheques in either US Dollar or UK Pounds, to avoid additional exchange rate charges.

Note : This information is correct at the time of research (October 2021) and is not intended to serve as financial advice.



## HEALTHCARE FACILITIES IN ABU DHABI

Both public and private healthcare facilities are available in Abu Dhabi, and the level of care and comfort is highly regarded across the board.

An expats specific health insurance coverage dictates in which hospitals they can receive treatment.

Doctors in Abu Dhabi are generally thought to be accessible, and service is prompt. For the most part, all health workers speak English, though some are more proficient than others. Many health workers have received their education abroad, and it is not unusual for expats to seek out professionals with accreditation from their home country.

High prices accompany healthcare in Abu Dhabi, but all expats are legally bound to have health insurance, which usually covers most of the costs. Where there are exceptions to this rule, expats will only have to finance a small co-payment.



## ACCOMMODATION

Here are some popular areas to live in Abu Dhabi for families:

**Raha Beach area** – Al Zeina, Al Muneera and Al Bandar. Al Zeina and Al Muneera have similar facilities while Al Bandar has a Marina instead of a beach.

**Al Zeina** - features apartments, penthouses, townhouses and villas. It caters to a range of budgets. Al Zeina has 6 pools and gyms, a playground as well as a private beach. It is popular with families so there is usually someone for children to play with. It is also car-free internally with all parking underground – making it pedestrian-friendly. Al Zeina also has a medical centre, chemist, a couple of restaurants and a Waitrose supermarket. Al Zeina is under the flight path, so you may need to watch which block and floor level you choose if you are sensitive to noise. Families love it as it many say it feels like a resort.

**Al Muneera** – similar to Al Zeina with a combination of villas, townhouses and apartments and a private beach. Has several pools, gyms and playgrounds. This compound features more restaurants including a Jones the Grocer, Leopolds of London and La Brioche (amongst others). There is a Carrefour supermarket and mini-market.

**Al Bandar** – similar facilities to Al Muneera and Al Zeina but with a Marina instead of a beach. Less popular with families than Al Zeina or Al Muneera and more expensive. Has a number of restaurants and cafes as well as a small Spinneys supermarket.

**Raha Gardens** – a very large villa compound consisting of several communities with a shared pool and gym and small mall with a small supermarket in the centre. The pool and gym facilities are part of the shopping complex so not necessarily walking distance from all villas. Some of the villas also have small private pools. Each community has 1 or more playgrounds all walking distance from villas.

**Al Forsan** – a fairly new compound with good feedback so far. Within the complex it has a large Spinneys supermarket, food outlets, indoor play centre and small shops. There are shared pool and gym facilities and play areas.

**The Al Rayanna compound** - is in Khalifa City A, near Al Forsan Sports complex. It is apartment-style living (1-3 Bedroom) and has nice facilities – great pools, gym, playgrounds and basketball area. It also has a supermarket. Many apartments overlook Abu Dhabi Golf course.

**Al Reef** – again, very popular with families. It is also nice and close to all the facilities on Yas Island – Yas mall, Waterworld, Ferrari world. There are 4 villages (Arabian, Desert, Mediterranean and Contemporary) in Al Reef, along with the Downtown area and shops/cafes. They are all essentially the same houses but with different facades. Each village has a shared pool and gym and playgrounds. The 5-bed villas also have a small private pool. Al Reef is quite good value-for-money. Downtown Al Reef has a large supermarket, medical centre, pharmacies, salons, café's and food options. Great location if you need to travel to Dubai often due to ease of access to motorways.



**Mohammad Bin Zayed City (MBZ)** - Often here you get private stand-alone villas or small compounds, so it may not have the same level of community that you might get in one of the larger compounds. Some have pools but many do not. Good value for money and is an up-and-coming area.

**Sas Al Nakeel (SAS)** – Another very popular compound with families. It is one of the older ones though so internal fittings of the villas can be a bit dated. The compound features a large pool and gym, function hall, children’s playground, as well as a small Spinneys supermarket, Café, hair & beauty salon and chemist.

