RELOCATE2UAE GUIDES | LIVING IN THE UAE

Christmas in the UAE 2026

Markets, Santa, church services, Christmas dinner, school dates, travel and New Year's Eve in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and every emirate

November 2026 edition | Last checked 9 November 2026 | Next update 1 December 2026

Written by the Relocate2UAE editorial team. Independent: no venue, hotel or seller pays to appear.

relocate2uae.com/christmas-in-uae-2026

Christmas in the UAE 2026: Markets, Church Services, Santa, Christmas Dinner and New Year's Eve in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Every Emirate

Everything a resident needs to plan Christmas in the UAE: whether you get the day off, where the markets and Santa are, how to find a Christmas service, how to get a turkey and a real tree, the rules on alcohol and pork, when the airports are busiest and what is planned for New Year's Eve. Written for families on their first UAE Christmas and for long-term residents who want the 2026 dates in one place.

November 2026 edition. Last checked 9 November 2026. We update this guide on 1 December 2026 and again as church timings and New Year's Eve programmes are published. Written by the Relocate2UAE editorial team, an independent relocation platform based in Abu Dhabi. No venue, hotel or ticket seller pays to appear here.

Quick answer: Christmas in the UAE in 2026

Christmas is widely and openly celebrated in the UAE, but it is not a public holiday. Christmas Day 2026 falls on Friday 25 December, which is a normal working day for most employers, so book annual leave if you want it off. New Year's Day, Friday 1 January 2027, is a public holiday for the public and private sectors, giving a three-day weekend. Most schools are on their winter break from Monday 14 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027.

The season starts straight after National Day on 2 and 3 December. In Dubai, the Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market (4 to 27 December, free), Winter City at Expo City Dubai (11 to 31 December) and the new DXB Winter Festival at Dubai Festival City (1 December to 10 January) are the big markets, with Santa at Ski Dubai from 1 to 25 December. In Abu Dhabi, Snow Abu Dhabi's Winter Wonderland, Mariah Carey at Etihad Arena on 12 December and the Yas, Abu Dhabi Mall and Al Qana winter events lead the season. There are Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox and Protestant churches in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah, and Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services are free and open to all.

Key facts at a glance

Question	Short answer
Is Christmas a public holiday in the UAE?	No. The UAE's official public holidays are set by Cabinet Resolution No. 27 of 2024 and do not include Christmas. Christmas Day 2026 (Friday 25 December) is a working day unless your employer gives it or you take leave.
Is New Year's Day a holiday?	Yes. Friday 1 January 2027 is a paid public holiday for public and private sectors, so most residents get a three-day weekend (1 to 3 January).
When are the school winter holidays?	Most UAE schools break from Monday 14 December 2026 and return on Monday 4 January 2027. Check your own school's calendar.
Can you celebrate Christmas openly?	Yes. Malls, hotels and restaurants decorate, churches hold public services and residents put up trees and lights at home. Normal rules on public behaviour still apply.

Question	Short answer
Biggest Christmas market in Dubai?	Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market, 4 to 27 December 2026, free entry (Reported). DXB Winter Festival (1 December to 10 January) and Winter City at Expo City Dubai (11 to 31 December, from AED 60) are the ticketed alternatives.
Where can children meet Santa?	Ski Dubai's Winter Wonderland (1 to 25 December, packages from AED 140), Snow Abu Dhabi (4 to 25 December, Reported), Winter City at Expo City Dubai, DXB Winter Festival and most big malls.
Where are Christmas services?	St Mary's Catholic Church and Holy Trinity Church in Dubai, St Joseph's Cathedral and St Andrew's Church in Abu Dhabi, and churches in Jebel Ali, Musaffah, Al Ain, Ruwais, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah. 2026 timings are usually published in mid-December.
Can I buy a turkey and a real tree?	Yes. Frozen turkeys are widely sold; fresh birds and real trees (mostly Nordmann and Fraser fir) are imported and best pre-ordered in November.
Do I need an alcohol licence?	In Dubai, residents need a free personal licence to buy alcohol from licensed shops. In Abu Dhabi no licence has been needed since 2020. Sharjah is a dry emirate. You must be 21 or over everywhere.
When is it hardest to fly home?	The first weekend of the school break (around 11 to 14 December), the weekend before Christmas and 27 to 29 December. In 2025 Dubai International's busiest day was 28 December.
What is the weather like?	Mild. The National Centre of Meteorology gives December daytime averages of about 22 to 27°C and nights of 13 to 17°C, with occasional rain and morning fog.
Is New Year's Eve 2026 announced?	Partly. Hotel galas are on sale. The Burj Khalifa, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah fireworks programmes had not been published on 9 November.

In this guide

1. Is Christmas celebrated in the UAE?
2. Christmas 2026 key dates
3. Christmas markets and winter festivals
4. Where to meet Santa
5. Christmas shows, pantomimes and concerts
6. Christmas church services and carols
7. Christmas dinner, brunch and food shopping
8. Alcohol and pork: the rules by emirate
9. Christmas trees, decorations and gifts
10. Christmas with children and the school holiday
11. Flying home for Christmas
12. Weather and what to wear
13. Christmas etiquette at work and in public
14. New Year's Eve 2026 in the UAE
15. Christmas emirate by emirate
16. What Christmas costs in the UAE

17. Your Christmas planning checklist
18. Frequently asked questions

Is Christmas celebrated in the UAE?

Short answer: Yes, openly. The UAE is a Muslim country with a large Christian population, and Christmas is visible everywhere from early December: decorated malls and hotels, Christmas markets, Santa's grottos, carol services and church services attended by tens of thousands of people. What it is not is a public holiday.

Is Christmas Day a day off in the UAE?

Not automatically. The UAE's paid public holidays are fixed by Cabinet Resolution No. 27 of 2024, which applies the same list to the public and private sectors: New Year's Day, Eid Al Fitr, Arafah Day and Eid Al Adha, Hijri New Year, the Prophet's Birthday and Eid Al Etihad (National Day). Christmas is not on it.

