

UAE weekend change: Airlines will have to adjust to new peak traffic schedules

Weekend shift could also mean changes to ticket fares in line with peak demand

Published: December 08, 2021

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How will the new weekend affect your travel plans?

Image Credit: Supplied

Dubai: The UAE's decision to shift the weekend to Saturday and Sunday will put the airline industry to be completely in sync with the global aviation sector.

The UAE took the step towards the four-and-a-half day work week to be in line with “changing attitudes towards balancing work with life and growing worker shortages,” said John Boyd, founder of Boyd Company, a consulting firm. “Its effect on tourism - a key sector of UAE’s economy - will be significant. The UAE is known for its lavish Friday social events and brunches at major tourist-focussed hotels - presumably, these will now be on Saturday.”

Tourists and residents flying in or out of UAE may have to shell out more for tickets as, globally, airfares generally peak on Saturdays and Sundays. “That may be likely, but it is too early to tell – (there are) lots of moving parts with respect to airline pricing, especially with international fares,” said Boyd. “As the UAE works to attract new global tourism dollars, corporate investment and jobs, this new shift will greatly facilitate those timely and important initiatives,” said Boyd.

It remains to be seen if other Gulf countries will follow UAE in the near future. “It will help standardize trade within the region - Indonesia and Morocco have already made this shift,” said Boyd.

Not a big change

John Strickland, Director of JLS Consulting, does not believe the decision will have a direct impact on airline operations. “Airlines are by nature seven-day-a-week business and have to work across many different regimes concerning hours, leave, social regulation and so on,” said Strickland. “It may have some impact on payments for overtime, but not likely to make a material difference.”

What are airlines saying?

Dubai-based budget carrier flydubai said it welcomed the government decision. “flydubai welcomes this announcement and we will follow the guidelines as set out by the authorities,” said the airline in a statement to Gulf News.

A top Wizz Air Abu Dhabi official said it was too early to comment on the matter. “We are majority owned by the Abu Dhabi Government and there will be a change to the weekend - I need to look into it, it is hot off the needles,” said Kees Van Schaick, Managing Director of Wizz Air Abu Dhabi. Emirates airline and Etihad Airways did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

The working week will start on Monday and end by Friday afternoon. The working hours for federal employees are set to be from 7.30am to 3.30pm, with 8.5 working hours per day. On Friday, employees will work for 4.5 hours.

A UAE-based pilot said the decision will mostly apply to office-based workers and not pilots and ground-handling staff. "This is for employees who do the 9-5 jobs," said the pilot.