**Khalifa City A** – close to Al Raha Gardens area. Similar to MBZ area, these are private stand-alone villas or small compounds so will not have that same level of community/outside living space that you might get in one of the actual compounds. Some have pools but many do not.

**Mangrove Village** – Popular due to ease of transport options into the city. A range of 4 and 5 bedroom villas with a good standard of fittings. Some 5 bedroom villas have their own pool. The compound features an indoor and outdoor pool, small beach and football pitch, children’s playgrounds, gym, basketball court, tennis court, café and children’s nursery plus occasional care centre and play centre. There is a small Spinneys supermarket at the complex.

**Seashores village** – next door to Mangrove Village. Features two pools, gym, tennis and basketball courts, squash courts, football pitch, children’s playground and small mini-market. A little less expensive than Mangrove Village.

**Rihan Heights** – Next to Zayed Sports City, so can walk down to it. Lovely apartments (1-3 bedroom and penthouses. Very well maintained with great facilities. Large pool, shared gym facilities, playground and recreation room. There is a café and small Spinney’s supermarket. Many families have their sport activities here such as Harlequins rugby, football, basketball, tennis, and 2 popular fitness centres. There are also food outlets, a bowling centre and ice rink at ZSC.



## ALCOHOL

Alcoholic drinks are readily available in certain licensed hotels, restaurants and bars. Licensed shops also sell alcohol for consumption at home. There is no requirement to hold an alcohol license in Abu Dhabi in order to purchase it. This may not be the case in other Emirates and it is an offence to transport alcohol without a license.

It is also an offence to be intoxicated in public.

### General Rules

Alcohol consumption in the UAE is only permitted in certain designated areas, such as licensed restaurants and bars attached to hotels.

When it comes to drink driving, there is a zero-tolerance policy. Anyone caught driving under the influence of alcohol can face a lengthy jail sentence, a fine, deportation or confiscation of their vehicle.



## COST OF LIVING

### Groceries

Abu Dhabi has a vast range of shops to suit a range of budgets, from local markets to high end supermarkets. Many items are imported, so cost more than you may be used to paying, however there is usually a local equivalent, which will cost much less. [www.luluwebstore.com](http://www.luluwebstore.com) will give you an idea of prices for individual items and offers an online grocery shopping and delivery service. There are several markets within Abu Dhabi (Mina Port and Mushriff Mall) where cheaper fresh groceries can be bought.

### Fuel

Petrol is significantly cheaper in the UAE than most other parts of the world. Prices are fixed by ADNOC (Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, who is the sole distributor). At the time of writing (July 2023) the cost of 1 litre of petrol is around 3.82AED.

### Utilities

#### Estimate of costs per apartment

Please note that these may change depending on your actual consumption and changes to utility tariffs.

	1 bed	2 bed	3 bed
Electricity	50 AED	150 AED	170 AED
Water	45 AED	80 AED	130 AED
A/C	100 AED	300 AED	450 AED
Municipality tax	350 AED	400 AED	450 AED
Total	545 AED	930 AED	1200 AED

Note: estimated utility costs as of July 2023

### Tax

The UAE can no longer be considered to be 'tax-free'. Although there is no income tax, VAT was introduced in January 2018 and there are a number of other applicable taxes (municipality tax, tourism tax, alcohol sales tax).

## WAYS OF COMMUNICATION

Keeping in contact with friends and family outside the UAE is easy. Here are the most popular ways of staying in touch:

- [Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter](#) (a degree of caution must be exercised when using social media in the UAE. Please refer to the section on cultural social awareness)
- [WhatsApp](#) (instant messaging but not calls)
- [Video messaging](#) (video calls, and instant messaging using the Bottim app)
- [Mobile phone](#) (many packages offer international calls and texts at reasonable rates)
- [Post](#) (there is no home delivery postal service, but PO boxes can be rented in post offices to enable you to receive 'snail mail' if required. Mail can be posted at post offices).

## PRE-SCHOOL CHILDCARE

If you are moving to Abu Dhabi with a young family, particularly if both parents are working, understandably, you will be anxious to know what is on offer in terms of childcare.

