



Is Nature the New Nightclub?

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You've probably seen that video of "the person who can't decide what lifestyle they want" doing the rounds on social media - raving one minute, cold plunging at sunrise the next, then back at another festival before finishing up at a yoga retreat.

Well... I'll admit, that's me.

(Side note: If you haven't seen the video, have you been living under a rock?)

As someone who loves a rave but is also a bit of a fitness freak and loves healthy living, wellness, and a (mostly) clean lifestyle, I've often found myself oscillating between these two extremes. And sometimes, in my more "why choose between" eras, I've even been known to squeeze in both. Ergo, case in point: last year I finished a 15k Tough Mudder, went home, showered, napped, and then headed straight out to Fabric in London to see Dutch DJ Joris Voorn play a 12-hour set. No regrets.

What can I say, I'm a "squeeze the juice out of life" kinda gal. All about balance, right?

But in spite of being partial to a cheeky little boogie (or two, or three), I must admit, now at the ripe old age of 33 (soon to be 34 by the time this article is published), I have found myself wondering if I'm still getting the same kick out of it. Last summer, after a four-day festival at Tomorrowland in Belgium, I swore that would be my last multi-day event like that for a while. If ever again. Don't get me wrong, I love a festival. I'm obsessed with music, art, culture, offline connection, and the collective calm and chaos that come with being surrounded by people who are just as keen to live their lives to the fullest as I am. But at the end of that festival, I asked myself whether I was still getting the same kick out of it.

So I started doing some soul searching. And some digging. As it turns out, it's not just me.

In my research, I noticed what feels like a broader cultural shift away from traditional means of socialising - nightlife, bars, even dating apps - towards something more offline, less performative, and a little bit more real.

Real life...who'd have thought!

To be honest, it doesn't surprise me. There's App fatigue. Swipe fatigue. Algorithm fatigue. Content fatigue. Screen fatigue. Performance fatigue. The list goes on. TLDR; we're all exhausted. We've become more disconnected and more lonely than ever, and the modern-day "traditional" methods of finding social connection aren't quite cutting it. Nightlife in its own way sometimes too can feel like social media in physical form; You dress a certain way, perform a certain version of yourself, scan the room, get scanned back, it can literally feel like living IN the highlight reel. But things can get a bit tedious, transactional, and conversations (the ones you can actually hear over the bassline) stay surface level. I'm not saying this is the case for every night out, I've had many "DMCs" (deep and meaningful conversations) crouched outside in the smoking area for hours at a gig, or at 5AM sat outside my tent at a festival. I've also had incredible nights out, but surveys show that as a generation, we are drinking and partying less. The rise of "sober curiosity" reflects a generation more willing to interrogate default behaviours. Drinking is no longer the assumed centrepiece of social life. It's one option among many.

What was also interesting to me was how “being offline” has itself become a kind of online movement. Scroll social media, and you’ll find swaths of creators documenting their “offline journeys,” encouraging followers to delete apps, meet people in real life, read books again, reclaim their attention. On forums like Reddit, people debate the irony of posting about disconnecting while still being very much online.

I mean... they have a point.

It sounds contradictory, but I do think it points to something deeper: even the algorithm is now feeding us content about how to escape the algorithm. That suggests a hunger for radical recalibration.

That recalibration I’ve noticed has taken shape through non-traditional, mainly outdoor activity-based forms of social connection - from run clubs, to cold water swim groups, to hiking collectives.

When I moved to New York, I was immediately introduced to an outdoor activity club called Outsiders, whose tagline is quite literally “Nature is the new nightclub.”

