



## Expat Guidance Abroad

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**Introductory Note** – This guidance is aimed at IOSH members working or looking to work in the Middle East region. Much of the guidance will be applicable to other regions globally, but currently this document is primarily based on IOSH members experience in the Middle East region.

This guide has been compiled by members of the IOSH Construction Group with experience of working abroad. While it reflects the experiences and views of those members, it does not represent the views of IOSH as a whole

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## Contents

### Section 1.0 Before You Go

- 1.1 Plan your Arrival
  - 1.1.1 Tax
  - 1.1.2 Pets
- 1.2 Where to get Information and Advice
- 1.3 Insurance
- 1.4 Documentation
- 1.5 Medical Fitness
- 1.6 Local Knowledge
- 1.7 Key Contacts
- 1.8 Mobile Phones
- 1.9 Driving Abroad
- 1.10 General Advice – Do's & Don'ts
- 1.11 Getting Help
  - 1.11.1 British Embassy Registration

### Section 2.0 In Country

- 2.1 Where to Live
- 2.2 Where to Shop
- 2.3 Communication
- 2.4 Driving

### Section 3.0 Work Issues

- 3.1 Differences in Working Practices
- 3.2 Legislation
- 3.3 Project Structures, Hierarchy
- 3.4 Competence
  - 3.4.1 Vocational Skills
- 3.5 Health and Safety Culture and Attitudes
  - 3.5.1 PPE
- 3.6 Local Practices
- 3.7 Politics
- 3.8 Security
- 3.9 Use and Abuse of Equipment

### Section 4.0 Work Environment

- 4.1 Climate / Weather
  - 4.2 Language
  - 4.3 Literacy
  - 4.4 Community / Team Engagement
  - 4.5 Holidays
  - 4.6 Infrastructure
-

## **Section 1.0 Before You Go**

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## **1.1 Plan your Arrival**

- i. Consider options / issues for you and your family. Negotiate package taking these factors into account:
  - Basic salary (Note – your leaving gratuity payment made to you when you are leaving the company / country is normally based on your basic salary and not on your total package – be aware of this)
  - General cost of living
  - Accommodation / rent
  - Travel to/from and in country (for everyone) - business class / economy flights. Bear in mind that the law is different with regard to resignation or termination so ensure that you consider this when planning flights home (exit strategy).
  - Cars (how many?) Consider if your spouse drives and if you can afford two cars - being isolated in a cheaper area of town can cause problems.
  - Schooling – identify suitable schools and plan to visit on arrival to finalise choice.
  - Health insurance / medical bills – whole family – include dental, maternity
- ii. Remember the package may seem good but rent and bills are high and there can be a lot of fees that need to be paid up front – so budget accordingly.
- iii. Arrange to arrive several months before the family and any other dependants including pets to 'set up shop'.
- iv. Investigate recreational activities, clubs.

### **1.1.1 Tax**

- i. Contact HMRC / research website to understand tax implications of working abroad.
- ii. Register for expat status and submit necessary forms.

### **1.1.2 Pets**

- i. Pet travel is very expensive and will be for your own cost - anywhere in the region of at least £300 to £400 for one dog or cat.
- ii. Consider the type of pet and how it will take to the environment as the weather reaches 50 degrees in the summer.

## **1.2 Where to get Information and Advice**

- i. Information and advice for the destination concerned can be found via the websites below and can be used to inform the risk assessment process:
  - ii. Foreign Office Travel Advice: <https://www.gov.uk/foreign-travel-advice> or call 0845 850 2829 (24/7).
  - iii. World Health Organisation: <http://www.who.int/en>
  - iv. Do not travel to a country if the Foreign & Commonwealth Office or WHO advises against this.
  - v. Visit or contact the Middle East embassy in the UK. Establish what checks need to be made prior to travel and in-country (e.g. visa requirements, criminal records checks). Obtain contact details for the in-country ME visa department.
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### 1.3 Insurance

- i. Ensure you are adequately insured both professional and personally (including any family members).
- ii. Have valid travel insurance to cover you and your family for when you arrive - local medical insurance can take time to arrange.