There are two main options for childcare:

1. Nurseries
2. Nannies

### Nurseries

There are many nurseries across Abu Dhabi, catering to varying budgets and nationalities. Some have options to drop off early (7.00am) and pick up late (after 4.00pm), and some will also offer transport to and from home.

We recommend that you visit several nurseries before committing to one, as standards and facilities vary enormously according to the location, facilities and training of staff.

### Nannies

Hiring a nanny (who either lives with you, or not) is an option that many expats prefer. Several agencies provide pre-vetted nannies and childcare can be arranged on an hourly, weekly or monthly basis. It is also possible to employ a nanny directly and sponsor them (as you would a dependent).



## RECREATION

Aside from the endless food and shopping related activities, there's a lot to do in Abu Dhabi and neighbouring Dubai.

### Abu Dhabi

#### For families:

- Yas Waterworld (water park)
- Ferrari World (indoor theme park)
- Warner Brothers (indoor theme park)
- Sea World (Marine Life Theme Park)
- The National Aquarium (largest aquarium in the Middle East)
- Yas Marina Circuit (cycling, go-carting, driving)
- Bounce, Marina Mall (trampolining)
- Fun Worx, Yas Mall (soft play and other children's activities)
- Emirates Zoo
- Adventure HQ, Dalma Mall (climbing, skate park, trampolining, BMX Little World Discovery Centre (Galleria Mall)  
(please see the 'Yalla' guide for an extensive list of children's activities, including swimming lessons and playgroups)

#### Cultural Activities:

- Arabian Nights Village (desert safari)
- Heritage Village (Breakwater, near Marina Mall)
- Sheikh Zayed Grand Mosque
- Abu Dhabi Theatre (near Marina Mall)
- Camel racing (Al Wathba Camel racing track)
- Al Ain Souq

#### Nature:

- Beaches: Corniche, Al Bateen, Saadiyat, Yas Beach, Al Hudayriat
- Al Wathba wetlands nature reserve
- Mangroves National Park
- The Falcon Hospital

#### Sports:

- Water sports (Eastern Mangroves (dragon boating, kayaking, paddle boarding, sailing)
- Golf (Abu Dhabi Golf Club, Yas Links Golf Club)
- Wakeboarding, horse riding, paintball, go-karting, archery, shooting (Al Forsan Sports Resort)
- Bowling, tennis, ice skating, roller derby, netball (Zayed Sports City)
- Rugby (Abu Dhabi Saracens, Al Ghazal Golf Club)
- Football (The Dome, Al Rawdhat)
- Jetskiing (Al Maqta area)
- Cycling (al Wathba circuit, Yas Marina circuit and Al Raha)
- Cricket (Sheikh Zayed Stadium)
- Yoga (The Hot House, Al Zeina, The Room, Zayed Sports City)
- Clymb, the world's tallest indoor climbing wall (Yas Island)

ABU DHABI



DUBAI



## Dubai

- Dubai Aquarium (Dubai Mall)
- Atlantis (aquarium and water park)
- Wild Wadi (water park)
- Ski Dubai (Mall of the Emirates)
- Sky Dive Dubai
- Legoland Dubai
- Motiongate Dubai (theme park)
- IMG Worlds of Adventure (theme park)
- Global Village (seasonal funfair, world food and world shopping)
- Dubai Creek (souq - fabric, spices, gold)

## FURTHER RESOURCES

There are several publications, websites, blogs, Facebook pages and apps that may make settling into life in Abu Dhabi a little bit quicker and easier.

