Buying Property in Dubai: Answers to the Questions I Am Asked Most Often

I have prepared this document for buyers who are considering Dubai for the first time and who, quite reasonably, want to understand how safe and how practical it really is. These are the questions I hear most often. Where a topic touches on law or tax, I share how things generally work and my own experience, but I always recommend confirming the specifics with a licensed lawyer or tax adviser, because I do not provide legal or financial advice.

Ownership and Security

1. Can a foreigner actually own property in Dubai, or is it only a long lease?

Foreigners can own property outright, on a freehold basis, in designated freehold areas of Dubai. These areas include most of the districts international buyers know, such as Palm Jumeirah, Dubai Marina, Downtown Dubai, Emirates Hills and many others. Freehold means you own the property and your share of the land in perpetuity, you can sell it, rent it, mortgage it or pass it on to your heirs. This has been enshrined in Dubai law since 2006, and every freehold owner receives a title deed issued by the Dubai Land Department, which is the government land registry.

2. Can the government take my property away?

This is one of the most common fears I hear, and I understand why international buyers often ask it. The short answer is that private property rights are protected under UAE law, and arbitrary confiscation does not happen. Expropriation exists in Dubai, as it does in every country in the world, but only for genuine public infrastructure purposes, and it requires compensation. In practice it is extremely rare, and it is essentially unheard of in the established freehold communities where my clients buy. Dubai's entire economic model depends on foreign capital feeling secure

here. The government has spent twenty years building that trust, and protecting it is in its own direct interest.

3. When I want to sell, does the government have a right to buy first, a right of first refusal?

No. There is no state pre-emption right on residential freehold property in Dubai. When you sell, you agree the price with your buyer, you both sign at a registration trustee office, the Dubai Land Department transfers the title, and the money is yours. The state's role is administrative, it registers the transfer and collects the transfer fee, nothing more. The only pre-emption concepts that exist here are contractual ones in specific situations, for example between co-owners, and a lawyer can confirm whether anything of that kind applies to a particular property, though for a standard freehold apartment or villa it does not.

4. Is my ownership recorded somewhere official that I can verify?

Yes. Every property is registered with the Dubai Land Department, and you receive an electronic title deed in your name. You can verify any title deed yourself through the Dubai REST application, which is the official government app. There is no ambiguity about who owns what, and this is one of the reasons transactions here complete in days rather than months.

Inheritance

5. What happens to my property if I die? I have heard the UAE applies Islamic inheritance law.

This is a legitimate question and the answer is reassuring. By default, and in the absence of any planning, UAE courts historically applied local inheritance rules, which is where the concern comes from. However, the law has developed significantly. Non-Muslims can now ensure their assets pass exactly according to their wishes, and the standard tool for this is a registered will. In addition, a federal law introduced in 2022 provides that the estate of a non-Muslim who dies without a will is distributed under statutory rules that resemble European ones, with half going to the surviving spouse and the remainder to the children. Even so, I always recommend that my

clients register a will, because it removes every doubt and it makes the probate process far faster for the family.

6. How does a will work here and how much does it cost?

There are two main routes. The first is a will registered through the local courts, which is the more economical option and typically costs in the region of two to three thousand dirhams, roughly five hundred to seven hundred and fifty euros. The second is a will registered with the DIFC Courts Wills Service, which operates under a common law framework in English. The DIFC route is more expensive, the registration fee for a full will is ten thousand dirhams plus drafting fees, but many international investors prefer it because the entire process, from drafting to probate, runs in English under familiar legal principles. Both routes achieve the same essential outcome, your Dubai assets go exactly where you intend them to go. I can introduce clients to specialists who handle this, and the whole process can even be completed remotely by video call.

Taxes and Money

7. What taxes will I pay as a property owner in Dubai?

For an individual owner, the position is remarkably simple. There is no annual property tax, no tax on rental income for individuals, no capital gains tax when you sell, and no inheritance tax. The main cost is a one-time transfer fee of four percent of the purchase price, paid to the Dubai Land Department at the time of purchase, plus modest administrative and trustee fees. I always remind clients that their tax position at home is a separate matter, and that they should speak with a local tax adviser about how foreign property and rental income are treated there.

