

Studying in the UAE

A guide for international students & families — how UAE higher education works, the university-sponsored student visa, English-medium branch campuses, tax-free study, and post-study visas.

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ENGLISH-MEDIUM, BRANCH CAMPUSES, TAX-FREE

The UAE has become a distinct higher-education market: **English-taught degrees, world-ranked research universities (Khalifa, MBZUAI, NYU Abu Dhabi), and 30+ international branch campuses that deliver UK and US degrees onshore** — in a tax-free, ultra-safe country with a career pipeline into Dubai and Abu Dhabi. Your **university sponsors your student residence visa**. This guide walks it in **ten steps**.

General guidance, not legal or immigration advice. UAE rules, tuition, and requirements change (recent education-law and work-rule updates). The details here are recent examples and **must be confirmed with your university, the GDRFA, and MOHRE**.

Understand Why Students Choose the UAE

WHAT TO KNOW

The UAE offers **English-taught degrees, world-ranked and branch-campus universities (UK/US degrees onshore), zero income tax, top safety, generous scholarships, and a career pipeline into Dubai/Abu Dhabi HQs** — an increasingly serious study destination.

BY THE NUMBERS

English-medium

+ branch campuses

Tax-free

+ top safety

Career pipeline

Dubai/Abu Dhabi HQs

HOW TO HELP

Weigh the UAE's **English-taught quality and career pipeline** against generally high tuition (offset by strong scholarships) — for business, tech, and engineering, it's a rising hub.

GOOD TO KNOW

Branch campuses deliver **UK/US degrees onshore at 30–50% less** than the home campus — a genuine value proposition.

Understand the System

WHAT TO KNOW

Three groups: **federal universities** (UAE University, Zayed, HCT); **UAE research leaders** (Khalifa — science/tech, MBZUAI — AI, NYU Abu Dhabi); and **international branch campuses** (Heriot-Watt Dubai, University of Birmingham Dubai, Sorbonne Abu Dhabi, RIT Dubai). Plus American University of Sharjah. **Verify accreditation** (CAA/Ministry).

BY THE NUMBERS

Federal

UAEU, Zayed, HCT

Research

Khalifa, MBZUAI, NYUAD

Branch campuses

Heriot-Watt, Birmingham

HOW TO HELP

Choose among **federal, research, or branch-campus universities** by field and budget, and confirm **accreditation** (with the Ministry/CAA) — it affects recognition and your visa.

WATCH OUT

For a UK/US degree, pick a **branch campus**; for full-ride research, NYU Abu Dhabi or MBZUAI — confirm accreditation either way.

Get the Student Residence Visa

WHAT TO KNOW

You **don't apply for a student visa independently**: once you accept your offer, pay your deposit, and submit documents, your **university applies for your student residence visa (إقامة طالب) on your behalf** (via the GDRFA). You'll complete a **medical test and get an Emirates ID** after arrival.

BY THE NUMBERS

University applies

not you

GDRFA

issues the residence visa

Emirates ID

+ medical test

HOW TO HELP

Let your **university sponsor and apply for your student residence visa** (after your deposit/documents), then complete your **medical test and Emirates ID** on arrival.

GOOD TO KNOW

You can also study under a **parent's sponsorship** if they're a UAE resident — otherwise the university sponsors you.

Apply to Universities

WHAT TO KNOW

Apply **directly to universities** (deadlines for the fall/September intake typically run **March–July**). Provide transcripts, English proof (TOEFL/IELTS), and program documents. Confirm **accreditation, scholarship conditions, and post-graduation rules** before committing.

BY THE NUMBERS

Apply directly

March–July (fall)

English proof

TOEFL/IELTS

Confirm

accreditation & scholarships

HOW TO HELP

Apply **directly** to your chosen universities for the fall intake, with transcripts and English proof — and confirm accreditation, scholarship terms, and work rules first.

GOOD TO KNOW

Apply **early** — confirm acceptance before starting the visa, and check on-campus housing (limited; NYUAD/AUS/Khalifa offer it).

Plan for Tuition & Scholarships

WHAT TO KNOW

Tuition varies widely: **federal universities ~AED 30,000–80,000/year; branch campuses ~AED 60,000–150,000/year** (still cheaper than home campuses). Two institutions offer near-full rides: **NYU Abu Dhabi and MBZUAI** (tuition + housing + stipend). Khalifa, UAEU, and Sheikh foundations also fund students.

BY THE NUMBERS

Federal

~AED 30k–80k/yr

Branch campuses

~AED 60k–150k/yr

Full rides

NYUAD, MBZUAI

HOW TO HELP

Budget the tuition (federal cheaper; branch campuses pricier but below home rates), and pursue the **full-ride scholarships (NYUAD, MBZUAI)** and Khalifa/UAEU/Sheikh foundation awards.