### 1.4 Documentation

- i. Ensure you have the correct visas and any other required documentation for the country you are visiting and that your passport is valid. For certain countries your passport must be valid for 6 months after the date you travel – check the entry requirements before you go.
- ii. Fill in the emergency contact details in your passport.
- iii. Make a note of the passport number and consider taking a photocopy with you.
- iv. Get certification documents stamped by your home country's government (education, service records or other official qualification documents)
- v. Marriage certificates also need authenticated by your home country, the embassy of the country you going to in your home country and on arrival to the Middle East, a lot of these need to be translated.
- vi. Make official copies of all documents and have stamped in home country before bringing. Lots of agencies require the same paperwork although all want to see originals.
- vii. Check if you need an International Driving Permit.
- viii. Ensure you have local currency with you when you leave the UK – do not wait until you arrive at your destination to obtain money.
- ix. Inform your Bank and Credit card companies of the country you are visiting to ensure they will not decline any transactions.
- x. Take contact telephone numbers of your bank, credit card company and any information you may need for online / telephone transactions and blocking your account should cards be lost or stolen.
- xi. Store numbers for the local Embassy and emergency services on your mobile
- xii. Ensure you have a copy of your insurance policy and contact details.
- xiii. Take supplies of business cards.

### 1.5 Medical Fitness

- i. Ensure you are fit to travel and work overseas.
  - ii. Before journeying to certain countries, vaccinations are required. Make an appointment with a GP at the earliest opportunity before travelling to find out whether you need any immunisations or medication.
  - iii. Identify any specific health risks associated with the destination (e.g. malaria), to ensure necessary medication is provided.
  - iv. If you are taking prescribed medication or using over the counter medication, check it is legal in the destination to which you are travelling – codeine and certain other medication is illegal in many Middle Eastern countries.
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- v. Pack all medication in your hand luggage.
- vi. If you are taking prescribed medication, take the prescription and a doctor's letter with you.
- vii. Consider taking along an extra pair of glasses and/or contact lenses.

### 1.6 Local Knowledge

- i. Ahead of the trip, learn more about the destination - particularly any threats to health, well-being, safety and security.
- ii. To avoid mishaps and the possibility of causing any offence, check key cultural and business do's and don'ts for the destination concerned. You must be mindful of laws that are different to those in the UK, e.g. alcohol consumption.
- iii. You must also make sure you comply with UK law as it is possible to be prosecuted for some crimes even if the crime did not take place in the UK. For example, UK law makes it illegal to bribe foreign private or public individuals and UK nationals can be prosecuted in the UK for this crime even if the crime took place outside the UK, for example, prosecutions under the Bribery Act.

### 1.7 Key Contacts

- i. If you are on your own - arrange key contacts before you travel:
- ii. Establish a contact point in country for any problems, emergencies and monitoring that you feel may be required. Ensure the embassy is in your ICE (in case of emergency) contacts and your family have this number.
- iii. Establish a contact within the UK. Take into account time differences. Agree general check-in points (daily, weekly, monthly).

### 1.8 Mobile Phones

- i. If using your mobile abroad, check with your service provider that your phone is enabled for overseas travel.
- ii. Use of phone and data overseas can be expensive.
- iii. Obtain a local phone as soon as possible, it would be useful to negotiate one into your terms and conditions.

### 1.9 Driving Abroad

- i. If you are planning to drive abroad you will need an International Driving Permit (IDP) for certain countries in addition to your UK driving licence - which you also need to take with you if you're driving and/or hiring a car abroad. An IDP can be obtained from the AA via the following link,  
<http://www.theaa.com/getaway/idp/index.html>
  - ii. When applying for an IDP you should note the following:
  - iii. The AA is authorised to issue IDPs to applicants **18 years and over** who hold a valid **UK driving licence**, or can obtain such a licence on the basis of a valid pass certificate.
  - iv. IDPs cannot be issued to a holder of a UK provisional driving licence without the **test pass certificate** and **provisional driving licence**.
  - v. An IDP is a permit for use in conjunction with your **driving licence**, not in place of it.
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- vi. In some countries, you risk being **fin**ed or worse for relying solely on an IDP.
- vii. Applications cannot be made any more than three months in advance of the date of travel.
- viii. An International Driving Permit (IDP) is valid for 12 months from the date of issue and cannot be backdated under any circumstances. It is not the same as an International Driving Licence.
- ix. You can check those countries for which an IDP is required or recommended via the following link:  
[http://www.theaa.com/motoring\\_advice/overseas/idp-requirements-by-country.html](http://www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/overseas/idp-requirements-by-country.html)
- x. This also details the special conditions or requirements that apply in each country.
- xi. Country-specific advice and information regarding local driving rules and requirements can be obtained via:  
[http://www.theaa.com/motoring\\_advice/overseas/countrybycountry.html](http://www.theaa.com/motoring_advice/overseas/countrybycountry.html)
- xii. A pdf file containing relevant details can be downloaded by selecting the appropriate destination country.
- xiii. Apply for a local license on arrival.

