

M MANCUNIAN MATTERS

THE AI TAKEOVER

A look into how far AI could go in 2025.

ROLLING INTO 2025

An inside look at Manchester's Rainy City Roller Derby

DRY JANUARY

A taste of going sober for a month.

VEGANUARY

The best vegan places to eat in Manchester.



Hello readers!

Welcome to the January 2025 edition of the Mancunian Matters magazine. We hope you have all had a lovely festive period.

Whilst the New Year is a time to reflect on what has just passed, it is also an opportunity to look ahead to what is in store for the future. We have plenty of that in these pages, with pieces on maintaining good mental health during the winter months, keeping New Year's resolutions and conquering dry January.

Keeping with the theme of sobriety, we have a piece on Hinterland, Manchester's alcohol-free bar - but for the beer-drinkers we have also interviewed James Campbell, co-founder of phenomenal Manchester brewery SureShot.

The visually awe-inspiring and adrenaline-fuelled sport of Roller Derby takes our front cover, and read on to learn how the Rainy City league have built an athletic

community for the alternative crowd. And the similarly brave sport of open-water swimming takes the final pages of the magazine. Are you brave enough to take the plunge?

We are also looking at the potential dangers in the years ahead, such as the overwhelming power of AI and how it will transform our lives, potentially beyond recognition in terms of our perception of what is and isn't reality. We also look at how more and more students are making their own side-projects, from DJ events to day trading.

For those who are looking for lighter topics may like our pieces on predicting 2025 fashion getaways and finding the best getaways for your future holidays this year. There is plenty on music too, from the best albums of 2024 to the artists and events to keep your eyes on in 2025.

Whether you want to try travelling solo for the first time, vet your new man in a Facebook dating group or check out ice baths and saunas, it's all inside this edition of the Mancunian Matters magazine!

Signed,
The Mancunian Matters team



New Year's Resolutions

Tips on how to keep at your new years resolution for the whole year.

Music

Looking back on 2024's top songs and new artists on the rise in 2025.

New Years around the world

A deep dive into the weirdest new years traditions around the world.

2025 Previews

Predicted fashion, sports, travel and music of 2025.

Rise of AI

An investigation into how far AI could go in 2025.

Dry Jan

What it's like going sober for the whole month.

SureShot brewing

An interview with a titan of British beer for the last 25 years, James Campbell.

How to avoid dating red flags

Dating culture of online forums protecting women from dating the same red flags.

Student side projects

Asking students in Manchester what their side projects are.

Veganuary

Tips and the best vegan places to eat in the city to help your veganuary journey.

Rise of solo travel

A guide to solo travelling for first timers.

Mental health in January

Analysing why people feel blue in January and some tips to get you out of a funk.

New music coming in 2025

An interview rising grunge band Brickhouse and English National Opera coming to Manchester.

Sauna ice bath cafe

Trying the newest sauna and ice bath cafe.

Alcohol free bars

An interview with Stephen Jeffreys, owner of alcohol free bar Hinterland.

Roller derby

A look at how Rainy City Roller Derby are building an alternative space for sports.

Open water swimming

Why open water swimming is growing in popularity.

4
6
8
10
14
18
22
24
26
30
32
36
38
40
42
44
48

New Year, New You?

By Harleen Uppal

Every January, millions make New Year's resolutions, pledging to shed old habits and embrace new beginnings, motivated by the promise of self-improvement. But why do so few succeed, and how have businesses turned promises into a lucrative industry?

The clock strikes midnight, and suddenly the air buzzes with plans for transformation. Gym memberships surge, diet plans surge social media, and journals fill with ambitious goals. Yet, for all the optimism, success is rare. Sound familiar?

It's a cycle many of us fall into year after year, only to abandon those resolutions before February even begins.

Psychological experts, like Ruth Micallef, a five-time award-winning eating disorder counsellor, point out that the festive season is often an unstable period for change.

She said: "The festive period often brings with it overconsumption and overwhelm, making people feel very ready for change in the new year.

"However, sustainable change is only ever possible with certain psychological factors; readiness, mental wellness, and healthy boundaries."

A survey conducted for this article found that 75% of people didn't make resolutions for 2024. Among those who did, 75% ad-

mitted that they hadn't kept them. Fitness goals made up half of all resolutions, while a quarter were education based. When asked why they failed, respondents pointed laziness or lack of drive as the primary culprit.

The psychology behind the struggle

A common thread among failed resolutions is the disconnection between the goal and the individual's deeper motivations or values.

As Micallef suggests, "People who don't succeed with their resolutions usually lack readiness for change for good reason. Perhaps this is because the harmful habits they have developed are actually keeping them afloat during difficult times."

Goals driven by guilt, societal pressure, or superficial ideas are less likely to stick. Instead, Micallef suggests focusing on resolutions that align with your values and lifestyle.

"If you simply want to go to the gym more 'to look better', what does that mean? Better for who?"

Reframing a fitness goal as 'building the strength to play with my kids' can make it more meaningful and easier to work towards. On the other hand, unrealistic resolutions often stem from unresolved issues. Harmful habits can turn into coping



mechanisms to provide stability during tough times. Cognitive Behavioural Therapist Leanne Alston agrees: "People often set goals aligned with their values or current capabilities."

Instead of setting vague intentions like 'losing weight', Alston recommends SMART goals: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time bound. A clear plan to 'lose two pounds a month' is far more achievable than a long-term desire to 'get fit'.

The origins of New Year's resolutions go back to the Ancient Babylon's, who made pledges to stay in their God's favour. The Romans also used the start of January to honour Janus, the two-faced God, by reflecting on the past and planning ahead. These traditions remind us that resolutions work best when tied to meaningful commitments and thoughtful reflection.



A market built on broken promises

The struggle to keep resolutions is no secret – and businesses are cashing in.

"Businesses profit because people struggle to maintain goals without seeing immediate rewards," Alston explains.

Promises of rapid results, such as 'lose X pounds in six weeks', appeal to a society obsessed with instant gratification and enables businesses to capitalise on a lack of patience.

A 2023/34 PureGym business report showed that 85% of the busiest days fell in the 3.5-week period between the 16th of January and 8th February, but 30% of the least busy days of the year fell in December, when many memberships remain active but unused. This highlights how businesses may benefit on the motivation spike following New Year's, with gyms reaping the benefits of customers paying for memberships they rarely use.

Breaking the cycle

How can we set ourselves up for success?

Micallef advises asking yourself why you want change: "Is it for yourself, or to fit into an aesthetic ideal of perfection?"

Here's how you can transform those New Year's resolutions into lasting habits. Start by choosing a goal that aligns with your lifestyle—not just what you 'want' to do. Set a clear timeline with specific steps, and remember to start small. Changing daily habits gradually, rather than taking on too much at once, increases your chance of success. Keep yourself motivated with tools like mood boards and weekly progress tracking, and most importantly, do it for yourself. People often fail because they lose focus or motivation, so remind yourself regularly why you started and how it benefits you.

Statistics show that most resolutions fail – but they don't have to. By rethinking why we set goals, we can start 2025 with a more realistic approach to self-improvement. So, what will your New Years Resolution be?

The rock and metal you need to listen to from 2024

As we take a look back at the year just gone, there has been a lot of great rock music you may have missed. Here are four 2024 albums you need to listen to.

By Thomas Brace

Geordie Greep - *The New Sound*

When the ground-breaking progressive post-punk band *Black Midi* broke up after just 3 albums this summer, fans of the band were heartbroken. However, they didn't despair for long, as almost immediately after the announcement came another one - that co-lead singer-songwriter *Geordie Greep* was releasing a solo album.

The result was a truly stunning record that is as unpredictable as it is captivating. *Greep's* style will be familiar to *Black Midi* fans, but through blending elements of jazz, samba and experimental pop into the mix, *Greep* creates an entirely new experience. It at times sounds a bit musical theatre but in the most non-degradatory, delightful, unique way possible.

Song to check out: *Holy Holy*

Mdou Moctar - *Funeral For Justice*

Mdou Moctar's personal story is remarkable, having made his first guitar from old bike cables due to his religious families' disapproval.

His music since his debut has been rooted in desert blues - a fusion of blues, rock and North African music - with psychedelic, Hendrix-esque riffs thrown in for good measure. The sound is hypnotic and captivating.

His latest album, *Funeral for*



Justice, has expanded *Moctar's* range further with an aggression and a more forthright style, accompanying his exploration of colonialism, Western imperialism and the loss of indigenous languages.

Funeral for Justice is an amazing record and *Moctar* is a true innovator. He is an artist to watch in the future.

Song to check out: *Imouhar*

The Cure - *Songs Of A Lost World*

This album was better than anyone could have reasonably expected it to be. *The Cure's* first



new material in 16 years, it is both true to form and something entirely different.

The goth legends' legacy would be secure regardless of the result of this record, having had an unbelievable career spanning decades.

But this record is a triumph - a personal and mature songwriting effort from lead singer *Robert Smith*, who wrote every song on the album. It is melancholic, yes, but also introspective and poignant. It reckons with mortality and heartbreak with nuance.

Smith's signature voice is as haunting as ever - it is incredibly impressive how well it has held up over the years.

Song to check out: *Endsong*

Blood Incantation - *Absolute Elsewhere*

Denver-based death metal band *Blood Incantation* have always had a flair for the unusual, but the band's offering this time round takes their progressive approach to new heights with science-fiction epic *Absolute Elsewhere*.

The album is a sprawling, cosmic journey, almost transcending death metal completely - shifting between guttural 90s heaviness, psychedelic dreamscapes and ethereal ambient passages.

It needs to be heard to be believed. *Absolute Elsewhere* cements the band as one of, if not the best and most innovative bands in metal today.

Song to check out: *The whole album!*

Three Manchester bands to keep your eye on in 2025

By Thomas Brace

Manchester has always produced amazing musical talent, from its rich punk heritage to *Madchester* to the electronic revolutions of the *Hacienda* days.

This hasn't changed today as the city is still buzzing with a new generation of talented artists - here are three poised to make waves in 2025.

Square Wild

Square Wild are a difficult band to pin down stylistically - and when we asked the band in our interview in 2023, they struggled to do it themselves!

"We definitely anchor ourselves to heavy rock but we just play what comes out," lead singer *Lucy Shevchuk* told MM after winning the 2023 Metal to the Masses.

"Ska, funk, metal, manouche jazz; nothing is off the table!" Their sound is a whirlwind and their live act is brilliant - *Shevchuk* is a captivating frontwoman, whilst the band play incredibly tight, interesting music,

Hopefully 2025 will finally see the release of their long-awaited debut album.

Tortured Demon

For fans of extreme metal, *Tortured Demon* is the band to watch.

The thrashcore band from Oldham are still very, very young and yet they have already been playing for years on big stages, and are *Bloodstock* festival regulars.

Drawing inspiration from thrash, death metal, and hard-

core, their sound is as punishing as it is exhilarating. The band toured as the main support to *Xentrix* and *Evile* across the UK and Ireland this year and have already released two promising albums. They show no sign of slowing down.

Loose Articles

A standout act in the Manchester punk rock scene, *Loose Articles* represent a celebration of a DIY ethos, with clever lyrics and a fun, vibrant sound to fit with it.

With their highly anticipated debut album released in the sum-

mer of this year, *Loose Articles* are ready to take their brash, uncompromising sound to a wider audience, and are the perfect band for those looking for a Manchester band with a punk-rock, alternative edge.

They also champion the "Kick Like A Girl" project - a community initiative with a slew of incoming 2025 dates aimed at breaking barriers in the music industry, especially for young women and non-binary people aged 14-25 from marginalised backgrounds.



PSYCH ROCKERS: Square Wild pose for the camera.

Five unique New Year's traditions from around the world

By Harleen Uppal

The countdown to midnight is a universal celebration, but how we welcome the New Year varies wildly across the globe. From superstitious rituals to fun-filled antics, here are five unique traditions guaranteed to make your New Year's Eve unforgettable. Which will you be trying this year?

1. Spain: Eating 12 Grapes for Good Luck (Under the Table!)

In Spain, locals eat 12 grapes as the clock strikes midnight—one for each stroke. But here's the twist: some take it a step further by eating them under the table, a quirky move said to enhance luck in love for the year ahead.

Jeralee Dias, a long-time believer in this tradition says, "I've been doing it for years. It's a bit silly, but I truly believe it gives me luck in love each year.

"Each grape is a wish for happiness, and being under the table feels like sealing those wishes with a touch of secrecy and charm."

Whether sweet or sour, every grape counts!

2. Denmark: Smashing Plates for Good Fortune

In Denmark, residents break plates on their friends' doorsteps as a sign of affection and good luck. The more broken crockery you find outside your door, the better your fortune! Who knew dish-breaking could bring joy instead of dread?



3. Turkey: Smash a Pomegranate

In Turkey, smashing a pomegranate on the ground is believed to bring prosperity and good fortune. The more seeds that scatter, the more abundant your year is expected to be.

4. Philippines: Go Polka Dot Crazy

Polka dots and round fruits are a must in the Philippines. The round shapes symbolise coins, believed to attract wealth and prosperity in the new year. Bonus points for a fully polka-dotted outfit!

5. Greece: Hang Onions for Growth

In Greece, onions aren't just for cooking—they're symbols of resilience and new beginnings. Families hang onions on their doors, believing the pungent bulbs will ensure a fresh and fruitful year.

Wherever you are in the world, these traditions remind us that a little magic and optimism can go a long way. Here's to an amazing New Year!

A guide to Lunar New Year 2025

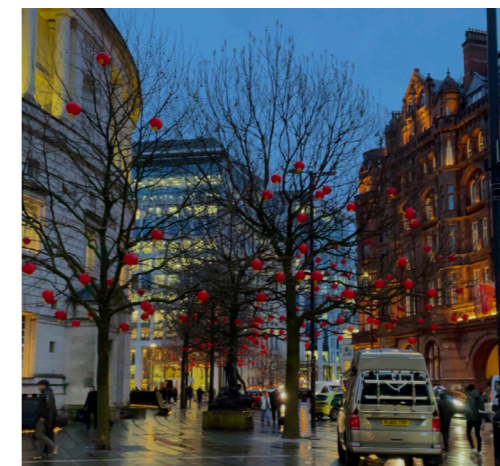
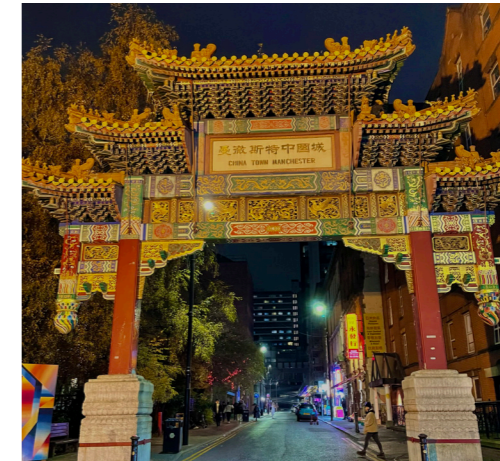
By Harleen Uppal

Picture the rhythmic beat of drums, dazzling swirls of dragon and lion dances, and a sea of glowing red lanterns lighting up the winter sky. Lunar New Year is an explosion of culture, tradition, and joy. In a vibrant, city like Manchester, the festivities blend ancient customs with modern flair. From dazzling parades to mouth-watering feasts, the city is set to come alive for the celebrations. Here's everything you need to know about the magic of Lunar New Year 2025 in Manchester!

