What to Check Before You Book a Desert Trip in Dubai

Starting Your Desert Adventure on the Right Foot

A desert trip in Dubai can be one of the most memorable parts of a visit to the city. The landscape of golden sand dunes, the chance to see a desert sunset, and the cultural touches like henna painting or a falconry display make it a popular choice. But with so many options available, it is easy to book something that does not match what you expected. A little checking beforehand can save you time, money, and disappointment. Here is what to look into before you confirm your booking.

What Is Included in the Package

The first thing to check is exactly what the package covers. Many trips advertise a set of activities, but the details can vary. Some include a camel ride, while others offer only a short ride for children. Some provide a barbecue dinner under the stars, and others serve a simpler meal in a camp. Look for a clear list of what is included and, just as important, what is not. For example, some desert trips include a falconry display as part of the evening entertainment, but others charge extra for it. Knowing this upfront helps you compare options fairly.

Another point is whether the package includes transportation from your hotel or meeting point. Many tours pick you up from central Dubai, but some may charge a supplement for areas further out, such as Jumeirah Beach Residence or the Palm. Check the pickup details and the return time, especially if you have other plans later in the evening.

Duration and Timing of the Trip

Desert trips in Dubai usually fall into a few common time slots. Morning trips start early and last around four hours, often including a short camel ride and some time for photography. Evening trips are more popular, typically running from late afternoon into the night, with sunset views, a barbecue dinner, and entertainment like a belly dance show or tanoura performance. Some operators also offer overnight stays with star gazing and a chance to sleep in a desert camp.

View the location on Google Maps

When you book, check the exact start and end times. A trip that says "evening safari" might leave at 3:00 pm or 4:00 pm, and return anywhere between 8:00 pm and 10:00 pm. If you have children, a shorter trip might be more comfortable. Also consider the driving time from the city

to the desert, which can be 45 minutes to an hour each way. The total time you spend actually in the desert may be less than the overall tour duration.



Type of Vehicle and Driving Style

Most desert trips include a drive over the sand dunes in a 4x4 vehicle. This is often the highlight for many visitors. However, the driving style can vary. Some drivers take a more gentle approach, while others go for a thrilling, high-speed ride that can leave some passengers feeling queasy. If you or someone in your group is prone to motion sickness, it is worth asking about the driving style. Some operators offer a choice between a "dune bashing" experience and a more relaxed scenic drive. Also check the type of vehicle. Larger groups may be in a shared vehicle, while private tours often use smaller 4x4s.

If you prefer a quieter experience, some packages focus on the cultural side and skip the dune driving altogether. These are a good option for families with very young children, elderly travellers, or anyone who prefers to keep their feet on solid ground.

Meals and Dietary Needs

Evening desert trips almost always include a dinner. The quality and style of the meal can vary greatly. Some camps serve a buffet with a range of dishes, while others offer a set menu. If you have dietary restrictions, such as vegetarian, vegan, or gluten-free needs, it is wise to confirm in advance whether the operator can accommodate you. Many can, but not all will advertise it.

Similarly, if you are booking a morning trip, check whether breakfast or snacks are provided. Some packages include only water and soft drinks, so you may need to bring your own food.

It is also worth checking the setting. Some dinners are served in a traditional Bedouin-style camp with floor seating and cushions, while others use regular tables and chairs. If you have mobility issues, the camp layout may matter more than you think.

Entertainment and Cultural Activities

Many desert trips include cultural performances such as a belly dance show, a tanoura dance, or a falconry display. These can be a lovely addition, but they are not always included in the base price. Some operators charge extra for certain shows, especially the more elaborate ones. Henna painting is another activity that is sometimes included and sometimes offered at an additional cost. Check the list of activities carefully so you know what to expect and what might cost extra on the day.

Some trips also offer a short camel ride. This is usually a gentle walk around the camp, not a long trek into the dunes. If you are hoping for a more extended camel ride, you may need to book a private tour or a specialist operator. The same goes for star gazing. While many camps are in remote areas with little light pollution, not all offer a guided star gazing session. If that is important to you, look for a package that mentions it specifically.



What to Bring and What to Wear

Dubai's desert can get surprisingly cold in the evening, especially during the winter months. Evenings can be cool, so bring a light jacket or a shawl. During the summer, the heat is intense, so light, breathable clothing is essential. Sunscreen, sunglasses, and a hat are wise for daytime trips. If you are doing a morning safari, the sun can be strong even before 10:00 am. Comfortable closed-toe shoes are a good idea if you plan to walk on the sand, as sandals can fill up with sand quickly.

Most operators recommend bringing a camera, but be aware that sand can damage electronics. A simple protective case or a plastic bag can help. If you are booking a private tour, you might also want to check if the vehicle has air conditioning, as not all older models do.

Reading Reviews and Checking the Operator

Online reviews can give you a realistic picture of what to expect. Look for recent reviews on multiple platforms, and pay attention to comments about the driver's behaviour, the quality of the food, and the overall organisation. A few negative reviews are normal, but a pattern of complaints about cleanliness, safety, or late pickups is a red flag. Also check whether the operator is licensed and follows safety standards. While Dubai has strict regulations for desert tour operators, not all companies comply equally. A quick check on the Dubai Tourism website can confirm if the operator is registered.

Comparing Options and Reading the Fine Print

Once you have a sense of what you want, compare a few different dubai desert safari packages. Look beyond the headline price and consider what each includes. One package might seem cheaper but charge extra for transportation, dinner, or activities that another includes in the base price. The total cost can end up being similar once you add the extras. Also read the cancellation and refund policy. Some operators offer full refunds if you cancel a few days in advance, while others have strict no-refund policies. If your travel plans are uncertain, a flexible cancellation policy is worth paying a little extra for.

Another detail to check is whether the package is shared or private. Shared tours are more affordable, but you will be with a group of strangers. Private tours cost more but offer a more personalised experience. If you are travelling with a large family or a group of friends, a private tour might work out better value per person.



Final Checks Before You Confirm

Before you hit the book button, double-check the date and time. Some operators have different schedules on Fridays and during public holidays. Also confirm the pickup location and whether the operator will contact you the day before with the exact time. Many reputable operators send a confirmation message or email a day in advance. If you do not hear from them, it is worth following up. Finally, consider travel insurance that covers desert activities, especially if you plan to take part in dune bashing or quad biking. While accidents are rare, having cover gives you peace of mind.

Classic Desert Safari Tours Dubai is also on Twitter.

One local option is Classic Desert Safari Tours Dubai. They are based in Murjan 3 - Beach Walk - Marsa Dubai - Jumeirah Beach Residence - Dubai - United Arab Emirates, and can be contacted for more details on their trips.