### **1.10 General Advice – Do’s & Don’ts**

- i. Don’t openly display valuables such as mobile phones or digital cameras.
  - ii. Keep your luggage with you at airports and other departure points to avoid having drugs planted - consider using a padlock on luggage.
  - iii. Only carry a minimal amount of cash, sufficient to reach the destination.
  - iv. Split amounts of cash, credit cards, etc. so that they are carried in separate zipped pockets or a money belt.
  - v. Use hotel safes wherever possible.
  - vi. In hot climates use sun protection, wear a hat and try to keep out of direct sunlight during the hottest part of the day, and have bottled water available at all times.
  - vii. Dress and behave according to local customs and obey local laws - there may be serious penalties for breaking a law that might seem trivial at home.
  - viii. Be careful when taking photographs, videos or using binoculars. Such activities may be misunderstood, especially near military installations.
  - ix. Check whether it’s safe to drink local tap water- if not, stick to bottled water and avoid salads, non-peeling fruit and ice in drinks.
  - x. If food hygiene is likely to be a problem, eat only hot, freshly cooked food.
  - xi. Use your judgement when buying and eating food you’ve not prepared yourself.
  - xii. Preserve the environment - don’t buy wildlife souvenirs, conserve resources like water and don’t drop litter.
  - xiii. Don’t carry anything through customs for someone else and be aware of even seemingly innocent approaches from people in airports.
  - xiv. Don’t cross borders with people you don’t know or drive across borders with unknown companions.
  - xv. There are certain goods that cannot be brought back into the UK - even if they are freely available overseas. Be mindful of this when returning.
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### 1.11 Getting Help

- i. Depending on the circumstances, a British Embassy or Consulate can help British people in difficulty while abroad. For example, they may be able to:
  - Issue or arrange a replacement passport if yours is lost or stolen.
  - Provide help if you are a victim of crime or are in hospital.
  - Provide details of local lawyers, interpreters, doctors.
  - Assist with reporting any incidences of theft to the local police. You will need a police statement to claim against travel insurance policies.
  - Assist with cancelling any stolen or lost credit cards or travellers cheques.
- ii. Find out where your embassy is and contact details.
- iii. Visit the embassy on arrival and give details of yourself and any family members who are following.

#### 1.11.1 British Embassy Registration

- i. It is advisable to take the details of the local British Embassy which can be sourced via: <https://www.gov.uk/world>
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## **Section 2.0 In Country**

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### 2.1 ML – 2.1 General

- i. The company you join is likely to place you in a serviced apartment or hotel for the initial month.
- ii. A company public relations officer (PRO) will assist in obtaining your visa, arranging medical and biometrics. Once this has been conducted an ID card can be applied for.
- iii. To open a bank account, you need all the above, plus normally a letter from your company for no objection. Be aware in most middle eastern countries it can be anywhere between one and six months to have the bank account up and running.

### 2.2 Where to Live

- i. Move into a serviced apartment near to the workplace until your family arrives. You may be waiting for your household goods to arrive from your country of origin. Start looking at schools that you have selected on the internet. Identify areas where you want to live more permanently.
- ii. If single a serviced apartment is the easier option - these are reasonable and relatively easy to find.
- iii. Contact the embassy and use local expat knowledge if hiring a maid / nanny.
- iv. Expat communities exist in the middle east, however, dependant on the country will depend on the level of security present (Saudi Arabia has national guard)
- v. Be aware of tenancy agreements, as they are difficult to leave should you wish to break your agreement.
- vi. Month by month accommodation is available.

### 2.3 Where to Shop

- i. Shop on the expat sites.
- ii. Middle east is famous for grand shopping malls.
- iii. There are many food markets and supermarkets that sell household goods along with groceries, with several chains specialising in UK goods.

### 2.4 Communication

- i. Skype is banned in the parts of the Middle East.
- ii. However, there are many communication and social platforms still available in the middle east.
- iii. Whatsapp is the main point of contact due to the flexibility of location sharing for deliveries etc.

### 2.5 Driving

- i. Rent a car initially.
  - ii. International driving licence is required in most Middle Eastern countries when renting a car; however, your records will need to be updated once you have a local driving licence.
  - iii. British driving licence holders are not required to take a driving test in most Middle East countries and can transfer their existing licences over to the local driving licence.
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- iv. Long term rental agreements are generally the best option as opposed to purchasing a car from the local garage.

## **2.6 Alcohol**

- i. Alcohol can be purchased from alcohol shops in most Middle East countries (excluding Saudi and Kuwait).
- ii. Alcohol licence is required to purchase and consume. You will normally pay a deposit for the licence which can be redeemed when you are leaving the country.
- iii. Company no objection letter is required for applying for a licence.
- iv. How much you can spend each month on alcohol using your licence is linked to your salary amount.

