

WEEKEND

WOMAN

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Oh no,
Mrs
Clinton!



Homecoming

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8 COVER STORY
While a major chunk of the expatriate population is leaving for home for some vacations, there are some who are returning to Dubai to spend their summer holidays. Children of expatriates who are studying abroad come here for their summer break. This week we talk to them about what they do here.

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We feature Yves Saint Laurent's spring/summer collection which will give you an idea of the genius and sheer magnificence that make him the top name in the haute couture world



How do children studying abroad spend their summer holidays when they return to Dubai? TAZEEN ALI speaks to some of these energetic youngsters to find out what they would like to do during their vacations

Annual Dubai HOMECOMING

"Some miss home cooked food, some run out of money, some want a change in pace, but basically we can't wait to return because we miss our friends and families"

PHOTOS: MATIUR RAHMAN

Faced with the idea of doing a story on how young people are occupied during holidays in Dubai, I must admit that I was a bit perplexed. For one, I thought it is not so much a problem for the young ones, it is more of an issue for their parents to ponder, for it's they who are confronted with the difficult task of keeping their kids amused and entertained. When parents have established lifestyles, they are either faced with the tedious chore of dropping and later fetching their offspring, or they feel pangs of guilt as they drive off to work every morning, leaving behind their children at the mercy of Star, MTV, Nintendo or, if they are lucky, the telephone.

The other reason was a little introspective, because we were all 'that age' once and we all had holidays and were generally perfectly content not doing anything. In fact, the only spectacular feat I remember achieving, on reflection, was defying all norms and breakfasting at 2.30 in the afternoon. The omelette, made by an ex-army, stickler-for-timing cook and consumed under the extremely scornful gaze of my very 'do something useful mum,' tasted divine—possibly because courtesy my age at the time, I wanted to sample the flavour of rebellion so badly. But, apart from such conveniently lazy acts of defiance, I don't think anyone in their teens has ever managed to anything earth-shattering during the much-lamented break.

"And why should they? This is supposedly a break during which they have the right to take it easy."

said my friend, Peter Pan. Why should they be expected to do something more useful than relaxing after having spent an entire year mugging for tests and doing tons of homework (which ought to be scrapped anyway because it is primarily a consequence of the educators' incompetence and their way of absolving themselves—I would even say a pathetic attempt at looking overworked and underpaid.)

"Nobody asks parents to 'do something useful' when they are soaking up the sun on the Riviera. Or when they are back home, partying and holding forth on the expatriate lifestyle. Since they are on holiday they are expected to do nothing more than unwind. 'These poor kids are just asking to be left alone to devise ways of dealing with life, their relationships. They are busy sorting out their conflicts and contradictions. So why can't they be left alone to do just that?' said my friend, who is hell-bent on perpetuating the myth of have tongue, will talk. The only problem is that there is something valid about this line of argument, even though it sounds a little lop-sided and somewhat draconian.

I argued that the readership of Weekend Woman is basically adult and would not care to be spoken about in this manner. But he was adamant. Why, he continued, are we bent upon forcing an existence on our holidaying children which is comparable to, if not worse than, the tyranny of routine at school? It was difficult to make our resident Peter Pan, who champions the





Saima Khan—16

on holiday for a chat. The informal discussion turned out to be quite an eye-opener. If this group could be considered a representative sample of their generation, I realised very early during the proceedings that the only thing young about today's teens is their chronological age! Their level of intelligence, sensitivity and independence is far greater than what one would expect. In fact the more I listened to them, the more merits I discovered in my friend Peter Pan's point of view.

Today's youth are aware, more sensitive and certainly more with it than yesterday's youngsters. A little given to psychedelic shoelaces, perhaps, but more focussed. They know what they want out of life and have the determination to get it. My first question to the panel was: So much raw energy. How do you deal with it?

The replies were ordinary enough: watching TV, playing a sport, going to the beach, talking on the phone, indulging in hobbies for which there is little time otherwise, reading, meeting friends, eating out, window shopping and taking up summer jobs. But such is the power of the Press that not a single reference was made to the otherwise popularly used term Boredom!

But is this it, is this how you'd like to spend your summer vacations? "This is it, more or less, because in the beginning you are excited about coming home to be with your family, but soon afterwards

you have to take up one of the things already mentioned," said Vidya. "There are very few places where one can meet friends. And transport is another problem—you have to depend upon your parents



Najeeba Khan—17

to take you around since not all of us drive." Some contested that, saying that the city has an extremely efficient bus service; but for girls that's more or less out, since they are not allowed to travel alone.