In 2026, Christmas Day falls on **Friday 25 December**. For most private-sector staff on a Monday to Friday week, that is a normal working day. In practice:

- Many international schools are already on holiday, so school staff are usually off.
- Some private employers, especially those with many Western or Christian staff, give 25 December as a company holiday or let staff work from home. This is the employer's choice, not a legal right.
- Everyone else should book annual leave early. December is the most requested leave month of the year in many UAE workplaces.
- Saturday 26 December (Boxing Day) is a normal weekend day under the UAE's Saturday and Sunday weekend.

New Year's Day, **Friday 1 January 2027**, is an official public holiday, so most residents get Friday 1 to Sunday 3 January off without using leave.

Who celebrates Christmas in the UAE?

Christians make up a substantial part of the UAE's expatriate population, from the Philippines, India, Europe, Africa, the Arab world and elsewhere. St Mary's Catholic Church in Dubai is one of the largest Catholic parishes in the region, and The National estimated that 200,000 worshippers attended its Christmas Day services in 2025. Many non-Christian residents also enjoy the season as a cultural celebration: the markets, brunches and decorations are aimed at everyone.

Christmas and Orthodox Christmas

Catholic, Anglican and most Protestant churches celebrate on 25 December. Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Russian, Serbian and some other Orthodox communities celebrate on **7 January**, which in 2027 is a Thursday and a working day. Armenian churches mark Christmas on 6 January. Malayalee Orthodox congregations in the UAE (Indian Orthodox and Jacobite Syriac) celebrate on 25 December.

Christmas 2026 key dates in the UAE

Short answer: The festive season runs from National Day (2 and 3 December) to the Orthodox Christmas on 7 January. The dates that matter most are the school break on 14 December, Christmas Day on Friday 25 December, New Year's Eve on Thursday 31 December and the New Year's Day public holiday on Friday 1 January 2027.

Date	What happens	Status
Tue 1 Dec	DXB Winter Festival opens at Dubai Festival City (to 10 Jan); Ski Dubai Winter Wonderland opens (to 25 Dec)	Reported
Wed 2 and Thu 3 Dec	Eid Al Etihad (UAE National Day) public holiday	Fixed date
Thu 3 to Sun 6 Dec	Formula 1 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, Yas Island	Confirmed
Fri 4 Dec	Dubai Shopping Festival opens (to 17 Jan 2027); Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market opens (to 27 Dec)	Reported
Fri 4 or Sat 5 Dec	Cinderella pantomime opens, Mall of the Emirates (to 24 Dec)	Confirmed (seller listing; opening date differs between promoter and seller)
Fri 4 Dec	Snow Abu Dhabi Winter Wonderland opens (to 25 Dec)	Reported
Wed 9 Dec	Mother of the Nation Festival opens on Abu Dhabi Corniche (to 3 Jan 2027)	Confirmed
Fri 11 Dec	Winter City opens at Expo City Dubai (to 31 Dec)	Confirmed
Sat 12 Dec	Mariah Carey's Christmastime, Etihad Arena, Abu Dhabi	Confirmed
Sat 12 Dec	Winter District opens at Jumeirah Emirates Towers (to 28 Dec)	Reported
Mon 14 Dec	Most schools start the winter break (return Mon 4 Jan 2027)	School calendars
Wed 16 Dec	Simbang Gabi, the nine-night Filipino Catholic novena, usually begins (to 24 Dec)	Annual tradition; check your parish
Thu 17 to Sat 26 Dec	A Christmas Carol, Theatre by QE2, Dubai	Confirmed (seller listing)
Fri 18 Dec	Festive Friday race meeting, Meydan	Confirmed
Fri 18 to Sun 20 Dec	Disney and Home Alone 2 film concerts, Etihad Arena	Confirmed
Thu 24 Dec	Christmas Eve: vigil and midnight services	Timings published by each church
Fri 25 Dec	Christmas Day (a working day for most employers)	Fixed date
Thu 31 Dec	New Year's Eve	Fireworks programmes to be announced
Fri 1 Jan 2027	New Year's Day public holiday	Fixed date
Mon 4 Jan 2027	Schools return	School calendars

Date	What happens	Status
Thu 7 Jan 2027	Orthodox Christmas (Coptic, Ethiopian, Russian and others)	Fixed date

For every non-Christmas event in December, from Grand Prix week to concerts and the winter heritage festivals, see our UAE Events Calendar 2026.

Christmas markets and winter festivals in the UAE

Short answer: Dubai has the biggest choice. The free Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market (4 to 27 December) is the traditional favourite, Winter City at Expo City Dubai (11 to 31 December) is the best ticketed option for young families, and the new DXB Winter Festival at Dubai Festival City (1 December to 10 January) is the largest and the only one that runs past New Year. Abu Dhabi's markets are smaller and most announce their dates in late November.

Christmas markets in Dubai, 2026

Market	Dates	Where	Entry	Best for	Status
Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market	Fri 4 to Sun 27 Dec	Fort Island, Madinat Jumeirah	Free	The classic Dubai Christmas evening: a giant tree, stalls, mince pies and abra rides	Reported
DXB Winter Festival (new)	Tue 1 Dec to Sun 10 Jan 2027	Waterfront beside Dubai Festival City Mall	Ticketed; prices not yet published	A big European-style market with 150+ vendors, funfair, Santa's grotto and stage shows	Reported
Winter City x Disney+ "Once Upon a Holiday"	Fri 11 to Thu 31 Dec, 4pm to 10pm	Al Wasl Plaza, Expo City Dubai	From AED 60; under-3s free	Young families: Frozen, Toy Story, Home Alone and Marvel themed zones	Confirmed
Winter District	Sat 12 to Mon 28 Dec	Jumeirah Emirates Towers	Check before you go	A grown-up market by the Museum of the Future	Reported
Global Village	Nightly to May 2027	Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Road	AED 25 weekday, AED 30 any day	Not a Christmas market, but a festive night out with visiting family	Confirmed

Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market. The longest-running and best-loved of Dubai's markets, set around the waterways of Souk Madinat Jumeirah. Entry is free; you pay for food, drinks and activities. Press listings give opening from 3pm Monday to Thursday and from 12pm Friday to Sunday. Note that it **closes on 27 December**, so it is not open between Christmas and New Year this year. Weekend evenings in the week before Christmas are very busy; go on a weekday or arrive before sunset.