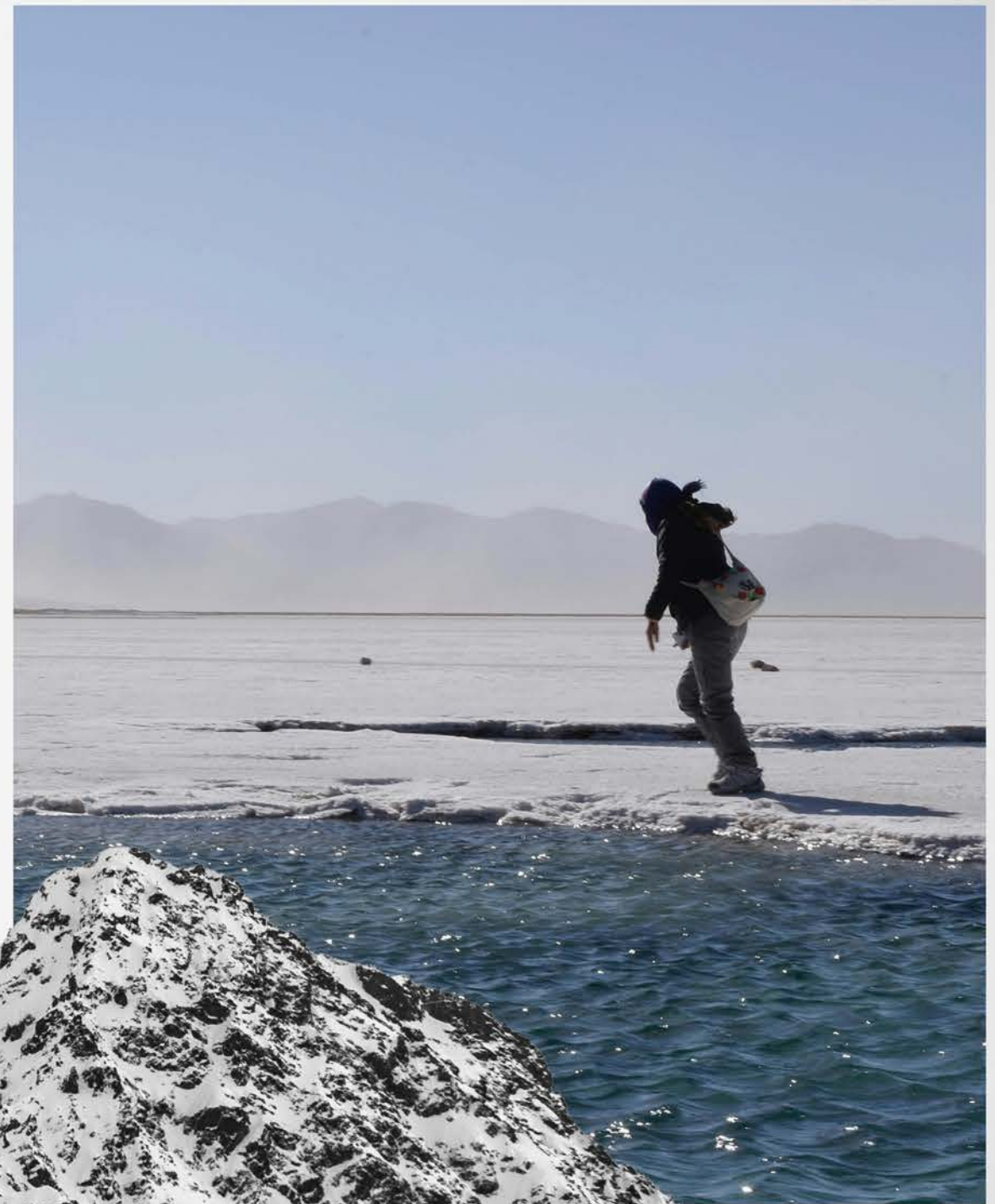
That intrigued me. I found myself drawn to the question: Is it?

So I started my quest to discover more by asking Jeremy Asgari, founder of Outsiders, for his take. Jeremy is uniquely positioned to answer the question. Before building a community around shared movement and outdoor adventures, he worked in the nightlife and entertainment scene in New York for twenty years, so he knows that world inside out.

“I went from working in nightlife and events,” he told me, “to running a social club built around outdoor adventures. When the pandemic hit, and there wasn’t really anything to do, we were socialising safely outdoors. I remember my friends saying, ‘We used to be in clubs, and now we’re outside.’ And I said, yeah - nature’s the new nightclub.”

It started out as a half-joke. But it stuck.

“Nightlife has a shelf life,” Jeremy said. “It’s indoors, there’s a lot of drinking, it can be a pretty unhealthy lifestyle. I still enjoy it occasionally, but working in that industry was tough - the hours, the environment. It just wasn’t speaking to me anymore.” What he wanted instead was something with less of an expiry date.





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“I just wanted to have fun in a way that felt playful, healthier, and honestly, even nostalgic,” he said. “Like when you’re a kid riding your bike with friends all day, being outside, and just exploring.”

As Jeremy talked me through his business journey and the types of events Outsiders runs, the word he kept coming back to was fun. Which was interesting to me, because when I spoke to Vanessa O’Brien, mountaineer, explorer, and the first woman to reach the highest point on land, the deepest point in the ocean, and travel to space, she said the same thing.

“If we ask a group of people why they like nightclubs, music, and dancing, they will say because it’s fun,” she said. “That’s not far off from George Mallory’s answer as to why he wanted to climb Everest. Both are legitimate. However, both lead to more questions.”