### Local press

The National (newspaper) [www.thenational.ae](http://www.thenational.ae)

Khaleej Times (newspaper) [www.khaleejtimes.com](http://www.khaleejtimes.com)

Time Out guide (monthly/quarterly entertainment guide) [www.timeout.com](http://www.timeout.com)

Yalla (free quarterly guide for families) [www.yallabudhabi.ae](http://www.yallabudhabi.ae)

### Websites and blogs

Expat Woman: [www.expatswoman.com](http://www.expatswoman.com)

Expat Exchange: [www.expatexchange.com/uae](http://www.expatexchange.com/uae)

Arabian Notes: [www.arabiannotes.com](http://www.arabiannotes.com)

Abu Dhabi Adventures: [www.reneestoll.blogspot.ae](http://www.reneestoll.blogspot.ae)

### Facebook pages

Abu Dhabi Q&A (general advice on life in AD)

Abu Dhabi Marketplace (buying and selling page)

Kids activities in Abu Dhabi (organised family activities)

Best Bites Abu Dhabi (restaurant reviews and discounts)

Abu Dhabi Women's Group (recommendations and general advice)

Most communities (i.e. Al Reef, Al Reem also have their own community Facebook page)

### Apps

The Entertainer (buy-one-get-one-free deals for food, entertainment, beauty)

Waze (GPS, navigation, maps and traffic information)

Abu Dhabi Taxi (bookings and fares)

Flight Aware (flight tracking app)

Talabat (for ordering takeaway food and deliveries)

XE Foreign Exchange (to send your savings back home)

## EMERGENCY TELEPHONE NUMBERS

Abu Dhabi has a very low crime rate, it has been ranked as one of the safest places to live globally.

Abu Dhabi Police has effective law enforcement and emergency procedures. Local police officers are also extremely courteous and helpful to visitors and residents alike.

In case of emergency please call the following toll-free numbers:

Emergency, Safety and Police Services	
999	Police
997	Fire Emergency
998	Ambulance Services
999	Emergency Helicopter Service
996	Coast Guard
800 72233	Saaed
800 2332	Water and Electricity Emergency

These services ensure that residents and visitors receive appropriate and efficient support from police and emergency services in the event of any incident affecting your safety or well-being.

Other useful emergency contacts are:

Directory Services	
181	Etisalat
155	Du

Dialing Codes	
00971	Country Code
02	Abu Dhabi
04	Dubai

Hospitals	
02 4446655	Mediclinic (Airport Road)
02 5085555	Burjeel Hospital
800900600	Medeor Hospital
8001122	NMC Royal Hospital
02 6149999	Danat Al Emarat





## PART FOUR: TRANSITIONS

The account below is based on an article entitled “Transition Programming in International Schools:

“An Emergent Mandate” by Barbara F. Schaetti (originally published in 1996, by the Association for the Advancement of International Education), was derived from a model of transition by the late David Pollock<sup>2</sup>. It has been included in this guide to help parents gain an understanding of the emotional challenges that may be experienced when moving internationally.

Student mobility is a defining characteristic of most international schools. It is not uncommon for 30% of any given student population to turn over every year. While faculty and staff mobility may be less extensive, regular turnover is not unusual.

Here at The British International School Abu Dhabi, we are accustomed to serving internationally-mobile families.

Children who move internationally because of a parent’s occupation are now known as Third Culture Kids (TCKs). Cross Culture Kids (CCKs) are children who are living or studying in environment where there is strong cultural diversity and where international mobility is common.

Part of the transition process entails understanding about Culture Shock. Culture shock can be defined as the feeling of disorientation as one moves from a familiar cultural environment to a different cultural environment. There are many symptoms and signs of culture shock that can set in after the initial ‘honeymoon’ period when the new setting is interesting, unusual, exciting, and can start two-to-six months after arrival.



## THE PROCESS OF TRANSITIONS

### Phase 1: Involvement

People who are involved in their community have a sense of belonging. They are perceived by others as being part of a group, with a reputation—for good or ill—and a social/professional position. They are known by others and they in turn know the people around them: histories, weaknesses, strengths. They have a similar knowledge about the community itself. They know where to look for the first flowers in spring, where to go to get their shoes fixed, multiple ways to get from point A to point B depending on the weather or traffic conditions.

As an adult global nomad put it to me after living in a rural community for thirteen years, being involved means ‘everyone knows you for 50 miles around and 50 years back.’

People in the involved phase typically present themselves to others as committed to their community, responsible and responsive. Their internal experience is one of intimacy. They feel secure, confirmed by the world around them in who they are. While they may also, of course, feel confined and claustrophobic, they nonetheless know what is expected of them without question.

