

Young Saudis

Level 3 | Advanced

1 Key words

Fill the gaps using these words from the text:

movie buff lucrative decline yearn monopolise
inevitable palpable delinquent militant mall

1. If something is _____, it cannot be avoided or prevented.
2. If a person or a group of people _____ something, they prevent other people from using it or being involved in it.
3. A _____ is someone who is very interested in films and knows a lot about them.
4. A _____ is someone, especially a young person, who behaves in a criminal or antisocial way.
5. If an activity is _____, it can bring you a lot of money.
6. If something is _____ it is politically extreme.
7. If something _____, it becomes less powerful or less effective.
8. If you _____ for something, you want something very much.
9. A _____ is a large building with a lot of shops and restaurants and sometimes a cinema.
10. If a mood or feeling is _____, it is so strong that you seem to feel it physically.

2 What do you know?

Decide whether these statements about Saudi Arabia are True or False:

1. There are no public cinemas.
2. Films cannot be shown on television.
3. Only 5% of the films produced worldwide can be seen in Saudi Arabia.
4. Saudis are not allowed to use the internet.
5. Saudi Arabia is not a member of the World Trade Organisation.
6. Youth unemployment stands at around 30%.
7. Women are not allowed to drive.
8. There are no cafes.

Young Saudis

Level 3 | Advanced

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 not a militant film, just 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 *Al-Riyadh* and a member of the original group. Browsing a website, 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 have grown up to become critics, directors, scriptwriters and actors, determined to share with others the new world they have discovered. It is not always an easy task, but Mutayri is sure there is genuine demand for films. 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 campaigning for change. Saudi society will approve, because only a minority is against opening cinemas."

Some of the shopping malls in Saudi Arabia already contain cinemas; the owners are just waiting for the green light to open their doors. "The influence of the imams is declining," says Mutayri. "People have realised that, contrary to what the preachers claim, films do not destroy the social fabric. Opening cinemas would lift one last cultural barrier . . . and all the others would disappear at the same time."

In many respects the kingdom is already part of the global village, thanks to the internet, mobile phones, satellite television and, since December, membership of the World Trade Organisation. A revolution is being driven by frustrated youth yearning for change. With no access to plays, films, concerts and discotheques, these people are discovering a new world of entertainment. "There is some variety," says one young man, "but leisure activities are dominated by 'specialists' who keep young people out. The old guard is monopolising everything, preventing the young from expressing themselves. Pressure is

Young Saudis

Level 3 | Advanced

building up and some day the bubble will burst. There is already an arts scene, in the cellars and garages, and it is bound to surface. It is a natural development and completely inevitable."

Saudi youth's appetite for change is palpable, 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 newcomers enter a job market capable of absorbing about 80,000. Almost a third of the 20-24 age group is out of work. Plenty of young people are at a loose end, with little in the way of entertainment apart from television, video games, shopping, eating out and sport. The number of cafes has rocketed. This is where the menfolk meet in the evenings. At the One Way Cafe, a fashionable watering hole where a Spanish football match is playing live on Al-Jazeera, university students Mohad, Muhammad and Abdulaziz all agree that unemployment is the key concern. "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 settle down."

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 above all to avoid the dislocation of our families and society. Each country evolves in its own way, without necessarily living up to the expectations of others. Anyway, whether we like it or not, change will continue. It's inevitable!" Even women's rights? "Of course," Salamah replies. "There are stupid traditions, such as the ban on their driving. But, look, we already have mixed banks, hospitals and supermarkets. The country will open up, come what may. I sometimes find the pace of change too fast. It takes your breath away."

Even Islamic purists 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 net and satellite TV. Change is a normal thing, but we should only take what is acceptable." He thinks cinemas are "for delinquents". Allowing women to drive is impossible, because "there are already too many jams". For him, Saudi Arabia means "security, stability and family ties".

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 gaze at the young women. They used to put messages into their shopping baskets. Now they send text messages.

Young Saudis

Level 3 | Advanced

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 tuck up their robes to make driving easier, dance and lark around, munching sunflower seeds and sipping soft drinks. At weekends there are hordes of people, mainly young people and families, with sandwich vendors and stalls renting quad bikes and horses. In the evening they light fires and sit around talking, enjoying the clear desert air.

3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer:

- 1. Why does the author believe that Saudi Arabia is already “part of the global village”?**
 - a. because it trades with other countries.
 - b. because change is inevitable.
 - c. because of communications technology.
- 2. Why do the movie director and his friends go to Bahrain?**
 - a. to watch movies in a real public cinema.
 - b. to make documentary movies.
 - c. to take a break from conservative Saudi Arabia.
- 3. What does the communication science lecturer think about women’s rights?**
 - a. they will soon be able to drive cars.
 - b. change in women’s rights is inevitable.
 - c. Saudi Arabia should copy the west.
- 4. What does the conservative sociologist think about change?**
 - a. it is not acceptable.
 - b. it is antisocial.
 - c. it is normal.

Young Saudis

Level 3 | Advanced

4 Vocabulary 1: Find the word

In the last three paragraphs find the words that mean:

1. someone who wants people to be correct and to follow rules carefully.
2. a hill of sand in a desert
3. to have fun by joking or playing
4. to eat something using your teeth and jaws in a noisy way
5. to drink in small amounts
6. large groups of people

4 Vocabulary 1: Collocations

Match the verbs in the left-hand column with the nouns or noun phrases in the right-hand column:

- | | |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| 1. browse | a. cultural barriers |
| 2. lift | b. meetings |
| 3. respect | c. text messages |
| 4. live up to | d. cultural diversity |
| 5. arrange | e. internet websites |
| 6. send | f. expectations |

6 Vocabulary 3: Idioms

Match these idioms from the text with their meanings:

1. at a loose end
 2. the bubble will burst
 3. a watering hole
 4. give the green light to
 5. it takes your breath away
-
- a. a pub or other place where people meet to have a drink
 - b. extremely impressive
 - c. with nothing in particular to do
 - d. the situation will end suddenly

Young Saudis

Level 3 | **Advanced**

e. to give formal approval to something

7 Discussion

Do you think cultural activities should be restricted to conform to religious feelings?