Lunar New Year 2025 falls on January 29th, marking the start of the Year of the Wood Snake, an event that happens once every 60 years. The snake, one of the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac, is often considered the most enigmatic. Known for wisdom and intuition, this year is expected to bring transformation and insight.

Manchester's celebrations will centre around Chinatown and cultural landmarks like the Chinese Art Gallery. Expect traditional dragon and lion dances, glowing Chinese lanterns, and a feast of festive dishes like poon choy, a communal hotpot symbolizing unity and abundance.

For the older generation, Lunar New Year holds deep significance. Circle Steele, CEO of the Wai Yin Society—one of the UK's largest Chinese community centres—explains how the festival combats isolation and homesickness for those without extended families.



She said: "We know a lot of the older generation are on their own."

"They haven't got any extended family. So not only do we say it's about cultural heritage, but also about trying to reduce loneliness. Social interaction is very important during these festivals; people feel supported."

Steele highlights Manchester's multicultural environment as a key factor in fostering belonging.

"We celebrate a lot of different cultures, different celebrations. For us, it's about belonging. So we are not just on our own—we are connected with other communities. We all come together to celebrate, provide a sense of support, and share identity."

For younger generations, often less fluent in Cantonese or Mandarin, Lunar New Year is a way to reconnect with their heritage. Steele stresses the importance of fostering cultural pride in a city like Manchester.

"If you look at younger people who grew up here, they may not speak much Chinese or Cantonese or Mandarin, because English probably is their first language. So, Chinese New Year celebrations are about cultural power—to help the migrant express their identity confidently."

Ultimately, Lunar New Year can be summed up in one word: togetherness. For Steele and many others, it's a time to honour traditions, strengthen community ties, and celebrate unity amidst diversity.

A fighting city



Jack Catterall, Credit: @daznboxing Insta



Zelfa Barrett, Credit: @zelfaflash Insta



Pat Brown, Credit: @patbrown__ Insta

By Joe Mulhane

For years, this city has produced champions from the likes of Ricky Hatton, Tyson Fury, Anthony Crolla and many more. So it is no surprise that two of the names on this list will be looking to achieve the same feat and the other two at the beginning of their journeys.

These are the four fighters to watch in 2025.

Jack Catterall

On the back of two huge wins in 2024, Chorley's Jack Catterall looks forward to his super lightweight world title ambitions.

'El Gato' extended his professional record to 30-1 (13 KOs) with points wins over former world champion Regis Prograis and arch rival, once undisputed champion, Josh Taylor.

The Prograis victory secured him a place in the conversation for title shots but the latter was a bitter sweet revenge against the man who he was previously robbed of winning.

However, all that is in the past with Catterall's future shot at a title.

Even if rumours suggest one more fight against Arnold Barboza Jr before a championship contest, there is no doubt that by the year's end he will be in a title fight or even crowned a king

Zelfa Barrett

Following in the footsteps of his uncle Pat Barrett, former British and European champion, and doing one better is Zelfa 'Brown Flash' Barrett (31-2, 17 KOs).

The 31 year-old has, just like his uncle, challenged for the world title and fell short. But after a win against Jordan Gill in April his dreams of challenging again are closer than ever.

In an open super featherweight division, his path to a shot could be tricky but 2025 could be the year he secures his shot again.

Hopefully at the very least, a huge domestic clash against Leigh Wood would be a great dust-up whilst also being his path to a championship.



William Crolla Credit: @daznboxing Insta

William Crolla

Already trying to make a name for himself in the game is Will Crolla - the younger brother of former world champion Anthony 'Million Dollar' Crolla.

Under his brother's tutelage he has experienced minimal rounds in the pro circuit with 6 wins and 5 knockouts so far but these explosive performances make him an exciting rising star.

Now signed to Eddie Hearn's Matchroom Boxing, his stock will continue to rise. With Hearn's stable of Manchester fighters and shows growing, Crolla will be one to lookout for on those huge bills at super welterweight.

Pat Brown

Pat Brown is a boxer not many will have heard of but everyone around him promises we will remember the name.

The Paris Olympian has signed with Matchroom and after a Q&A at Hallé St Peter's in Ancoats, his plans are clear. A headline debut in the city at cruiserweight will begin the professional career of a fighter who, in his own words, loves a "tear up."

Hearn has hailed him as the "next star of British Boxing", with talk of a dream stadium fight at Old Trafford in the years to come.

Will he be Manchester's next iconic name? Only time will tell.

The four standout Manchester music events in 2025

Manchester has always been at the forefront of the UK music scene and next year is no different when it comes to the best events around, so here are four of the standout for 2025.

By Joe Mulhane

Oasis

It would be remiss to not include the biggest event of the year in music, which is the long awaited reunion of Oasis.

Maybe one of the biggest shocks of 2024? Definitely, as the announcement that the Gallagher brothers would reform for gigs across the world sent fans and ticket sites into a spiral.

In their first hometown shows since 2009, they will be supported at Heaton Park by Wigan's own Richard Ashcroft and Cast to complete the event's 90s nostalgia trip.

Fontaines DC

One of the best Irish alternative bands of the past decade have had one of their biggest years in 2024, with their most recent album 'Romance' taking their acclaim and fame to even higher levels.

So it is no surprise that the band will embark on a three city takeover at some of the most iconic outdoor venues. Manchester's Wythenshawe Park will be treated to a mini-festival of sorts as the Dublin quintet take the stage at one of their largest headline shows to date.

They will be joined by some of the top rising stars this year including Mercury Prize winners English Teacher and the Belfast rap trio Kneecap.

Parklife 2025

Manchester's iconic festival returns to Heaton Park with Charli XCX set to headline.

If you thought 'Brat' summer was over, think again, as the undeniable star looks to continue the success of her acclaimed album.

The line-up also includes Confidence Man, salute, Interplanetary Criminal, DJ Heartstring, Girls Don't Sync and more to be announced in January.

Psych Fest 2025

A slight change in music stylings but this multi-venue festival boasts some of the best artists from across genres.

What is also unique about the festival beside the 70+ artists is their range of exhibitions and films for all comers to enjoy.

Already announced is Swedish seven piece experimental fusion group Goat, alternative band DEADLETTER, electronic musician George Clanton and a whole host of other different artists for you to discover across one day.



Charli XCX in NYC, Credit: Howard Weiss

Most popular getaways in 2025

By Poppy Dippnall

If you're looking for a quick getaway in the new year here's a list of the most popular places to visit.

Visiting the same old place can be boring. Walking round the same shops, eating at the same restaurant, visiting the same museum with the same abstract artwork that you still can't figure out the meaning of.

You crave adventure, mystery, excitement – but that's not going to come booking the same holiday destination for five years in a row.

Whatever you look for in a holiday, whether it's a relaxing time at the beach or a week of historical sightseeing, here's a list of the most popular holiday destinations according to flight booking website, Skyscanner, to broaden your horizons.

Reggio Calabria, Italy

With an increased search percentage of +541%, most rush over this scenic city to depart from the mainland to the island of Sicily.

Tartu, Estonia

Second on the list with a +294% search increase, Tartu is the second largest city in Estonia and the oldest town in the Baltic States, but it's most known for its active night-life.

Siem Reap, Cambodia

With a +241% search increase, this city is located in the north-



west of Cambodia. The city is next to the romantic Tonle Sap lake and is home to the majestic Angkor Wat architectural complex, recognized by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage.

Baltimore, USA

At a +217% search increase, this populous city was on the New York Times top ten places to go in 2024. It's known for the largest collection available to the public of artwork by Henri Matisse in the world.

Portsmouth, Dominica

If you're looking for a hotter holiday, at a +186% search increase, Portsmouth is the second largest town in Dominica.

Córdoba, Spain

With a +133% search increase, Cordoba is most famous for its handcrafted leatherwork.

Tromsø, Norway

On the rise at a +85% search increase, the city is crowned 'The Arctic Capital' as its the largest city in northern Norway. If you're looking to broaden your knowledge, the city is home to the Norwegian Polar Institute.

Panglao, Bohol, Philippines

IMAGES of Tartu, Tromsø, Bohol, and Baltimore from Pixabay.

Another relaxing and hot holiday, at a +77% search increase, this island has numerous beaches and sky blue oceans to dip into.

Stuttgart, Germany

With a search increase of +70%, this city is most famous as the manufacturing hub of Mercedes-Benz and Porsche and one of the largest zoos in Europe.

Thiruvananthapuram, India

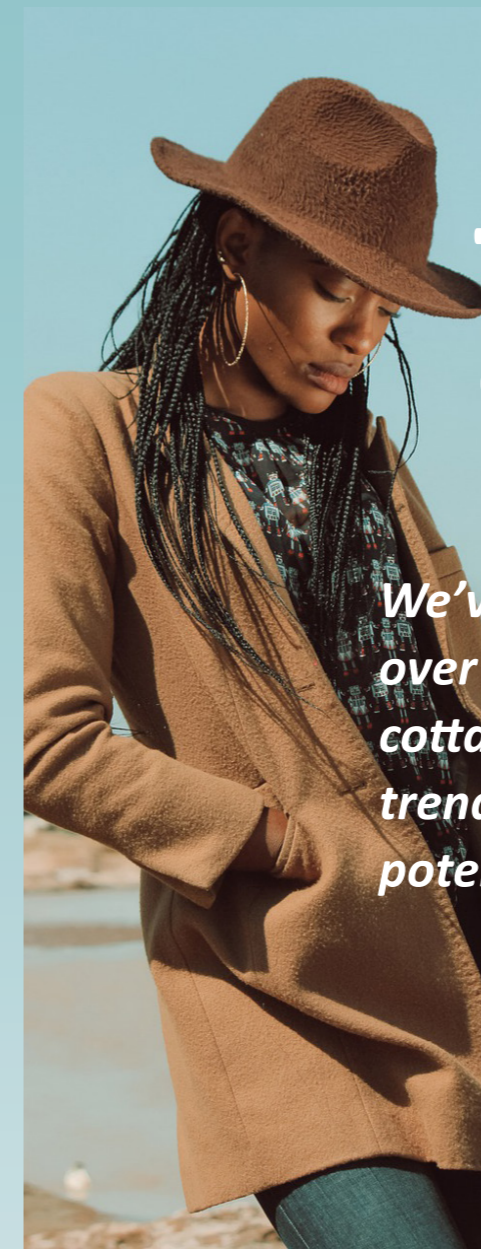
Finally at a +66% search increase, the city holds significant history as Asia's first space university, the Indian Institute of Space Science and Technology, was first established in 2007.

Research was based on destinations that saw an increase in flight searches between January 1, 2024, and June 30, 2024, for travel in 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

Predicted fashion trends in 2025

IMAGE of woman in suede coat and cowboy hat from Pixabay.

We've had plenty of fashion trends over 2024 – from brat summer, to cottage core, to clean girl. Some trends were short lived, but some have potential to make a comeback in 2025.



By Poppy Dippnall

Imagine, you've got a party tomorrow and no outfit. You're frantically flicking through Pinterest, you're ruthlessly rummaging through your wardrobe, throwing all the clothes you bought on your bed.

You look at the heap of clothes on your bed and piece together the numerous trends that have cycled through your wardrobe, some lasting longer than others – clean girl tank tops, a mob wife fur coat, brat summer mini skirts.

But nothing is calling to you, so what should you wear?

Looking forward to 2025, here's a list of Mancunian Matters' predicted clothing and style trends

for the new year so you're ahead of the fashion game.

Boho bounce back

Originally popular back in late 2000s, the earthy boho style will be making a resurgence and suede clothing and accessories along with it.

A pop of yellow

As well as a rise in more earthy toned looks, pale yellow will be the colour of the spring season. The colour first saw its surge when Sabrina Carpenter revealed her yellow heart cutout dress. The shade replaces the short lived 'brat green' as the next 'unflattering' colour of the season.

The bigger the better

Bigger hems and bubble skirts will be the new craze in 2025 by adding a bold silhouette and feminine flare to each look.

Skirt over pants? Not again!

Popular in the noughties, the trend has been reimagined with a more elegant take on this classic look.

Seen briefly during the 'mob wife' trend in spring 2024, animal print tops and skirts will carry over to 2025. Expect to see plenty of exotic prints, with leopard remaining the most popular, and a new king of the jungle as snakeskin.

Off to work we go

Utility wear will be the new street wear, as we've already seen a resurgence in suede and neutral colours thanks to boho. Big pockets and thick, heavy material will be the main characteristic of the look. The tones will remain neutral

Asymmetrical all the way

Asymmetrical patterns and outfits will be the look of the season with a focus on shape and dimension. It's a good way to stand out from the crowd.

Heels to play sports?

An elevated reimagine of sportswear – expect to see heels paired with rugby shirts as opposites attract to create a dressed-down look.

“It’s almost like we’ve unleashed a monster”

As AI technology advances, its ability to generate highly convincing synthetic media is transforming industries from social media to cybersecurity. From reshaping entertainment to undermining truth, this article explores the groundbreaking - and sometimes alarming - capability of AI going into 2025.

By Harleen Uppal

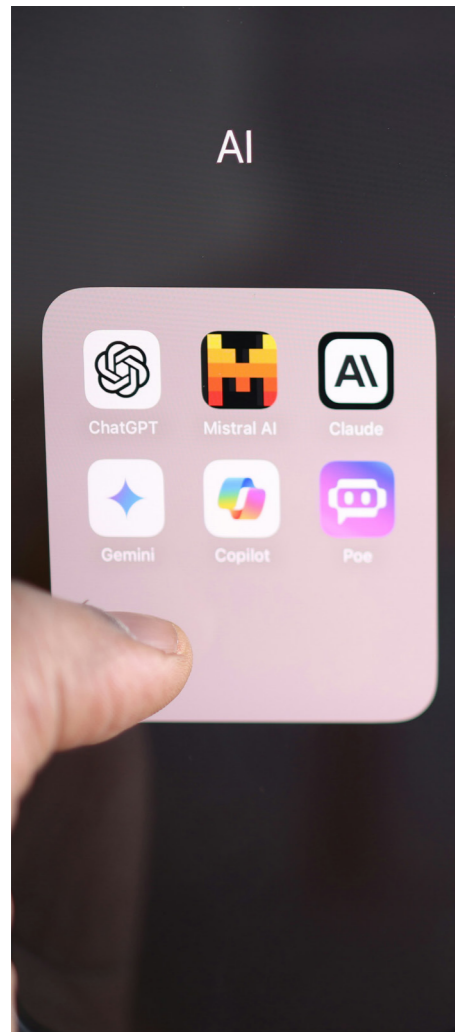


Photo by Solen Fevissa on Unsplash

You’re scrolling on X, aimlessly sifting through updates when a post makes your heart stop. An image stares back at you, a graphic, AI-generated pornographic image of yourself. It’s humiliating, and feels unreal, but still has you questioning if what you see is actually you.

This nightmare became reality for broadcaster and former Big Brother contestant Narinder Kaur. As the image spread across the platform, she was left horrified, grappling with the reality that such AI-generated content can cause irreparable harm. You may try to ignore it, but the emotional impact and the potential consequences of such technology are far from small.