DXB Winter Festival. New for 2026 and the largest market by area, covering around 20,000 square metres on the Festival City waterfront. The organiser has announced weekday opening from 4pm to midnight and weekends from 2pm to midnight. Ticket prices had not been published when we checked; an early-bird allocation with a 25% discount is available by registering on the official site. It runs through National Day, Christmas and New Year's Eve, which makes it the best option for the days after Christmas.

Winter City at Expo City Dubai. The fifth edition, this year in partnership with Disney+, under the Al Wasl Plaza dome. Tickets from AED 60 on the authorised seller's page, children aged three and under free, and tickets can also be bought at the gate. Some workshops cost extra. Open daily from 4pm to

10pm. The Expo 2020 Metro station is the easy way in.

> **Avoid the obvious mistake.** Several 2026 market guides online still show last year's dates. Madinat Jumeirah, for example, ran to 31 December in 2025 but closes on 27 December in 2026. Check the official page before you plan a visit around a market.

Christmas markets and winter events in Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi's festive events are just as popular but are announced later than Dubai's. When we checked on 9 November, most had not published 2026 dates.

Event	2026 status	What to expect	What happened in 2025
Snow Abu Dhabi Winter Wonderland	Reported: Fri 4 to Fri 25 Dec	Santa in real snow at Reem Mall; timed Meet Santa sessions	Ran 12 to 25 Dec; Meet Santa from AED 130 early bird
Yas Winter Fest	2026 dates not yet announced	Abu Dhabi's biggest outdoor winter festival: snow zones, carnival rides, a festive market and Santa's Village at Yas Gateway Park	Ran 12 to 21 Dec, from AED 25 for children and AED 35 for adults
Abu Dhabi Mall Winter Village	2026 dates not yet announced	Free entry, a winter market, Santa and craft workshops in the atrium	Ran mid-December to early January
Al Qana Winter Festival	2026 dates not yet announced	Free waterfront lights, a large tree and weekend workshops	Ran 12 to 31 Dec, free
The Galleria Al Maryah Island	2026 dates not yet announced	A large tree and festive zones	Ran to 26 Dec
Emirates Palace Mandarin Oriental	2026 programme not yet announced	Tree lighting, afternoon tea and a luxury festive market	Market ran over two short windows in early and late December

Mother of the Nation Festival on the Abu Dhabi Corniche (Wednesday 9 December to Sunday 3 January 2027, Confirmed) is not a Christmas event, but it is the capital's biggest family festival over the school break and is open on Christmas Day and New Year's Eve. The **Sheikh Zayed Festival** at Al Wathba is open every evening to mid-March 2027.

Christmas in Sharjah and the northern emirates

There are no large Christmas markets in Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Ras Al Khaimah or Fujairah. Christmas there centres on church services and hotel celebrations. Ras Al Khaimah's beach resorts on Al Marjan Island and Al Hamra run festive dinners and family programmes, and are a popular choice for a quiet Christmas break within driving distance of Dubai. Remember that **Sharjah is a dry emirate**, so hotel Christmas dinners there are alcohol-free.

Where to meet Santa in Dubai and Abu Dhabi

Short answer: For a real-snow Santa, book Ski Dubai's Winter Wonderland (1 to 25 December, packages from AED 140, tickets on sale from 9 November) or Snow Abu Dhabi (reported 4 to 25 December). For a cheaper visit, Santa appears at Winter City, DXB Winter Festival and most large malls in the run-up to Christmas.

Where	Dates	From	Good to know	Status
Ski Dubai Winter Wonderland, Mall of the Emirates	Tue 1 to Fri 25 Dec	AED 140	Meet Santa and Snow Park package AED 295; new Snow Daycation AED 375. Timed slots: arrive 40 minutes early	Reported
Snow Abu Dhabi Winter Wonderland, Reem Mall	Fri 4 to Fri 25 Dec	To be confirmed	In 2025, Meet Santa was AED 130 early bird and from AED 165 standard	Reported
Winter City, Expo City Dubai	Fri 11 to Thu 31 Dec	AED 60 (entry)	Santa meets included in the festival programme	Confirmed
DXB Winter Festival	Tue 1 Dec to Sun 10 Jan	To be confirmed	Santa's grotto on site	Reported
Malls across the UAE	Mostly mid to late December	Often free	Most large malls run a grotto or Santa appearances; check the mall's own events page	Varies

Book early. Weekend Santa slots at Ski Dubai sell out first, and the most popular dates are the first weekend of the school break (12 and 13 December) and the last weekend before Christmas (19 and 20 December). Both snow parks have run sensory-friendly Santa sessions in past years; ask when you book if that would suit your child.

Christmas shows, pantomimes and concerts

Short answer: Dubai has four Christmas pantomimes and family shows this year: Cinderella at Mall of the Emirates, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs and Magic Phil at Jumeirah Beach Hotel, and A Christmas Carol on the QE2. In Abu Dhabi the festive highlights are Mariah Carey on 12 December and the Disney and Home Alone 2 film concerts on 18 to 20 December.

Show	Dates	Venue	From	Ages	Status
Cinderella: A Holiday Pantomime	4 or 5 Dec to Thu 24 Dec	New Covent Garden Theatre, Mall of the Emirates, Dubai	AED 150	3+	Confirmed (seller listing)
Mission Elf-Possible	Sat 5 to Sat 12 Dec	Theatre by QE2, Port Rashid, Dubai	AED 75	Families	Confirmed (seller listing)
Magic Phil's Croc 'N' Roll Christmas	Fri 11 to Sun 13 Dec	Meyana Theatre, Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai	AED 110	Families	Confirmed (seller listing)
Mariah Carey's Christmastime	Sat 12 Dec	Etihad Arena, Yas Island, Abu Dhabi	AED 249	All ages; under-16s with an adult aged 21+	Confirmed

Show	Dates	Venue	From	Ages	Status
Elf The Musical	Sat 12 to Sun 20 Dec	Raj Mahal Theatre, The World of Riverland, Dubai Parks and Resorts	AED 195	Families	Confirmed (seller listing)
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs (Dubai Panto)	Wed 16 to Mon 28 Dec, no show on Christmas Day	Meyana Theatre, Jumeirah Beach Hotel, Dubai	AED 100	Families	Confirmed (seller listing)
Charles Dickens's A Christmas Carol	Thu 17 to Sat 26 Dec	Theatre by QE2, Port Rashid, Dubai	AED 79	3+	Confirmed (seller listing)
Disney and Home Alone 2 film concerts	Fri 18 to Sun 20 Dec	Etihad Arena, Abu Dhabi	AED 80	All ages	Confirmed
Bolshoi: The Nutcracker	Fri 4 to Sun 6 Dec	Dubai Opera	AED 495	Families	Reported
Festive Friday race meeting	Fri 18 Dec	Meydan Racecourse, Dubai	See organiser	Everyone	Confirmed

On the Cinderella dates: the promoter, Live Nation Middle East, lists the run as 4 to 24 December, while the authorised seller's booking page starts on 5 December. Book the date you want directly on the seller's page and it will show you what is actually available.

