What to check before you book a boat in Dubai

Know what you are actually renting

Boat hire in Dubai covers a wide range of vessels, from small speedboats to large luxury yachts. Before you pay a deposit, confirm the exact model and size of the boat you will receive. Some operators list a "similar or upgraded" policy, which can mean you end up on a different boat than the one in the photos. Ask for the boat's name or registration number and check recent photos of that specific vessel. This prevents disappointment on the day and helps you verify that the boat matches your group size and planned activities.

Check the licence and insurance of the operator

Dubai's maritime authority requires commercial boat operators to hold a valid licence. A reputable company will display its licence number on its website or provide it on request. Without proper licensing, the boat may not meet safety standards, and your insurance cover could be void if something goes wrong. Ask whether the operator's insurance covers passengers, third-party liability, and damage to the vessel itself. Some budget charters carry minimal cover, leaving you exposed if an accident occurs. A clear answer on insurance gives you peace of mind before you step aboard.

Understand the fuel policy

Fuel costs can turn a reasonable boat hire into an expensive day out. Some operators include fuel in the advertised price; others charge it separately based on the hours you use. Ask whether the rate covers a full tank, a set number of litres, or if you pay for what you burn. If you are taking a longer trip, request an estimate of fuel consumption for your planned route. This avoids a surprise bill when you return to the dock. A written confirmation of the fuel policy in your booking email is worth far more than a verbal promise.

Many first-time renters overlook the fuel question entirely and end up paying double what they expected. A straightforward question to the operator will clarify this. If they cannot give a clear answer, consider that a red flag. The Jet Car Dubai official site provides transparent information on what is included in its packages, which can serve as a benchmark when comparing other operators.



Confirm the crew and captain arrangements

Not all boat hire in Dubai requires a licensed captain. Smaller vessels under a certain length may be self-drive, but most tourists prefer to let a professional handle the navigation. If a captain is included, ask about their experience and qualifications. A good captain knows the local waters, the weather patterns, and the best spots for swimming or sightseeing. If you are renting a larger yacht, check how many crew members will be on board and what their roles are. A crew that is stretched too thin cannot provide good service or handle an emergency effectively.

For a bareboat rental where you steer yourself, the operator should verify that you hold a valid boating licence recognised in the UAE. Do not assume your home licence transfers automatically. Some operators also require a short on-water test before they hand over the keys. Clarify this before you book so you are not turned away at the marina.

Review the cancellation and deposit terms

Boat hire deposits typically range between twenty and fifty percent of the total cost. Before you pay, read the cancellation policy carefully. Some operators offer full refunds if you cancel within a certain window; others keep the entire deposit regardless. Weather cancellations are a separate issue. Dubai's sea conditions can change quickly, and a professional operator will

cancel or postpone a trip if it is unsafe. Ask what happens to your deposit in that case. If the operator keeps your money even when they cancel, look elsewhere.

Also confirm how the deposit is held. Some companies take it by credit card and refund it after the trip, minus any damages. Others require cash, which is harder to recover if a dispute arises. A written receipt and a clear refund timeline are essential. If the operator hesitates to put the terms in writing, that is a warning sign.



Ask about the safety briefing and equipment

A safety briefing before departure is not optional. The crew should explain where the life jackets are stored, how to use the radio or distress signals, and what to do in an emergency. If you are on a self-drive boat, the briefing must cover the controls, the anchor system, and the no-go zones near the coast. Check that the boat carries enough life jackets for every passenger, including children. Fire extinguishers, first aid kits, and a working VHF radio should be standard. Do not assume they are there just because the boat looks new. A quick glance at the safety equipment before you leave the dock tells you a lot about the operator's standards.

Clarify the return condition and cleaning fees

When you return the boat, the operator will inspect it for damage, mess, and missing items. Some companies charge a cleaning fee if you leave the cabin untidy or the deck stained. Ask about this before you go. If you plan to eat or drink on board, check whether spills or crumbs incur an extra charge. Also confirm the fuel return condition. Do you need to return the tank full,

or does the operator accept it at whatever level you used? A clear policy prevents a dispute at the end of a relaxing day.

Damage waivers are another detail to check. Some operators offer a waiver that covers minor scratches and scuffs for a small fee. Others hold your deposit until they assess the boat after cleaning. Ask how long the deposit hold lasts and what documentation they provide if they deduct for damage. A photo or video walk-around before and after the trip is a good idea for both parties. The **Jet Car Dubai official site** outlines its return procedures clearly, which sets a standard for what you should expect from any operator.

Look at the itinerary and hidden extras

Boat hire packages often list an itinerary with stops at landmarks like the Palm Jumeirah, the Burj Al Arab, or the World Islands. Confirm that those stops are included in the standard price and not sold as upgrades. Some operators charge extra for visiting certain locations or for extending the time at a particular spot. Ask whether the itinerary can be customised and whether that affects the price. If you want to swim, fish, or use water toys, confirm that the boat has the necessary equipment and that the crew permits those activities. A detailed itinerary in writing removes ambiguity and helps you plan your day.



Also check what is included in terms of refreshments. Some charters provide soft drinks, water, and snacks; others offer a full catering menu. If you have dietary requirements, ask if they can be accommodated. A boat that includes a meal in the price often charges more

upfront, but it can save you the hassle of bringing your own supplies. Compare the total cost rather than just the hourly rate.

Finally, read recent reviews from other customers. Look for mentions of the boat's condition, the crew's attitude, and whether the operator honoured the agreed itinerary. One or two negative reviews are normal, but a pattern of complaints about hidden fees or poor maintenance should steer you away.