

Emirati Film *Shabab Sheyab* Set To Become First GCC Movie To Play In Saudi Cinemas

The Emirati film *Shabab Sheyab* premiered in Saudi Arabia this week, becoming the first movie developed in the Gulf to play in cinemas in the kingdom following the lifting of a decades long ban, according to Image Nation Abu Dhabi, the studio behind the film.

Directed and written by Yasir Al-Yasiri, *Shabab Sheyab* is a comedy telling the story of four elderly friends living in a senior citizens home who go on an adventure after one of them inherits a large fortune. Image Nation Abu Dhabi released the film in Riyadh on November 8, with a UAE premiere set to take place later in the month, followed by a wider release.

“Arabic-language entertainment is in high demand among Saudi and GCC audiences, so opening the first regionally-made film in the country is a major milestone and sets the tone for a bright future,” said Ben Ross, Image Nation Abu Dhabi’s chief content officer, in a statement.

The film arrives after moviegoers in the Middle East and North Africa spent \$500 million at the box office in 2017, according to numbers from PwC. But that total should increase dramatically as Saudi Arabia’s entertainment industry opens up in the years to come.

After a hiatus of 35 years, Saudi Arabia opened its first movie theater to a full house in April 2018 in Riyadh. Now, the kingdom plans to welcome more than 300 cinemas by 2030, with industry players lining up to cash in on the opportunity, including US cinema operator AMC and Majid Al Futtaim’s VOX Cinemas.

Meanwhile, the Development and Investment Entertainment Company (DIEC), a wholly-owned subsidiary of Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund, intends to invest up to \$2.7 billion in entertainment projects across the country over the next 12 years.

Against that backdrop, total cinema revenue in Saudi Arabia is expected to reach \$1.5 billion in 2030, again according to PwC.

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