

Trade Victoria's Regional Director for Trade and Investment to the Middle East, Africa, Turkey, Russia and CIS countries, [Kassem Younes](#) shares some tips and insights for Victorian food exporters looking to do business with the Middle East.



With a population projected to exceed 500 million by 2020, the region's demand for high-quality food and beverage products is predicted to grow.

If you're a Victorian exporter of whole, organic and functional food or beverage items, have you ever thought about entering the Middle Eastern market?

With the rise of a middle-class demographic that has plenty of disposable income and an increasingly westernised palate – there's a genuine craving for premium quality products – so it's a worthwhile consideration.

Accounting for 22 countries, the Middle East is a region not to be sneezed at. It's huge! So let's break it down into digestible, bite-sized chunks and focus on trade and export opportunities currently open in the Middle East's second-largest economy, which also enjoys a low expropriation and political risk.

We're talking namely about the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Clean, green and safe

As a Victorian food exporter, you're already at a significant advantage simply due to your location.

The typical UAE middle-class consumer is young, affluent and demands high-value food items that are full of flavour and sourced from origins regarded as clean, green and safe. With a solid reputation for supplying some of the world's cleanest and tastiest food products, Australia is an attractive option for many UAE importers.

Know your audience

Having a clear understanding of Middle Eastern culture and how differently it operates to western culture could mark the line in the sand between success and failure for your business.

Connect with the Dubai VGTI office

If you're really serious about exporting your food product to the UAE, reach out and engage with a Government representative at [Dubai's Victorian Government Trade and Investment office](#).

They'll provide you with valuable in-market intelligence about doing business with the Middle East and will play an essential role in helping you to succeed in the Middle Eastern market.

[Austrade UAE](#) can also provide Australian businesses looking to grow their business in the UAE, Libya and/or Qatar with their full suite of export services.

Minimise risk

Companies expanding into the Middle Eastern market have to deal with bureaucratic minefields and an uncertain, ever-changing regulatory and tax climate.

While the UAE presents a low risk, if you're looking to enter the region, it's crucial to [conduct a thorough risk analysis](#).

For example, local laws can have an impact on how businesses and business people need to operate. It's imperative to be fully aware of the legal environment in which you're operating. Working closely with your potential local buyer is essential to understanding their requirements and local import rules and regulations.

Don't be put off. Despite the instability in some parts of the Middle East, there are good reasons why the commercial outlook is promising.

For example, an eight-hour flight from Dubai can put your business in contact with two-thirds of the world's population, including the 420 million people in the Middle East and North Africa.

Do your homework

Ask any successful exporter, and they'll agree – visiting the country you're thinking about trading with is essential.

Travel to the region and see what it's like. If you can afford to, travel there regularly.

Join a [trade mission](#) and attend a food trade fair such as [Gulfood](#) – the Middle East's largest food show. Trade missions provide unique business matching and networking opportunities.

For example, visit the supermarkets. The shelves are full of Australian fresh produce and food products in Dubai. What are other Australian exporters selling? How do their products match up with your value proposition?

Choose your business partner wisely

Exercise due diligence concerning finding potential business partners, and minimise any correspondence with middle-men or brokers. Check with the [Dubai VGTI office](#) representative before making any commitments.

Once you're confident you've connected with the right person or people, take your time to build a genuine relationship.

Working closely with your potential local buyer will be essential to understanding their requirements and the region's import rules and regulations.

Modify your structure to fit into theirs

Time moves in a different, more relaxed fashion in the Middle East when it comes to work schedules.

For example:

- Don't be surprised if your business partner is late for a meeting. Be patient. Pressuring your business partners for a meeting at a specific time may not be well received.
- Negotiations are often likely to take a lot longer than we're used to in Western business culture. Try not to organise a meeting too far in advance and be sure to confirm the meeting by telephone a few days beforehand.
- Face-to-face meetings are essential for negotiating business in the Middle East to build up trust and establish rapport.
- Don't rely on email communications in the Middle East – you won't get far in this part of the world if you do.
- Be prepared for small talk - it's very important in establishing friendly business relations. An Arab businessman or woman will want to engage in small talk on a personal level before the purpose of the visit or meeting is even brought up. This is all part of a desire to understand you on a personal, friendly level, before discussing business.

Many laws in the region are based on Islamic principles.

For example:

- Ramadan is considered the holy month by Muslims. Business hours are usually significantly reduced, so it's recommended to avoid doing business or organising meetings during this month.
- The weekend in most Middle Eastern countries falls on Friday and Saturday, and congregational prayers are held at noon, but there are some exceptions.

Certify

Are you Halal and export certified? While not all importers require Halal certification, if your products *are* certified, your business will enjoy a larger share of the booming halal food industry.

A halal certificate issued by a UAE approved Islamic centre in Australia is compulsory for exporting any meat, poultry products or products containing gelatine. This documentation may also require attestation by the Australia Arab Chamber of Commerce and UAE Embassy.

Do your detective work

The Middle East is a very competitive market.

Supporting your brand financially is essential to be able to grow your business. Get a full picture of any associated or hidden costs doing business in the Middle East.

For example:

- Check out the costs of visa entry, sales and marketing costs, promotion listing and shelf fees, rebate and other marketing costs.

- Food and beverage import regulations vary from one country to another in the Middle East, and advice can vary across official websites and documents so refer to multiple sources.
- Always check the latest regulations with the buyer when you are planning to export products to the UAE.

Label correctly

Labelling is one of the most critical issues for food exporters, and you must be sure to include production and expiry dates, which need to be printed on the original package or label. Arabic labelling is a requisite and can be printed on a sticker.

Want to know more?

- [Visit our About Us](#) page to find out how our 22-strong network of VGTI offices can help your dreams of going global.
- [Explore our range of trade missions, programs and initiatives, resources](#) and [events](#) designed to support your export journey.
- Discover more export opportunities in the MENAT region by [visiting our find an export pages](#).