Prices are the lowest "from" prices on the authorised seller's page when we checked, usually before booking fees. Buy only from the venue, the organiser or an authorised seller such as Platinumlist. Our UAE Events Calendar 2026 explains how to spot fake ticket sellers.

Christmas church services and carols in the UAE

Short answer: Christmas services are held in churches in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Al Ain, Sharjah, Ras Al Khaimah and Fujairah, in English and many other languages. Services are free and open to everyone. Each church publishes its own 2026 timings, usually in the first half of December, so check the parish website or social media in the week before Christmas.

Churches holding Christmas services, by emirate

Emirate	Catholic	Anglican and Protestant	Orthodox and other traditions
Dubai	St Mary's Catholic Church, Oud Metha; St Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, Jebel Ali	Holy Trinity Church, Oud Metha; Christ Church Jebel Ali; Evangelical Christian Church of Dubai, Jebel Ali	St Thomas Orthodox Cathedral; Coptic, Syriac Orthodox and Mar Thoma parishes
Abu Dhabi	St Joseph's Cathedral, Mushrif; St Paul's Church, Musaffah; St Francis Church at the Abrahamic Family House, Saadiyat; St John the Baptist Church, Ruwais; St Mary's Church, Al Ain	St Andrew's Church, Mushrif; Evangelical Church of Abu Dhabi	St George Orthodox Cathedral; Coptic, Armenian and other parishes
Sharjah	St Michael's Catholic Church	St Martin's Anglican Church; Union Church	The Al Yarmook church district, including Coptic, Armenian and Syriac Orthodox churches
Ras Al Khaimah	St Anthony of Padua Church	St Luke's Anglican Church; Evangelical Church of Ras Al Khaimah	St Mary's Orthodox Church

Emirate	Catholic	Anglican and Protestant	Orthodox and other traditions
Fujairah	Our Lady of Perpetual Help Church		St Gregorios Indian Orthodox Church

We could not find a church in Ajman or Umm Al Quwain; residents there usually attend services in Sharjah, a short drive away.

What to expect at a Christmas service

- **Crowds are very large.** At St Mary's in Dubai, The National estimated 200,000 worshippers on Christmas Day 2025, with screens set up outside some churches for the overflow. Arrive at least 45 minutes early for vigil and midnight services.
- **Many languages.** Catholic parishes run services in English, Arabic, Tagalog, Malayalam, Konkani, Tamil, French and other languages. In past years St Mary's Dubai has started Christmas services on the afternoon of 24 December, with a service for the elderly and sick, evening masses, carol singing and a midnight mass, then masses through Christmas Day.
- **Some churches ask you to register.** In past years several Orthodox parishes asked worshippers to pre-register online for Christmas Eve. Check before you go.
- **Parking is the hardest part.** Church compounds fill early. Take a taxi or the Metro where you can; St Mary's and Holy Trinity in Oud Metha are a short walk from Oud Metha Metro station.
- **Dress modestly**, with shoulders and knees covered.

Simbang Gabi and carol services

Simbang Gabi, the nine-night Filipino Catholic novena of evening masses, usually runs from 16 to 24 December at St Mary's Dubai and other Catholic parishes and draws very large congregations. Many churches and hotels also hold **carol services** in the two weeks before Christmas, and several schools hold carol concerts in the last week of term (7 to 11 December). Check your local church for dates.

Visiting a church for the first time? You do not need to be a member of the parish or of that denomination to attend a Christmas service. Most churches post their timings on their website, Facebook or Instagram, and Gulf News and Khaleej Times usually publish a round-up of service times across the UAE in the week before Christmas.

Christmas dinner, brunch and food shopping in the UAE

Short answer: You can have a fully traditional Christmas dinner in the UAE, either at a hotel Christmas brunch or lunch (prices vary widely by hotel and drinks package, so compare before you book) or at home with an imported turkey, which should be pre-ordered by mid-December. Hotel takeaway turkeys with all the trimmings are a popular middle option.

Christmas Day brunch and lunch

The Christmas Day brunch is a UAE institution. Most hotels in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah run a Christmas Eve dinner, a Christmas Day brunch or lunch and a Boxing Day offer, usually with soft-drink and alcoholic packages and a children's price. Many include a visit from Santa.

- **When menus are published:** from early to mid-November, with early-booking discounts that often end in early December.
- **What it costs:** prices vary hugely by venue and package. As a guide, expect a premium on Christmas Day over a normal Friday or Saturday brunch, and check whether the price includes service charge.
- **Book early:** popular family brunches are often full by mid-December. Christmas Day is a Friday this year, so many residents are working in the morning; lunch and evening sittings book up fastest.
- **Visiting family?** Choose a venue with a children's area or entertainment, and check the dress code.

Christmas dinner at home

What you need	Where to get it	When to order
Frozen whole turkey	Most supermarkets, including Spinneys, Carrefour, Lulu, Union Coop and Waitrose	Any time in December
Fresh or oven-ready turkey, duck or goose	Premium supermarkets and butchers on pre-order	By about 10 to 17 December; in past years Spinneys pre-orders closed in mid-December
Cooked turkey and trimmings to take home	Hotel festive takeaways in every emirate	Usually 24 to 48 hours' notice; order early for 24 and 25 December
Christmas pudding, mince pies, stollen and panettone	Supermarkets and hotel pastry shops	From late November
Pork, ham and gammon	Designated pork sections in larger supermarkets (see the rules below)	Pre-order joints and hams for Christmas

Planning tip: many UAE kitchens have smaller ovens than people are used to at home. Measure yours before you order a large bird, or order a turkey crown or a hotel takeaway.