In the past year, AI has driven life online more than ever before. From creating content to never escaping Chatbots in the corner of every website, this technology is reshaping how we engage with the digital world – blurring the line between what is real and fake.

The rise of AI in our everyday lives

Social media platforms have seen an explosion of content created by or including AI in 2024, with trends like AI generated music mixes and ageing filters taking TikTok by storm. Tools like ChatGPT offer young people ways to brainstorm ideas and boost productivity. However, this rise also brings concerns about AI’s ability to manipulate and harm.

Aiden Cramer, CEO and Co-founder of AiApply, explains the basics of AI as ‘a way to make computers think and process information like humans’.

He said: “It involves creating algorithms and models that enable machines to process information, recognise patterns, and make decisions. While AI is still in its early stages, it has the potential to revolutionise many aspects of our lives, from healthcare and transportation to entertainment and education.”

The UK AI market, valued at £16.8 billion, is projected to grow to £801.6 billion by 2035, according to the US International Trade Administration. While AI enhances fields like healthcare and entertainment, they also raise critical concerns about data privacy, cybersecurity, and unclear legal regulations.

The dangerous world of deepfakes

One of the most pressing threats is the creation of deepfake content. As Cramer highlights, “You only have to look online over the last few months to see the amount of news stories covering deepfake content during the 2024 US presidential election and the misinformation that has been circulating online.”

“We also had a high-profile case involving Taylor Swift and a deepfake image of her that was shared online, that prompted a Bill being passed in the US senate that would criminalise the spread of non-consensual, sexualised images that were created



using AI tools.”

This is something that broadcaster and former Big Brother contestant, Narinder Kaur, knows all too well. She has been no stranger to online abuse after her time on the reality show over 24 years ago, but was left ‘horrified’ after two deepfake pornographic images of herself, created by AI, emerged on X.

“You don’t realise until it happens to you.”

“I think that’s why people don’t pay enough attention because it has not happened to them. They don’t see how bad it is. So, until it happened to me, and I’m ashamed to say this, I didn’t realise how bad it is. I really didn’t.” She expressed.

In June 2024, an Internet Matters survey in Britain revealed that 13% of children had encountered a nude deepfake in

some capacity, including sending or receiving one, but the reporting rate remains relatively low as many victims remain frightened about the consequences of speaking out.

Kaur said: “Look, I’m a 52-year-old woman. I can almost take it. But can you imagine being a 16, year old girl or boy, and that’s your image being sent around? That would destroy you.”

Earlier in the year, Kaur also found herself seeking legal advice after actor Laurence Fox shared an upskirt picture of her on X, which took two weeks to be removed off the site, prompting charity Revenge Porn Helpline to step in and assist with taking the image down.

“If you’re just a school child or a teenager or a young adult, it’s so much harder to get these images off. There’s Revenge Porn Helpline. You know, they work tirelessly to try and get some of these images off, but social media platforms, no. X does not do enough at all.”

Artificial intelligence is increas-

ingly becoming essential in daily life, especially among young people. Ofcom research reveals that 59% of 7-17-year-olds and 79% of 13-17-year-olds in the UK have interacted with generative AI tools within the past year, with Snapchat’s My AI chatbot being the most popular choice, used by 51% of respondents.

ChatGPT and similar tools have also become increasingly used in education, where universities use AI detectors to identify AI-generated content. As AI becomes woven into daily routines, it marks a significant cultural shift in technology use.

Kaur said: “People love it. My kids love it. Even when I’m going to go and do a debate show, I put so many bits in AI, it’s fantastic.

“But it’s almost like we’ve unleashed a monster. We can’t get that monster back in the can. It’s unleashed now. And it’s like, how, how do we stop it? You can’t stop it. We just need tougher laws around it.”

Creating sexually explicit deepfake images is a criminal offence in England and Wales under a law introduced in April. The legislation makes it illegal to produce such content even with no intention to share it, marking a significant step in addressing this form of abuse.

However, enforcement remains a challenge, particularly on online platforms like X, which many argue are not doing enough to remove harmful content promptly. This lack of action can make the harm caused by deepfakes worse, as victims face delays in having images removed, leaving them vulnerable to ongoing distress and reputational damage.

Cramer says: “Legislations such as the EU AI Act and GDPR already exist, but governments will need to ensure that laws are fit for purpose and continue to protect their citizens as we see more elaborate AI methods that criminals are using.”

The bright side of AI

AI's integration into industries like healthcare and marketing is set to revolutionise operations. Cramer predicts significant strides in generative AI, especially in healthcare and manufacturing, where it could work effectively alongside the workforce.

"We're already seeing companies such as Coca Cola using AI to enhance their TV advertising campaigns, so it's likely that we'll start to see more of this being rolled out in the future," he explains.

"We could also see AI being used in healthcare more frequently, helping to aid with complex medical diagnoses and prescribing of medication."

Over the past year, AI has brought creativity and fun to daily life. Platforms like Instagram and TikTok have embraced AI-powered filters, enabling users to transform their appearance or experiment with styles. Spotify's AI DJ creates tailored playlists, adding a personal touch to music discovery. Even this article's accompanying image was generated with ChatGPT's help,

showing how accessible AI tools make content creation for journalism and beyond.

Beyond entertainment, AI is advancing critical fields like cancer screening, where algorithms enhance early detection and save lives. From playful innovations to groundbreaking applications, AI continues to shape our routines, offering joy and utility alongside transformative potential in essential sectors.

The dark side of AI

With this progress comes the inevitability of AI being weaponised for criminal activities, such as highly convincing phishing schemes, where scammers use AI to craft personalised emails, text messages or even voice recordings that deceive victims into revealing sensitive information.

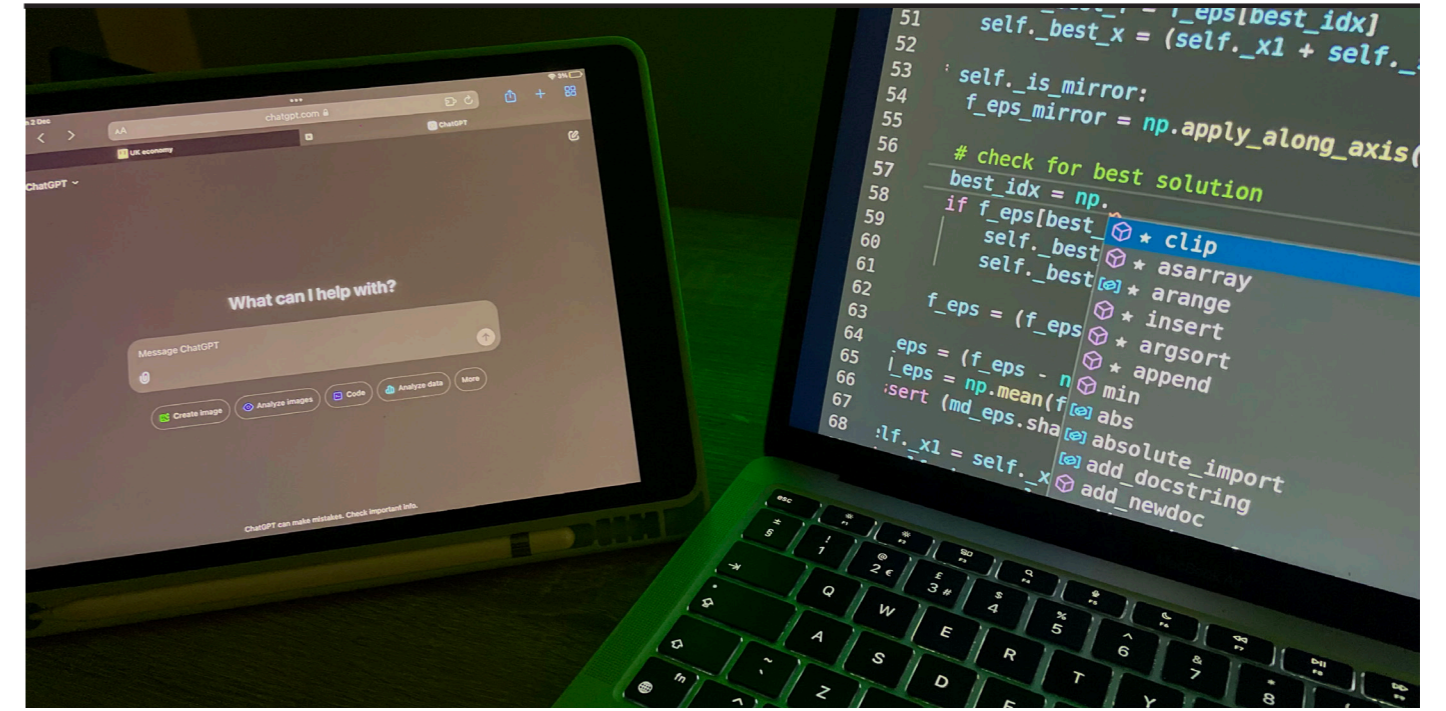
Deepfake content is also increasingly being used to manipulate public perception and spread misinformation, as seen with fake endorsements like AI-generated images of Taylor Swift supporting Donald Trump during the 2024 US Election.

Cramer also highlights data profiling, where AI analyses patterns in data to uncover personal information, such as financial habits or medical conditions.

He said: "This information can be exploited for blackmail, identity theft, or social engineering attacks. By using AI to understand an individual's or organisation's preferences, habits, and weaknesses, attackers can craft highly convincing and personalised attacks that are more likely to succeed."

Beyond misuse by criminals, broader societal issues loom, such as job displacement due to automation and the risk of widespread social manipulation. A report by the Tony Blair Institute estimates that AI could displace one to three million UK jobs over time, with a peak annual loss of up to 275,000 positions.

However, the report notes that many displaced roles could be offset by new AI jobs. Proactive measures like upskilling and workforce transition policies will be key to balancing AI's disruptive potential with its promise for innovation.



Striking the right balance

Transparency and accountability remain critical as AI evolves. Cramer points to LinkedIn's controversial use of user-generated data to train its AI tools without consent.

He said: "Organisations should learn from LinkedIn's mistakes and be completely transparent with how they collect, store, and use the data."

AI scams, like fake voice calls, can exploit vulnerable groups, especially the elderly. Promoting public education is essential to help individuals recognise and respond to potential threats effectively.

Human oversight remains vital against these risks. Human presence alongside AI operations is important for quick and effective intervention when issues arise.

"Ensuring that a human is working alongside AI to monitor the efficiency of the outcome will allow any potential threats to be identified and dealt with as quickly as possible."

In just a short time, AI like ChatGPT has become integral to daily life, aiding with tasks such as brainstorming and drafting documents.

Its shift from a novelty to an essential tool highlights its rapid integration into everyday technology.

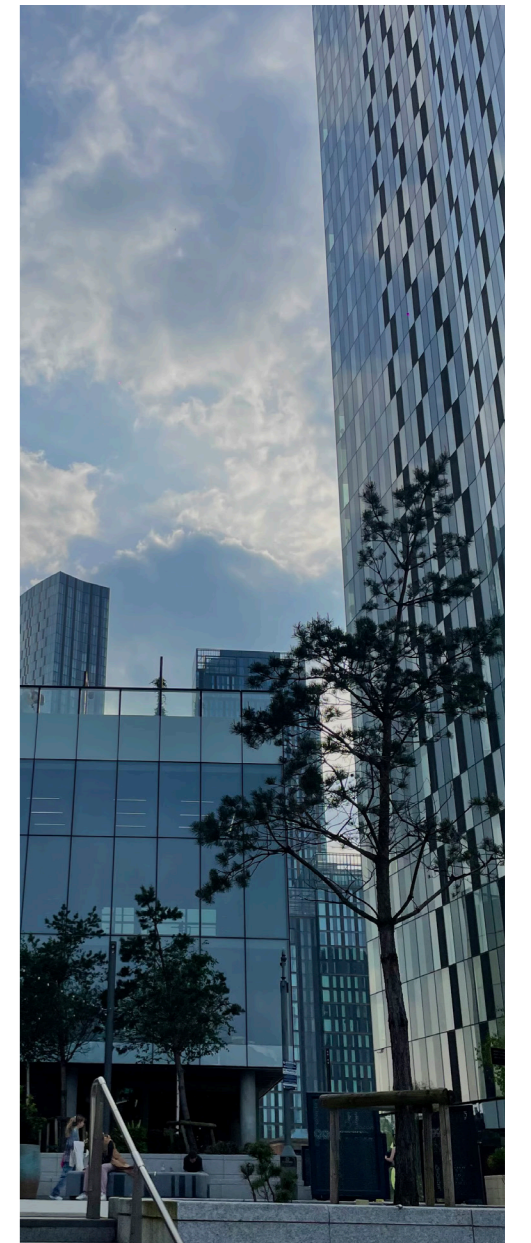
The evolution of AI tools has been particularly evident over the past year. Trends like AI-generated filters, voiceovers, and music mixes have gained immense popularity on platforms like TikTok, reshaping online interactions and creating viral moments.

The constant rapid growth of AI raises significant concerns. A Channel 4 News investigation in early 2024 revealed that while only one deepfake pornographic video was identified in 2016, by the first three quarters of 2023, over 143,000 new deepfake porn videos had been uploaded across the 40 most popular sites. This dramatic increase shows the darker implications of AI's progress and its uncertainty in the future.

As AI evolves, it offers incredible opportunities alongside complex challenges. Striking a balance between its innovations and risks will be crucial to ensure the technology benefits society without causing harm. Its future remains both promising and unpredictable.



Image generated by ChatGPT specifically for this article,



Trying Dry January? How a month sober changed my perspective on alcohol

By Emma Butterworth

“Don’t mind the girl on the sofa,” were the words I woke up to on November 1st, “it was Halloween.”

The girl speaking, my friend, was letting an engineer in the house to fix the boiler and the girl on the sofa, me, was wearing a full cat-woman costume, last night’s makeup, and a sizeable hangover.

Like many 20-year-old students, I had gone out to celebrate the night, drank far too much, fallen asleep on the sofa and - after receiving a video of myself snoring to the backdrop of drunken 2 AM conversation - found myself uttering the famous words “I’m never drinking again”.



Alcohol had become a large part of my social life

Maybe never was a bit strong, but I gave it a good month. Here is how my sober month went, what I learnt and how you can tackle Dry January.

What is Dry January?

Dry January was created in 2013 by the charity Alcohol Change UK, encouraging people to have a break from the booze after the festive period and think about their relationship with alcohol.

The sober month phenomenon is like marmite; people either love the side effects of better sleep, weight loss and overall recovery, or loathe participants for harming the pubs, and for simply being boring.

Dr Richard Piper, CEO at Alcohol Change UK said: “There

is a growing recognition of alcohol’s impact on our health, well-being and quality of life - from headaches, sleepless nights and feeling ‘off’ the next day, to high blood pressure, anxiety, and cancer.

“As these wide-ranging impacts affect so many of us, the New Year offers all of us an opportunity to set our goals for the 12 months ahead and, increasingly for many, that includes a desire to improve our relationship with alcohol.

“Being alcohol-free for 31 days shows us that alcohol doesn’t need to take centre-stage for us to have fun, relax or socialise.”

That is exactly why I wanted to try the challenge, I realised that, like many students, alcohol had become a focal point of my social life.