Questions I thought, like: What kind of fun are we talking about? Is it distraction? Is it transcendence? Is it belonging? Is it sensory overload? Or rather, sensory cleansing?

“Nature magnifies fun,” Vanessa told me. “It gives you something unavailable in any nightclub - real serotonin. Serotonin released by sunlight, helping stabilise mood and enhance well-being.”

More than that, she argues that nature’s unpredictability engages us fully.

“Nature is constantly changing. Our senses stay alert; watching, listening, observing. On a dancefloor, there’s very little visual observation beyond people dancing. In nature, everything shifts.”

In other words, it switches us on. The brain, she suggests, rewards that engagement.

“It’s as if the conductor in the brain acknowledges all the extra sensory work and adds a crescendo - an accomplishment boost in the form of endorphins.” And that matters in a culture that so often numbs us. And melts our brains.

So that got me thinking: Is it just about the nature? Or is social connection important too?

To explore that, I turned to Florence Williams, author of *The Nature Fix: Why Nature Makes Us Happier, Healthier and More Creative*.

In her book, she describes the “Mappiness” study, led by economist George MacKerron, which gathered over a million data points from 20,000 participants tracking their real-time happiness. One of the most striking findings was that where people lived mattered enormously. On average, participants were significantly happier in green or natural environments than in urban ones. That resonated. Anecdotally, I’ve always known that being near the ocean or in the mountains shifts my mood instantly. But Williams argues many of us underestimate how restorative nature actually is.

“Mappiness reveals our epidemic dislocation from the outdoors is an indictment not only of the structures and habits of modern society, but of our self-understanding. Why don’t we do more of what makes our brains happy?”

She continues: “We have gained so much since the dawn of the internet, but many experts argue we’ve grown more irritable, more narcissistic, more distracted, and less cognitively nimble. We can’t blame all our malaise on a separation from nature, but our complaints reveal some fraying of psychological resistance.”

What I found particularly confronting to read was when she wrote, quoting Ontario psychologist Elizabeth Nisbet’s conjecture that people stay indoors in part “because a chronic disconnection from nature causes them to underestimate its hedonic benefits. American and British children today spend half as much time outside than their parents did. Instead, they spend up to seven hours on screen.” Florence’s research found that the average person checks their phones 1,500 times a week. That’s 200 times a day. Once every 5 minutes. And that number only goes up year on year.

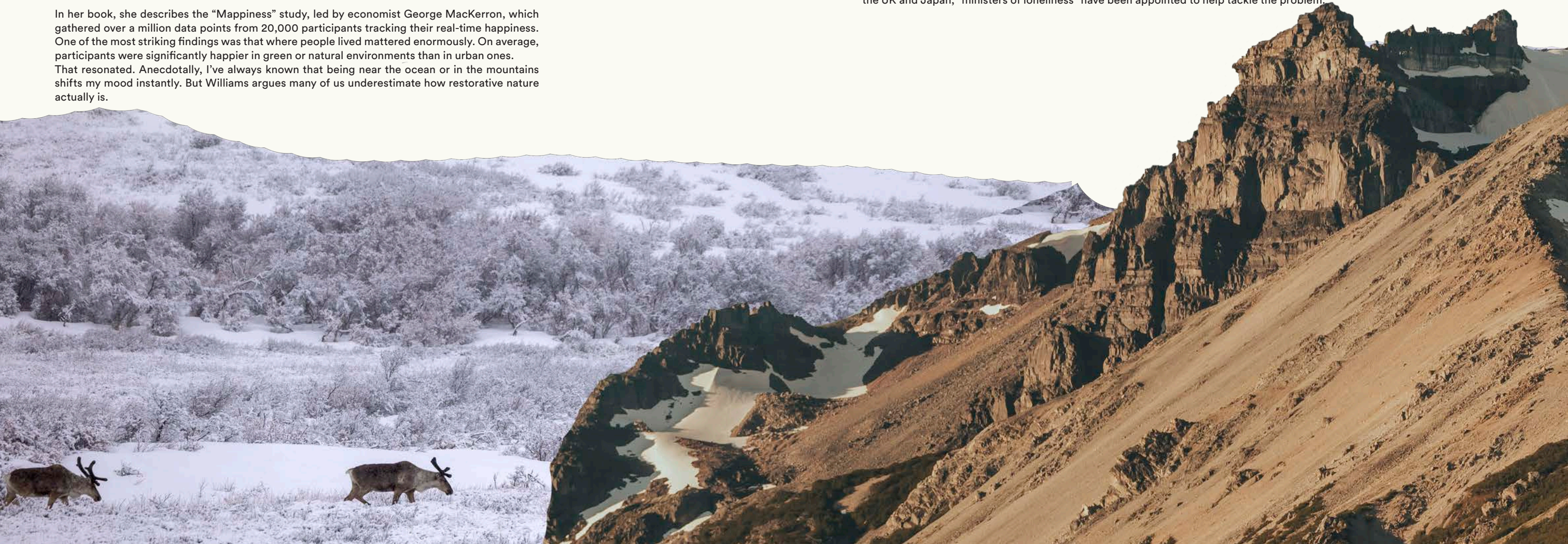
Now that, I find terrifying.