Alcohol and pork at Christmas: the rules by emirate

Short answer: Non-Muslim adults aged 21 and over can drink alcohol in licensed venues and at home. Dubai residents need a free personal alcohol licence to buy from licensed shops; Abu Dhabi abolished its licence in 2020; Sharjah is dry. Pork is legal for non-Muslims and is sold in separate, clearly marked sections of larger supermarkets.

Emirate	Buying alcohol for home	Drinking	Notes
Dubai	Residents need a personal licence, free since January 2023, issued with your Emirates ID at licensed stores (MMI and African + Eastern) or through the official licence website	Licensed hotels, bars and restaurants, and private homes	Tourists can buy with a passport at licensed stores
Abu Dhabi	No licence needed since September 2020; buy from licensed shops for personal use	Licensed venues and private homes	Must be 21 or over; not for resale

Emirate	Buying alcohol for home	Drinking	Notes
Sharjah	Not permitted	Not permitted	A dry emirate: no alcohol in hotels, restaurants or homes
Ras Al Khaimah, Ajman, Umm Al Quwain, Fujairah	Sold through licensed outlets	Licensed venues and private homes	Age 21+; ID may be checked

Rules that apply everywhere:

- **Zero tolerance for drink-driving.** There is no legal limit. Book a taxi or a designated driver for Christmas parties and New Year's Eve; all ride-hailing apps are very busy after midnight.
- **No drinking in public places**, including beaches, parks and streets, unless it is a licensed area.
- **Being drunk in public is an offence.** Fines and more serious penalties apply.
- **Carrying alcohol between emirates:** take care when driving through Sharjah, where alcohol is not permitted. Keep purchases sealed and your receipt with you.

Pork: non-Muslims can buy and eat pork. It is sold in separate, signed pork sections (often called the non-Muslim section) of larger supermarkets, with its own tills. Hotels and some restaurants serve pork dishes and label them on the menu.

These are the general rules as we understand them in November 2026 and are not legal advice. Our UAE Culture & Customs Guide covers public behaviour in more detail.

Christmas trees, decorations and gifts

Short answer: Real Christmas trees are imported each year, mostly Nordmann fir from Denmark and Fraser fir from Canada, and are sold by supermarkets, garden centres and florists from late November. Pre-order in November for the best choice. Artificial trees and decorations are in every home store, and the Dubai Shopping Festival (4 December 2026 to 17 January 2027) brings big discounts on gifts.

Where to buy a real Christmas tree

Seller	What they offer	Good to know
Spinneys	Danish Nordmann firs, pre-order for collection or delivery	Pre-orders usually open in early November
Kibsons	Real and artificial trees, home delivery	Has offered tree collection and recycling after Christmas
Dubai Garden Centre	Premium Nordmann and noble firs	Fresh stock usually arrives in the first week of December
Carrefour	Real and artificial trees	In-store and online
ACE Hardware	Real trees at selected branches, plus a large range of artificial trees and decorations	Known for its Christmas village displays
Florists (FNP, Oleander, Flowwow, Bloombox and others)	Real trees, some pre-decorated, with delivery across the UAE	Oleander lists delivery from the third week of November 2026
Plant Street, Satwa (Dubai)	Real trees on the street in December	Compare quality and haggle

Keep it fresh. UAE homes are air-conditioned and dry. Cut 2 to 3cm off the trunk when it arrives, use a stand that holds water, top it up daily and keep it away from AC vents. A real tree bought in early December should last to New Year.

Decorations and outdoor lights

Artificial trees, lights and decorations are sold at IKEA, ACE, Home Centre, Carrefour, Dubai Garden Centre and many independent stores from November. **If you rent**, check your building's rules before decorating balconies, corridors or front doors; many communities have rules on what can go on shared areas and balconies, and some ban outdoor lights on facades. Inside your own home there are no restrictions.

Christmas shopping and gifts

- **Dubai Shopping Festival** runs from Friday 4 December 2026 to Sunday 17 January 2027, the 32nd and longest edition, with discounts, raffles and events across Dubai's malls. The full programme was still to be published when we checked.
- **Sending gifts abroad:** international post and courier cut-off dates for Christmas are usually early to mid-December from the UAE, and earlier for surface mail. Emirates Post and courier companies had not published 2026 Christmas cut-offs when we checked. As a rule, post international parcels by the end of November and use a tracked courier after that. For larger shipments, our Moving & Logistics Guide explains customs and couriers.
- **Ordering online from abroad:** allow for customs duty and VAT on imported goods, and for longer delivery times in December.

Christmas with children and the school winter holiday

Short answer: Most UAE schools break up on Friday 11 December and are off from Monday 14 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027, returning on Monday 4 January. That gives children three weeks, including Christmas and New Year, and gives families a 23-day window for travel or staying put.

School type	Winter break 2026/27
All Dubai private schools (KHDA)	Monday 14 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027
Ministry of Education and most Abu Dhabi and northern emirates schools	Monday 14 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027
Sharjah private schools (SPEA)	From 14 December 2026; check your school
Indian, Pakistani and other April-start schools	Usually the same winter break; check your school

Always check your own school's published calendar; a few schools add extra days. See our UAE School Holiday Calendar 2026 to 2027 for every term date and public holiday.

Family Christmas plan in the UAE: a week-by-week idea

When	Idea
Week of 7 December	School nativity plays and carol concerts; book Santa slots and Christmas lunch now
Weekend of 12 and 13 December	Madinat Jumeirah market or Winter City; Mariah Carey in Abu Dhabi on Saturday

When	Idea
Week of 14 December	Pantomime week: Snow White opens on 16 December and A Christmas Carol on 17 December
Weekend of 18 to 20 December	Disney film concerts at Etihad Arena; Festive Friday at Meydan
Christmas Eve and Day	Church, Santa visit or Christmas brunch; a beach walk in the afternoon sun
26 to 31 December	Mother of the Nation Festival, Global Village or a desert camping night as the weather cools

Childcare if you are working on Christmas Day: many school holiday camps close on 25 December and 1 January. Book holiday camps or babysitters early, or ask your employer about leave or working from home. For year-round family ideas, see Things to Do With Kids in the UAE.