The involvement phase means people’s time orientation is to the present. Those in this phase are not thinking about where they have come from nor are they thinking about where they are going. Although they of course think about the past and the future, their primary orientation is in terms of what is going on now.

The experience of involvement typically requires that a person spend time in a given geographic location. It’s important to remember that multi-mover students and their families may not have a recent experience of this phase of the transition experience. The well-known 3-year expatriate cycle does not really allow for it: the first year you’re in the confusion of arrival, the second year you’re beginning to figure out how things work, the third year—just as you’re becoming involved—you get transferred on.

For some, a transfer can be a big relief. International school students are quick to say that one advantage of moving is that you can re-invent yourself in your new location. Don’t like the reputation you have?—change it at your next school. Want to start fresh?—wait for that next international transfer.

Of course, the flip side of this is also true: do like the reputation you’ve worked hard to build, now begin all over again from the bottom up. A multi-mover non-salaried spouse, having at the time lived in one place for several years, told me how she had finally been able to build a reputation in the community such that she was elected to the board of her children’s school. At last here was a position which she could put directly on her c.v. (resume), a credible position with status (albeit volunteer). Unlike other expatriate spouse volunteer positions, she would not have to search for ways to legitimise its professional relevance to hoped-for future employers. This multi-mover, finally re-involved in her community after their last transfer, came home one day to learn that her husband had been transferred yet again. There she was, facing loss of reputation, loss of position, loss of being known and of knowing others. Time to start over—again.

## Phase 2: Leaving

When people learn that they are about to be transferred, their time orientation suddenly shifts from the present to the future—where are we going, what will it be like, will I fit in...?

People in the leaving phase of transition are typically (and hopefully) perceived by others in celebratory fashion. Friends pay them a lot of attention, ask a lot of questions about where they are going and when. It's a time of recognition, of farewell parties and of bringing closure to relationships and activities.

Inevitably, however, one's social posture necessarily becomes distant. In order to leave, one must loosen ties, let go of roles, disengage. In order to transplant a plant, one has to pull up its roots. Just as when transplanting a plant, however, a person's roots must be carefully disengaged; they will otherwise be torn and damaged and not be able to take firm hold again in the new location.

While those in the leaving phase of a transition must disengage from people and activities being left behind, so too must those remaining disengage from people leaving. This can lead, on everyone's part, to feelings of rejection and resentment. A child or adolescent—or indeed an adult—may understand when friends plan future activities and don't include them, but it hurts nonetheless.

International school teachers often report another dimension to disengagement. It's common to see students creating conflict and rousing anger with one another as a way to ease the sense of loss from an impending transfer. For some reason humans seem to think it's easier to leave a friend when we're angry with him or her than otherwise.

Unfinished business goes with us, however. Three months later, six months later, the regret over harsh words once spoken can very much impede a person's ability to settle into a new community. Just when it seems least worth our effort—after all, we'll never see this other person again—is when it's most important to reconcile differences.

Leaving, one's own or a friend's, is a time fraught with emotion. One common response is to deny uncomfortable feelings. (There is a bumper sticker in the United States which reads "denial is not a river in Egypt".) I asked a group of secondary school students with whom I worked recently what skills they or those they knew had gained from moving internationally. One young man replied, "how not to feel feelings". The other students laughed with him, but everyone in that room knew the truth of what he said. For multi-movers especially, not feeling feelings can become a survival skill. So can disengaging from all academic and social roles immediately upon learning of a transfer.

While people leaving must disengage, they must do so in a timely fashion: neither too late nor too early.



### Transition Phase 3: Transition

When people find themselves without status, unknown and unknowing. They have special knowledge—such as where to go to get shoes fixed in Copenhagen—which is totally without use in Tokyo. Their internal experience is typically one of chaos and isolation. The whole world seems turned upside down, often right on top of them. Time orientation for people in this phase is typically to the future: how will this situation resolve itself, will it ever end.

