

Young Saudis

Level 2 | Intermediate

1 Key words

Match these words from the text with their definitions:

1. a documentary
 2. a movie buff
 3. a critic
 4. a dozen
 5. lucrative
 6. a mall
 7. an imam
 8. inevitable
 9. a dune
 10. to sip
-
- a) someone whose job is to write their opinions about books, films or plays
 - b) bringing a lot of money
 - c) a set of twelve
 - d) a film or television programme that deals with real people and events
 - e) a Muslim priest or leader
 - f) to drink in small amounts
 - g) a hill of sand in the desert
 - h) someone who is very interested in and knows a lot about films
 - i) impossible to avoid or prevent
 - j) a large building with a lot of shops and restaurants and possibly a cinema

2 Find the information

Look in the text and find this information as quickly as possible:

1. How far is it from Riyadh to Bahrain?
2. What percentage of films made worldwide can be seen in Saudi Arabia?
3. How many people in Saudi Arabia are aged under 14?
4. How many young Saudis aged between 20 and 24 are out of work?
5. How many young Saudis enter the job market each year?
6. How far is it from Riyadh to Al-Thumamah?

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Young Saudis in search of fun / Two-thirds of the population of Saudi Arabia are under 24, but they have no access to cinemas or nightclubs. Michel Bole-Richard reports on the cracks appearing in the conservative regime.

Abdullah Eyaf, a young Saudi film director, has just completed his first documentary, *Cinema 500 kilometres*. It follows a group of Saudi movie buffs who decide to drive from Riyadh to Bahrain for the pleasure of finally seeing a film in a real cinema. "It is the story of a journey into a new world to enjoy an art form the way it was meant to be seen," says Raja al-Mutayri, 25, the film critic on the daily newspaper *Al-Riyadh* and a member of the original group. While looking at the internet he and his friends realised that "in Saudi Arabia it was only possible to see 5% of all the films produced worldwide" (and only on television).

The number of fans in the group has more than doubled from about a dozen. They are film critics, directors, scriptwriters and actors, and now they want to share with others the new world they have discovered. It is not always an easy task, but Mutayri is sure there is a real demand for films in Saudi Arabia. More than three-quarters of cinema audiences in neighbouring Bahrain are Saudis and he believes that cinemas will finally open in his home country in a couple of years. "Businesspeople see it as a lucrative market and are trying to change the law. Saudi society will approve, because only a small number of people are against opening cinemas."

Some of the shopping malls in Saudi Arabia already contain cinemas; the owners are just waiting for permission to open their doors. "The imams have less influence than they used to," says Mutayri. "People now understand that films do not destroy the social fabric, despite what the imams say. Opening cinemas would lift one last cultural barrier ... and all the others would disappear at the same time."

In many ways Saudi Arabia is already part of the global village, thanks to the internet, mobile phones, satellite television and, since December, membership of the World Trade Organisation. Young people want change. With no plays, films, concerts or discotheques, they are discovering a new world of entertainment. "There is some variety," says one young man, "but leisure activities are organised by 'specialists' who keep young people out. Older people try to prevent the young from expressing themselves. But pressure is growing and one day the bubble will burst. This is a natural development and completely inevitable."

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It is clear that young people in Saudi Arabia want change, but with two-thirds of the population under 24, and almost half under 14, the main problem is finding them all work. Every year 150,000 to 200,000 young people enter a job market where there is only work for 80,000. Almost a third of the 20-24 age group is out of work. A lot of young people have nothing to do, and there is almost no entertainment apart from television, video games, shopping, eating out and sport. The number of cafes has increased dramatically. This is where the men meet in the evenings.

At the One Way Cafe, a fashionable cafe where a Spanish football match is live on Al-Jazeera TV, university students Mohad, Muhammad and Abdulaziz all agree that unemployment is the main worry. "Everyone says it's difficult," they say, "and as you need a lot of money to get married, we have to wait till we're 25 before we can marry and start a family."

Abdulaziz Ben Salamah, a lecturer in communication science and consultant, says Saudi Arabia's youth are not bored. "This is not a western country. It is different. We must preserve that difference and respect cultural diversity. We don't want to copy the West, just to take the good things, but family life is very important here. Each country develops in its own way. Anyway, change will continue. It's inevitable!" Even women's rights? "Of course," Salamah replies. "There are stupid traditions, such as the fact that women are not allowed to drive. But, look, we already have mixed banks, hospitals and supermarkets. The country will open up I am sure. I sometimes think it is changing too fast already."

Even Islamic conservatives agree to some extent. Mansur Askar, a sociologist at Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, says: "I am conservative, but you have to live in the present, with the internet and satellite TV. Change is a normal thing, but we should only take what is acceptable." He thinks cinemas are "for antisocial elements". Allowing women to drive is impossible, because "there are already too many traffic jams". For him, Saudi Arabia means "security, stability and family relationships".

In the evening on Tahlia Street, Jeddah's main avenue, young men drive up and down in their big cars. They arrange meetings in the huge malls to look at the young women. They used to put messages into their shopping baskets. Now they send them text messages.

To get away from Riyadh, the young drive 65km into the desert to Al-Thumamah, where they climb the dunes with their SUVs and quad bikes. Long-haired youths dance and fool around, eating sunflower seeds and sipping soft

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drinks. At weekends there are crowds of people, mainly young people and families. In the evening they light fires and sit around talking, enjoying the clear desert air.

3 Comprehension check

Decide whether these statements are True or False according to the text:

1. There are no open public cinemas in Saudi Arabia.
2. Most films produced worldwide can be seen on Saudi TV.
3. Young people in Saudi Arabia are conservative and do not want change.
4. Most people watching films in cinemas in Bahrain are from Saudi Arabia.
5. Most people are against opening cinemas in Saudi Arabia.
6. Women are not allowed to drive in Saudi Arabia.
7. It is not possible to use the internet in Saudi Arabia.
8. Al-Thumamah is a seaside resort.

4 Vocabulary 1: Chunks

Rearrange these words to make phrases from the text. Check your answers in the text:

1. a years couple of in
2. number only a of small people
3. bubble the day burst will one
4. some to extent agree they
5. to have young nothing people do
6. weekends crowds are there at people of

5 Vocabulary 2: Adjectives and noun collocations

Match the adjectives in the left-hand column with the nouns in the right-hand column to make expressions from the text:

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1. global | a. diversity |
| 2. natural | b. demand |
| 3. cultural | c. development |
| 4. soft | d. fabric |
| 5. real | e. village |

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6. social

f. drink

6 Vocabulary 3: Word building

Complete the table:

	Verb	Noun
1.	entertain	_____
2.	employ	_____
3.	arrange	_____
4.	destroy	_____
5.	develop	_____
6.	discover	_____
7.	permit	_____
8.	worry	_____

7 Discussion

Do you think cultural activities should be restricted for religious reasons?