Flying home for Christmas from the UAE

Short answer: December is the busiest month of the year at UAE airports. Avoid the first weekend of the school break, the weekend before Christmas and 27 to 29 December if you can, arrive at least three hours before an international flight from Dubai, and check in online. Fares for the second half of December are usually the highest of the year, so book as early as possible.

Peak travel days to plan around

Dubai Airports and Emirates publish their own forecasts for the festive season in late November or early December. The pattern in recent years has been consistent:

Period	Why it is busy	2025 pattern
Around National Day (late Nov to early Dec)	Residents take short breaks	Outbound peak before the long weekend
First weekend of the school break (11 to 14 Dec 2026)	Families leave the UAE	Emirates listed 12 to 15 December among its busiest departure days in 2024
Weekend before Christmas (19 to 22 Dec 2026)	Residents fly home; visitors arrive	Saturday 20 December was an early forecast peak in 2025
27 to 29 Dec 2026	Visitors arrive for New Year's Eve	Dubai International's busiest day of December 2025 was Sunday 28 December, with about 312,000 passengers forecast
1 to 4 Jan 2027	Families return for school	Long immigration and taxi queues on arrival

Make the airport easier

- **Check in online** and use the airline's early or city check-in options where available.
- **Arrive three hours early** for international flights in December, more for large family groups.
- **Use the Metro** to Dubai International Terminals 1 and 3 to avoid road congestion.
- **Children travelling with one parent:** carry a signed letter of consent and the other parent's ID copy; some destinations require it.
- **People of Determination** can use dedicated assistance at UAE airports; request it when you book.

If you would rather stay, the UAE in December is also one of the world's great winter-sun destinations, and visiting relatives often outnumber leavers. Our UAE Holiday Destinations Guide

covers short escapes, and our UAE Public Transport Guide covers getting around with visitors.

> **Relocate2UAE partner: somewhere for visiting family to stay.** If family are coming for Christmas and your home is too small, short-term furnished apartments are often better value than hotel rooms over the festive peak. Our partner Maison Privée offers furnished short-stay homes in Dubai. See our partners. Partner mentions are labelled and do not affect what we recommend elsewhere in this guide.

Christmas weather in the UAE and what to wear

Short answer: Expect warm, sunny days of around 22 to 27°C and cool evenings of 13 to 17°C, according to the National Centre of Meteorology's December averages. A Christmas Day beach visit is realistic, but you will want a light jacket for evening markets and a warm layer in the desert or on Jebel Jais.

	December average (UAE)
Mean temperature	About 17.7 to 21.8°C
Average daytime high	About 21.7 to 27.4°C
Average night-time low	About 12.9 to 17.4°C
Rain	Occasional; some Decembers bring heavy showers and thunderstorms
Fog	Common on early mornings, especially inland; drive carefully
Coldest recorded	-0.7°C on Jebel Jais, Ras Al Khaimah (2004)

What to pack or wear: light clothes for the day, a jumper or light jacket for evenings outdoors, a warm coat if you are camping in the desert or going up Jebel Jais, and sun protection. Christmas jumpers are entirely acceptable at evening markets and parties.

Christmas etiquette at work and in public

Short answer: Christmas greetings, office decorations, gift exchanges and Christmas parties are common and welcome in UAE workplaces. Be inclusive, keep celebrations respectful and remember that the usual rules on public behaviour, dress and alcohol still apply.

- **Greetings:** "Merry Christmas" and "Season's greetings" are widely used. Many Muslim colleagues will wish Christian colleagues a happy Christmas, and it is courteous to return good wishes at Eid.
- **At work:** decorated offices, Secret Santa and team lunches are normal. Keep gifts modest and suitable for everyone, and avoid anything that could offend.
- **Christmas parties:** if alcohol is served, it must be in a licensed venue. Plan a safe way home; there is zero tolerance for drink-driving.
- **In public:** dress modestly in malls and public places, avoid public displays of affection and do not photograph people without permission, including at markets and church services.
- **Music and noise:** keep home parties considerate, especially late at night in apartment buildings.
- **Charity:** giving at Christmas is common. Donate through licensed UAE charities and official campaigns rather than individuals collecting online.

New Year's Eve 2026 in the UAE

Short answer: New Year's Eve is Thursday 31 December 2026 and New Year's Day, Friday 1 January 2027, is a public holiday. Hotel galas are already on sale, including Katy Perry at Atlantis The Palm. The Burj Khalifa, Abu Dhabi and Ras Al Khaimah fireworks programmes had not been published on 9 November; they are usually announced in late November or December and the ticketed viewing areas sell out quickly.

What happened last year (2025/26)

This shows the scale to expect. It is not the 2026 programme.

- **Dubai:** 48 fireworks displays at 40 locations, including Burj Khalifa, Burj Al Arab, Atlantis The Palm, Global Village, Expo City Dubai, Dubai Festival City, Al Seef and Hatta. Burj Park was the only ticketed viewing area in Downtown Dubai, from AED 997.50 per adult, with free public viewing zones that closed once full.
- **Abu Dhabi:** a 62-minute fireworks display at the Sheikh Zayed Festival in Al Wathba, plus fireworks on the Corniche and Yas Island.
- **Ras Al Khaimah:** a 15-minute drone and fireworks show from Al Marjan Island to Al Hamra that set a Guinness World Records title.
- **Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah and Umm Al Quwain:** waterfront and park fireworks, including Al Majaz Waterfront in Sharjah.

How to plan New Year's Eve 2026

1. **Decide early between free and ticketed.** Free viewing areas close when full, often by early evening. Ticketed areas and restaurant packages need booking weeks ahead.
2. **Plan transport first.** In Dubai, roads around Downtown close from the afternoon and the Metro runs extended hours. Driving into Downtown on the night is not practical.
3. **With children,** consider an earlier or smaller display: Global Village, Expo City Dubai, the Sheikh Zayed Festival and many malls and hotels hold family-friendly celebrations.
4. **Book New Year's Day lunch** now; it is a public holiday and popular brunches fill up.

