# Your Complete Pre-Departure Checklist: From Accepted to Arrived

### A Foreword from Your International Education Consultant

Congratulations! Receiving an acceptance letter from a university in the United Arab Emirates is a monumental achievement and the first step on an incredible academic and personal journey. The UAE, a global hub of innovation, culture, and opportunity, offers a world-class educational experience in a uniquely dynamic setting. From the futuristic skylines of Dubai and Abu Dhabi to the rich cultural tapestry that permeates daily life, you are poised for an adventure that will shape your future.

However, the path from holding that acceptance letter in India to sitting in your first lecture in the UAE is paved with a series of critical administrative, financial, and logistical steps. This journey can feel complex, especially as the UAE's processes differ significantly from those of other popular study destinations. Many of the most important immigration procedures, for instance, are completed *after* you arrive, which requires meticulous pre-departure planning.

This guide is designed to be your trusted companion through every stage of this transition. As a specialist in cross-cultural education, I have distilled years of experience into this comprehensive checklist to demystify the process and empower you with the knowledge to navigate it confidently. We will walk through this journey in four distinct phases: the initial foundational steps, the crucial documentation and logistical arrangements, the final pre-departure preparations, and your first week on the ground. Think of this as your roadmap—a clear, step-by-step plan that transforms potential challenges into manageable tasks, ensuring your transition is as smooth and exciting as the adventure that awaits. Your journey to the UAE begins now. Let's get you there, prepared and ready for success.

## Phase 1: Foundation Stage (3–4 Months Before Departure)

The moment you receive your acceptance letter, the clock starts ticking. This initial phase is about laying a strong foundation for the months ahead. The actions you take now are critical, as they trigger the most important processes, including your visa sponsorship.

### 1.1. Decoding Your Offer & Securing Your Place

Your university offer letter is more than just a confirmation; it is a contract that contains vital information and deadlines.

* **Action: Review Your Admission Letter Meticulously:** Read every line of your official admission letter.1 Pay close attention to:
  + **Conditions of Admission:** Are there any academic or financial conditions you must meet before your offer is finalized? This could include submitting final transcripts or paying a deposit.
  + **Tuition Fee Deposit:** Note the exact amount and the deadline for paying the initial tuition or seat reservation deposit. This payment is often the trigger for the university to begin your visa sponsorship process.2
  + **Program Start Date & Orientation Week:** Identify the official start date of your course and the mandatory orientation week. This will be crucial for booking your flights later.
* **Action: Accept the Offer and Pay the Deposit:** Formally accept your offer through the university's online student portal. When it comes to paying the deposit, international transfers can be complex.
  + **Pro-Tip: Use a University-Approved Payment Platform:** Many UAE universities partner with platforms like Flywire to facilitate international tuition payments. These services are highly recommended as they offer more competitive exchange rates, lower fees, and better tracking capabilities than traditional bank wire transfers. They allow you to pay in Indian Rupees (INR), and the university receives the exact amount in UAE Dirhams (AED), eliminating shortfalls due to currency fluctuations and intermediary bank charges.4

### 1.2. Initiating Your Student Visa: The Sponsorship Model

The UAE student visa process is fundamentally different from that of countries like the US or UK. You do not apply for the visa yourself; you are sponsored.

* **Core Concept: The University as Your Sponsor:** In the UAE, all student visas must be sponsored. For most international students, the university you are enrolled in will act as your official sponsor.1 The university's Public Relations Officer (PRO) or a dedicated visa services team will liaise with the relevant government authorities—either the General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs (GDRFA) for Dubai or the Federal Authority for Identity, Citizenship, Customs & Port Security (ICP) for other emirates—on your behalf.1
* **Action: Complete the University's Visa Application Form:** Shortly after you accept your offer and pay the deposit, the university will send you its internal visa application form. Complete this form immediately and accurately. This is not the official government form but the document your university needs to start the sponsorship process.2
* **Document Submission (to Your University):** Your primary task is to provide flawless documentation to your university's international office. Any errors or delays here will directly impact your ability to travel. Prepare high-quality, coloured scans of the following:
  + **Valid Passport:** The biodata pages of your passport. It must be valid for at least six months from your intended date of arrival in the UAE.1
  + **Passport-Sized Photographs:** Recent photos with a clear white background, adhering to UAE visa specifications.1
  + **University Admission Letter:** The official offer letter you received.
* **Understanding the Entry Permit vs. The Residence Visa:** The initial document your university secures for you is an **Entry Permit**, not the final visa.
  + **Entry Permit:** This is a temporary, single-entry document that is valid for 60 days from the date of issue. It allows you to legally enter the UAE for the specific purpose of your studies.2 You must travel to the UAE within this 60-day window.
  + **Residence Visa:** This is the long-term visa that allows you to live in the UAE for the duration of your studies (typically issued for one year and renewed annually). The Residence Visa is only stamped into your passport *after* you arrive in the UAE and complete a medical test and Emirates ID registration.1

