

Getting a liquor licence

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Muslims are prohibited by religion and law from using alcoholic beverages. For non-Muslims there are no such restrictions, though for home consumption it will have to be purchased from one of a handful of licensed suppliers. And you are required by law to hold a liquor licence in order to purchase alcoholic beverages legally from an alcohol shop.



Your employer might be able to obtain most of the documentation for you and a PRO could collect the actual licence – you don't need to turn up in person to collect it. But it will probably be faster and cheaper to do it yourself.

ELIGIBILITY

You can get a liquor licence if:

- You are a resident of Abu Dhabi (meaning you have a residency visa).
- You are not Muslim.
- You earn more than AED 3,000 per month.

DOCUMENTS

You will need:

- A completed application form (they may ask for the form to be filled in both English and Arabic, but they will take English only). You can get a copy from your local liquor store – try African + Eastern (listed at <http://tinyurl.com/3hnf3cm>) or GMP (<http://tinyurl.com/3gsb7yt>), but note that the 'get a licence' information on both sites is out of date.

- Your original passport with residence visa. If the residence visa was issued in another Emirate, the applicant must attach a document from the competent authorities in that emirate certifying that no licence has been obtained there (that's effectively a No Objection letter from the local police – the Dubai CID, for Dubai residents) along with a letter issued by the employer certifying that the applicant has moved to Abu Dhabi emirate.

- Two recent colour passport-sized photos.
- If you are of Arabic descent, a certificate of religion from a church or an embassy to confirm that you are not a Muslim.
- Either a copy of your employment contract (which must be in Arabic and addressed to the Directorate General of Police Abu Dhabi Criminal Investigation Department) stating your monthly salary; or, if you are an investor in Abu Dhabi, the commercial licence of the business.

- The fee. This is 20 per cent of the licence value, which in turn is calculated on the basis of your salary – up to 20 per cent may be used for alcohol. So if you're getting AED 15,000 per month and want a licence for the maximum permitted amount, that would be AED 3,000 and the fee would be AED 600.

A spouse who is sponsored by their partner can be added to the licence of their partner after completing an additional form and providing two recent colour passport sized photos. Spouses can also receive their own licence if their partner does not wish to obtain one. By law, in order to purchase and consume alcohol, spouses who are sponsored by their partners should either be named on their partner's licence, or hold their own licence.

A child over the age of 18 and sponsored by their parents cannot be added to his or her parent's liquor licence. They must obtain their own licence and can only do this once they are working, sponsored by their employers, and earning over AED 3,000 a month. This also applies to children who are studying abroad but still holding a residence permit for Abu Dhabi.

THE LICENSING OFFICE

Documents used to be processed at the Police Station in Khalifa City A, but that changed last year. You now need to take the documents to the CID office located one block behind Muroor Road/4th St.

It's not especially easy to find the office, especially as at the moment there is absolutely no signage. We have identified the location on a Google map – <http://tinyurl.com/4xwa539> : to drive there, head out of town towards the mainland on Muroor Road and go through the lights at 15th St.

Take the next right – it's after Technical Scissors – and then the next left. Look for somewhere to park. Alternatively, park on Muroor Road and walk down one of the alleyways into the square containing the CID building.

Parking here can be really tricky during the day (especially after 2pm on a school day: there are a couple of very large schools in the area).

The CID offices are in a small unnamed square and are distinguished by a blue and white pattern over the glass and doors (currently there are no signs). At the moment the Licensing

Department is in Shop No 3 – the offices were actually built as shop units – though we were told it might be relocated soon elsewhere in the building.

The Licensing Department is open from 8am to 2.30pm Sunday to Thursday, in theory. In practice you might not get in until 9am, and some people have been turned away if they arrive after 2pm.

You can wait and collect within the hour or return the next day; or you can have the licence mailed to you via Empost for an additional AED 10.

THE RULES

According to the Alcoholic Beverages Law, it is illegal to:

- Drive under the influence of alcohol
- Purchase and consume alcohol if holding a residence permit but not a liquor licence
- Obtain alcoholic beverages from places other than those permitted by the law
- Exceed the monetary limit imposed by the licence
- Obtain alcoholic beverages if under the age of 18 years or supply alcohol to those under 18

Even if you have a liquor licence, you should be aware that:

- The liquor licence is only a buying permit and it gives no immunity against any alcohol related criminal offence.
- The Alcoholic Beverages Law states that anyone arrested for being drunk in a public place, and found guilty by a court of law, could receive a custodial sentence of not less than two months and not more than one year. They may also be fined AED 500 or more. Any other offence or crime committed while drunk will be heard separately.

The licence is valid only in the issuing emirate. And some specific rules apply, including ...

- The licence should not be given to an unauthorised person.
- The licence holder must keep the alcohol for his personal consumption and not sell or give the alcohol to a third party. If the holder breaks this rule, their licence may be considered cancelled.
- It is the duty of the licence holder to ensure that the value of alcoholic beverages purchased is endorsed, by the seller, on the actual licence.
- The licence holder must report any loss or theft of the licence.

If you find this information has changed or have anything useful to add, let us know via editor@AbuDhabiWeek.com and we'll post an update

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