We will add the 2026 fireworks programmes to our UAE Events Calendar 2026 and to this guide as soon as they are published.

Christmas emirate by emirate

Short answer: Dubai has the most Christmas markets, shows and brunches; Abu Dhabi has strong hotel and mall celebrations, Mariah Carey and the big family festivals; Ras Al Khaimah is the favourite for a quiet beach Christmas; Sharjah, Fujairah and Al Ain centre on church services.

Emirate	Christmas highlights	Churches	Alcohol
Dubai	Madinat Jumeirah, Winter City, DXB Winter Festival, Winter District, Ski Dubai Santa, four pantomimes, hotel brunches	St Mary's, St Francis of Assisi, Holy Trinity, Christ Church Jebel Ali and more	Licence needed to buy for home (free)

Emirate	Christmas highlights	Churches	Alcohol
Abu Dhabi	Snow Abu Dhabi, Mariah Carey (12 Dec), Disney film concerts (18 to 20 Dec), Yas, Abu Dhabi Mall and Al Qana winter events (2026 dates to come), Mother of the Nation Festival	St Joseph's Cathedral, St Andrew's, St Paul's Musaffah, St Francis at the Abrahamic Family House	No licence needed
Al Ain	Quiet, family Christmas; church services	St Mary's Catholic Church and others	No licence needed
Sharjah	Church services in the Al Yarmook church district; family hotel lunches	St Michael's, St Martin's and others	Dry emirate
Ras Al Khaimah	Beach-resort Christmas breaks on Al Marjan Island and Al Hamra; New Year's Eve fireworks	St Anthony of Padua, St Luke's and others	Licensed outlets and venues
Fujairah	Beach resorts on the east coast; church services	Our Lady of Perpetual Help, St Gregorios	Licensed venues
Ajman and Umm Al Quwain	Hotel celebrations; residents usually attend church in Sharjah	None found	Licensed venues

Thinking about where to live? Our UAE Emirates Comparison Guide compares lifestyle across all seven emirates.

What Christmas costs in the UAE

Short answer: You can enjoy a lot of the UAE's Christmas for free (Madinat Jumeirah market, mall decorations, church services, the beach), but the paid highlights add up quickly for a family. Use the prices below as a guide; they are the lowest prices we saw from official or authorised sources and usually exclude booking fees.

Item	Typical cost	Source and status
Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market	Free entry	Reported
Winter City, Expo City Dubai	From AED 60 per ticket; under-3s free	Authorised seller, Confirmed
Meet Santa at Ski Dubai	From AED 140; AED 295 with Snow Park	Press report of organiser prices
Christmas pantomime	From about AED 79 to AED 150 per ticket	Authorised seller
Mariah Carey, Etihad Arena	From AED 249	Venue, Confirmed
Global Village	AED 25 weekday, AED 30 any day	Official, Confirmed
Real Christmas tree	Varies widely by size and seller; small trees from under AED 100, full-size premium firs several hundred dirhams	Retailer listings
Christmas Day hotel brunch	Varies widely; usually a premium on a normal brunch	Check each hotel
Burj Park, New Year's Eve	2026 prices not yet published; AED 997.50 per adult in 2025	Emaar, previous year

For loyalty schemes and discount apps that cut the cost of brunches, attractions and shopping, see our UAE Discounts & Savings Guide.

Your Christmas in the UAE planning checklist

Now to the end of November

- ☐ Book annual leave for 24 and 25 December if you want them off
- ☐ Book flights if you are travelling, avoiding the peak days above
- ☐ Book Santa at Ski Dubai or Snow Abu Dhabi (Ski Dubai advance tickets on sale from 9 November)
- ☐ Book pantomime and concert tickets from authorised sellers
- ☐ Book Christmas Day brunch or lunch, and New Year's Day lunch
- ☐ Pre-order a real tree
- ☐ Post international cards and parcels by the end of November
- ☐ Book short-stay accommodation for visiting family
- ☐ Dubai residents: apply for a free alcohol licence if you will buy alcohol for home

Early December

- ☐ Pre-order turkey or a hotel takeaway (by about 10 to 17 December)
- ☐ Check school nativity, carol concert and last-day dates
- ☐ Book holiday camps or childcare for days you are working
- ☐ Check your church's 2026 Christmas service timings
- ☐ Watch for the New Year's Eve fireworks programmes and ticket releases

Christmas week

- ☐ Collect your turkey and trimmings
- ☐ Plan transport to church and to Christmas lunch, with no drink-driving
- ☐ Check market and attraction opening times for 24, 25 and 31 December

Frequently asked questions

Is Christmas a public holiday in the UAE?

No. The UAE's official public holidays are set by Cabinet Resolution No. 27 of 2024 and Christmas is not one of them. Christmas Day 2026, Friday 25 December, is a working day for most employers. Some companies give the day off, and many residents take annual leave. New Year's Day, Friday 1 January 2027, is a public holiday.

Is Christmas celebrated in Dubai and Abu Dhabi?

Yes, openly and on a large scale. Malls and hotels decorate from early December, there are Christmas markets, Santa's grottos, pantomimes and Christmas brunches, and churches hold Christmas Eve and Christmas Day services attended by very large congregations.

Is it legal to celebrate Christmas in the UAE?

Yes. Christians can worship at licensed churches, and residents can decorate their homes and celebrate privately and in licensed venues. The usual rules on public behaviour, dress and alcohol apply.

When are the school Christmas holidays in the UAE in 2026?

Most UAE schools, including all Dubai private schools, are on winter break from Monday 14 December 2026 to Sunday 3 January 2027, returning on Monday 4 January 2027. Check your own school's calendar.

Do I get New Year's Day off in the UAE?

Yes. Friday 1 January 2027 is a paid public holiday for the public and private sectors, so most residents have a three-day weekend from 1 to 3 January.

What are the best Christmas markets in Dubai in 2026?

The Madinat Jumeirah Festive Market (4 to 27 December, free), the new DXB Winter Festival at Dubai Festival City (1 December to 10 January), Winter City at Expo City Dubai (11 to 31 December, from AED 60) and Winter District at Jumeirah Emirates Towers (12 to 28 December).