Photo by Scott Warman on Unsplash

My boozebreak

I work in a pub in Oldham and often turn up to my weekend shifts hungover much to my pub regulars’ amusement, so when I justified my choice by saying “I don’t drink that much” you can imagine the responses I heard.

But the truth is I don’t. I have a rule (most of the time) to only drink on weekends,

“You didn’t drink? Are you pregnant?”

so I saw this challenge as four weekends as a social recluse, to which I was pleasantly surprised.

The first weekend was quiet, a Chinese at my friend’s house and a chill movie night, and waking up on a Sunday without a hangover was a refreshing

change.

I went to work with a pep in my step and a rather smug “told you so” to everyone who thought I would crumble my first sober Saturday since the start of the year.

That’s when I was met with questions like “you didn’t drink? are you pregnant?” and “are you trying to lose weight?”, with some customers even betting with each other about how long I would last as if I was some sort of alcoholic.

But that is drinking culture, especially in areas like

Greater Manchester.

I’ve spent 20 years of my life growing up in Oldham, an area which locals will tell you once had the most amount of pubs in a UK town and - according to experts at the websites Stag week-



working in pubs made alcohol a normality



Even as a child i searched for a pint

ends and Hen weekends - was crowned 7th best place in the UK for a night out with 49 pubs per ten square miles in 2022.

The previous year, data from Public Health England showed that nine of Greater Manchester's ten boroughs have a higher record of alcohol related deaths than the national average and the rate of admissions for alcohol-specific conditions sat at 53% higher around here than the England average.

I have to admit this attitude must have subconsciously rubbed off on me as I will go to the pub to be social and see friends – only to wake up the next morning having taken it slightly too far.

According to Dr Catherine Carney, Psychiatrist at Delamere Rehab Clinic, 'social drinking' is a prominent issue in the UK which can soon escalate to dependency.

She said: "Social drinking often leads to binge-drinking behaviour in which the UK is world-leading in this dangerous past-time.

"The UK has an alcohol prob-

"Nine of Greater Manchester's ten boroughs have a higher record of alcohol related deaths than the national average and the rate of admissions for alcohol-specific conditions sat at 53% higher around here than the England average."

lem and, near Christmas and New Year, we see a sharp rise in 'social' drinking.

"For many, who are able to set and stick to boundaries, this may not lead to immediate and serious drinking problems, but the festive period is a time where we see more escalations and relapses."

For many people, a month-long alcohol cleanse after the festive period feels necessary, as Dry January doubled in popularity from 2019 to 2024, with 8.5 million people last year trying the sober month according to Alcohol Change UK.

A sober night out?

Many times, I've stepped into my local bar on a Saturday night



enjoying the sober night out with my inebriated friend

in a tipsy state and found myself intimidated by the swarms of lairy drunks, saying the words "I'm too sober for this" to my friends.

In fact, feeling too sober seems to be the reasoning most of my social circle use when we're not enjoying a night out as much as usual.

This isn't just when I'm socialising, in work I often find myself irritated by drunk people, storming around like some sort of disgruntled taxi driver doing a 3am run, when after a few I act just the same as them.

So, when I entered the same local bar completely sober on a Saturday night mid month, I was expecting a night of hell and social awkwardness, to my surprise it

was everything but.

I realised that I could enjoy a night fuelled by caffeine and 0% gin despite many of my peers being obliterated around me and I didn't have to hide behind a mask of alcohol.

In fact, it felt quite refreshing to be the one laughing instead of the one being laughed at, and I managed to stay out until 4am dancing - something I thought would be unachievable without the help of pinot grigio.

Throughout the night I tried a range of different non-alcoholic alternatives, starting with a Heineken 0% lager (pre-drinks some may call it) and ending with a Whitley Neil 0% rhubarb and ginger gin.

Everyone I spoke to was in complete shock asking me how I was out, with one friend saying and I quote "she's a raging p*** head I can't believe she's sober".

I woke up the next day feeling revived and, despite a lack of sleep, was glad not to be experiencing my usual state of hangxiety (an alcohol fuelled state of crippling anxiety).

What I learnt from my sober month

Overall, throughout my month I noticed increased productivity with no hangover to blame and found that my sleeping routines had improved, as someone who struggles to get more than a few hours sleep after a night out.

I went on dates, meals with my friends, and celebrated my brother's birthday without nasty repercussions the next day, if I had told myself this at the height of summer I would have been in a state of shock.

But I wasn't alone in my teetotalism, with more shops stocking alcohol free alternatives and the 'sober curious' movement, a crusade to shift people's focus away from alcohol, gaining popularity amongst young peo-

ple.

According to a 2024 study by Drinkaware, one in four people aged 18-24 do not drink, a rate twice as high as their parent's generation, and the number of adults buying alcohol free drinks has doubled since 2018.

This post-pandemic shift is due to many factors, with the main being that drinking is more expensive, and Gen Z are clued up about the health risks.

My biggest take away from this month is not a physical one, it's not about how many pounds I lost or pennies I saved, but more about people's perspectives around alcohol.

I learnt the most from the way people spoke about my abstinence, with 20-year-old students and 70-year-old pub regulars united in their confusion as to why I would not want a drink.

To step out of the bubble and gather a holistic view of drinking culture made me realise that the way people talk about needing a drink, or not being able to socialise without it is a dangerous thing that can soon spiral to dependence and abuse.



A different type of brew at the pub



Will I return to alcohol? Of course, but this break taught me that I don't need it to enjoy my night.

How can you tackle Dry January?

In my experience, I would suggest trying 0% alcohol options when socialising instead of regular soft drinks, at meals out it made me feel more like I was treating myself and less like a 12-year-old girl who had just graduated from the kid's table.

Resisting the urge to self-hibernate also helped, go out with people that are drinking and enjoy yourself, being sober is not an excuse to be a hermit.

Try a range of activities, I went on a mini golf date and trips to the cinema instead of the local pub, this kept me looking forward to the weekend without the thought of an Aperol Spritz.

To stay motivated, talk to others trying the challenge or download Alcohol Change's Try Dry app, which helps you track your progress and earn badges for alcohol free achievements.

Or, if you aren't partaking in Dry January, then maybe you fancy something different from your drinking experience. If you're a beer fan looking for more from your drink, then you may wish to check out SureShot brewing.

James Campbell: A 25-year career defining British craft beer

By Thomas Brace

Beer has always been more than a drink.

For centuries it has connected people - a social ritual for millions and a symbol of camaraderie both here in Britain and across the world.

But for many there's a desire to go further - to take beer and root it in cutting edge creativity.

No one embodies this more than James Campbell, an innovator of British craft beer.

Taking inspiration from brewing in the United States, the craft beer scene in the UK exploded in the 2000s, pushing boundaries with a big focus on quality over quantity.

I met with Campbell to learn about his journey from a part-time brewing assistant, to big roles at influential breweries which have shaped British beer.

We talked at the Piccadilly Trading Estate where the brewery he co-founded, SureShot, is located. But Campbell's journey began as a part-time assistant in the 90s. He was known as "Cask Monkey Second Grade," as he began to learn the art of brewing.

He recalls: "Three days a week I was washing and filling casks. Another couple of days I didn't get paid for; I came in voluntarily to learn how to brew and do a lot more."

"When they realised they couldn't do without me, they started paying me," he adds with a modest smile.

James is as a humble guy - he is soft-spoken and unassuming,



BOSS AT THE BAR: James Campbell at the SureShot taproom

yet he also exudes a quiet confidence, perhaps rooted in the years of dedication to his craft which has shaped hugely influential names in brewing.

Most notably, Campbell was the head brewer at Manchester's Marble Brewery for 13

years, where he helped redefine what British beer could be. The brewery became known for bold, high-quality IPAs that earned a devoted following and acclaim.

In Campbell's next chapter he was instrumental in setting up Cloudwater and shaping its out-



BAR BEAR: The mascot of SureShot's Milson beer.

“Beer-making, it’s not like being a nurse or a policeman, it’s fundamentally frivolous. However, it does serve a function of making people happy.”

put.

He told us: "I met with the original crew that set up Cloudwater. We spent a year planning that and it was ambitious. We weren't thinking little - it was like, we're going to do this and go hard at it. And we did, and Cloudwater has been a trailblazer in the UK."

This brings us to SureShot, the brewery Campbell co-founded in the Piccadilly Trading Estate, just a stone's throw from Cloudwater.

"I met Michael, my business partner. After a couple of years of planning, we got an opportunity halfway through the pandemic," Campbell said. "Nobody knew what was going on. It was a horrible time for the industry. Some people were doing very well selling cans, others were closing their doors. So we thought, what the hell - if we're going to do something, let's do it."

The first project was a collaboration with Vocation Brewery to

create a double IPA, which even made its way onto Tesco shelves - a milestone for craft beer at the time.

"I can't think of a better partner than Vocation," Campbell told us. "Dom, the buyer at Tesco, was instrumental in making it happen. It was a great experience, and it resulted in a beer I'm really proud of. I think it was the first double IPA available in UK supermarkets."

I ask James what it is that has driven him to dedicate his decades-long career to craft brewing, and what it is that keeps SureShot going.

"I mean, first and foremost, it's a business. We have to make a living out of it. But what drives it is that you want to make people happy," Campbell said. "Beer facilitates good times, celebrations and also the enjoyment of the product itself. We want people to enjoy it rather than passively

enjoy it."

"I think that's by and large what drives a large section of craft brewing."

The craft beer industry is no stranger to challenges. The sector is affected by forces far beyond its control from the large multinational breweries, rising production costs, and economic instability. Navigating these challenges requires resilience.

Campbell explains: "It's really, really tricky industry. The margins are very, very tight."

"I think things like the war in Ukraine makes a huge difference. That affects grain prices. I mean, we've only managed to avoid a weak pound through everybody else's currency being weak as well. Odd things like the strength of the mineral trade from Australia can affect the price of hops because it means their currency is strong."

"So, I guess from a socio-economic level, nobody's an island. We're not going to be exempt from the rules of other businesses."

And to overcome this: "First and foremost, the product has to be right. We work really, really hard on our product. We've got some excellent people. Being approachable is another thing. I think we've very much concentrated on who we are. Our branding is warm and embracing. We want to be as inclusive as we possibly can be."

As our conversation comes to a close, it's clear how vibrant Campbell's passion for brewing is. Fundamentally, he is driven by a desire to make good beer.

"Beer-making, it's not like being a nurse or a policeman," he says. "It's fundamentally frivolous. However, it does serve a function of making people happy."

SureShot taproom is located in the Piccadilly Trading Estate, and beer is available to order from their website.

Inside the not-so-secret community of women sharing 'red flags'

By Emma Butterworth

"Any tea or red flags?" Is a question which would confuse my grandmother, "what is the correlation of these two inanimate objects? Is she planning some sort of jubilee tea party?" I imagine she would think.

But for those of us across the world who are members of the 'Are We Dating The Same Guy' Facebook groups, this is a question we see every day as we refresh our feeds – though often in the form of emojis.

Starting in New York in 2022, the first group was set up to keep women safe on dating apps, allowing them to read all types of warnings about men before having to risk meeting them in public.

These groups, likened by some to resemble the female bathroom at a club, became exceedingly popular and now two years later there are more than 200 groups worldwide.

I stumbled upon the Greater Manchester group, applied to join and after being seriously vetted by admin, entered the community of Greater Mancunian women sharing the most salacious gossip; I was hooked.

The group, which has 42.1k members, has strict guidelines which include no negative words or phrases about the men, no judgement and most importantly, no screenshots being sent to 'outsiders'.



Are We Dating The Same Guy? | Manchester / Bolton / Stockport >

Inside the group

As I look at my phone right now, I see one man's tinder profile and without scrolling too far into the comments, I'm met with accusations of revenge porn, narcissism, swinging, and one response which warranted several laughing reactions.

"It's my best friends daughter's sperm doner can you ask him to pay some child maintenance" it reads, punctuated with an apt laughing emoji.

All jokes aside, for some women the AWDTSG community has been a safe haven, as online dating in a modern age can be full of anxiety.

We now have apps playing 21st century cupid with all types of gimmicks; Hinge has been advertising itself as the app designed to be deleted, Bumble has women making the first move and Tinder has made a fortune on singles swiping.

20 years ago, people met at the pub, at work, or through blind dates, but this no longer seems to work with data from Ofcom showing that in 2023, 1 in 10 UK adults used online dating services.

Furthermore, data from a 2022 survey by the BBC showed that amongst the respondents, 33% of dating app users have experienced harassment or abuse by someone they met on dating apps, so what is the harm with women helping each other navigate the world of online dating?

The real people behind the profiles

For one woman, who wished to stay anonymous, the group has become a lifeline in helping her avoid potential danger or cheaters.

"I joined the group after a friend told me about it, she



Photo by Kristina Flour on Unsplash

said it was entertaining to scroll through but I never imagined I would be the one posting on it," She told me.

After a few dates with a man she'd met on a dating website, Rachel* decided to post a screenshot of him on the group with the familiar line "any tea" followed by the man's initials and location.

She said: "I just thought better safe than sorry, if there was anything worth hearing I would rather know now than before I fell for him."

Rachel* woke up the next morning to comments claiming that her Prince Charming actually had a wife, toddler and another child on the way.

"Of course I was shocked, but after being in that Facebook group you realise anything is possible, I just feel so sorry for her.

"I just keep thinking what if I didn't post in the group? I would still be seeing him and she would be none the wiser."

Some use these groups for advice, others for entertainment, but what about the men?

Shawn Condon, 33, from Liverpool has had two encounters with these groups, with his first appearance on AWDTSG resulting in a warning for women to stay away, as he had 'ghosted' one group member in 2018.

The other post occurred just a few weeks ago when, in less than 12 hours of matching with a woman on Tinder, he was posted in a Warrington area group asking for 'tea'.

The post, which Condon believes has damaged his reputation, was deleted after he was 'instantly' sent screenshots by people who knew him - with even his sister seeing the post and comments.

He said: "It was damaging because everyone sees you on there.

"It shouldn't be allowed, no one should be allowed to put my face somewhere like that."

He argued that although he agrees with keeping women safe, public humiliation is not the answer as important information can be found through the Domestic Violence

Disclosure Scheme, known as Clare's law.

"That's what Clare's Law is for," he said.

"If you have a problem, you do Clares Law and find out, its free."

From the posts, Condon received jokes from his friends as they made fun of the situation, but for some, being posted in these groups can have worse repercussions.

Speaking to UTV in 2024, one man shared how false claims about him in an AWDTSG group "traumatised" him as he had no way to defend himself.

He said: "It had a massive impact on my mental health where it got that bad, that in December I had considered taking my own life.

"I spent 3 weeks in a psychiatric hospital, following a suicide attempt that left me clinically dead for 3 minutes."

As the popularity on these groups boom, so does the controversy, meaning it might be better to keep the gossip inside your close group chat.

Meet the students using their time outside of university to turn their passions into projects.

By Joe Mulhane

When people think about how they want to spend time at university, often their first thoughts are going out for a pint with friends or joining a society to dive into a hobby that they love. But some students are taking things one step further.

Side projects or hustles are not a new thing for cash-strapped undergrads but recently there has been a huge increase among students looking to do more than just work your standard part-time job.