This distinction is crucial. Your pre-departure goal is to secure the Entry Permit. The full Residence Visa process is a post-arrival task.

### 1.3. Mastering Your Finances: Proof of Funds

While your university handles the visa submission, they will require you to provide evidence that you can financially support yourself. This assures both the university and the UAE authorities that you will not face financial hardship during your studies.14

* **Requirement:** Be prepared to demonstrate access to funds covering your first year of tuition fees plus living expenses. While requirements can vary slightly by university and emirate, a widely accepted benchmark for living expenses is approximately USD 15,000 (around AED 55,000 or ₹12.5 lakhs).11
* **Acceptable Financial Documents for Indian Students:**
  + **Sponsor's Bank Statements:** Official bank statements for the last 3 to 6 months from your parents' or legal guardian's account. These must be on bank letterhead and stamped by the bank manager.14 Sudden large deposits should be avoided or explained with supporting documentation.
  + **Affidavit of Financial Support:** A notarized letter signed by your sponsor(s) (typically parents) on stamp paper, confirming their relationship to you and their commitment to cover all your educational and living expenses during your stay in the UAE.14
  + **Education Loan Sanction Letter:** If you have secured an education loan, the official sanction letter from a recognized Indian bank is a strong piece of evidence. The letter must clearly state the loan amount and that it is for your studies in the UAE.14
  + **Scholarship Letter:** If you have been awarded a scholarship, the official letter from the awarding institution (your university or an external body) should be included. It must specify the value of the scholarship and what it covers (tuition, living expenses, etc.).14
* **Pro-Tip:** Although you submit copies to the university, keep the original financial documents safe and bring them with you to the UAE. You may need them for opening a local bank account or for your own records.

### 1.4. Accommodation: Your First Home in the UAE

Securing your accommodation early is vital, as proof of a UAE address may be required by your university to process your visa application.11

* **Action: Choose and Book Your Housing:**
  + **University-Managed Housing:** This is the most hassle-free option for first-year students. It eliminates the need to deal with landlords and contracts from abroad and places you directly within a student community. Apply through your university's housing portal as soon as it opens, as spots fill up quickly.
  + **Private Student Residences:** Dubai, in particular, has a growing market of high-quality, purpose-built student accommodation complexes. These are excellent alternatives that often provide superior amenities. Leading options located in or near Dubai International Academic City (DIAC) include **KSK Homes**, **The Myriad**, and **Yugo Dubailand**. These residences offer facilities like gyms, rooftop pools, study lounges, supermarkets, and dedicated shuttle bus services to various universities.17
  + **Secure Proof of Booking:** Whether you choose university halls or private residences, obtain an official confirmation letter or tenancy agreement (Ejari in Dubai). This document serves as your proof of accommodation.

## Phase 2: Documentation & Logistics (1–2 Months Before Departure)

With your admission, visa sponsorship, and housing underway, this phase focuses on meticulous organization and tackling key logistical hurdles like health checks and flight bookings.

### 2.1. The Document Dossier: Your Key to a Smooth Process

Centralizing your documents is the single most effective way to reduce stress. Create both a physical file and a secure cloud-based folder (like Google Drive or Dropbox) to store copies of everything. This ensures you have backups in case of loss and easy access whenever needed.