Is the Madinat Jumeirah Christmas market free?

Yes, entry is free; you pay for food, drinks and activities. In 2026 it runs from Friday 4 to Sunday 27 December, so it closes before New Year.

Are there Christmas markets in Abu Dhabi?

Yes. Yas Winter Fest, Abu Dhabi Mall's Winter Village, the Al Qana Winter Festival and Emirates Palace's festive market have all run in recent years. Most had not announced 2026 dates on 9 November; Snow Abu Dhabi's Winter Wonderland is reported for 4 to 25 December.

Where can my children meet Santa in Dubai?

Ski Dubai's Winter Wonderland at Mall of the Emirates (1 to 25 December, packages from AED 140) is the most popular. Santa also appears at Winter City, DXB Winter Festival and most large malls. Book weekend slots early.

Where can I go to church on Christmas Day in the UAE?

Major churches include St Mary's Catholic Church and Holy Trinity Church in Dubai, St Joseph's Cathedral and St Andrew's Church in Abu Dhabi, St Francis of Assisi and Christ Church in Jebel Ali, St Michael's in Sharjah, St Anthony of Padua in Ras Al Khaimah and Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Fujairah. Services are free and open to all; 2026 timings are published by each church, usually in December.

Can I buy a turkey for Christmas in the UAE?

Yes. Frozen turkeys are sold in most supermarkets. Fresh and oven-ready birds are sold on pre-order by premium supermarkets and butchers, usually until mid-December, and many hotels sell cooked turkeys with trimmings to take home.

Can I buy pork in the UAE?

Yes, if you are not Muslim. Pork is sold in separate, signed sections of larger supermarkets with their own tills, and some hotels and restaurants serve it.

Do I need an alcohol licence for Christmas in Dubai?

To buy alcohol from a shop to drink at home, Dubai residents need a personal alcohol licence, which has been free since January 2023 and is issued with your Emirates ID. You do not need one in licensed bars, restaurants and hotels. Abu Dhabi abolished its licence in 2020. Sharjah does not allow alcohol.

Where can I buy a real Christmas tree in Dubai?

Spinneys, Kibsons, Dubai Garden Centre, Carrefour, selected ACE Hardware branches and florists such as FNP, Oleander and Flowwow sell imported real trees, mostly Nordmann and Fraser fir. Pre-order in November for the best choice.

What is the weather like at Christmas in the UAE?

Warm and sunny by day, about 22 to 27°C on average, and cool at night, about 13 to 17°C, according to the National Centre of Meteorology. Rain is occasional and morning fog is common.

What is the busiest day to fly out of Dubai in December?

In December 2025, Dubai International's busiest day was Sunday 28 December. Expect the first weekend of the school break (around 11 to 14 December 2026), the weekend before Christmas and 27 to 29 December to be the peaks in 2026. Dubai Airports usually publishes its forecast in late November or December.

What should I do on New Year's Eve 2026 in the UAE?

Watch the fireworks at Burj Khalifa, on Abu Dhabi's Corniche or at Al Wathba, on Al Marjan Island in Ras Al Khaimah or at one of dozens of smaller displays, or book a hotel gala. The 2026 fireworks programmes had not been published on 9 November; book ticketed areas as soon as they are announced and plan transport first.

When is Orthodox Christmas in the UAE?

Coptic, Ethiopian, Russian and several other Orthodox churches celebrate Christmas on 7 January, which falls on Thursday 7 January 2027, a working day. Armenian churches celebrate on 6 January.

Is Sharjah a good place to spend Christmas?

Sharjah has many churches in its Al Yarmook church district and family hotels, but it is a dry emirate, so Christmas there is alcohol-free. Most residents who want markets or a Christmas brunch go to Dubai.

Know about a Christmas event we have missed?

Venues, churches and readers can send us Christmas events and service times. We publish a date only after we have seen it on the organiser's, venue's, church's or authorised seller's own page. WhatsApp the Relocate2UAE team or email info@relocate2uae.com with the event name, dates, venue and official link.

Related guides

- UAE Events Calendar 2026: every major event to New Year's Eve, updated monthly
- UAE School Holiday Calendar 2026 to 2027: term dates and public holidays

- Things to Do With Kids in the UAE: family days out by age and emirate
- Dubai Events 2026 and Abu Dhabi Events 2026: city-only calendars
- UAE Culture & Customs Guide: etiquette, dress and public behaviour
- UAE Discounts & Savings Guide: cut the cost of brunches and attractions
- UAE Holiday Destinations: short escapes over the winter break
- UAE Public Transport Guide: getting around with visitors
- Moving & Logistics Guide: shipping, couriers and customs
- UAE Emirates Comparison Guide: lifestyle across all seven emirates
- Your First 30 Days in the UAE: new to the UAE this Christmas
- Expat Networking in the UAE: communities to join over the festive season
- Our partners

How we researched this guide

We checked every date and price between 2 and 9 November 2026 against official government sources (Cabinet Resolution No. 27 of 2024 on public holidays, the National Centre of Meteorology, the Ministry of Education and KHDA school calendars, Abu Dhabi Media Office and WAM), venue and organiser announcements, authorised ticket sellers, and reputable UAE press (Gulf News, Khaleej Times, The National, Time Out Dubai and What's On). Where we could find a date only in reputable press, we have labelled it Reported. Where sources disagreed, we have said so. Where a 2026 date had not been published, we say that rather than repeat last year's. No venue, hotel or seller has paid to be included. Maison Privée is a Relocate2UAE partner and is mentioned only where relevant.

Important note

Christmas and New Year's Eve programmes, opening hours, prices, church service times and age rules are set by organisers and can change without notice. This guide is general information for residents. It is not legal advice and is not a recommendation or endorsement of any event, venue, church, retailer or seller. Always confirm details on the official page before you book, travel or pay. Where you need advice on your own employment rights, such as leave over the festive period, speak to your employer or a qualified adviser. Relocate2UAE accepts no liability for any loss arising from reliance on this guide, including the cost of tickets, travel or accommodation if an event changes. Prices are indicative and are not offers.