According to Save the Student's 2024 National Student Money Survey, 30% of students are working a side hustle alongside their academic commitments. Furthermore, accommodation provider, Fresh, analysed Companies House data and they found that a total of 4,093 businesses were registered by students in 2022, with the majority falling in the 18-25 bracket.

I spoke to three students who invested their time into different kinds of ventures from a trading community to an indie rock band and a music events company.

A different kind of trade

Arjun Rai, a 21-year-old trader from London started YouTube channel 'Arjun Trades' in his first year of university. His channel is based around foreign exchange trading which has now grown into a community where he teaches students how to trade.

His interest in trading began at the end of his first semester. He



Arjun Rai, Credit: @arjxn_r Insta

went on holiday to visit family and his uncle introduced him to the world of trading.

"He was just heavy into crypto trading. I was just very fascinated with seeing all these lines and charts. I was fascinated in how you can actually make money and how you can predict where it's going to go next?"

He originally invested some money into cryptocurrency but after some ups and downs in the trading he transitioned into Forex, which he became 'fascinated' with and began learning about the intricacies of it all.

"It's not just all about the money, it's about just the fact that I love doing this, and it doesn't even seem like work to me anymore."

I asked him how he found the balance during the different phases of his degree.

He said: "In first year, I wasn't that serious about the channel.

In second year the tempo started to increase so I was getting more serious, so I had to sacrifice going out on the weekends. Then I was just focusing on everything from the channel to my trading to reading and educating myself with marketing.

"Third year is where I'd say that I had both of them on the same scale (degree and channel). I started to get students who want to learn from me. So now it's more about teaching and building a website, so it's not just YouTube anymore."

With the work increasing on the channel and its expansion into a whole community of people, Arjun in his own words said he had to make the 'hard choices' even if it meant missing out on what a 'typical' uni life would be.

But he said: "It wasn't easy, but I just had to put in the work and get through it."

"Encourage people to have a different hobby, outside of your degree, just to keep your sanity"

Banding together

Nathan Baggott, 21, is a member of indie rock band 'The Wears', alongside friends Ted Bryant, Josh Brooke, and Jake Collins. They formed while at college, but they initially fell in love with the idea after seeing Blossoms perform in 2016.

They have steadily risen since the start of 2022, even though they were not able to gig prior due to Covid. Their first gig post lockdown was at the Spinning Top in Stockport - then, two years later they headlined and sold out the Deaf Institute.

Luckily he hasn't found it hard to strike the balance between the band and his degree in music and sound design as they go "hand in hand."

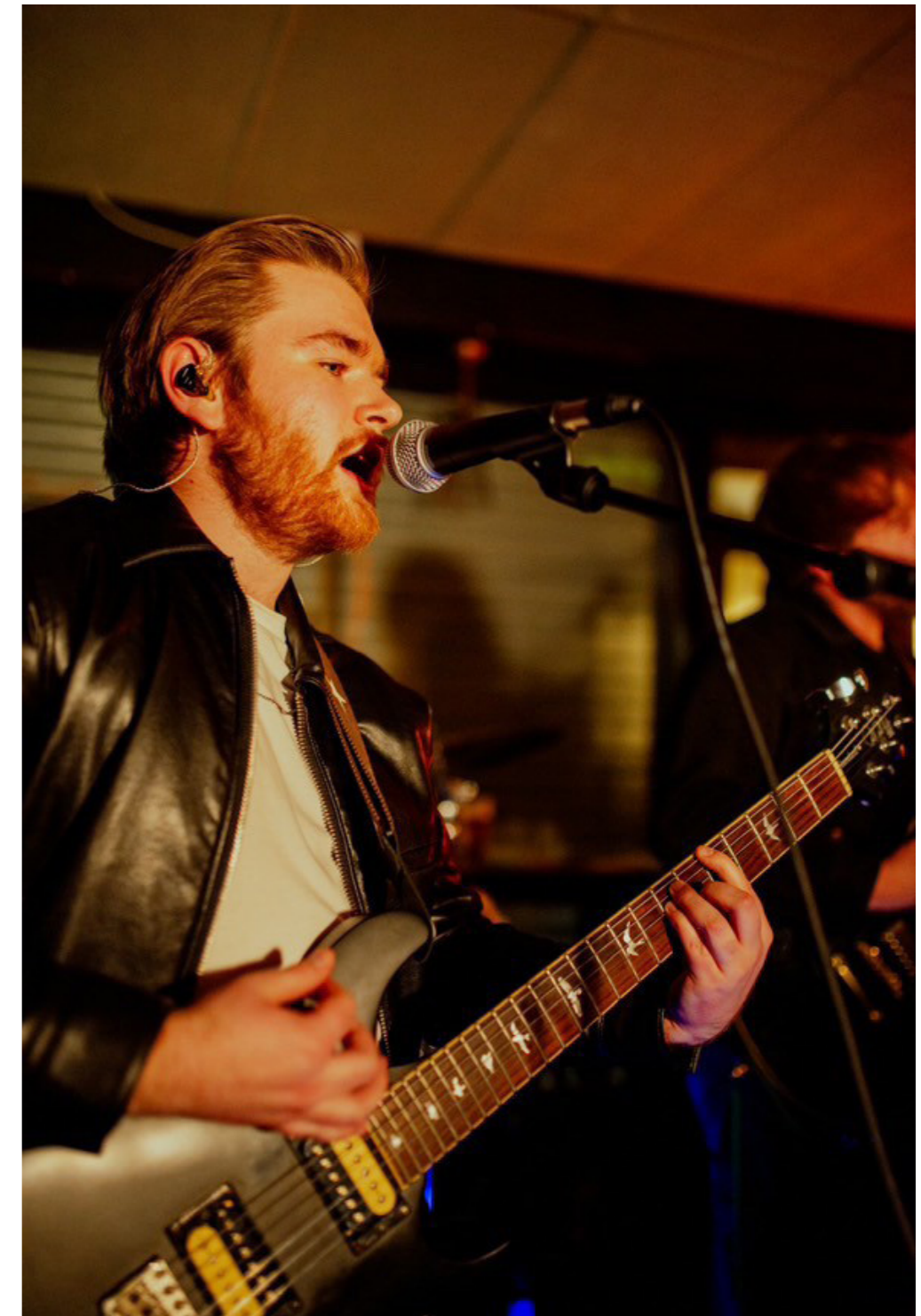
He said: "It's never really sort of been too much of an issue. Obviously, nearer a uni deadline that is prioritised."

"But there's never been issues with clashes because most of it is just using what I've learned at uni basically to help the band."

I asked if there was anything universities could do to encourage more people to take up a side project and the benefits of a student taking one up.

He said: "Definitely. I think just more of a focus on other extra-curricular stuff because most of the time it's your normal sports teams and societies."

"Encourage people to have a different hobby, outside of the degree, just to keep your sanity really."



Nathan Baggott at the Bevi, Credit: @10before Insta

Something to rave about

On the opposite end of the musical spectrum, 21-year-old Charlotte Barber created an events company called Burst Drums.

The idea came when Charlotte and her coursemate Edward Bayley realised Manchester Metropolitan University did not have a rave or DJ society. So after a lecture they decided to create their own alongside co-founders Ryan Douglas and Luke Hollings.

She said: "We wanted to get involved in the DJ scene within Manchester. Ed is from there and I'm from Blackpool. So when I came here, I really wanted to get involved. We thought how hard could it be? Why not go ahead and do it?"

"We also didn't want it to just be something massively associated with students or uni. We wanted it to be a thing of its own."

As it was a project so focused around creating and promoting events I wondered if the balance would be hard to strike because of the workload.

She explained: "It's weird, because it goes in and out. You

know we could be putting on so much more stuff than we are. But then it will roll around to exam season and it does get a lot.

"I don't do all the artwork but I do a lot of graphic and online stuff. So when we've got a poster, Instagram, and TikTok posts to get done, I do get stressed."

But the stress is not just the balancing Burst Drums and uni - it's also the nerves the night before an event.

"I get really stressed and nervous before the night, thinking no one's going to come, and then it's all great and you manage to hand things in on time," she said.

"So it does work out in the end, but it is just a bit of added pressure."

"That's what we're doing at the very core of it, we're just all testing out our music and our skills, and just trying to have a laugh and fun while we do it."

When I asked if there was any help universities could provide to facilitate more students creating a side project, she said: "I know that a lot of students don't necessarily want to go into direct employment. They want to be self-employed. And to start that most people do need a loan or a grant. If the university was able to do that it would be amazing."

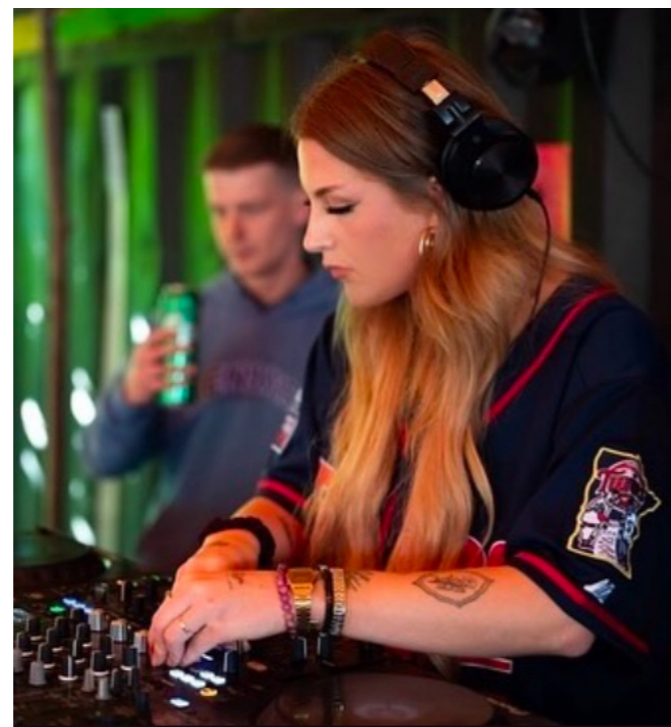
While it is an events company on paper, Charlotte told me how they want it to be fun and be used as a vehicle to help smaller creatives.

She said: "In the past we've done outreach posts looking for DJs, photographers, videographers and if you're a young creative, or someone starting out and you want to come and test out your skills on our night, be our guest."

"That's what we're doing at the very core of it, we're just all testing out our music and our skills, and just trying to have a laugh and fun while we do it."



Burst Drums crowd, Credit: @beckninetysseven Insta



Charlotte, Credit: @beckninetysseven Insta

Where next?

Even though most of these projects are in their infancy, I wanted to know where they each see them going in the future.

Arjun, over the next five years, wants to grow his community and following as much as possible.

He said: "I would say over 100,000 subscribers, to put a figure on it, I say over 100,000 followers on social media platforms as well, and 1000 members in my community, in a paid community, and 10,000 in a free community."

With The Wears, Nathan said they want to do more gigs in places like London, Sheffield, and Liverpool while also continuing to record more music.

Charlotte said how they want Burst Drums to expand into a music label and magazine. Their goal for next year is to do a festival takeover which she said would be a 'dream'.



The Wears, Credit @benjaminalexanderashton Insta

Advice for others

I asked each of them if they could give any advice to students who want to start their own projects during university.

Arjun said: "I would say whatever it is and just have fun with it. Enjoy the journey, enjoy the process, and see where it gets you."

Nathan stressed to not be put off by fear because you can't spend all your time "doing work."

He said: "At the end of the day you need a life outside of just doing uni work. Go try and do something because you can definitely balance the two more than easily enough."

Charlotte said: "Just do it because you would regret not doing it."

"You can feel so unprofessional and you have that 'Oh, you're just a student' and you may not get taken seriously, you just have to shake off that stigma and do it anyway."



Arjun Rai, Credit: @arjxn_rai

There are countless ways to spend time at university and these students have shown it is possible to create something you're passionate about whilst studying towards a degree.

More than ever Gen Z are looking to invest their energy into small businesses which they start just for fun, extra cash or in the hope of turning it into a fully-fledged career.

So if you are a student looking to turn an idea you love into something new, as the interviewees put it best - don't be afraid and just do it.



Poster, Credit: @burstdrums_ Insta

"Just have fun with it. Enjoy the journey, enjoy the process, and see where it gets you."

Veganuary in Manchester



By Emily Grimsey

For many, January is a drag, you're consumed with the task of eating all the leftover Christmas dinner and keeping your new year's resolutions longer than your brother but for vegans it's the best month of the year.

Finally they can go to any restaurant YOU want and with more choices in supermarkets it's basically a second Christmas.

The Veganuary campaign was launched in 2013 by Matthew Glover and Jane Land, with the aim of encouraging more people to adopt a vegan lifestyle and reduce their impact on the planet. Over the years it has grown into a global movement. In 2024, 25 million people worldwide took part.

Six months after taking part in the 2024 challenge a survey revealed 27% of participants were still eating a fully vegan diet.

Vicky Issot, from Presten has been vegan ever since she took part in Veganuary in 2020.

"My biggest struggle is other people criticising me. Going out for meals can be painful especially on holiday with family members that do eat meat. My husband is now a vegetarian but will occasionally eat fish when we eat out."

"I'd say do it now, I regret waiting and don't beat yourself up for eating vegan junk food, I love it!"

And what better place to be vegan than in the country's best city: Manchester. Research from January 2024 by LNER ranked Manchester the 2nd best UK city

"I get a bit annoyed when the best vegan products disappear from the shop shelves mid January and you know you won't see them again until next year."

for vegans only topped by Brighton.

Manchester has loads to offer in terms of vegan spots: The Vegan Shack, Herbivorous, Eighth Day Cafe, The Vegan Picnic Basket, Tampopo, Bundabust, Otto Vegan Empire, Hip Hop Chip Shop.

Tia, a final year Zoology student said she finds it really easy to make sure she is still getting all the protein she needs.

"We are really lucky here in Manchester. There are so many more places to eat than in my hometown."

Stuart Ralston, a teacher in Greater Manchester originally from Glasgow has been vegan for over 30 years.

Like a lot of vegans Stuart said: "I get a bit annoyed when the best vegan products disappear from the shop shelves mid January and you know you won't see them again until next year."

He is thankful for the progress that has been made, "years ago if I wanted something like vegan cake or fudge for example, I'd have to get it through mail order as there was nothing like that in shops. I do respect retailers more if they have an exclusive vegan

section. I don't like having to find my vegan choices in the middle of the meat aisle."

He gave some great recommendations including Greggs if you're ever out and about or if you find yourself in Bolton, Carr's Pasties have several cakes (and a pasty) that are vegan.



Veganuary survival guide

For those of you doing Veganuary for the first time, we have you covered. Here's our guide to help you get through the month.

It's really easy now to do a vegan shop in your local supermarket. Asda and Lidl have the best plant-based ranges.

Budget retailers like Heron Foods usually have amazing bargains. Stock up when they do as they won't hang around.

Never throw out your chickpea water. We call it aquafaba and it can be used as an egg substitute and binding agent in cakes and other recipes.

Lots of supermarket own brand stuff is actually vegan such as jaffa cakes and Jammie Dodgers

It's not just about food though. Many big clothing brands do vegan products too - if you see something like a pair of vegan shoes you fancy, be quick. Some brands sell out quickly.