* **Action: Assemble Your Master Document File:** Use the "Ultimate Document Dossier" table below as your guide. This folder will be your go-to resource for university registration, visa formalities, and other administrative tasks upon arrival.1
* **Power of Attorney (PoA) - A Non-Negotiable for Indian Students:**
  + **Rationale:** While you are in the UAE, you will inevitably have financial or administrative tasks that need to be handled in India—operating your Indian bank account, signing tax documents, or dealing with mobile phone contracts. A Power of Attorney (PoA) is a legal instrument that empowers a trusted person (usually a parent) to act on your behalf.21 Failing to arrange this can lead to significant logistical headaches. University international student offices strongly recommend it.24
  + **Action:** Consult with a lawyer in India to draft a **General Power of Attorney (GPA)** or a **Special Power of Attorney (SPA)**. A GPA provides broad powers, while an SPA is limited to specific tasks. The document should be drafted on non-judicial stamp paper, signed by you, witnessed by two individuals (not immediate family), and notarized.28 For use abroad, it may also need to be attested or apostilled by the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.25 Leave the original, executed PoA with your designated person in India.

### 2.2. Health & Wellness Preparations

Health is a top priority, and the UAE has strict requirements that must be met *after* your arrival. Preparing in advance is key.

* **Pre-Departure Health Check-up:** Schedule a comprehensive medical, dental, and optical examination in India.
  + Obtain a summary of your medical history in English.
  + Get updated prescriptions for any required medications.
  + Pack an extra pair of glasses or a supply of contact lenses.
* **Understanding the Mandatory UAE Medical Test:** It is crucial to understand that you must undergo a medical fitness test *in the UAE* to get your Residence Visa stamped. This test is non-negotiable and is conducted at government-approved health centres.1 The screening includes:
  + A blood test for infectious diseases such as HIV and Hepatitis B & C.30
  + A chest X-ray to screen for Tuberculosis (TB).30  
      
    A positive result for active TB or other specified communicable diseases will lead to the denial of your residence visa.30
* **Health Insurance:** You must have valid health insurance for the entire duration of your stay. This is a mandatory requirement for your visa.33
  + **University-Offered Plans:** The simplest option is to enroll in the group health insurance plan offered by your university. This ensures compliance with the local health authority (like the Dubai Health Authority - DHA) regulations.34
  + **Private Insurance:** If you choose your own insurance, you must provide proof that the policy meets the minimum coverage standards set by the UAE government.33
* **Bringing Prescription Medications from India:** The UAE has extremely strict laws regarding medications. Some substances that are common in Indian medicines may be classified as controlled drugs in the UAE.36
  + **Crucial Step: Obtain MOHAP Approval:** For any prescription medications, especially those classified as narcotic, psychotropic, or controlled (Class A or B), you **must** get prior approval online from the UAE's Ministry of Health and Prevention (MOHAP).38
  + **Action:** Visit the MOHAP website and use the e-service to "Issue of Permit to Import Medicines for Personal Use".40 You will need to upload a doctor's prescription (in English, issued within the last three months) and a detailed medical report.38 With this permit, you can legally bring up to a three-month supply of your medication.38
  + **Expert Tip:** Do not attempt to carry any medication without its original packaging and a clear, recent prescription. For over-the-counter medicines like paracetamol or ibuprofen, no prior approval is needed, but it is still wise to carry them in their original packaging.37

### 2.3. Booking Your Flight: Smart Tips for Students

With your Entry Permit in hand, it's time to book your flight.

* **Timing is Everything:** Only book your flight *after* you have received the scanned copy of your Entry Permit from the university.3 Plan to arrive in the UAE at least 7 to 10 days before your orientation week begins. This buffer is essential for completing the post-arrival formalities without feeling rushed.
* **Unlock Student Benefits:** Many airlines offer special perks for students. When booking, look for "student fares" or special student offers.
  + **Emirates:** Offers students a discount of up to 15% on Economy and Business Class fares, plus an extra 10kg of baggage allowance or one extra piece.41
  + **Virgin Atlantic:** Provides an extra 23kg bag for students on Economy Classic and Delight fares, bringing the total allowance to 69kg (3 x 23kg bags) on flights from India.42
  + **IndiGo:** Offers students up to 10% off base fares and an extra 10kg baggage allowance on domestic flights, with benefits on international routes as well.43
  + **Verification:** To claim these benefits, you will need to present your valid student visa (or Entry Permit) and university acceptance letter at the check-in counter.42
* **Compare and Contrast:** While airline websites are great for student-specific deals, use flight aggregators to compare prices across different carriers to ensure you're getting the best value.