Najeeba suggested that vacations should be utilised to discover Dubai as a tourist—the city's galleries and

COVER STORY



Tariq Mohammad—15

its older sections can prove to be of considerable interest.

But I was determined to find out how today's youngsters, with so much energy and a wider understanding of things around them at their disposal, and armed with the knowledge that there is so much to seek, possibly be content to flick channels all day.

"Many of us would jump at the opportunity of taking up summer jobs, but there aren't many companies around who do that sort of thing now. It would be great if they did, though, because that would really help a lot of us. Apart from the experience, it would help those like me who are graduating soon to get used to a nine-to-five routine," said Harjeev.

His brother Jasveer thinks that the routine at school leaves one with negligible time for extra-curricular reading and vacations give him the opportunity to satisfy his voracious appetite for books.

They were unanimously of the view that they would like to see some places here where young people can get together. Because, all said and done, once you're together in a group, it doesn't really matter where you are—you can always have a good time.

But what about kids who have been away at boarding school since they were 11 or 12? Not going to school here may also mean that you end up with fewer reference points, a narrower circle of friends.



Vivek Prakash—11



Genevra Rodrigues—16



Vidhya Thiagarajan—16

As with other questions, this one took off on a tangent as well but an interesting one. The group was divided on what is the best age for a child to be sent to a boarding school. Those who did leave when they were around 11 consider that the best age as it helps a child to develop a well-rounded personality; children learn to be financially independent and emotionally consolidated.

Rahul, who left for boarding school two years ago added to the argument's validity by saying that living in Dubai really spoils one. His junior at his Alma Mater, Vivek, who

left Dubai just this year and is 11, shared his opinion and added that going to boarding school early really helps you to form your own relationships.

"Once a child reaches his maturity level, I think he should get out in the real world and experience things for himself. I think that's really important," added Vidya.

Others, however, insisted that there was absolutely no need to hasten the process of growing up. It all happens in its own time and the child should only be sent away when he is old enough. Some thought that parents are the best judges of their child's maturity level. Opinions differed, and the discussion continued...

What makes those who have been living abroad for some years now and have friends there want to come back to Dubai?

Many reasons were given in reply to this query. Some claimed they were beckoned by the home-cooked chicken biryani. Others said they had no option. One lamented about how the money mysteriously runs out by this time of the year, closing all other exit points but the one that leads homewards. But they were all unanimous that they can hardly wait to get back because they miss their families.

Besides, for most of these young ones Dubai is the only home they've known. They were either born here, or came to the UAE while they were still infants and toddlers. The affinity



Rahul Roy—14



Harjeev Kandhari—17½

they feel with this country is so strong in some that they want to take up residence here after completing their education. "I think those of us who were born here really have a very deep sense of belonging to the UAE. We really think of it as our home. When the UAE football team qualified for the World Cup, we actually rejoiced because as far as we are concerned this was our team," said one and the others nodded in agreement.

The discussion after this point sprouted yet another dimension when I asked them how their parents interpreted their 'relaxation'. For when a child says he or she is

Beaches: a popular place for holiday makers



Jasjeev Kandari—19½

relaxing, the parental mind is quick to dub it a moping, doing-nothing phase.

A voice said "guilty," but before I could follow up on that, Faisal had already launched into a diatribe about the mysterious ways in which the parental mind works its wonders to perform. "I really don't understand how they (parents) send us thousands of miles away from them and trust us to take care of ourselves, but as soon as we come back to them there is always a curfew to be adhered to."

That's a fairly universal complaint, and every young person interprets such regulations as a personal



Pankaj Wagh



Faisal Adil—22



Naira Ahmad—16½

what's not on the curriculum.

The debate could have continued, but (for paucity of space) I shall sum it up by quoting one of the members of our lively panel, who said: "There are plenty of opportunities around, but you have to stop giving in to the lazy part of you. Because if you really want to learn or do something useful, nothing can stop you. If you lack the will, then no opportunity will be good enough for you..."

Like I said, Peter, if this is the lot whose cause you are championing, then you aren't really barking up the wrong tree after all...



A stroll down to the local fast food joint

affront to his independence. We wait for you to enforce your brand of "injustice and oppression" some years down the road to paternity, Faisal!

"For people like me who get about five hours of sleep at school, it's really great to come back home and unwind. I get up after noon and it's really the ultimate in luxury for me," said Harjeev, who carries books on his reading list to Dubai in order to read them before the new term begins because then it would be impossible to take time out to read



Rhea Kanji—16