A selection of some of our favourite vegan must buys:

- Swedish Glace ice cream is a house favourite for me and my housemates. Especially the raspberry one.
- Aldi tofu- It's such a bargain and a great source of protein.
- Supermarket own plant-based ranges have really improved. Tesco's own plant-based sausages are a great alternative

VEGANUARY

All you need to know about solo travel

By Emily Grimsey

Eager to see the world but your friends are busy, want my advice? GO WITHOUT THEM!!

Solo travel has been on the rise for the past 6 years and it's predicted to keep growing, 24% of Brits plan to take a solo trip in 2025 according to Travolution.

Solo travel is a booming trend, with more people packing their bags to explore the world on their own. The reasons behind this rise vary for some, travel is an escape from everyday life. For others it offers the freedom to explore without dragging someone else behind.

Social media has played a huge role in the rise. On TikTok the Hashtag has over 9k posts, with 65% of users between the age of 18-24. Users are normalising traveling alone and inspiring others to go on their own adventures. The communities on these platforms offer support and advice to make your travel experience easier.

Charlotte Dring, 22, backpacked South East Asia, South Korea and Australia.

"I love travelling because of the adventures and the freedom. There is no better feeling than taking yourself out of your comfort zone and just living in the moment. To experience the lifestyles and the cultures of the people who live there, but also meeting people from across the world that you would otherwise never have met. It's also just so much fun."

"If you're thinking about it, and you can, then you should defi-

nately do it. You will create memories forever."

She spoke about her all time favourite travel memory: The Hai Giang loop in North Vietnam. The loop is a 4 day motorbike adventure that takes you through the rugged landscape, showcasing the mountainous landscape and villages. "It was so fun and the most beautiful scenes I've ever seen. The food was also amazing"

May Nksjjs, 24, spent the summer traveling around Europe after graduating from University.

"I think meeting new people is one of my favourite parts of travelling."

"I would recommend bringing a notepad with you, when your boarded on the train or bus you can jot down what you've been up to. Having a routine as much as you can is also a good idea, if you're near a beach I like to go swimming in the sea in the morning"

Florence, 22 a History student in Manchester said she often picks where she goes based on the price of flights. "Of course I have a list of places I really want to go to but as a student I'm aware of my small budget."

If you despise to travel but not picky where you go, planning your trip around your budget is a great idea. Hostels are often a lot cheaper than hotels and they are great ways to meet fellow solo travelers.

Che Southers, 22, went inter-railing after sixth form, "It was the best decision I ever made. I think it prepared me for the so-

cial aspects of uni" She The first time I travelled solo I was 19, since then I have done three solo trips. My first trip was to Spain, I remember the morning of my flight and the overwhelming anxiety of having to spend the next three weeks completely alone.

Don't get me wrong, I love going on holiday with friends but solo travel gives me the freedom to do the things I love that my friends don't enjoy. I'm able to plan my trips around what excites me. I personally love spending time in art galleries and local cafes where as my friends are much more lounge by the pool people.

I always new I wanted to travel and that first trip confirmed that. As soon as I landed I fell in love with the idea of solo travel. My confidence increased and I'm able to trust my instincts more. If I can navigate a new city by myself I can do anything, right?



Your first time as a solo traveller can be really daunting and overwhelming but it doesn't have to be! Here are some of my tips. I've also consulted other travel experts to help compile the best tips possible.

You're not the only one!

One of the scariest things about solo travel is simply being alone. If you're travelling solo in my experience, hostels are the perfect place to be. You have to remember everyone who is travelling solo feels the same way. Sara recommends "just open a bottle of wine, share a few glasses, and you'll see: that's all it takes to spark a conversation."

Whether you're embarking on a safari in Africa or exploring the historic ruins of Athens, the best hostels often organise events that make meeting new people easy. From bar crawls and walking tours to free yoga classes, these activities offer a great chance to connect with fellow travelers- so don't hesitate to get stuck in!



Sara van Geloven, a travel expert from Polarsteps, advised: "Don't be afraid to be alone. Going solo is one of my favourite ways to travel, because you don't have to consider anyone else and can do exactly what you feel like doing. You're also much more open to new experiences

and encounters."

Start small

Start with just a weekend away or a week long adventure, ease yourself into the solo travel world- it can be very overwhelming. For your first few trips choose places you'd be comfortable navigating yourself in.

Why not hire a tour guide

Sarah Stephens is a travel agent she recommends: "If travelling somewhere off the beaten track it can be useful to hire a guide for the first day to help you find your bearings and brief you on the local areas and more importantly areas to avoid."

Do your research

Sarah also recommends you always pack a pashmina in your hand luggage as you can easily use it as a cover up if you decide you want to go into a place of worship. Do your research and be respectful to the place you're visiting, if you're in a Muslim country-cover up.

Justin Chapman: "Book flights

that will get you to your destination during the day rather than after dark, research how to use the areas public transport before you get there"

"Learn some basic phrases that will help you in an emergency like asking for medical help or asking someone to phone the police, this is especially important if you are somewhere less touristy."

Safety first

Sara said: "Always trust your intuition. If you feel unsafe for no obvious reason, leave the situation immediately. Don't worry about being impolite—your safety comes first."

Justin Chapman, "Make sure someone knows where you'll be at all times, whether that's turning your phone location on with someone at home or letting the front desk at your hostel know. It will give you a little piece of mind"

Grant Winter recommends getting currency from reputable outlets or using a travel money card. "Don't risk a scam or being handed fake currency"



Image by: Marc Rafanell Lopez

How to: Travel more green

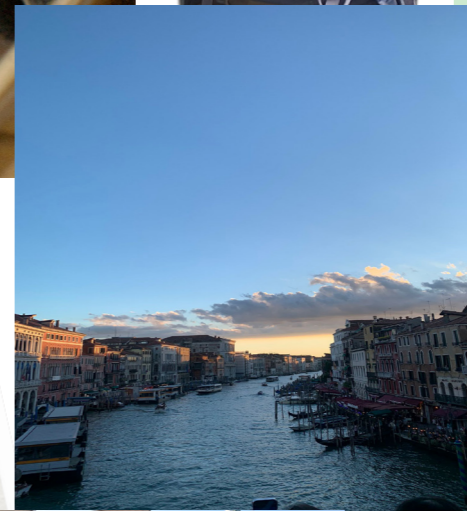
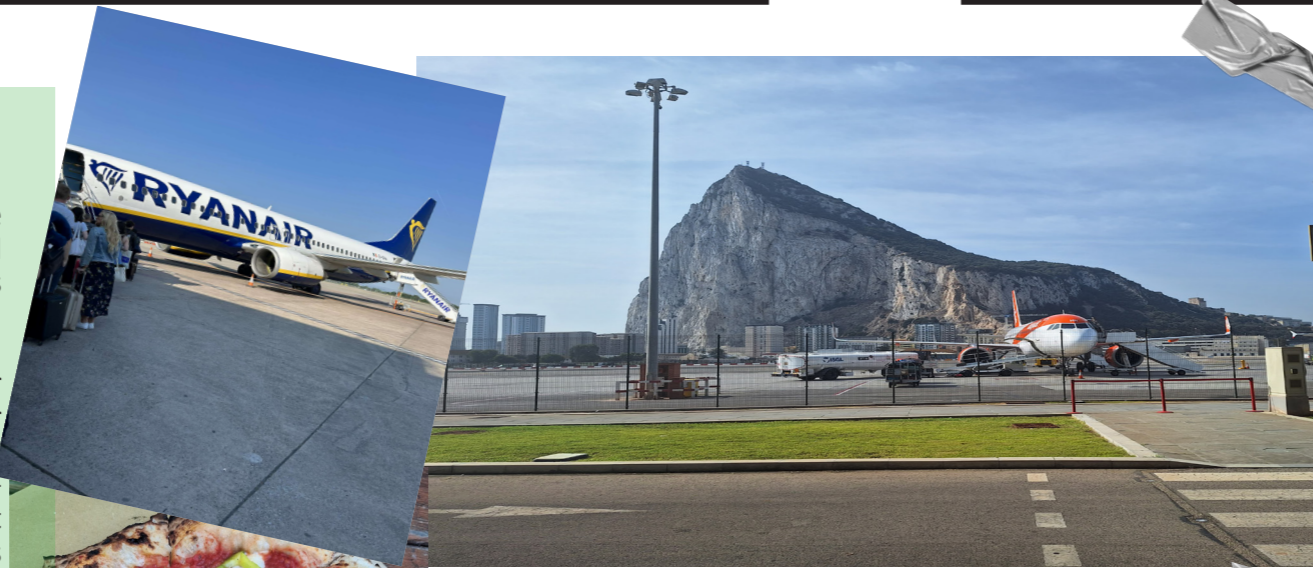
Backpacking is a great way to explore the world but it can also have an environmental impact. So we have come up with a few ways to make your teip more sustainable.

Mindful packing: Invest in good quality gear and only replace it when its broken. If your bag does break recycle it. Need new clothes for your trip? Shop second hand from charity shops or apps like Vinted. Bring what you need and nothing more. Not only does traveling lighter reduce emissions but it could also save you money as you can skip baggage check in.

Reduce waste: Dont forget to bring a reusable water bottle, cutlary, shopping bag and even tupperware. Choose toiletries with minimal packing. Why not opt for shampoo bars these not only have less packaging but will also save you space. If hiking rember to stick to designated trails and paths to avoid disterbing wildlife and leave no trace.

Food glorious food: Your in a new place make sure you try the local food. Buy from local markets or eat at local restaurants. Need a coffee break? Sit in local cafes that support local trading.

Travel Green: Where ever you can use public transport or why not hire a bike to get round for the day. If you cant use public transport use ride share apps. Choose your destination based on options available.



How to: Get the right backpack

The first question you have to ask yourself is backpack or suitcase? Whether your embarking on your trip solo or with freinds, the right backpack will make or break your experince. Heres a quick guide to help you choose the right pack for your trip.

Travel style: Will you be exploring the cities or hiking? If your going to be doing a lot of hiking then ensuring your pack is waterproof and durable is key.

Support and Size: Your backpack should math the length of your torso. Adjustable straps and a hip belt are essential features to help adjust the weight. We reccomend you shop for backpacks in person to ensure you get the right one for you.

Features: Whilst having lots of compartments is a great way to stay organised dont let this distract you from quality. Choose durability and padded straps over extra pockets. A clampsell design will allow you to access your stuff easier than the typical top loading style backpacks.

Budget Wisely: While it is tempting to save money on a backpack it is important to get the right one for you. Brands like Osprey and North Face offer great options that balances praice and durability.



Is it more than just 'January blues'? A guide to seasonal depression



Photo by Milada Vigerova on Unsplash

After the Christmas tree comes down and there's no more mulled wine to warm up the winter nights, the month-long festive hangover known as 'January' is one that requires more than paracetamol and a red bull.

'January blues' is a term that's been thrown around to explain every symptom of this phenomenon; low motivation, lethargy, depression - but for some sufferers of Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), the winter can have a serious effect for their mental health.

What is Seasonal Affective Disorder?

SAD is a psychiatric syndrome that can cause a persistent low mood in people and alter their sleep patterns, appetite, and energy levels.

A reduction in daylight hours during the winter months is believed to be the main cause of the condition because of the effect daylight has on our circadian rhythms, with a reduction of natural

light exposure resulting in lower levels of serotonin and melatonin in the body, which regulate our mood and sleep cycle.

According to Healthwatch, one in twenty people in the UK suffer with the condition, with men more likely to be diagnosed than women.

For people like Kerri Moore, a 46-year-old woman from Liverpool, these symptoms can become unbearable and form somewhat of a new year dread.

Having suffered with depression for what Kerri describes as 'always', she only recently became self aware of the seasonal aspect of her condition following a diagnosis of ADHD and autism.

"I think because obviously in December there might be something to look forward to, it might fuel you but in January I think I just am gripped by this depression that just takes a hold of me," she told me.

"In the winter I feel like, just low motivation, no energy, just considerably impacted by the change in season.

"I think less daylight hours impacts me and I just lose that motivation and struggle with my mood, everything really."

Kerri pointed to how being Neurodiverse has become a catalyst



Kerri says she has become "gripped" by SAD

By Emma Butterworth

for the condition, with significant links being found between the condition and neurodivergence.

She said: "The statistics show that people with autism are more likely to suffer in the winter months just because of the changes, the daylight hours, the weather, the temperature, all those stimulants that neurodivergent people are effected by"

How can it be treated?

The cure? Kerri suggests that a combination of exercise, socialising and keeping a routine can help ease her symptoms, stating that her worst habit in the colder months is 'self hibernation'.

These sentiments are echoed by professionals in the field, with Dr Jeff Foster, an NHS and private GP, underlining the importance of a healthy routine for combatting SAD.

The mental health specialist suggests that the best way to do this is by "fighting the urge to stay up in the evening" and allowing the body to get enough sleep, as well as exercising daily when possible, with as little as 10 to 15 minutes of exercise outside being ideal.

He said: "Force yourself to socialise: when it's dark out lots of us want to sit on the couch and wrap up warm but actually being sociable is a really good way of removing symptoms of depression.

"Plan something positive for the future, book a holiday somewhere warm and focus on this as a driver, and if in doubt see your doctor, there are effective medications out there that can help."

Charities supporting your mental health this month

By EMILY GRIMSEY

January is often seen as the month of blues but there are lots of charities that are here to help you get through the month.

Why not challenge yourself and raise money all while benefiting your mental health.

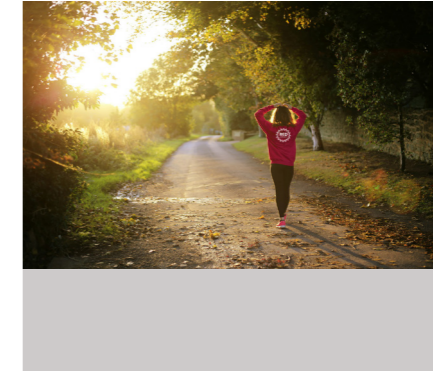
2025 marks the 10th anniversary for RED January, a movement that gets people moving whilst raising money for community grassroots.

Whether you take part on your own or within a team. Whether you challenge yourself to run everyday or swim three times a week you can benefit your own mental health whilst raising money for projects in your very own community.

Mandy has participated in RED January for the past 9 years, she has challenged herself to swim, run half marathons and even cycle the length of Britain.

"Being a part of the RED community has been an integral part of benefiting my mental health and wellbeing. Starting that journey 9 years ago was just an incredible change in how I felt about exercise and how I know it can benefit my mental health. I've also been really quite moved on how much of an impact that has had on my friends and family's life."

I spoke with Dr Carolyn Keenan, a registered psychologist about the benefits of exercise on your mental health. "A brisk walk or workout can provide an outlet for tension and leave you feeling calmer and more grounded. Exercise can re-



duce levels of the body's stress hormones, it can also help regulate your sleep patterns, allowing for deeper and more restorative sleep, which is crucial for mental resilience. Joining a group class, running club, or team sport can increase social interaction and combat feelings of isolation, a key factor in maintaining mental health particularly if you are struggling with loneliness."

Action for happiness is another

charity who through action groups hope to promote happiness.

Founded in 2010, the Action for happiness app and downloadable monthly calendar encourages you to carry out small acts that spreads happiness around your community.

Emma Wheatley who leads a monthly meet up in Blackburn said: "The aim of the group is to give people manageable ways to improve their happiness. We make a pledge to do something positive."

