A two-year Dubai visa without property: work, company or freelance

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You do not have to buy property to get residency in Dubai. There are three main routes to a two-year visa without property: through an employer, through a company you set up, or through a freelance permit in a free zone. Here is who qualifies, what each one costs and how the process works.

In short

- You can get a two-year residence visa in Dubai without property in three main ways: through an employer, through a company you set up, or through a freelance permit in a free zone.
- With an employment visa, the employer pays the costs by law. With your own company or as a freelancer, you pay, and a company costs tens of thousands of dirhams in the first year.
- Staying outside the UAE for more than 180 days in a row cancels your residency.

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01 The three routes at a glance

	Employment visa	Visa through your own company	Freelance in a free zone
Issued by	Your employer	Your company, on the mainland or in a free zone	The free zone, for example GoFreelance
Validity	Two years, renewable	Up to two years in a free zone, renewable	One or two years
Who pays	The employer	You	You
First-year cost	Nothing to you	Tens of thousands of dirhams	About AED 14,600 per the price list, plus a medical test, Emirates ID and insurance
Family	Yes, subject to the income rule	Yes, subject to the income rule	Subject to the general income rule

02 1. Employment visa

- **What it is:** an employer in Dubai issues your work permit and residence visa. For a mainland company the permit comes from the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MOHRE); in a free zone, from the free-zone authority.
- **Validity:** two years, renewable. In the free zones, visas have been issued for one or two years since October 2022.
- **Who pays:** the employer. Under the Labour Law, the employer may not charge you recruitment or visa costs.
- **The process:** a signed job offer, the employer's work permit application, an entry permit (or a change of status if you are already in the UAE), a medical test and fingerprints, and finally the residence visa, the Emirates ID and the employment contract.
- **Work permit fee, per MOHRE:** AED 250, 1,200 or 3,450 for two years, depending on the company's category. The employer pays it.

03 2. A visa through your own company

- **What it is:** you set up a licensed company, and the company issues you an investor or partner visa. You can set it up on the mainland, with a licence from the Department of Economy and Tourism (DET), or in a free zone.
- **Validity:** in a free zone, up to two years, renewable.
- **The process, in short:** choose an activity and a trade name, get initial approval, sign the memorandum of association and an office lease, get the licence and the establishment card,

then the entry permit, medical test, Emirates ID and visa.

- **What it costs:** the government does not publish an all-in price. With the licence, the establishment card, the visa and, in many cases, an office, it comes to tens of thousands of dirhams in the first year. The exact price depends on the type of company and the zone you choose.
- **Keep in mind:** the company licence is renewed every year, so this visa keeps costing money in the years that follow.

04 3. Freelance in a free zone

There is no federal "freelance visa" in the UAE. There is a freelance work permit, and the residence visa comes through a free-zone freelance package.

- **Example, GoFreelance:** the freelance package of the TECOM free zones, such as Dubai Media City and Dubai Internet City. It is only for tech, media, education and design.
- **What it costs, per the GoFreelance price list:** the freelance permit is AED 7,500 a year, the establishment card AED 2,000, and a two-year visa AED 5,042. That is about AED 14,600 in total, plus the medical test, Emirates ID and health insurance.
- **The process:** register on the GoFreelance website, apply and pay, receive the permit and the establishment card, then the visa. If you already hold an employment visa, you need a no-objection letter from your employer.

05 Family

A residence visa holder can sponsor a spouse and children if their income is at least AED 4,000 a month, or AED 3,000 plus accommodation. Sons can be sponsored up to age 25. Each family member has separate fees.

06 Rules that apply to all these visas

- **Six months abroad:** staying outside the UAE for more than 180 days in a row cancels the visa. The federal service for requesting a return permit does not apply to Dubai residents.
- **Health insurance:** required in Dubai to issue or renew a visa. With an employment visa, the employer pays for it.
- **Emirates ID:** required for every resident, and valid for as long as the visa.
- **Overstay fine:** AED 50 a day after the visa expires.

07 What about a visa through property?

If you own a completed apartment in Dubai, there is another route to a two-year visa, with no employer and no company. Since 2026, a sole owner has no minimum property value, and the fees for the owner are about AED 10,200, per the Dubai Land Department. There is no licence to renew every year as with a company, and the apartment stays yours. The full comparison is in the guide on the two-year visa and the Golden Visa.

08 Which route suits whom

- **If you have a job offer in Dubai:** an employment visa. It costs you nothing, but it is tied to the employer.
- **If you are self-employed in tech, media, education or design:** freelance in a free zone.
- **If you run a business from Dubai:** a visa through a company.
- **If you are buying, or already own, a completed apartment:** a visa through the property, without a company's annual costs.

09 Other visas (not two-year)

- **Green Visa:** five years, no employer, for the self-employed, skilled professionals and investors, and it also lets you sponsor family.
- **Remote work visa:** one year, for people employed by a company outside the UAE. It has a minimum income requirement.

10 From my own experience

Setting up my own company in Dubai cost several tens of thousands of dirhams. I did not get a visa through it. I got my Golden Visa through property (the details are in the Golden Visa guide).

All the steps of moving to Dubai, in order, are in the guide to moving to Dubai.

Frequently asked questions

Can I get a two-year visa in Dubai without buying property?

Yes. Through an employer, through a company you set up, or through a freelance permit in a free zone.

Who pays for an employment visa?

The employer. Under the Labour Law, the employer may not charge the employee recruitment or visa costs.

Which is cheaper: a visa through a company or through an apartment?

With a company, you pay for the licence every year, and the first year costs tens of thousands of dirhams. With a completed apartment, the fees are about AED 10,200, and the apartment stays yours.

Sources

- Two-year employment visa: u.ae, Residence visa for working in the UAE (updated 07.08.2026) and MOHRE, Recruiting a worker from overseas.
- Free-zone visas for one or two years since October 2022: Mercator and Fragomen.
- The employer pays for the visa: Gulf News and Emirates247.
- Work permit fee: MOHRE and Khaleej Times.
- Company costs on the mainland and in a free zone: Avyanco and Meydan Free Zone, pricing.
- Freelance: GoFreelance (checked 21.10.2026) and Avyanco. No federal freelance visa: u.ae, Work permits.
- Family: Khaleej Times and RAKEZ.
- Six months abroad, health insurance and overstay fine: u.ae, General provisions for the residence visa (updated 28.09.2026), Erickson Immigration Group and Gulf News.
- Green Visa: u.ae, Green visa (updated 28.07.2026). Remote work visa: u.ae and Gulf News.
- Visa through property: the sources in the guide on the two-year visa and the Golden Visa.

Considering a visa through property?

Tell me what you are looking for, and we'll check together whether an apartment in Dubai can get you residency.

Send a WhatsApp message →

This is general information, correct as of the update date. Fees and conditions change, so check them with the authority or the free zone before you start. It is not legal advice.