What to look into before you book a boat in Dubai

Know what you are paying for

Before you hand over any money, ask for a full breakdown of the price. Some operators quote a low base rate and add fuel surcharges, port fees, or cleaning deposits later. A reputable company will tell you the total cost upfront, including VAT if applicable. Ask whether the quoted price covers the full hire period or only a set number of hours with overtime charges after that. Also check what is included in the price: do you get crew, fuel, water, and soft drinks, or are those extras? Getting this in writing avoids surprises at checkout.

Licensing and insurance

Every boat operating in Dubai waters must hold a valid marine license and commercial insurance. You can ask the hire company for their license number and insurance certificate. For self-drive boats, check that the vessel is insured for the driver you have in mind, not just the owner. If you plan to take the boat outside the immediate marina area, confirm that the insurance covers that zone. Dubai has strict maritime regulations, and unlicensed operators can be fined or impounded, which would ruin your day out.

Crew experience and language

The captain and crew make or break the experience. Ask how long the captain has worked in Dubai waters, and whether they speak a language you are comfortable with. A local captain knows the currents, wind patterns, and spots where you can anchor safely. They also know which areas are restricted or have shallow water. If you are hiring a boat for a private event, a crew that communicates well can adjust the route or stop at a better beach without you having to explain twice.

Boat condition and age

Dubai's heat and saltwater are hard on boats. Ask about the vessel's age and when it last had a full service. Check the upholstery, electronics, and safety gear when you board. A boat that looks tired above deck may also have neglected engines or outdated safety equipment. Many companies post recent photos online, but ask for a current photo or a video walkthrough. If the operator hesitates, that is a red flag. Also check the capacity: the advertised number of guests often includes the crew, so count only the seats for your group.



What happens if the weather turns

Dubai can have sudden wind, dust storms, or rough seas, especially in summer. Ask about the operator's weather policy before you pay. A good company will offer a full refund or a reschedule if the port closes or if the captain judges the conditions unsafe. Some operators try to keep your deposit and ask you to go out anyway; do not accept that. Your safety is the priority. Also check whether the boat has a cabin or shaded area where you can shelter if a squall passes.

Cancellation and refund terms

Read the cancellation policy carefully. Some companies offer a full refund up to 48 hours before departure, while others keep a percentage as a cancellation fee. If you are booking through a third-party platform, check whether they add their own terms on top. Also ask what happens if the operator cancels: do you get a full refund or a credit for another date? A clear policy protects both sides and shows the operator is professional.

Boat size vs group size

Bigger is not always better, but too small is uncomfortable. A 30-foot boat can feel cramped with ten people for four hours, while a 40-footer gives you room to move. Think about what you want to do: fishing, sunbathing, dining, or just cruising. Each activity needs different deck space. Ask the operator to recommend the right size for your group and itinerary. If they push a larger or more expensive model without explaining why, be cautious.

Fuel policy and range

Some operators include a full tank of fuel in the hire price, others charge by usage. Ask how far the boat can travel on a full tank, and whether the itinerary you have in mind is within that range. If you plan to go to the Palm Jumeirah, the Burj Al Arab, and back to the marina, that is a different distance than a trip out to the World Islands. Also check whether the boat has a fuel gauge you can see, so you can monitor usage during the trip.



Docking and boarding location

Dubai has many marinas, and some are easier to reach than others. Ask where exactly the boat departs from, and whether parking is available nearby. Some operators charge extra for parking or for transfers from the marina gate to the boat. If you have guests with mobility issues, check whether the boarding ramp is gentle. Also ask about the return time: some operators enforce strict docking times because the marina has limited berths.

What you can bring on board

Every operator has rules about food, drinks, music, and decorations. Some allow outside catering, others insist you use their supplier. Some allow alcohol, others do not, and some require you to buy it from them. If you are celebrating a birthday or hosting a corporate event, ask about decorations and sound systems. Also check whether the boat has a fridge, icebox, or sound system built in. Knowing these details ahead stops you from hauling gear you cannot use.

One more thing: if you want a smooth experience, consider a provider that specialises in private boat charters. For example, Jet Car Dubai offers a range of boats and handles the logistics so you can focus on enjoying the water. They can advise on the best vessel for your group and help with any special requests.

Read recent reviews, not just the score

A five-star rating means little if the reviews are old or generic. Read the latest three or four reviews, especially the ones that mention the booking process, the crew, and the boat condition. Look for patterns: if multiple reviews say the boat was late, or the captain was rude, take that seriously. Also check how the company responds to negative reviews. A professional reply that addresses the issue shows accountability.



Payment methods and deposits

Ask how the operator takes payment. Credit card offers more protection than bank transfer or cash. Some companies ask for a security deposit against damage. Ask how much it is and when you get it back. Take photos of the boat before you leave and after you return, so there is no dispute about scratches or spills. Also ask whether the deposit is refundable if the boat returns undamaged.

When you book through a reputable operator, the process should feel transparent. A company like Jet Car Dubai will give you clear answers to all these questions without pressure. Taking a few minutes to check these points means you can relax and enjoy the Dubai coastline, knowing your day on the water is safe and well planned.