She also notes that nature appears to calm the autonomic nervous system directly, while indirectly encouraging movement and facilitating social contact. “We don’t experience natural environments enough to realise how restored they can make us feel. Studies show nature can make us healthier, more creative, more empathetic, and more engaged with the world and each other.” “Nature, it turns out, is good for civilisation.”

Which brings me to the social connection piece of the puzzle.

Nature facilitates and enables real connection.

We’ve all read the headlines: we’re in a loneliness epidemic. In fact, loneliness has become a global public health concern. In the United States, the Surgeon General has warned that chronic loneliness carries health risks comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. In countries like the UK and Japan, “ministers of loneliness” have been appointed to help tackle the problem.



Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Brigham Young University and a leading researcher on social connection, has spent decades studying the link between social connection and health.

“There is some evidence that those who spend time in nature are less likely to report being lonely,” she has said. “But those are correlations - so we have to understand why that might be the case.”

She suggests that green spaces create opportunities for spontaneous interaction and act as what sociologists call “third places” - environments outside home and work where community can form. They also lower stress, making connection easier.

When I think about that, I think about the difference between shouting over a DJ at 2 AM and walking side by side with someone on a trail.

The latter is quieter; the conversation is usually different; and, arguably, it has a little more depth than the former. Perhaps that’s the shift.

Phones stay in pockets. At least more than usual. You can’t optimise a mountain. You can’t algorithm your way to the top of a climb. And you can’t drink your way through the social anxiety of meeting new people when you’re three miles into a hike...and heaving. But you show up, a little uncomfortable, vulnerable, and totally unfiltered. And because everyone else does too, something softens. The performance drops, conversations deepen, lengthen, and silence becomes acceptable, not something that needs to be filled immediately.

In a culture that constantly asks us to perform - online, professionally, romantically, socially - being in nature feels like opting out of the audition. Jumping off the hedonic treadmill, even if it’s only for just a few hours, especially when so many of us live in what Xiaoqi Feng, Professor of Urban Health and Environment at the University of New South Wales in Australia, calls a “lonelygenic environment” - environments dominated by cars and concrete over grass and trees, aggravating loneliness. Research shows that spending even just an hour or two in nature per week helps people feel less isolated and more connected.

Jeremy put it simply: “I feel like a lot of people are just missing real human connection and looking for healthier ways to find it.”

Interestingly, public health systems are also beginning to explore new, more “nature-based solutions” to address this lack of connection. In fact, one proposed approach is what researchers call “social prescribing”, where physicians connect their patients with non-medical services in the community. One pilot program for this is a global research project called Recetas (short for Reimagining Environments for Connection and Engagement: Testing Actions for Social Prescribing in Natural Spaces), which is exploring how time in green spaces can be formally integrated into care.

If that doesn’t signal a shift, I don’t know what does.


After that four-day festival in Belgium, I didn’t quite swear off raving forever. I still love music, gigs, dancing and losing myself in a crowd at 2AM when the bass drops.

But I am much more cognisant and intentional about how and where I look for joy.

I think perhaps what we’re witnessing isn’t nature replacing nightclubs entirely, but a subtle, broader shift away from traditional scripts of fun towards more authentic, embodied, often healthier ways of accessing the same dopamine rush.

Getting offline, going outside, being around others, disconnecting to reconnect, doing healthy things - but doing them in a way that still feels playful, communal, and alive.



A photograph of a small boat with two people on a large body of water, with mountains in the background. The water is a deep teal color, and the mountains are dark and rugged. The scene is captured in a cinematic style with soft lighting.

*Not abandoning fun, just redefining it.
I don't think the dancefloor has
disappeared just yet.
But I do think it's expanding to include
new terrains.
And perhaps it's about time it did.°*