## **2.7 Getting around**

- i. Many forms of transport are available:
  - Metro,
  - Taxis
  - Uber and Careem
- ii. Females will need to be aware of the local custom in regard to travelling alone.

## **2.8 Place of worship**

- i. Most Middle east countries have a liberal and welcoming attitude towards other religions.
- ii. Churches, mosques etc. are present.

## **2.9 Post**

- i. PO Box may be required should you require regular post.
- ii. Alternatively courier service is available (Aramex, Fed Ex, DHL etc).

## **2.10 Public Holidays**

- i. There are several and simple search on the internet will identify them, as some dates move (Ramadan for example each year).
- ii. A good reliable source is <https://publicholidays.me/>

## **2.11 Ramadan**

- i. Ramadan is a major holiday in the Middle East and important for the local populations and expat Muslim's.
  - ii. For the month of Ramadan many things change. Fasting is key and you must respect this key matter and not eat during the daylight hours in front of muslims who are fasting.
  - iii. Working hours for most of the population are reduced.
  - iv. In the early part of Ramadan the initial effects of fasting can affect driving behaviour on the road, take extra care.
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### 2.12 VAT

- i. 5% VAT is now applicable in most middle eastern countries.

## **Section 3.0 Work Issues**

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### 3.1 Differences in Working Practices

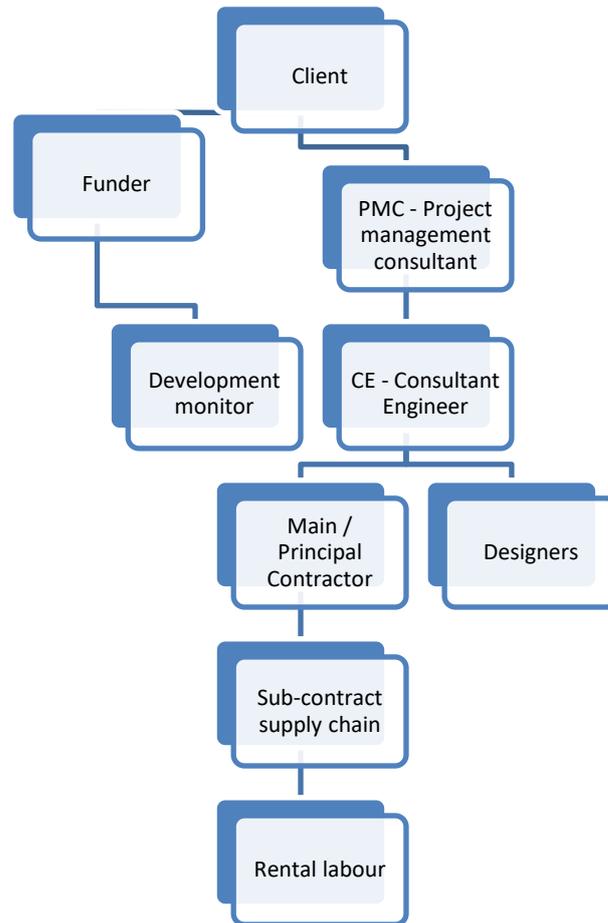
- i. Each individual country in the Middle East has its own nuances, so you will encounter slightly different situations dependent upon which Middle East country you work in.
- ii. For example, whilst in Oman you will encounter Omani's who work and fill positions (taxi drivers), in Qatar there are no Qatari taxi drivers.

### 3.2 Legislation

- i. Legislation and the approach to its use and enforcement differs greatly across the Middle Eastern countries. The different legislation across the ME region is sometimes American based (OSHA) and sometimes English / European driven (HSE.GOV).
- ii. It is important that you have a competent knowledge of the legislation in the country in which you are working in.
- iii. A very useful site for the myriad of legislation across the ME countries is the ILO LEGOSH website. The links are:
- iv. ILO website guidance on LEGOSH - [https://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS\\_217849/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/safework/info/publications/WCMS_217849/lang--en/index.htm)
- v. LEGOSH website - <https://www.ilo.org/dyn/legosh/en>

### 3.3 Project Structures, Hierarchy

- i. Projects are structured differently compared to the UK, with more management levels and layers of bureaucracy, dependent on the size and scale of the project. A typical project structure could consist of the following:
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- ii. It is important to understand the hierarchy of senior management and to find the movers and shakers.