The transition phase is a time of self-centeredness. People in this phase necessarily think first and foremost of themselves. Despite all good intentions, parents may be less emotionally available to their children during this time and certainly the reverse is true. At the same time, just when people may most want to isolate, they must self-initiate: get up, get out, meet others, keep busy. It's typically a time of psychological anxiety. There's often a loss of self-esteem as the reality sinks in that you truly are statusless and unknown by others.

The experience of this phase as chaotic may be exacerbated by being on "home leave," visiting friends and family and favourite places, living in hotels or other people's homes, rather than being in one's own domain. The loss of continuity brought on by a move is extreme during this phase; one is not only without familiar people and places but also without the household goods which may be the only real continuity outside the immediate family. Teachers and staff can educate students and parents about "sacred objects," those few things which remind a person of home and community wherever he or she may be. Sacred objects are best taken on the airplane, in a carry-on bag, rather than packed in a household shipment.

However uncomfortable this phase may be, it can also be a time of great creativity. The creative act is essentially one of stepping outside the tried and true into something new and different. William Bridges, in his book *Transitions*, writes about the chaos of transitions as a necessary phase, a necessary fermentation, out of which comes the creative future<sup>1</sup>. The more this experience of chaos is resisted, the less creative are the future possibilities. This is an important perspective and consideration for people in transition, even for the non-salaried spouse and dependent child who may not feel that they have much power over future possibilities.



## Transition Phase 4: Entering

People in this phase of transition are constantly having to introduce themselves to others. In uncertain positions within the new community, they may easily misinterpret nonverbal signals and moves taken for granted by others. Entering is often a time when people feel marginalised, on the edges of the society and looking for a way in to the centre.

The entering phase of a transition is usually one of great vulnerability. People in this phase can often be ambivalent, fearful, and easily offended. While their time orientation may again be to the present, it may also be only temporary as they look repeatedly to the past and the (often now idealised) memory of where home once was.

Students at all grade levels repeatedly tell me that their first self-imposed task upon entering a new school is to make friends. Even students in the midst of transition fatigue, more inclined to isolate than to socialise, need to have at least one friend before any measure of security is reached in the new environment.



## Transition Phase 5: Re-Involvement

The most fortunate of those in transition stay in their new location long enough to finally complete the cycle. Now one's time orientation is again to the present, this time with a sense of permanence. People who have re-involved themselves again have a sense of belonging, of knowing others and of being known. They again have a reputation and a position in society. They experience themselves as committed and secure, affirmed by the community in which they live, work, study, and play.

### A Special Kind of Transition: Re-Entry

Re-entry, moving to one's passport country, is typically found to be the most difficult of all transitions. As such, it requires special attention in any discussion of international school student transitions.

Many factors come into play to make re-entry such a challenging transition, not least of which is the assumption that one is "going home." Even a short one or two year international sojourn is enough to change perspective and outlook. People returning to their passport countries after such a brief time abroad may expect to fit right back into their old friendships and daily patterns. Typically, however, their international experiences have re-shaped them enough that they don't fit in quite the same way. They've become to some extent like a square peg trying to squeeze into a round hole, a hole they think should be familiar but isn't. This is all the more true for the multi-mover or long-term international sojourner whose experience of "home" may be based solely on family stories or periodic vacations.

A Canadian who grew up in Papua New Guinea and India spoke of "riding on his parent's mythology" about Canada. The Canada which he eventually re-entered bore little resemblance to the Canada of his family's myth.

