

Car boom leaves Caracas in one big jam

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Key words

Fill the gaps using these key words from the text:

clogged
inaugurate

irritability
detour

disruption
odyssey

boom
gridlock

potholed
berate

1. If you _____ something, you introduce or start something new or important.
2. _____ is a situation in which there are so many cars on the roads that traffic cannot move.
3. If you _____ someone, you criticise them in an angry way.
4. _____ is a problem or situation that interrupts something and prevents it from continuing or from working properly.
5. An _____ is a long journey during which many things happen.
6. A _____ is a way of going from one place to another that is not the shortest or the usual way.
7. _____ is a state where people easily become annoyed or impatient.
8. If a street or road is _____, there are a lot of holes in it and it is difficult to drive along it.
9. If streets are _____ with traffic, they are completely blocked.
10. A _____ is a sudden major increase in trade or profits in a particular country or region.

2 What do you think?

The article gives advice on what to do if you are stuck in a traffic-jam. Which three of these six pieces of advice do you think will be given?

1. read a newspaper
2. close your eyes
3. take deep breaths
4. do a crossword puzzle
5. eat a snack
6. punch someone

Now look in the text and check your answers.

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by Rory Carroll in Caracas

Eat a snack, read a book, do a crossword, listen to music and try not to punch or shoot anyone. That is the advice psychiatrists are giving to commuters in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, in the wake of traffic jams that are among the world's worst.

An explosion in car ownership has clogged motorways and side-streets from early morning until late at night, paralysing entire districts and driving motorists to distraction. Doctors say the stress is inflicting physical and mental damage on drivers and leading to increased incidents of road rage, including shoot-outs.

Those who try to beat the traffic by leaving home at 5 am have been warned that they are likely to suffer sleep deprivation, which will diminish productivity, increase irritability and harm sex lives.

A sense of anxiety, anguish and tension is spreading, Robert Lespinasse, the former head of the Venezuelan Society of Psychiatry, told the daily, *Ultimas Noticias*. A psychologist, Hernan D'Oliveira, said that the disruption in mental processes was making people less open to criticism. Armed motorcycle gangs who ambush stationary motorists in broad daylight do not help.

In the absence of an urban planning miracle, people have been advised that when traffic grinds to a halt they should have a drink or something to eat and occupy their minds with music, a book, newspaper or crossword.

An oil-fuelled economic boom has boosted vehicle ownership in Venezuela, with sales in the last year alone doubling to 300,000. In the absence of new roads, the swollen traffic streams into a creaking, potholed infrastructure which has been neglected for years.

Caracas, squeezed into a long narrow alley between skyscrapers and shantytowns and

baked beneath a tropical sun, can appear to be the site of a battle against geography and climate.

The government, flush with oil revenues, has inaugurated bridges and metro lines in the run-up to next month's presidential election, but many are unfinished, including a bridge connecting Caracas to the airport, which is forcing detours through hillside barrios that can turn the 16-mile trip into a five-hour odyssey.

Everyone agrees that gridlock is getting worse every month. Taxi drivers say their income has been slashed because they are down from an average of five to three fares a day. 'It's impossible. If someone asks to go into especially heavy traffic I say no, it'll take up half my day,' said Fredy Afanador, a veteran cabbie.

President Hugo Chávez has berated previous infrastructure ministers but praised the incumbent for doing a good job. And he is also looking further afield for help. In return for discounted diesel for London buses, the city's mayor, Ken Livingstone, is to share insights on congestion charging and other policies in an attempt to end the traffic nightmare.

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3 Comprehension check

Choose the best answer.

1. Car ownership in Venezuela has increased rapidly as a result of...
 - a. a government road-building programme.
 - b. a boom fuelled by oil sales.
 - c. next month's presidential election.
2. Leaving home at 5 am is likely to...
 - a. allow drivers to beat the traffic jams.
 - b. cause various health and personal problems.
 - c. stop people sleeping.
3. The problem is made worse by...
 - a. stress.
 - b. a sense of anxiety and tension.
 - c. a neglected infrastructure.
4. Psychiatrists are advising people to...
 - a. leave home earlier.
 - b. try and relax.
 - c. punch or shoot other drivers.

4 Vocabulary Expressions

Match these expressions from the text with their meanings.

1. in the wake of
2. to drive to distraction
3. road rage
4. to grind to a halt
5. a creaking infrastructure
6. flush with money

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7. in broad daylight
 8. congestion charging
-
- a. violent behaviour by a driver towards another driver
 - b. a system under which drivers pay to enter a particular part of a city
 - c. with more money than you usually have
 - d. to annoy someone so much that they become angry
 - e. happening after an event or as a result of it
 - f. in the middle of the day when people can be easily seen
 - g. a transport system that is close to collapse
 - h. to move more and more slowly until everything stops

5 Vocabulary Collocations

What verbs go with these nouns? Check your answers in the text.

1. _____ a crossword
2. _____ damage
3. _____ productivity
4. _____ one's mind
5. _____ irritability
6. _____ entire districts
7. _____ sleep deprivation
8. _____ advice

6 Vocabulary Find the word

Find the word that means:

1. fights using guns (para. 2)
2. a lack of something you need or want (para. 3)
3. a feeling of great physical or emotional pain (para. 4)
4. the period of time just before an important event (para. 8)
5. poor districts of a city in a Spanish-speaking country (para. 8)

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6. reduced drastically (para. 9)
7. taxi-driver (para. 9)
8. the person holding a particular job or office at the present time (para. 10)

7 Discussion

What do you think are the best ways to reduce congestion and prevent traffic-jams in major cities?