### 3.4 Competence and Culture Challenges

- i. There are huge differences in competency levels of both site-based working operatives and white-collar site management staff (engineers, site management, project managers). A large majority have no comprehension of health, safety and wellbeing matters due to their working background.
- ii. Many white-collar site management staff regard HSW as separate to the rest of the project dynamics (cost, programme, quality) and a tick box function with them holding no responsibility for health and safety matters.
- iii. Many health and safety professionals tend to be very process driven and have a lack of understanding around human behaviours on construction sites.
- iv. You will also encounter site operatives who have come to the Middle East to earn money and change their future who have never worked on a construction site before and who are not familiar with their allocated job role and work equipment / activities.
- v. The blue-collar workforce is generally a hardworking friendly group but need help and professionalism to keep them safe and healthy.

### **3.4.1 Vocational Skills**

- i. Factors to consider:
  - Legislation
  - Indigenous skills
  - Certification
  - Skills shortages – migrant workers (restrictions)

### **3.5 Health and Safety Culture and Attitudes**

- i. There are many different nationalities providing work resources in the Middle East. They bring with them a huge range of cultures, attitudes, behaviours, and bias (CABB). CABB range from national prejudices, societal approaches, class or caste systems, to a dislike of other nations.
- ii. It is important to have a good understanding of CABBs as these affect how individuals treat each other and subsequently has a direct impact on health, safety and wellbeing on site.
- iii. All Arabic nationals, from clients to the local workforce, value respect within a project hierarchy, and it is important not to lose face. This needs to be borne in mind when developing strategies and delivering health and safety on site.
- iv. Other factors to consider:
  - Risk awareness (knowledge varies greatly)
  - Health and fitness levels of workers

#### **3.5.1 PPE**

- i. Factors to consider:
  - Availability / quality
  - Anthropometrics
  - Adaptation
  - Behaviour
  - Enforcement

### **3.6 Local Practices**

- i. Factors to consider:
  - Tradition
  - Informal methods
  - Labour costs
  - Available expertise
  - Enforcement

### **3.7 Politics**

- i. Factors to consider:
    - Enforcement
    - Poor communities
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- Client
- Local administration
- Ethics

### **3.8 Security**

- i. Factors to consider:
  - Site access
  - Local policing
  - Civil unrest
  - Theft

### **3.9 Use and Abuse of Equipment**

- i. Factors to consider:
    - Machinery
    - Vehicles
    - Regulations
    - Certification
    - Training
    - Incentives
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## **Section 4.0 Work Environment**

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#### **4.1 Climate / Weather**

- i. The summer working hours are factor to be managed. In most ME countries there are restrictions on the hottest part of the day. Generally between the hours of circa 11.30am to 3.30pm working outside in the open sun is not allowed.
- ii. Climate is a major factor for the workforce and the management of health and safety on site, the. The eight hot months of the year impact greatly on energy levels and tiredness and it is important to drink plenty of fluids to keep hydrated.
- iii. Site health and safety logistics are crucial and need to take into account drinking stations, satellite first aid stations, rest and shade areas, working hours, job rotation.
- iv. Heavy downpours during the cooler months can present challenges as a result of inadequate physical drainage and sewage capacity.

#### **4.2 Language**

- i. It is useful to learn basic Arabic phrases: introductions and greetings, asking about family, simple instructions, simple questions, as well as basic phrases in Hindustani, Philippino, Urdu, (bear in mind there are many variants / dialects within each of the main overseas workers languages).
- ii. Factors to consider:
  - Translation / working with trusted translators;
  - Visual methods to convey essential messages;
  - Ethnologue - a comprehensive study of the world's languages - available on their website - can provide an insight into the diversity of languages that are likely to be encountered when working in different countries;
  - Multilingual staff.

#### **4.3 Literacy**

- i. Potential for high levels of illiteracy in workers.
- ii. Factors to consider:
  - Training
  - Education programmes
  - Minimise wording on posters – use images to convey messages

#### **4.4 Community / Team Engagement**

- i. Spending time with your team and their communities is valuable in establishing their support and getting to know them and their family values.
- ii. Within the communities and on a project level there are specific alpha group males who all hold useful intel which can be harnessed to help on site.

#### **4.5 Holidays**

- i. In the Middle East, contracts for the majority of expats from all corners of the globe normally allow circa four weeks holiday.
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- ii. The expat workforce (particularly from the subcontinent and MENA regions) usually prefer to take this holiday allocation all at once in a monthly block.
- iii. In terms of resources on site, this needs to be managed to ensure sufficient site coverage.

#### **4.6 Infrastructure**

- i. The support provided by the infrastructure in European countries may not be available in many ME countries and this will impact on the health and well-being of workers on any project.
  - ii. Factors to consider:
    - Housing
    - Hospitals / access to medical facilities – transport times
    - Roads / safe transport to/from and on site
    - Procurement
    - Catering for workforce
-