These pledges could be anything from exercising, learning new things to reconnecting with old friends.

The calendar can be downloaded from their website: <https://actionforhappiness.org/>



Image by: RED Together

Curtains Up in Manchester: The English National Opera's Bold New Move for 2025

By Emma Butterworth



Manchester has long been a hub of culture in the UK; football, style, architecture, the Gallaghers... the city is quite literally buzzing with a hive of entertainment and art.

Now imagine the cherry on top of the cake, does it look like Pavarotti?

The English National Opera has announced a major partnership with Greater Manchester, bringing new projects and opportunities to the region as early as 2025 – but how did we get here, and what will it do for the community and culture scene?

The English National Opera will be moving from its home at the London Coliseum due to a long and controversial battle with Arts Council England who, under instruction from the previous conservative government, ordered the company to relocate or lose their multi-million-pound annual subsidy.

But with companies like Opera North and The Hallé already performing in the city, ENO's plans to be 'firmly established within Greater Manchester by 2029' may either be a win for the community, or a major misjudgement of public appetite.

Big plans

Ambitious plans for 2025 include vocational training opportunities for young people in the

region through the award-winning Factory Academy training scheme, as well as work to bring opera to classrooms, and the creation of a Greater Manchester Youth Opera Company.

ENO is also collaborating with the city's well-established institutions, including the Lowry for a production of Benjamin Britten's classic opera *Albert Herring* in October and a summer performance for Manchester Classical festival with The Hallé.

Jenny Mollica, Chief Executive of English National Opera, explained the move by describing the region as "the perfect place to put down roots".

She said: "Building on the region's legendary reputation as the heart of music making in this country, we can make a difference to audiences and communities, help invest in the next generation of talent and break new ground in the future of the art form- locally, nationally and internationally."

Andy Burnham, Mayor of Greater Manchester, welcomed the move, claiming that the city has "always been at the heart of the UK music scene" with a "legacy and energy that's second to none".

The company has also vowed to tap into the city's football heritage, starting work with local football teams this summer to explore the impact mass singing has on team performance and the spectator experience.

It seems that ENO are pulling out all the stops to settle in up north, but it hardly appears to be out of choice.

A controversial move

The move has been anything but smooth sailing with the ENO opposing the relocation in 2022, claiming that it would not be "doable".

Following this, Burnham stated that the ENO did not deserve to come to Manchester if the company thinks Mancunians are "heathens" who would not attend performances.

He said: "If they want to come, come willingly, but if you're not coming willingly don't come at all."

Fans of the ENO also opposed the move, with one X user Fraser Contra labelling it "stupid" as "Manchester already has Opera North".

He said: "The whole reason Opera North was created was as a representation of English National Opera for the North of England."

"This is so stupid. London needs ENO."

Hopefully, the opportunity to add Opera on the list of things that, to sarcastically quote Tony Wilson, "we do differently here" will not fall flat on its face - but the proof will be in the pudding.

After all, it ain't over till the fat lady sings.

Meet Brickhouse - the city's new indie-grunge sensation

By Emily Grimsey

Manchester is known as the heart of the UK's music scene, it's the home of bands such as The Stone Roses, Oasis and The Smiths.

But where do small bands such as Brickhouse fit in?

"We don't have much planned yet in 2025, we have a couple gigs booked, a big one in March but really we want to work on new music" Owain told me.

Owain, 21, was a late addition to the band, the others knew each other from school but straight away there was a bond. The story of Owain joining might not be the typical way one joins a band but according to Max, the band's singer, it was love at first sight.

Brickhouse - like Manchester's weather - is bold, a bit wild and unapologetically loud.

And their fashion? Picture a mix of 90s grunge swag with a little modern indie flair.

They each have their individual style: Freddie, 21, the band's drummer is into shoegaze-y bands but with heaviness. I must have looked puzzled because he followed up with "bands like Deftones, Slowdive and My Bloody Valentine".

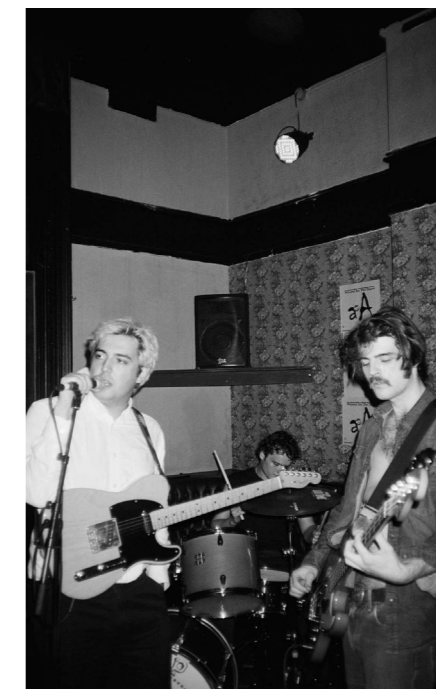
Owain, guitarist, likes a lot of grunge. Max, 21, is into punk and Alex, bassist, is more of a funk kinda guy.

"Yeah but that's a good influence for a bassist. Our setlist is made up of loads of different ideas as we all contribute to songs together. I think the varying tastes make our sound quite



BRICKHOUSE BAND Image by: Rohan Walsh

unique." Freddie adds.



We move on to talk about Manchester, what makes the city so great for young musicians. Owain said: "I can't imagine any

reason why I wouldn't want to be here as a bloke in my 20's. It feels like opportunity is rife and more accessible here than it would be for me anywhere else."

"As far as the UK's concerned from what I can tell Manchester's gotta be the best place for small bands. It's an atmosphere where collaboration is always taking precedence over competitiveness so it feels like no matter who you're supporting or who's supporting you, everyone is boosting each other up."

The band took a moment to appreciate the number of small venues and grassroots in the city that let bands get a taste of the stage and make it so easy for them to get gigs as well as the number of north west promoters.

"I think everyone with an interest in live music would fall in love with Manchester instantly."

Contrast therapy and iced coffee—both know how to keep you cool and wake you up!

A new type of social space has been popping up around the city which encourages people to test their limits for the sake of 'health'. I tried this new concept in the recently opened Kontrast sauna and ice bath cafe to see what the hype is about.

By Poppy Dippnall

Numbing, intense, frigid – This is what I felt when I tried a cold water plunge for the first time. My feet lost their feeling, my chest tightened which seized my breath as I lowered myself into the icy bath.

But as soon as I sprung up, the tense feeling in my muscles melted and it was bliss. I went into the sauna afterwards and felt more relaxed than any other sauna I'd tried before.

There's a new concept going around that is taking the health community by storm – contrast therapy is a type of treatment that involves alternating between hot and cold temperatures to improve blood circulation, re-

duce swelling and inflammation and speed up muscle recovery.

Manchester has seen the addition of many new contrast therapy spaces like FIX sauna and ice baths that arrived on Newton Street in September 2024, and more recently a new addition located in the Green Quarter, just a short walk from Victoria station.

Kontrast is a sauna and ice bath cafe that opened late October 2024, it's owned by Jamie Smith who was inspired by his travels to Taiwan, Japan and Scandinavia to bring the sauna culture to the North West.

Speaking to Jamie about the idea of bringing sauna culture to Manchester, he said: "The vision

is just wanting to bring the community aspect of sauna culture to Manchester in an accessible way for everyone to enjoy.

"Somewhere that can boost everyone's mood and offer a space where it is not drink-central for people to hang out and relax in."

After nearly walking past the huge outdoor sign under a railway bridge, I saw a cosy outdoor seating area with fairy lights hung around it.

Inside was decorated fittingly in a Japandi style – an interior design style combining Japanese and Scandinavian decor containing lots of panelled natural wood and plants. To add to the cosiness, blankets and books were in every corner of the cafe area, as well as ducks dotted around to add its own quirkiness.

Kontrast's main focus is to steer away from the prominent drinking culture in the UK and create a safe space accessible for anyone to enjoy a different kind of night out with friends. They have a variety of reasonably priced drinks available to have in the cafe area from cold kombucha to hot coffee.

They also offer different types of group activities weekly, such as a 'girls only night', run club, and 'social sober night'.

In Kontrast's first opening two weeks, 50% of all profits made



cold water shock seized my body as soon as I felt the water on my chest.

It was a strange refreshing feeling after I got out of the pool as I quickly began to warm up. I went to the larger Finnish sauna to relieve the tension in my muscles. My body and mind were twice as relaxed as the first sauna I went into.

Whether you're a gym enthusiast or in search of an alternative activity to do in the city with mates, Kontrast is definitely a good spot to try out, especially with how reasonably priced the sessions are and their late opening hours.

Sessions are priced at £10 for 60-minute off-peak sessions, or £17 for 90-minute peak sessions.

from bookings went to the Manchester MIND charity, which has been advocating for better mental health for 30 years.

Jamie said: "This is to show our commitment to mental health. That's what the saunas and ice baths are about, to get people to feel better about themselves and get them out of a funk."

Once I changed into my swimwear and sliders, it was time to try their plunge pools and saunas. There are three plunge pools and three saunas to try – two traditional Finnish saunas and an infrared sauna and three plunge pools ranging from three degrees celsius to 12 degrees celsius.

I tried the small Finnish sauna first, which was super snug and relaxing. There was a bucket of water so you could adjust the temperature yourself to get the best experience.

Then it was time for a cold plunge. I wussed out of going for the three degree plunge pool and went for the six degree pool instead as I thought it would be more bearable than three degrees.

It was not – the first dip was excruciating, my feet started tingling and all my leg muscles contracted. I shot down so the water covered my shoulders, the





Hinterland: The bar changing perceptions of going out

Nestled away under the Manchester Buddhist Centre is an alcohol-free space who want to be known for more than just that - they want to be a sustainable community centre for the city.

The background

Hinterland has only been open for six months but the space has garnered interest for their alcohol free bar full to the brim with options. When you walk down the stairs at first glance it looks like a typical speakeasy bar, but you are greeted with a warm and welcoming environment which exudes calm.

Stephen Jeffereys, 33, is a co-founder of Hinterland along with his business partner Hatthaka Sanghadhara. The idea came together from Stephen's own personal journey as a recovering alcoholic.

He worried that he wouldn't be able to connect with people unless alcohol was involved but being in those spaces was too triggering for him. This experience led him to the concept of Hinterland, a place where connection is not dependent on alcohol but people.

I spoke with him about the space, the events they offer, young people's engagement, and what he wants the space to be



Three years ago his business partner Sanghadhara had approached him to start a company underneath their apartment - in the very basement where Hinterland is situated now.

Originally a Mexican and Japanese restaurant, the idea pivoted to an alcohol-free space when Stephen had found himself at a turning point.

He said: "I realised that my life as it was wasn't quite working for me. Over the next few months of reflection, I decided to completely turn my life around and become better to help create Hinterland."

"Fun is not dependent on alcohol; it's dependent on other people."



By Joe Mulhane

His motivation behind starting the company was the UK's alcohol culture - there is a perception that many of us only want to socialise when alcohol is involved. He wanted to prove that wrong.

Stephen explained: "From personal experience those connections are deeper rather than going out, having a load of beers and then telling your friends that you love them or finally opening up about something, and that sense of connection being completely dependent on alcohol."

"I suppose that that was the reason why I decided, okay, now is the time to get bold."

For his personal journey, this was important to show people there are other ways to socialise without the need for alcohol, he said: "Sobriety is something near and dear to me. I am a recovering alcoholic, and I think a large part of my addiction came from feeling the need to drink to connect with people."

"My addiction is connection, I think we're all addicted to connection, and there are just different ways to get it."



All photos credited to Tom van Berkel

The events

What stands out about Hinterland is the events. From poetry nights to silent discos it is much more than just another bar. Stephen told me that the events had to hit one of the core values: communication, community, wisdom, and/or imagination.

He said: "I think they are really important in communicating what we're about. Because if you come down on a normal day, you'll get a taste of what we're about but you won't fully understand the importance of the values behind it."

"The name comes from the realm beyond the known, pushing boundaries that is what we're trying to do. We don't want to run events that you can find at every other bar in Manchester."

One of the unique events they host is the death cafe, which explores people's relationships, experiences, and fears around the topic of death.

Stephen explained: "There's no kind of experts or therapists or anything like that. It's just broaching the subject as a group together and seeing if we can view it in a slightly different way."

Looking ahead to their first Dry January, he was excited to show people the bar at its best.

He said: "It's such a rich opportunity, and we will be really pushing the message into and

over Dry January, because it's a time when people are more open to it."

Young people

One demographic the bar has a focus to engage is young people, and you can see why. According to Drinkware One in four members of Generation Z, those aged 18 to 24, are completely teetotal.

But Stephen said it would be a "mistake" to say it was their only target audience.

"We are a very broad coalition of customers. I've been really happy to see different ages coming in."

He has enjoyed how younger people have positively engaged with the space.

He said: "They'll talk to us and be open about either recovery journeys or their experience with alcohol or want to know more about the message behind Hinterland which is great, I hope that we can keep going."

A community interest company (CIC) are ones which use their profits to grow the business and invest in projects which serve the community - rather than for private shareholders.

Stephen told me: "We're a CIC. So we're not for profit."

Once they become profitable, they are looking to invest money into the community and causes which will "make the world a



better place."

"We don't want to just reach young people to make money, we're trying to bring about change and that's where I think change can be done."

A new community

I thought I'd conclude by asking Stephen how he thought people can engage with the space for it to thrive.

He said: "We're a community, come and engage with the community. We have amazing food and drinks, but that's a fraction of what we are."

"So come down and get a drink but talk to us. We're not therapists, we're not counselors or anything like that, but we're pretty good listeners."

The main goal for Hinterland is to become a community centre, he spoke about how Manchester seemed to be more disconnected and he wants Hinterland to be that focal point for the community.

He said: "We're here to serve the community, and not just the sober community or Buddhist community, but our whole community."

"Help us to create a community center, that would be the best way to interact with what we're doing."

Hinterland is a new bar with big ideas - and it will be interesting in the years ahead to see how they craft their community.

The space is open Wednesday through to Sunday and it is situated in Basement, 16-20 Turner St, Manchester M4 1DZ.

Rolling through Rainy City: how people find community through Roller Derby

By Thomas Brace

I walk into a leisure centre in Bury, and the old-school sports hall echoes with the clash of skates, the wails of players, and the rhythmic thud of bodies hitting the track.

The crowd - full of neon hair, tattoos, and big, friendly smiles - can't be more than 50, maybe at a push 100 people, but what they lack in numbers they make up for in noise and enthusiasm.

And on the track, we see pandemonium - or perhaps it's better to say controlled chaos.

Elbows and bodies collide and jostle whilst the brave players cunningly weave and slam through the mass of bodies blocking them. Meanwhile, the colour commentary on the side of the track entertains with cheesy jokes, and drag-inspired pop-queen Chappell Roan plays in the background.

Welcome to Rainy City Roller Derby. The Manchester based league has four teams, two of which compete as part of the UK Roller Derby Association and the Women's Flat Track Derby Association.

I'm here to check out what the sport is all about. Manchester's Rainy City has one of the best teams in the world, so it's a good place to find out.

I won't try and explain all the rules - some of the rookies I spoke to struggle to understand the intricacies themselves, nevermind myself - but for the basics:

The game is played on a flat track. The bout takes place over

two 30-minute halves.