GOOD TO KNOW

NYU Abu Dhabi and MBZUAI offer full scholarships (tuition, housing, stipend) to most admitted students — worth targeting if you qualify.

Meet the Financial Requirement

WHAT TO KNOW

For the visa, you must show **proof of paid tuition** and sufficient funds, plus a **certificate of good health** and a valid passport (6+ months). The university handles most of the visa process and fees. Health insurance is required.

BY THE NUMBERS

Proof of paid tuition

+ funds

Good-health certificate

required

University handles

most of the visa

HOW TO HELP

Provide **proof of paid tuition and funds**, a **good-health certificate**, and a valid passport — your university manages most of the visa process and fees.

GOOD TO KNOW

The **university pays for and processes most of the visa** — your job is to submit documents and complete the medical/Emirates ID.



Meet Language Requirements

WHAT TO KNOW

Programs are taught **in English** (the medium at most universities and all branch campuses), so you prove English (TOEFL/IELTS). Arabic is the official language and used in some support services; some Arabic helps daily life.

BY THE NUMBERS

English

medium of instruction

Proof

TOEFL/IELTS

Arabic

official; some helps

HOW TO HELP

Prove **English proficiency** (TOEFL/IELTS) for your program — teaching is in English — and pick up some Arabic for daily life.

GOOD TO KNOW

Teaching is **in English** across most universities and all branch campuses — language is rarely a barrier.

Prepare for the Move

WHAT TO KNOW

After arriving, complete your **medical test, Emirates ID, and banking**. On-campus housing is limited (Abu Dhabi/Sharjah universities offer it; most Dubai universities don't — rent privately, e.g., Bur Dubai or Discovery Gardens, ~AED 2,000–3,500/month shared). Budget for higher living costs.

BY THE NUMBERS

Medical + Emirates ID

first tasks

Housing

limited on-campus

Shared rent

~AED 2,000–3,500/mo

HOW TO HELP

Handle arrival admin — **medical test, Emirates ID, banking** — and arrange housing early (on-campus is limited; private shared rentals run ~—2,000AED 3,500/month).

GOOD TO KNOW

Most **Dubai universities have no on-campus housing** — plan to rent privately (Bur Dubai, Deira, Discovery Gardens are most affordable).

Understand Work Rules

WHAT TO KNOW

Students on university-issued residence visas can work **part-time (typically 15–20 hours/week during term, full-time in holidays)** with a **No-Objection Certificate (NOC) from the university and a part-time work permit from MOHRE**. Internships with corporate partners are often easier to arrange.

BY THE NUMBERS

Work

~15–20 hrs/week

NOC + MOHRE permit

required

Internships

via university partners

HOW TO HELP

You may work **part-time (~15–20 hrs/week)** with a university **NOC** and a **MOHRE work permit**, and internships with corporate partners are often the easiest route.

GOOD TO KNOW

You need a **university NOC** and a **MOHRE part-time work permit** before working — arrange these first.

Thrive & Work After Study

WHAT TO KNOW

The UAE actively retains graduates: after study you can pursue a **5-year Green Visa (self-sponsored)** or a **Golden Visa (for outstanding students/graduates)**, and Dubai/Abu Dhabi's regional HQs (finance, tech, aviation, energy) offer strong career pipelines — in a tax-free economy.

BY THE NUMBERS

Green Visa

5-year, self-sponsored

Golden Visa

outstanding students

Dubai HQs

strong pipeline

HOW TO HELP

Plan for the **Green Visa** (or Golden Visa if you qualify) after graduating, and target Dubai/Abu Dhabi's regional-HQ job market — a genuine, tax-free career pipeline.

GOOD TO KNOW

The UAE's **Green and Golden Visas** make staying to work realistic — outstanding students can even secure the Golden Visa during study.

Studying in the UAE: The Essentials

A snapshot — rules change, so confirm everything with your university, the GDRFA, and MOHRE.

The system

Federal universities (UAEU, Zayed, HCT), research leaders (Khalifa, MBZUAI, NYU Abu Dhabi), 30+ international branch campuses (Heriot-Watt, Birmingham, Sorbonne, RIT), and American University of Sharjah; verify accreditation.

Visa

Students don't apply independently — the university sponsors and applies for your student residence visa (via GDRFA) after your deposit/documents; complete a medical test and Emirates ID on arrival.

Tuition & scholarships

Federal ~AED 30k–80k/year; branch campuses ~AED 60k–150k (below home rates); NYU Abu Dhabi and MBZUAI offer near-full rides; Khalifa, UAEU, and Sheikh-foundation scholarships.

Money & language

Show proof of paid tuition and funds, a good-health certificate, and a valid passport; the university handles most of the visa; English is the medium of instruction (TOEFL/IELTS).

Work & after

Work ~15–20 hrs/week with a university NOC and MOHRE permit; the Green Visa (5-year) and Golden Visa (outstanding students) support staying, into a tax-free, HQ-rich job market.

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