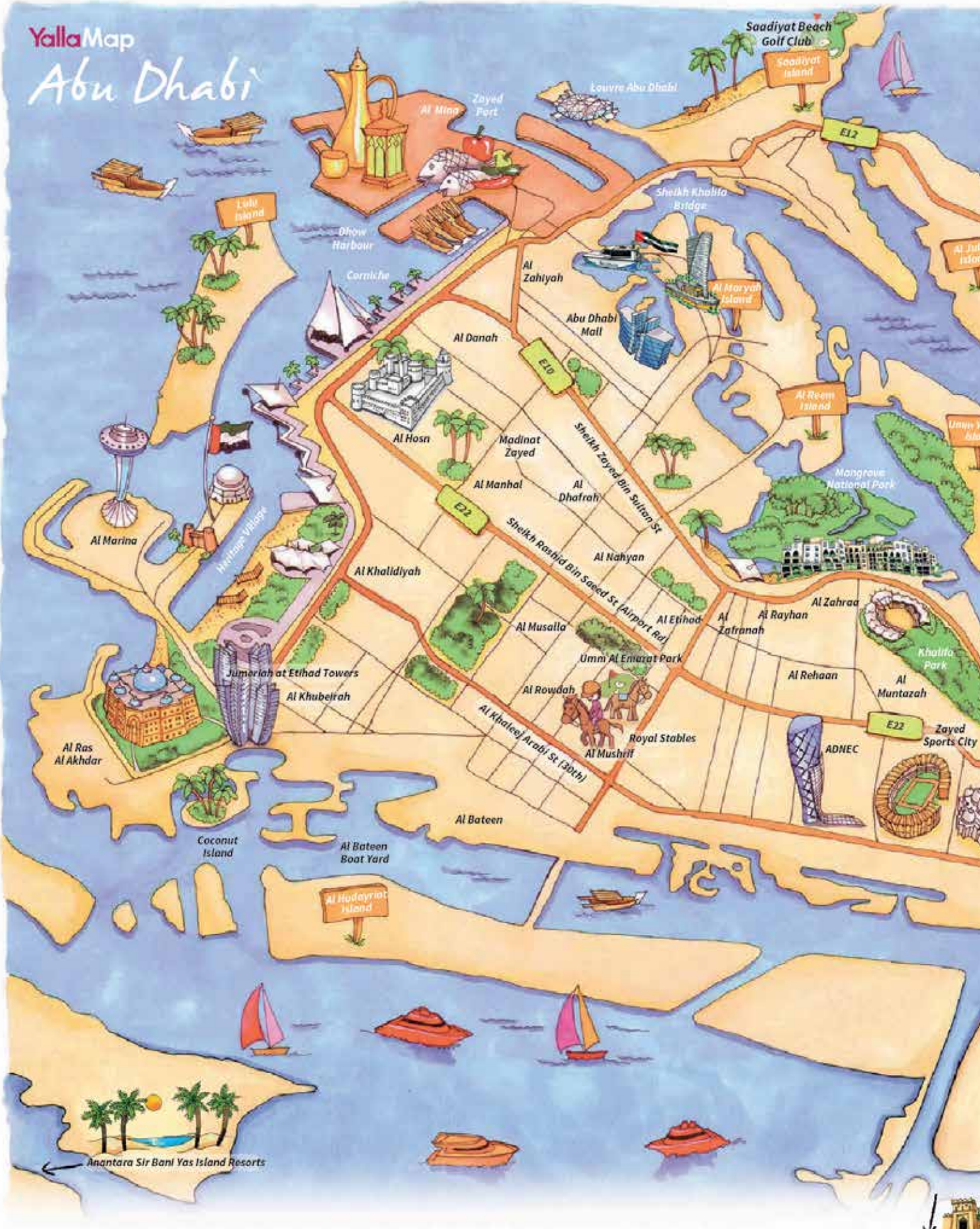
Entering one's passport country is also challenging because, once there, students typically attend local rather than international schools. Students and teachers in an international setting tend to be very aware of helping new students make friends—after all, everyone there has at one time or another been new. This is much less the case in a local school context where student mobility is more often the exception than the rule. Ask any international school multi-mover student who has experienced re-entry which is easier, entering another international posting or re-entering one's passport country, and the answer will invariably be the former.

