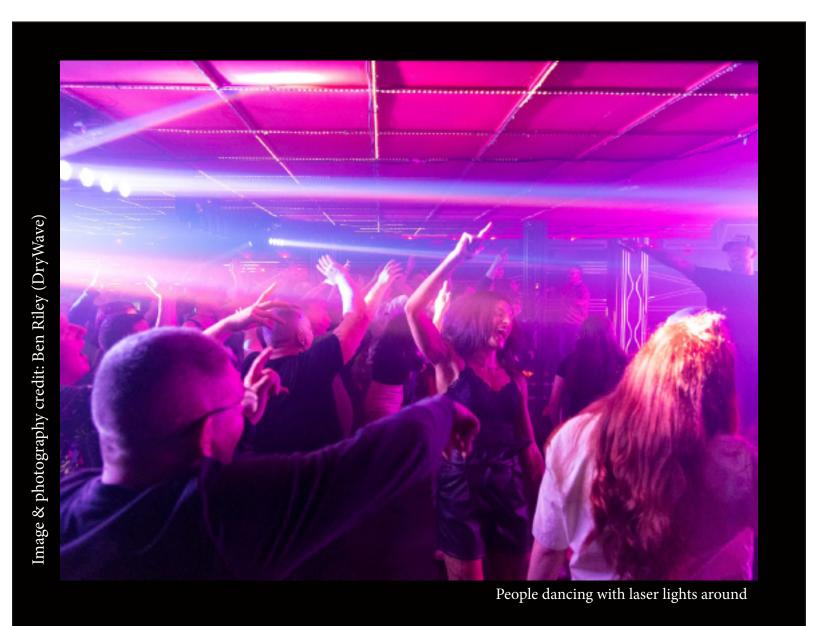
Rave culture, reimagined: The rise of sober raves

As drinking declines among young people, sober raves are rising. Driven by Gen Z, these sober events are creating safer, substance-free spaces — challenging stigma and reshaping the future of partying.

by Buraera Ahsen



Sober raving is gaining rapid and meaningful momentum among Gen Z, who are choosing connection, the thrill of music, mental clarity and their health over booze, drugs and blackout nights.

"Raves were a thing in the 90s, and they were associated with drinking and drugs, but did drinking and drugs heighten the experience? We're proving that it didn't because our (sober) clubbing nights go absolutely off the energy." says Ben Riley, founder and director of Manchester-based sober rave brand and community interest company DryWave.

Traditionally, raves have been linked to alcohol and substance use. Even the Cambridge Dictionary defines them as "an event where young people dance to modern electric music and sometimes take illegal drugs." But Gen Z is challenging that perception.

The rise of the 'Sober curious' generation

Credit is due to the rise of the 'sober curious generation' – a term that describes Gen Z's more mindful relationship with substances, popularised by Ruby Warrington's 2018 book "Sober Curious." The movement encour-

The data speaks

ages intentional drinking choices rather than simply following default social norms.

tate and embrace sobriety, such as sober raves, are flourishing.

The new age of raves

This cultural shift is being echoed by major DJs like Kaskade, ILLENIUM, DRIIA, Chris Lake and Tom Bundt, who have now publicly embraced a sober lifestyle and actively support sober raving.

In a medium article, UK DJ Tom Bundt said his nightlife/festival experiences have improved since becoming sober: "The buzz just sticks with you so much more afterwards. Not only is the memory clearer, but the feeling of excitement and joy from an amazing night out sticks with you so much more vividly."

Across the UK, Venues have been taking notice and respond-

ing. Venues and dedicated spaces like House of Happiness in London, a queerled sober rave event, and DryWave, a prominent sober brand and a community interest company supported by the National Lottery and Arts Council, provide immersive yet drug- and alcohol-free environments. Another UK venture, Morning Gloryville, a sober morning raving experience, further illustrates the growing culture and demand for sober spaces.

Voices of the movement

"There's a major dip in alcohol sales and people getting wasted because young people don't want to be out of control."

Frinzess Jane (23), Midwife



Ben Riley, Founder + Director of DryWave

A producer, MC, and promoter, Ben Riley founded DryWave during his own sobriety journey. His sober brand and community interest company use music, creative tools, and ideas to engage hard-to-reach young people.

"People come to DryWave because they want a night off but still crave the clubbing experience - the loud music, amazing DJs, lights, lasers - they just don't want to drink," He explains. "There's a major dip in alcohol sales and people getting wasted because young people don't want to be out of control. That comes with the rise in social media. If you get too smashed, you're on blast. Everybody sees it. Social media is educating people about the dangers of drinking and drugs and also helping break the stigma around sober raving."

Jamie Hughes, sober raver & property developer

Jamie, 41, has been attending DryWave events since becoming sober and now sponsors one of their sober living spaces. He says in regards to taking drugs to heighten the night out/rave experience: "When you are under the influence, you create a fake version of yourself which tends to destroy the atmosphere around you."

He encourages others to enjoy a sober night out: "Just do it, it's always tough because under that pressure you think you are the only person but as soon as you go, you see the variety of personalities and backgrounds. Everyone's welcome."

What recovery experts say about sober raving

"Sober raves offer vital opportunities for people in recovery or those making lifestyle changes to socialise and have fun in safe environments," says Miggy James from Nottingham Recovery Network, who leads the Inclusive Recovery Cities project in Nottingham.

"These alternatives also help with relapse prevention, especially since social events are often high-risk scenarios"
But are more people becoming open to partying without substances?

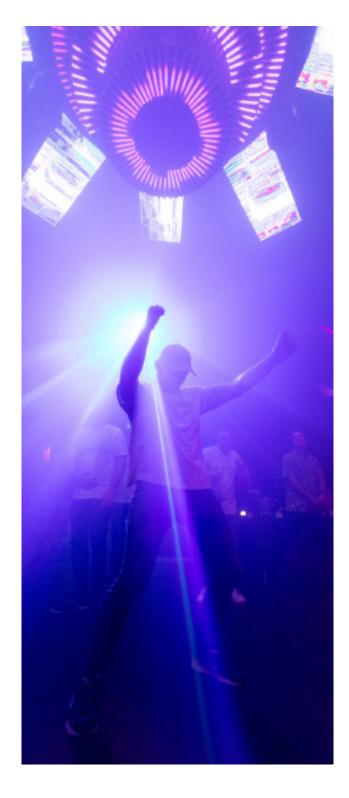
"We can see that young people today are better informed than previous generations about the harms of alcohol and drugs. They are more proactive in making informed decisions, and the cost-of-living crisis, housing issues, and economic pressures have made them even less inclined to indulge."

What's next?

Even London's most popular nightclub, Ministry of Sound is adapting.

From May 11th, it's launching a series of daytime sober raves that will run quarterly until November to offer "a more inclusive club experience for the modern raver."

In another instance, Cheryl Holland, now a sober Leeds musician, has recently launched a clubbing night that's entirely alcohol-free and finishes before 10 pm in West Yorkshire. Analysis by Mintel predicts that the trend away from drinking alcohol among young people will continue to grow. With Gen Z now making up one-third of the global population, the alcohol industry is adapting to young people's new preferences.



So, as summer festival season approaches, the question remains:

Could we see sober sets at Glastonbury this year? Or is the scene still yet to align with the shifting preferences of its youngest crowd?