### Table 1: The Ultimate Document Dossier

This master checklist consolidates every critical document you need. Organize originals and at least two sets of photocopies in a waterproof folder. Keep this folder in your hand luggage at all times.

| **Document Category** | **Specific Document** | **Purpose** | **Carry Instructions (Originals & Copies)** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Immigration** | Passport (valid 6+ months) | Primary ID, Visa Stamping | Hand Luggage |
|  | Entry Permit (Colour Printout) | Entry into UAE | Hand Luggage |
|  | Passport-sized Photos (White Background, 10-12 copies) | Visa, Emirates ID, University ID | Hand Luggage |
| **Academic** | University Acceptance/Offer Letter | University Registration, Immigration | Hand Luggage |
|  | Attested Academic Transcripts & Certificates (10th, 12th, Bachelor's) | University Final Registration | Hand Luggage |
|  | Tuition Fee Payment Receipts | University Registration, Financial Proof | Hand Luggage |
| **Financial** | 6-Month Bank Statements (Sponsor/Self) | Proof of Funds | Hand Luggage |
|  | Education Loan Sanction Letter (if applicable) | Proof of Funds | Hand Luggage |
|  | Scholarship Award Letter (if applicable) | Proof of Funds | Hand Luggage |
| **Health** | Medical History & Prescriptions (in English) | Personal reference, MOHAP approval | Hand Luggage |
|  | MOHAP Approval for Medications (if applicable) | Customs Clearance | Hand Luggage |
|  | Health Insurance Certificate | University Registration, Visa Process | Hand Luggage |
| **Accommodation** | Tenancy Agreement / Housing Confirmation Letter | Proof of Address | Hand Luggage |
| **Miscellaneous** | Flight Ticket Printout | Travel | Hand Luggage |
|  | Power of Attorney (Notarized Copy) | Managing affairs in India | Keep a copy in hand luggage; originals with agent in India |

## Phase 3: Final Preparations (The Last Two Weeks)

The final countdown has begun. This phase is about packing smart, finalizing your finances, and preparing for the cultural transition.

### 3.1. The Ultimate UAE Packing Guide

Packing for the UAE requires a different strategy than for Europe or North America. The key is to pack for a hot climate while being mindful of cultural norms and baggage limits.

* **Core Strategy:** Focus on essentials for the first month. The UAE has excellent shopping options, from budget-friendly hypermarkets to high-end malls, so you can buy most non-essential items upon arrival.
* **Clothing:**
  + **Climate:** Pack lightweight, breathable fabrics like cotton and linen. The UAE is hot and humid for most of the year.44
  + **Cultural Norms:** While Dubai is cosmopolitan, it's respectful to dress modestly in public places like malls, government buildings, and traditional areas. Include long skirts, trousers, and shirts that cover your shoulders and knees.45
  + **University & Indoors:** Campus life is generally casual. However, be prepared for powerful air conditioning in all indoor spaces. A light jacket, cardigan, or shawl is an absolute essential to carry with you daily.44
  + **Essentials:** Pack enough daily wear for two weeks, one or two formal outfits for university events or presentations, and at least one traditional Indian outfit for cultural festivals.45
* **Electronics:**
  + **Crucial Detail: Plug Type:** The UAE uses the **Type G** electrical socket, the same three-pronged plug used in the United Kingdom.46 Your Indian two-pin or three-pin plugs (Types C and D) will not fit.
  + **Action Plan:** Purchase at least two high-quality universal travel adapters before you leave India. Also, pack an Indian multi-socket power strip; this allows you to plug multiple Indian devices into a single travel adapter, which is incredibly convenient.45
  + **Voltage Check:** Most modern electronic chargers for laptops and phones are dual-voltage (labeled INPUT: 100-240V, 50/60Hz), making them safe to use in the UAE, which operates on a 230V supply voltage.46 However, it is always wise to double-check the label on your charger.
* **Indian Essentials:**
  + **Kitchen:** A small (2-3 litre) pressure cooker is a top-requested item by Indian students abroad and is worth the luggage space if you plan to cook.45
  + **Spices:** Bring a small starter-pack of your essential masalas (turmeric, red chili, cumin, garam masala) in sealed, airtight, and clearly labeled packets. This will get you through the first few weeks.
  + **Availability:** Do not overpack food items. The UAE has a large Indian expatriate population, and supermarkets like Lulu Hypermarket, Carrefour, and Nesto are extensively stocked with a wide variety of Indian groceries, spices, and ready-to-eat meals.45
* **Hand Luggage Survival Kit:** This bag should contain everything you cannot afford to lose or will need within the first 24 hours of landing.
  + All documents from **Table 1**.
  + Prescription medication (with doctor's note and MOHAP approval printout).
  + A complete change of clothes.
  + Basic toiletries (under 100ml).
  + Laptop, phone, power bank, and all chargers.
  + Your universal travel adapter.