There are two teams, with five players from each team on the track at any one time.

Of those five, one is designated as the jammer, who can score points. They score by passing the players on the other team as they go around the flat track.

The other four players will try to block the jammer and stop them from scoring points.

There are lots of other rules as well - pivots, penalties, official reviews, the sin-bin and more - but a full understanding of every rule isn't required to enjoy the game. And despite the astonishing sights it can bring with its athleticism and, at times, brutality, I don't think the spectacle is where the appeal ends.

I think the real heart of Roller Derby lies in the people who play it - what motivates them, the community they have built, and their love for the sport and each other. Those who play aren't usually your typical people who compete in sports.

Jenni Palmer plays as a blocker for Reckoning, Rainy City's B-team. She said that before Roller Derby came into her life, she had "never really been involved or engaged with sport". As an outsider, that world felt blocked off to her.

"I didn't think that I was someone who could play sports - I am plus sized and I'm disabled", Jenni said.

"But I found roller derby and it was a community for me, it was very welcoming and it



was a space where other people were the same as me, they hadn't been involved in sports previously as well. So I just think it's a really good sport if you have always been on the outside of being an 'athlete'."

This inclusivity is woven into

ly open to people who are non-binary and trans - I'm trans and I'm really worried about being accepted into sports, so this is somewhere where I can really do it and enjoy it without that sort of stupid worry that comes

"It doesn't matter who you are, what your sexuality or gender or body size is, it's open to all."

the fabric of Rainy City - it is unashamedly vibrant, alternative and queer. And this is really where you can begin to see the bricks and mortar of the community it has built up compared to more traditional athletic spaces.

It's not just about the game - it's about belonging.

A new recruit to Rainy City, Lauren, spoke about this to us through her own experiences.

Lauren said: "I think what's really good is how it's obvious-

with that.

"30 years ago it (trans people in sport) seemed to be no problem at all and now it seems to be suddenly a problem and I don't really get why. I really worry about the bad media around that and being able to play with other women as part of a team is, for me, really important."

That community also extends out to how Roller Der-



by is run. There is a DIY, almost punk-rock ethos to the sport that mirrors or perhaps even shapes its spirit.

Teams are built on the dedication of volunteers who run social media accounts, design merchandise, sort out the venues, run the press office, do safety and concussion protocol, amongst many, many other things.

Dr Claire Stapleton is a jammer for Reckoning, and uses the name Sonic Boom on the track. She has been playing for around ten years.

She told us: "It is about giving back - there are people who put a lot of time in coaching, and you know we obviously can't hold games

and matches without a whole crew of refs and non-skating-officials, so it is about giving back what you can - there is a whole league that wouldn't run without volunteers."

"I see it with my kids' sport - those opportunities wouldn't be there if there weren't volunteers in the community that are running things behind the scenes. I think it's important that you are able to contribute where you can, give a little back and volunteer."

However, whilst the DIY ethos and the alternative culture are at the heart of Roller Derby, we must also as well talk about the sport itself - it is entertaining, rough, deeply strategic and visually awe-inspiring.

"You can't just be good at skates

to play at a top level, you've got to be quick thinking on the track and know the strategy," Claire tells us.

"Sometimes what marks a difference between the top players is being able to communicate to the people you are playing with, so all the blockers are working together - bringing all those things together is what makes it not only physically challenging but mentally challenging as well."

"I've never played a sport that has that same intensity and same challenge - I have played a high level of hockey and tennis, and it doesn't have that same thrill."

The sports' unique blend of athleticism and aggression means injuries are inevitable. Players take big hits to the ground and each other - calculating split-second moves to outwit opponents can, obviously, go wrong. Bruises, and even broken bones, come with the territory.

But so does the reward and thrill of playing and, in Claire's words, "the elation of finishing

"I've never played a sport that has that same intensity and same challenge."



ALL FUN AND GAMES: The Rainy City and London teams together after their match. All Roller Derby images taken from Roller Derby on Film.

a game". She comes from a background in physiotherapy, and as a lecturer has guided student projects around injuries in roller derby.

"I think it looks worse than what it is sometimes - it looks quite brutal to watch, but actually when someone is on skates sometimes it's hitting the floor that hurts more than actually getting hit by somebody else," Claire said.

"I've been fortunate and not had big injuries - you do see some big injuries, I think it's just part of the sport."

Whilst roller derby thrives on the intensity and the bone-rattling hits, leagues like Rainy City prioritise their players' health. There are robust safety measures and assurances that newcomers aren't thrown straight into the deep-end.

Jenni Palmer told us: "I think what I would say is that you don't join roller derby and play roller derby

straight away. You learn to skate safely, you have to be rookie ready and there is a slow process to make it safer. One of the things I would say about Rainy is that we have a really strong concussion protocol."

In the games I attended, the main event was Rainy City's A-team, the All-Stars, competing against their London rivals, Brawling. It's always a close encounter when these teams play, and this was no different.

Rainy City were fingertips from winning - within seconds and a couple of points of taking home the result - but in the end, London took a hard-fought victory. It was thrilling. In this sense, roller derby was like any other competitive sport.

But it's more than that, isn't it? In a world where the mainstream has rigid norms about who can and can't be in sports, derby opens its arms to the world in all its varieties, colours, creeds and

backgrounds. This should, in my view, be celebrated. Individuality should thrive, and in turn this builds a diverse community.

Claire puts it well: "I just think that it has got different types of people involved that makes it a lot more inclusive and non-judgemental. It doesn't matter who you are, what your sexuality or gender is, it's actually open to all - body size, shape as well is key to that."

Check out Rainy City Roller Derby's website or social media accounts to get a ticket for upcoming games, or maybe even get on the track yourself.



Are you brave enough to take the plunge?

By Poppy Dippnall

Imagine going about your normal routine having a morning swim at your local leisure centre. You're not the greatest swimmer, but you do it to help your back injury. You're recuperating in the pool, challenging yourself to do one more length than last time. You pause, take a breath, start chatting with the other swimmers to pass the time.

You find out they're preparing for outrageous challenges, one training to swim the length of Windermere Lake. They go on about their swimming journey, and the more they explain the more inspired you feel.

Then you think to yourself, maybe that could be me one day?

These were the very conversations that sparked Karen Quatermain's love for open water swimming 11 years ago. Since that day, she has accomplished a Jersey to France Solo swim, Solo Windermere several times, Ullswater, Coniston and numerous English Channel Relay swims.

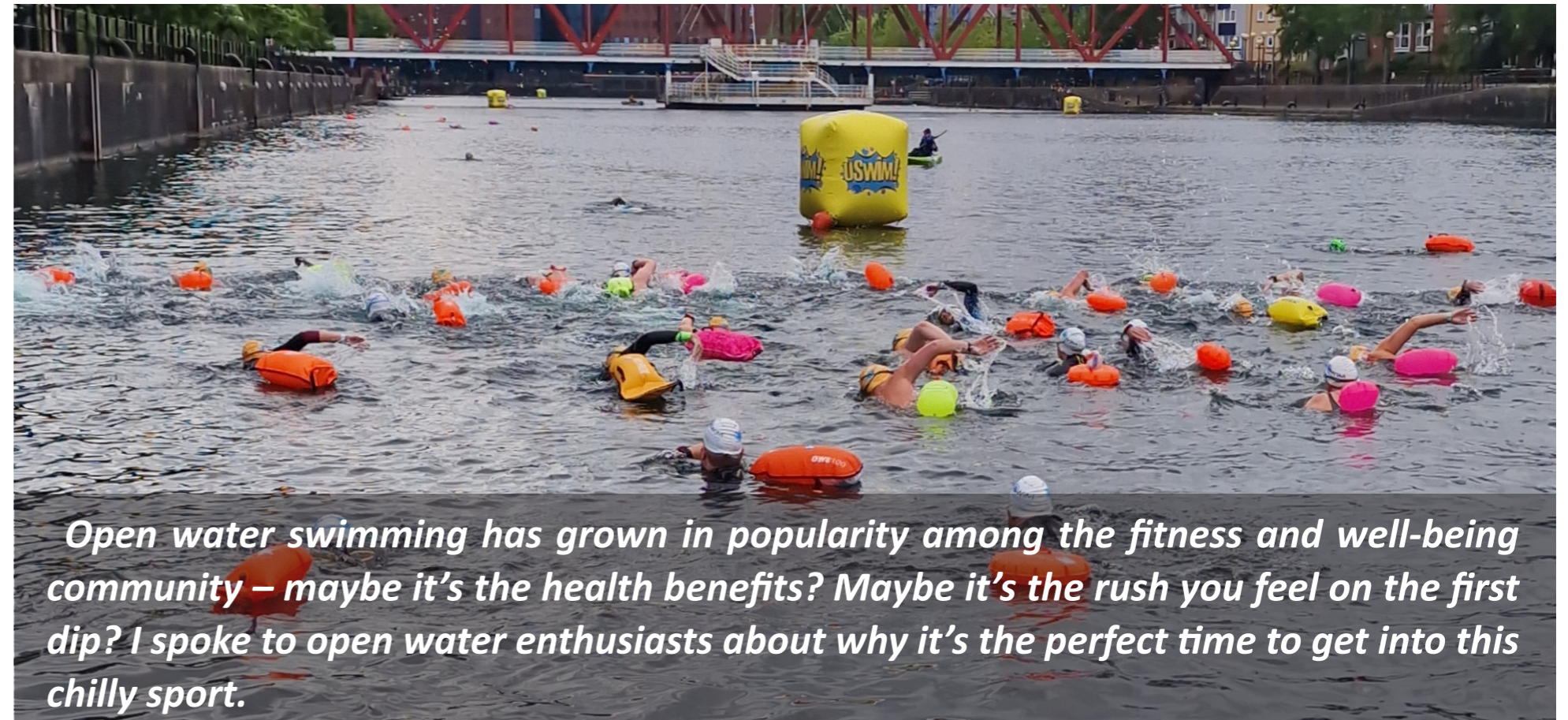
Open water swimming has been around for many years but has grown more popular since Covid when people would resort to this due to the closure of leisure centres and indoor pools. So why are more

people taking the plunge?

Uswim is an open water swim club was formed by Karen's husband, Dave Quatermain, as a way for him and a small group of his friends to train for swimming the length of the English Channel – 25 years later, it's one of the most widely recognised open water clubs in Greater Manchester, hosting lessons, open sessions and events to hundreds of people in Salford Quays. Karen, who



KAREN Quatermain in open water (above) and Uswim in the quays (top of page).



Open water swimming has grown in popularity among the fitness and well-being community – maybe it's the health benefits? Maybe it's the rush you feel on the first dip? I spoke to open water enthusiasts about why it's the perfect time to get into this chilly sport.

co-owns the club, reminisced on the club's growth.

"It's phenomenal," she said.

"Back then it was a clipboard and a pen and people jumped off the side of the wall and the bridge. Now there's structure, there's processes, there's a lot more to it than there was back then. There were 10 to 20 people, now our sessions can have up to 200 people.

"You sit back and you look at it and think, wow, he's done this from his passion. He's making people's dreams come true and he supports people."

There are plenty of health benefits to swimming in open water. According to Swim England, open water swimming can improve sleep, boost the immune system, increase mood and prevent or manage long term illnesses.

Karen said: "I think there's lots of benefits. When you say open

water swimming you haven't got lane ropes, you haven't got lane rage, you haven't got chlorine chemicals, you haven't got the heat.

"You can't really go to an indoor pool and just sit there and quiet your mind, whereas you can go in open water and just find yourself a place and just shut off from it all."

Her husband Dave began the club with his passion for open water swimming. He was one of the UK's top open water swimmers in the late '90s, achieving some insane challenges such as becoming the first British winner to swim around Manhattan Island, New York, swimming around Africa's Robben Island, and swimming many of the UK's lochs and lakes races.

His love for open water swimming led him to set up Uswim to provide safely supervised swims to water-lovers. The club celebrated its anniversary during their annual Greater Manchester Swim event in May, where

hundreds of people swam up to three miles in Salford Quays.

Celebrating the club's roots, Karen said: "We mainly celebrated Dave because he was the founder and he was doing this before it was a business. He was one of the very first out there to run supervised [open water] sessions which stemmed from him training for the English Channel himself and not having anywhere to go, so he wanted a safe place for people to swim."

Karen has been helping Dave run the swim club for 11 years. For her, open water swimming was a challenge to test her limits.

"My story is very different," she explained. "Dave's background is a swimmer, he's always swam – I'm not a swimmer."

"I had a back injury and pushed myself to do a challenge. I was just recuperating in the pool, trying to learn to swim a bit better because it helped my back, and then before you know it I was speaking to some people about the Great North Swim in

Windermere.

"You get to chat with people and you're so inspired by them. You're like, yeah, I could do that. The next minute I did the mile swim, then it became a 5k, then you swam the length of Windermere and then you swam to France before you knew it. You just get hooked on it and the feeling in the community around it."

A core belief of Uswim is water safety, especially during the winter months where temperatures of the water can plummet to seven degrees celsius. According to the Royal Life Saving Society UK, there were 226 accidental fatalities in the UK in 2022. The report found inland water such as rivers, canals, lakes, reservoirs, and quarries continued to be the leading locations for accidental drowning with 60% of deaths in 2022.

On water safety, Karen said: "We're a professional business with insurance. The water's been tested, we risk assess it, our busi-



ness is covered and insured. We would always say to come to a commercial venue where you know you've got protection, you know the water you're going into is of safe quality, it's been tested, there's lifeguards, there's experienced people to help you on your first journey open water."

For Karen, the most fulfilling thing is watching people achieve great things from the club.

She said: "Seeing people on their own journeys, seeing them from day one and being part of that. A couple of years down the line, they've swam the English Channel or they've done the length of Coniston or they've come back and they've done some crazy challenge.

"You've seen them from day one, you've done an introduction with them, you've helped them with the technique, you've given them pointers and you can see how much they can develop within themselves, but

they don't know it."

Although Uswim train only in open water, many local swimming clubs resorted to open water swimming during the pandemic. Lucy Bull, head coach of Marple Swimming Club, was one of these clubs who chose to train her team at Sale Water Park.

Lucy said: "What we tended to do when the pools were closed was take the swimmers to Sale water park and swim in the open water. We went every couple of weeks and we took about 60 people to Sale at a time. It meant we didn't really lose a lot of swimmers, because they were still swimming and they could all have fun."

"People used to have to pre-book onto the [indoor] sessions so we couldn't charge a monthly fee because we couldn't guarantee that they would get on. We were only allowed 24 people in the pool and they had to be five metres apart. So as a

club, it meant that we weren't generating as much income from the swimmers."

Speaking to one of Lucy's competitive swimmers, Abby Wood, who went along to the open water sessions, she enjoyed testing her limits and utilising it as a way to train with her teammates while restrictions were in place.

Abby said: "I found open water swimming really fun. I love swimming and it was a way to keep swimming during Covid when the pools were shut. It gets you out of your comfort zone by trying something new.

"I felt very refreshed and energised once I got used to the cold water. I would love to go again when I have time and I would recommend it to anyone."

Open water swimming has more than meets the eye and it makes a great new year's resolution to dive into.



KAREN and friends taking a selfie (left) and Karen in the water with some swimmers from the open water swim club (above).



BRICKHOUSE playing at the Old Pint Pot, Salford.