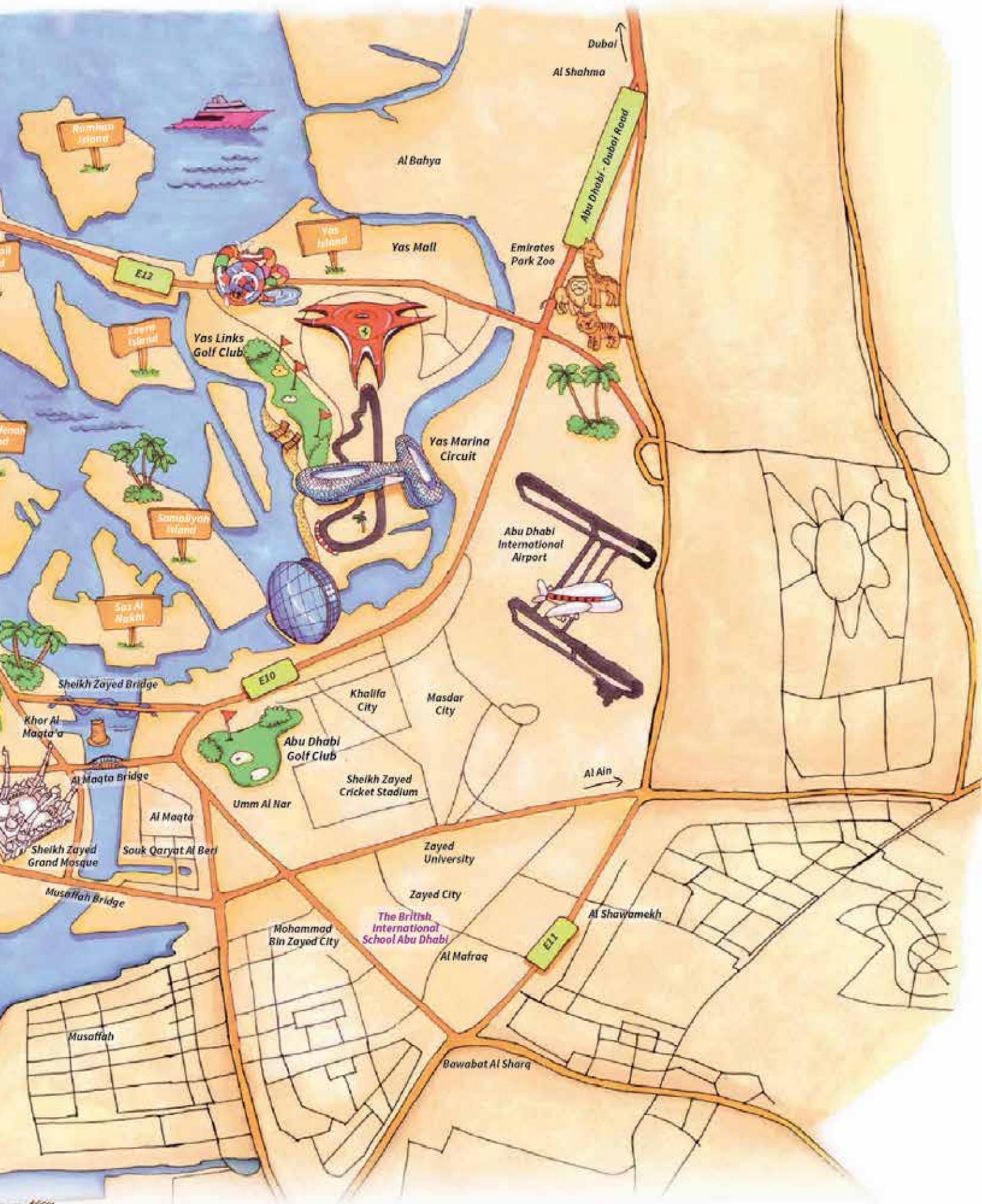
Transition activities and education specific to preparing students for a re-entry experience include those described earlier in the discussion of "leaving". The particular characteristics of re-entry should also be addressed however, giving a slightly different twist to the focus of the work. It can be especially effective for students to hear from their peers on this topic.

<sup>1</sup>Bridges, William. *Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes*. Reading MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1980.

<sup>2</sup>Pollock, David C., *The Transition Model*, Albany NY: Interaction Inc., 1990.

# Abu Dhabi





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A NORD ANGLIA EDUCATION SCHOOL