### Table 2: Smart Packing Checklist: Bring vs. Buy

To avoid excess baggage fees and the hassle of carrying unnecessary items, use this strategic checklist.

| **Category** | **Bring from India (Essentials)** | **Buy in the UAE (Recommended)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Kitchenware** | Small pressure cooker, starter kit of essential spices, one set of basic cutlery/plate. | Heavy pots and pans, full dinnerware sets, bulky utensils, most groceries (rice, dal, etc.). |
| **Clothing** | Climate-appropriate daily wear, one set of ethnic/formal wear, undergarments, a light jacket. | Bulky bedding (duvets, pillows), heavy towels, extensive wardrobe items. |
| **Toiletries** | One-month supply of specific/preferred brands (e.g., face wash, hair oil), prescription skincare. | Standard shampoos, soaps, toothpaste, and other personal care items (these are heavy and widely available). |
| **Electronics** | Laptop, phone, universal adapters, power bank, Indian power strip. | Hairdryers, kettles, rice cookers (to avoid voltage issues and save luggage space). |
| **Stationery** | A few pens and one notebook for the first few days. | Bulk notebooks, binders, and other supplies (available at university stores or hypermarkets). |

### 3.2. Final Financial Checklist

Finalizing your financial arrangements in the last two weeks is crucial for a smooth landing.

* **Activate Your Forex Card:** Load a multi-currency Forex card with a substantial amount for your initial expenses (e.g., USD 2,000-3,000). Cards from providers like HDFC Bank (ISIC ForexPlus), ICICI Bank, and Axis Bank are popular choices for students and offer better exchange rates and lower transaction fees compared to using Indian debit or credit cards directly for international spending.16
* **Inform Your Indian Bank:** This is a step that is frequently overlooked but critically important. Contact your bank(s) in India and place a 'travel note' on your account.48 Inform them of your travel dates and your destination (UAE). This action prevents their automated fraud-detection systems from flagging your first international transactions as suspicious and blocking your debit or credit cards—a situation you want to avoid at all costs when you've just landed.50 You can often do this through your bank's net banking portal or by calling customer service.49
* **Carry Local Currency:** Visit a currency exchange in India and convert enough INR to have approximately AED 500 to AED 1,000 in cash. This will cover immediate expenses like a taxi, a meal at the airport, or purchasing a SIM card, before you have a chance to visit an ATM or open a local bank account.

## Phase 4: Arrival & Your First Week in the UAE

You've landed! The first week is a whirlwind of essential administrative tasks that will set the foundation for your life as a student in the UAE. Following a structured plan is the key to navigating this period successfully.

### 4.1. Navigating the Airport & Immigration

* **Arrival and Immigration Process:** After disembarking at Dubai International Airport (DXB) or Abu Dhabi International Airport (AUH), follow the signs to immigration. At the counter, present your passport and the colour printout of your Entry Permit. The immigration officer will verify your details and stamp your permit, which officially marks your entry into the country.2 This stamp is crucial, as you will need a copy of it for your post-arrival visa processing.
* **Airport Transfer Options:**
  + **University Airport Pickup:** Many universities, such as the American University of Sharjah (AUS), offer a free or paid airport transfer service for new international students.51 This is often the most stress-free option and should be booked in advance through your university portal.
  + **Public Transport (Dubai):** The Dubai Metro is a clean, efficient, and cost-effective way to get to many parts of the city. Stations are conveniently located inside Terminals 1 and 3 of DXB.52 You will need to purchase a  
    **Nol card** (a rechargeable smart card) from the ticket machines at the station to use the metro and bus services.53
  + **Taxis and Ridesharing:** Official airport taxis are readily available 24/7 at the designated taxi ranks outside the terminals. Ridesharing services like **Uber** and the local equivalent, **Careem**, are also available from clearly marked pickup zones.52 While more expensive than the metro, a taxi is the most convenient choice if you have significant luggage.

