How to check a developer in Dubai before you buy off-plan

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In recent weeks, people who bought an off-plan apartment in Dubai have been contacting me. They tell me the handover date has passed and the apartment is still not ready. This is not rare. According to Fitch, of about 174,000 units scheduled for handover in Dubai in 2022 to 2024, about 97,000 were actually delivered, roughly 56%. So choosing the developer matters as much as choosing the apartment. Here are the checks I go through with everyone I guide, before they sign.

In short

- Check that the developer is on the Dubai Land Department's list of approved developers, and look at what happened with their past projects.
- Check the project in the official Dubai REST app: status, completion percentage, site photos and the escrow account.
- Dubai has no official developer rating. What counts is the developer's track record, the account you pay into, and what the contract says.

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01 Five checks before you sign

What to check	Where	What to look for
The developer is approved	The approved developers list on the Dubai Land Department website and app	That the developer appears on the list
The developer's track record	The "Project Status" service on the Dubai Land Department website	In past projects: the registered completion date versus the date they were actually handed over
The project itself	Dubai REST, in the "Project Status" service	That the project is registered, the completion percentage, site photos and the developer details
The escrow account	Dubai REST	That the bank and account number in the payment instructions match what the app shows
The contract	The contract itself, before you sign	Handover date, what happens if there is a delay, and a compensation clause

02 How to do it in practice

1. **The list:** the Dubai Land Department website has a list of approved developers. If the developer is not on it, stop.
2. **The track record:** in the "Project Status" service, search for the same developer's past projects. Each project shows its start date and planned completion date. Compare the planned completion date with the date the project was actually handed over.
3. **The project:** in the Dubai REST app, go to services, choose "Project Status" and search by project name. You will see the status, the developer details, the escrow account details, the completion percentage and photos from the construction site. You can also request a site visit. Want to see it screen by screen? See the Dubai REST guide.
4. **The payment:** pay only into the escrow account shown in the app, and keep a receipt that shows that account. A request to transfer to a different account is a reason to stop and ask (see "How to check a project").
5. **The contract:** check that the unit is registered in your name in the interim register (Oqood), and what the contract says about delays and compensation.

03 There is no official developer rating

The Dubai Land Department has a list of approved developers, and that is all: a developer is either approved or they are not. The star rating the Dubai Land Department launched in January 2025

rates **buildings**, and it is used for the rental index. It does not rate developers. If someone shows you a developer "rating", it is not an official one.

04 What the law gives you

- **Escrow account:** under Dubai law, every project has its own separate escrow account, and the money in it is used only for that project. The developer is paid from it according to the escrow agreement and as construction progresses, as verified by the trustee bank's engineer and by the project consultant.
- **If the Dubai Land Department cancels the project:** the refund is paid from the escrow account of the project, and if it does not hold enough, the developer must make up the difference. Even so, the law does not guarantee that the full amount will actually come back (see the guide to buying off-plan).
- **If the handover is delayed:** the law has no automatic refund. What counts is what the contract says about delays and compensation. You can ask the court to cancel the contract when the developer materially deviates from the specifications (see the guide to buying off-plan).

05 Already bought, and the handover is late? Your rights

There is no automatic compensation, but you do have rights. Dubai law does not set a compensation amount for a late handover. Your rights depend on the contract, and if you and the developer cannot agree, the court decides.

What to check in the contract:

- **The handover date and the grace period.** Most contracts allow extra time after the handover date, usually 6 to 12 months, during which the delay is not yet considered a breach of contract.
- **A delay compensation clause:** check whether the contract has one.
- **Force majeure:** a clause that lets the developer postpone the handover because of events outside its control.
- **Arbitration:** if the contract says disputes go to arbitration, the claim is heard there and not in court.

What you can ask for:

- You can cancel the contract, get back what you paid, and claim compensation for the damage.
- Or you can keep the deal in place and claim compensation for the delay.

In cases published in recent years, Dubai courts have ordered developers to refund buyers, plus interest of 5% a year. The court usually appoints an expert to assess the state of the project, and

relies heavily on the expert's report. These are examples, not a promise: every case is judged on its own contract and facts.

Do not stop paying on your own. If a buyer stops paying, the developer can start a process through the Dubai Land Department: they send a notice, the buyer gets 30 days to fix the situation, and then the developer can cancel the contract without going to court. Depending on how far construction has progressed, the developer can keep up to 40% or up to 25% of the price (see the guide to buying off-plan). In one published case, a buyer who stopped paying because of a delay lost the apartment. The court reduced the amount the developer kept from 40% to 10%, but the apartment did not go back to the buyer. So, if you are thinking about stopping payments, do it only with a lawyer.

06 How to start

1. **Gather documents:** the contract, receipts for every payment into the escrow account, the interim register (Oqood) registration confirmation, screenshots of the completion percentage in Dubai REST, and every letter or email from the developer about dates.
2. **Send the developer a written notice:** state that the handover date has passed, and ask for an updated date with a deadline for their reply.
3. **File a complaint with the Dubai Land Department** through its website or the Dubai REST app. The Dubai Land Department may try to mediate between the parties.
4. **If there is no solution:** claims up to AED 500,000 usually start at the Dubai Courts' Centre for Amicable Settlement of Disputes, and larger claims go to the real estate court. If the project was stalled or cancelled, the case may move to a special tribunal for such projects.
5. **A lawyer:** it is worth working with a local lawyer licensed in the UAE. I am not a lawyer, and this guide contains general information only.

Want to sell before handover instead of waiting? See the guide to selling an off-plan property.

07 My service

After the initial consultation call I can give you a quote. It depends on the sale process and the services you ask for.

Frequently asked questions

Does a big developer guarantee an on-time handover?

Not necessarily. Handover delays are common across the Dubai market, so you should check the track record of every developer, even the well-known ones.

Where can I see how much of the project has been built?

In the Dubai REST app, in the "Project Status" service. The percentage appears on the building image, and there are also site photos.

Am I entitled to compensation if the handover is late?

Not automatically, because the law does not provide for such compensation. So first check what the contract says about delays and the grace period. If there is a significant delay, you can claim cancellation of the contract and a refund, or compensation, and you should do this with a local lawyer.

What happens to my money if the project is cancelled?

The money is held in the project's escrow account. Under the law, when the Dubai Land Department cancels a project, the refund is paid from that account. The law does not guarantee that the full amount is in it.

Sources

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Already bought, and the handover is late?

Tell me about the project, and we will check together what your contract says.

Send a WhatsApp message →

This information is general and correct as of the update date. It is not legal advice, and it does not replace reviewing your contract with a local lawyer.