



LEGAL HIGHS

Take a trip to Dopamine Land

Emma Freud boosts her mood inside a popcorn machine

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Our world really is changing. In the UK, outside of work now spend an average of five hours a day on our screens. But despite that, or perhaps because of it, we're still hungry for human connection. The immersive entertainment industry is worth \$60 billion in the US, and has grown by 30 per cent in the past two years.

It appears that just watching live entertainment is no longer enough; there's an appetite to be inside the action, taking part in a collective experience that results in an uptick of dopamine, the neurotransmitter responsible for feelings of pleasure after you engage in rewarding activities. And one determined events company is now attempting to cut out the middle man. Why produce an immersive play, concert, art or dance in the hope that the audience will find their brains flooded with dopamine? Why not go straight for the end result by inventing Dopamine Land?

For £20 you get nearly an hour in this labyrinthine web of expectant dopamine-inducing zones in South Kensington, London, where various areas of the brain can be triggered to release the happy hormone.



Emma Freud at Dopamine Land

We started with a guided group meditation to bond us to our fellow travellers, after which we found the deep-red popcorn room, which uses smell, sound, sight and taste to simulate living inside a popcorn machine. That was followed by a mirrored room of coloured lights, reminding us of the very tiny part we play in the cosmos. We then rolled around like babies in a darkened ballpit; found a playful pillow-fight room that connected each of us with our inner child; ambled through a multisensory simulated forest with birdsong, scent and dappled light for a commune with nature; threw shapes in a dimly lit disco room to touch base with abandon; linked with a higher power in a cold, lantern-lit hall of candles, where we lay on beanbags and remembered the dead; and finished in a Bubble Bar to wash it all down with a shot of tequila.

Is it a good idea? Yes. Does it work? No. And apparently the most important question: is it Instagrammable? Clearly: there are markers in each room showing where the best photograph can be taken, so you can let the 'gram know just how deeply in-the-moment you were. Having said that, when I looked back at the photographs I had taken there, they did look great. And that in itself gave a tiny ironic dopamine high.

dopaminelandexperience.com