8. Can I take my money out of the UAE when I sell?

Yes. The UAE has no capital controls and no restrictions on repatriating sale proceeds or rental income. The dirham has been pegged to the US dollar since 1997, which removes local currency risk from the equation. When you sell, the buyer typically pays by manager's cheque or bank transfer at the moment of title transfer, and you are free to send the funds wherever you wish.

9. Is my money safe during the purchase itself?

The process is designed so that money and title change hands simultaneously. For ready properties, payment is made at a government registration trustee office at the same moment the title is transferred into your name. For off-plan purchases, the law requires developers to collect all buyer payments into a project escrow account supervised by the regulator, and the developer can only draw funds as construction milestones are certified. This system was introduced in 2007 and reinforced after the 2008 to 2009 crisis precisely to protect buyers.

Off-Plan and Market Risk

10. What if I buy off-plan and the developer never finishes the building?

This risk was real fifteen years ago, and the regulatory response has been substantial. Today, every off-plan project must be registered with the authorities, buyer payments sit in a supervised escrow account rather than in the developer's pocket, and if a project is cancelled the regulator oversees the refund of escrowed funds to buyers. Beyond the legal protections, my own approach is simpler, I guide clients towards developers with long, verifiable delivery track records, because the best protection is choosing the right counterparty in the first place.

11. Is Dubai not a bubble? I remember what happened in 2009.

I would never tell anyone that any property market only goes up, and I cannot predict prices. Dubai had a severe correction in 2009 and a softer one between 2015 and 2020, and prices have risen strongly since 2021. What I can say is that today's market is structurally different from 2008. Speculative flipping is constrained by escrow rules and payment plans, the buyer base is far more end-user and long-term-investor driven, transparency is incomparably better, and demand is supported by real population growth and by residency reforms that tie people to the city. Whether the timing is right for a particular buyer depends on their horizon and objectives, and that is exactly the conversation I have with each client individually.

Residency

12. Does buying property give me residency?

It can, and this is one of the strongest practical benefits. As matters stand in 2026, owning property worth at least two million dirhams, around five hundred and fifty thousand US dollars, qualifies you for the ten-year renewable Golden Visa, which also allows you to sponsor your spouse and children. The threshold can be met with one property or several combined. For smaller purchases, Dubai now also offers a two-year renewable investor visa, and recent rule changes removed the previous minimum value for sole owners of completed properties. There is no minimum stay requirement attached to the Golden Visa, so it works equally well for people who relocate and for people who simply want the option. Visa rules do change from time to time, so I always confirm the current requirements at the moment a client is ready to proceed.

Practicalities

13. Do I need to come to Dubai to buy?

No. The entire purchase can be completed remotely through a power of attorney, and many of my clients buy their first property before ever visiting. That said, I always encourage a visit, because seeing the communities in person changes how confidently people decide. When clients do visit, I organise the viewings around their shortlist so the trip is efficient.

14. Can I rent the property out, including short-term?

Yes. Long-term rental is straightforward and contracts are registered through the official Ejari system, which protects both landlord and tenant. Short-term holiday letting is also legal and regulated, it requires a permit from the tourism department, and it can be run either by the owner or through a licensed management company. Gross yields in Dubai are among the highest of any major global city, typically in the range of five to eight percent depending on the area and the format, though I always present yield figures for the specific property rather than relying on averages.

15. What are the ongoing costs of owning?

The main ongoing cost is the annual service charge, which covers maintenance, security and amenities of the building or community. It is charged per square foot and varies considerably by development, so I include the exact figure in every proposal I prepare. Beyond that, there are utilities and, if you let the property, management fees. There are no annual government property taxes.

16. What legal system applies, and will my contracts be in English?

Property matters in Dubai are governed by clear, codified local laws, and the institutions that matter to a buyer, the Land Department, the regulator RERA and the rental dispute centre, are well established and efficient. Sale contracts for international buyers are issued in English or bilingually, and title deeds are bilingual. For clients who want an additional layer of comfort, independent conveyancing lawyers are available at reasonable cost, and I am happy to recommend firms I trust.

This document reflects my professional experience and general market knowledge as at mid-2026. It is prepared for general information only and does not constitute legal, tax or financial advice. Laws, fees and visa rules change, and every individual's circumstances are different. You should always confirm the current position with a qualified and independent legal and tax adviser before making any decision based on the content of this document.