What to look for when booking a private yacht in Dubai

Understanding what goes into a private yacht booking

Booking a private yacht in Dubai sounds straightforward: you choose a date, pick a boat, and head out onto the Arabian Gulf. But the details matter more than most first-timers expect. The size of the vessel, the itinerary, and the inclusions all vary widely between operators. Without a clear sense of what to check, you can end up with a boat that feels cramped, a route that skips the landmarks you wanted to see, or hidden fees that double the quoted price.

This article walks through the key points to verify before you confirm a booking. Each point helps you match the experience to your group size, budget, and expectations. None of them are difficult to check, they just require asking the right questions early.

Vessel size and layout

The first thing most people consider is how many guests the yacht can hold. But capacity numbers can be misleading. A yacht rated for 12 guests might have only six comfortable deck seats; the rest may have to sit inside or stand. Ask for the maximum passenger count and then ask how many can be seated outdoors, how many can dine together, and whether there is a shaded area. If your group plans to sunbathe, socialise on deck, or take photos from the bow, you need a layout that supports that.

Also check the cabin configuration. Some yachts have one large saloon and a small sundeck; others have multiple decks with separate lounges and a flybridge. For a daytime cruise with a large group, a single-deck motor yacht might feel tight. For a quiet evening with a few friends, a sailing yacht with an open cockpit could be perfect. Think about how you will actually spend the time on board, and choose the layout to suit that.

Crew, licence and insurance

Dubai requires all commercial passenger vessels to hold a valid licence from the Dubai Maritime Authority. The crew must include a captain with a recognised qualification and at least one deckhand or steward. Ask the operator whether the vessel holds a current commercial licence and whether the crew are certified. A legitimate operator will share this information without hesitation.



Insurance is another point that often gets overlooked. The yacht should have third-party liability insurance that covers passengers. If you are chartering the entire vessel, ask for a copy of the insurance certificate or at least confirm the policy number and the insurer. This protects you in case of an accident or damage to the vessel. Without it, you could be held financially liable for repairs or medical costs.

Itinerary and cruising area

Dubai's coastline offers several distinct cruising areas. The Palm Jumeirah, Dubai Marina, Jumeirah Beach, and the Dubai Creek all provide different views and atmospheres. Some operators stick to a standard route that loops past the Atlantis and back. Others allow you to customise the itinerary. Before you book, confirm the cruising area and whether the route can be adjusted.

If you want to anchor near a specific beach, visit the Burj Al Arab, or cruise past the World Islands, make sure the yacht is permitted to go there. Some licences restrict the vessel to certain zones. Also check the duration of the cruise: a standard three-hour charter might only cover a short stretch of coast, while a five-hour trip can reach farther out. Ask for a sample itinerary and compare it with your expectations.

Inclusions and extra costs

The quoted price for a private yacht rental in Dubai often covers the vessel, the crew, and basic fuel. But many extras are not included. Food and drinks, water toys, fuel for long distances, port fees, and crew gratuity can all add up. Ask for a full list of what is included and what costs extra. A reputable operator will provide a written breakdown.

Water toys such as jet skis, inflatable slides, and snorkelling gear are usually optional extras. If your group wants to swim or play in the water, confirm that the equipment is available and what it costs. Some yachts carry a small tender or a paddleboard; others have nothing. Also check whether the yacht allows swimming at all, some licences restrict swimming in certain areas or during certain times of day.

Fuel is another variable. Most charters include enough fuel for the agreed route, but if you decide to go farther or the captain has to motor against a strong current, you might face a surcharge. Clarify the fuel policy before the trip starts, and ask whether there is a charge for additional hours if you want to extend the cruise on the day.

Catering and dietary needs

The food and drink on board can make or break the experience. Some operators provide a full catering service with a chef; others offer a cold buffet or only soft drinks. If you have specific dietary requirements, vegetarian, vegan, halal, gluten-free, or allergies, confirm that the caterer can accommodate them. It is better to know in advance than to arrive and find nothing suitable to eat.



Many charters allow you to bring your own food and drinks. That can be a cost-saver, but check whether the operator charges a corkage fee or a cleaning deposit. Also confirm that the yacht has a refrigerator, ice maker, and proper glassware if you plan to serve champagne or wine. For a formal event, the presentation matters; a plastic cup does not suit a celebration.

Weather and sea conditions

Dubai's weather is generally fine for yachting most of the year, but summer months can be extremely hot, and winter winds can create choppy seas. The captain has the final say on whether it is safe to sail. Ask the operator about their weather policy: what happens if the trip is cancelled due to bad weather? Do you get a full refund or a reschedule? Some operators offer a full refund; others only give a credit. Understand the terms before you pay.

Also check whether the yacht has air-conditioned indoor spaces. In the summer heat, a fully enclosed, air-conditioned saloon makes the trip comfortable. A boat with only open decks can be unbearable in July. If you are booking for a summer cruise, look for a yacht with both indoor and outdoor areas.

Booking process and deposit

Most operators require a deposit to secure the date. The deposit amount varies, but 30 to 50 percent is common. Ask what happens if you need to cancel or change the date. A flexible cancellation policy gives you peace of mind. Some operators offer a full refund if you cancel more than 48 hours in advance; others keep the deposit regardless. Read the terms carefully and get them in writing.

Payment methods also matter. Credit card payments offer some protection if the operator fails to deliver. Cash payments are riskier and harder to trace. If possible, pay by credit card or a recognised online payment platform. Avoid wiring money to an individual's personal account. A legitimate business will have a corporate bank account and a proper payment system.

What the charter includes, the fine print

Before you sign anything, ask for a contract or a booking confirmation that lists every agreed detail: the vessel name, the date and time, the departure and return points, the route, the crew, the inclusions, and the total price. A professional operator will provide this without being asked. If the operator hesitates or gives vague answers, consider that a red flag.



Also check the small print about damage liability. Some contracts hold the charterer responsible for any damage caused during the trip, even if it was accidental. Others have a waiver for minor damage. Understand your liability and whether you need to purchase additional insurance.

A private yacht in Dubai can be a fantastic way to see the city from the water. But the experience depends heavily on the preparation you do beforehand. By checking the vessel size, the crew credentials, the itinerary, the inclusions, the catering, the weather policy, the booking terms, and the fine print, you can avoid surprises and enjoy a smooth, memorable day on the Gulf.

The brand Private Yacht offers a range of vessels that suit different group sizes and preferences. When you research operators, keep these points in mind and ask the same questions of every company you consider. A well-informed booking leads to a better trip. *Private Yacht* charters, like any other, require you to verify the details that matter most to you. Take the time to check, and you will be glad you did.