### 4.2. Your First 72-Hour Action Plan

The first three days are about getting connected and tackling the most urgent administrative tasks. The following action planner breaks down this critical period into a manageable, step-by-step schedule.

### Table 3: Your First Week Action Planner

| **Day** | **Primary Task** | **Required Documents/Items** | **Pro-Tips & Notes** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day 1: Arrival & Connectivity** | **Get a Local SIM Card & Settle In.** | Passport, Entry Permit, AED cash. | Major telecom providers like **Etisalat** and **du** have kiosks directly in the airport arrivals hall. A local UAE mobile number is mandatory for the Emirates ID process and for opening a bank account. Unpack and explore your immediate surroundings.58 |
| **Day 2: University & Banking** | **Complete University On-Campus Registration & Open a Local Bank Account.** | Passport, Entry Permit (stamped), University Offer Letter, Fee Receipts, Passport-sized Photos, Emirates ID Application Form (often provided by the university). | Visit your university's international student office or registrar first. They will provide you with a "No Objection Certificate" or a letter required to open a student bank account. Choose a bank with student-friendly options, such as **Emirates NBD's Youth Package**, which often has no minimum balance requirement for students aged 18-25.60 |
| **Day 3: Health & ID** | **Undergo Medical Fitness Test & Complete Biometrics for Emirates ID.** | Passport, Stamped Entry Permit, Passport-sized Photos, University Letter, Emirates ID application receipt. | Your university will guide you to a government-approved medical fitness centre. The test is quick and involves a blood sample and a chest X-ray.1 Biometrics (fingerprinting and photo) are completed at an ICP or GDRFA service centre. An appointment is usually required.2 |
| **Day 4: Transport & Exploration** | **Apply for a Student Nol Card (Dubai) & Explore Your Local Area.** | Emirates ID (or application proof), Student ID, Passport-sized Photo. | A student Nol card provides a 50% discount on Dubai's public transport network (Metro, bus, tram), a significant saving. Application can be done online or at metro stations.62 Use this day to locate the nearest supermarket, pharmacy, and your route to campus. |
| **Day 5: Finalizing Residency** | **Submit Passport for Residence Visa Stamping.** | Passport, Medical Test Results, Emirates ID application confirmation. | This step is typically handled by your university's Public Relations Office (PRO). They will collect your passport and submit it to the immigration authorities. The process can take 1-2 weeks, during which you **cannot travel outside the UAE**.2 |
| **Day 6-7: Settling In** | **Attend University Orientation & Social Events.** | Student ID, an open and positive attitude. | Orientation is non-negotiable. It's where you'll learn about academic expectations, course registration, and campus resources. It's also the best opportunity to meet fellow students, both from India and around the world, and start building your social network.65 |

### 4.3. Completing Your Residency & Getting Around

* **Visa Stamping:** This is the final and most crucial step in the immigration process. Once your medical test is cleared and your Emirates ID biometrics are captured, your university's PRO will submit your passport to the GDRFA/ICP. A one-year renewable Residence Visa will then be stamped inside your passport, officially making you a resident of the UAE.1 You will be notified by the university when your passport is ready for collection.
* **Emirates ID:** Your Emirates ID card is your primary identification document in the UAE. It is used for everything from accessing campus facilities to official government services. The physical card will be sent for collection a few weeks after your biometrics are completed. You will receive an SMS notification when it is ready.1
* **Public Transport Mastery:** Getting comfortable with public transport is key to exploring your new city affordably. In Dubai, the **Student Nol Card** is essential. It offers a 50% concession on all RTA transport, including the Metro, buses, and trams.62 Familiarize yourself with the routes and schedules using the RTA's official apps to make your daily commute and weekend explorations seamless and budget-friendly.

This comprehensive checklist covers the critical milestones of your journey. By tackling these steps methodically, you can ensure a smooth, organized, and stress-free transition to your new life as a student in the UAE. Welcome, and best of luck with your studies!

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