

A new public holiday

By Emma Higham



Emiri Decree No.(80) of 2011 (Decree) was published in the Official Gazette on January 15th 2012 giving the majority of employees in Qatar a new public holiday; a National Sports Day. The Decree provides that Ministries, Government Departments, public sector institutions as well as other organisations, including those in the private sector, shall organise sporting activities on this day for their employees. Qatari's National Sports Day shall be held on the second Tuesday of February in each year; this year that means Tuesday the 14th of February.

Sport is material to Qatar's national vision. Qatar's success in hosting the 2006 Asian Games and the 2011 Arab Games has enabled it to develop this vision culminating in a successful bid to bring the FIFA World Cup to the Middle East for the first time in 2022; providing a firm basis for Qatar's bid to host the 2020 Olympics.

The National Sports Day is an indication of Qatar's commitment to incorporate sport into everyday life. These initiatives also highlight the importance of physical education, with particular emphasis on school children and young adults.

The National Sports Day is the second public holiday to be introduced in as many years. The Council of Ministers Decision No.(33) of 2009 (the Decision) which took effect on August 30th 2009 provided for a new public holiday on the first Sunday of March of every year.

The Decision amended Emiri Decision No.(29) of 1996 and Council of Ministers Resolution No.(6) of 2008 (the Resolution), both of which set out the various public holidays applicable to the employees of Qatari Ministries and other Government bodies, the public authorities and institutions of Qatar and the Qatar Central Bank (QCB), and the financial institutions it supervises, namely the Qatar Financial Markets Authority (QFMA) and the Qatar Securities Market (QSM).

The Resolution initially sets out the public holidays applicable to employees of the QCB, the QFMA, and the QSC:

- Eid Al-Fitr, three days;
- Eid Al-Adha, three days;
- National Day, December 18th; and
- Financial Year Closing, January 1st.

It was to these employees that the Decision added a new public holiday; unsurprisingly given the business sector the employees work within this holiday is sometimes referred to as a Bank Holiday.

The Resolution also sets out the public holidays applicable to the employees of the Qatari Ministries and other Government bodies:

- Eid Al-Fitr, from day 28 of Ramadan to the end of day four of Shawal;
- Eid Al-Adha, from day nine to end of day 13 of Dhu Al-Hijjah; and
- National Day.

The Resolution sets out the public holidays applicable to the employees of the public authorities and institutions of Qatar:

- Eid Al-Fitr, from day 28 of Ramadan to the end of day four of Shawal for public authorities and the end of day three of Shawal for public institutions;
- Eid Al-Adha, from day nine to end of day 13 of Dhu Al-Hijjah for public authorities and the end of day 12 of Shawal for public institutions; and
- National Day.

It should be noted that Law No.(14) of 2004 (the Labour Law) sets out the public holidays applicable to the majority of private sector employees:

- Eid Al-Fitr, three working days;
- Eid Al-Adha, three working days;
- National Day, one working day; and
- Employer specified, three working days.

The Qatar Financial Centre (QFC) regulations mirror those of the Labour Law in terms of public holidays although QFC employees also enjoy the Bank Holiday.

Note: All Qatari Laws (save for those issued by the QFC to regulate its own business) are issued in Arabic and there are no official translations, therefore for the purpose of drafting this article we have used our own translation.

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