

WHERE DO

YOU RATE
ON
THE JOY INDEX?

Think 2016 was the year that killed happiness? Well, 2017 is the time to get it back. [Alix O'Neill](#) investigates...



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— there are over three million of them on Instagram alone. They're on phone covers, cakes and, last week, a guy turned up to my yoga class in purple leggings emblazoned with a psychedelic print of the elusive creature. The latest craze is unicorn toast — all jazzed up with a generous smear of cream cheese in a rainbow of natural dyes, including beetroot juice and freeze-dried blueberry powder.

You've heard of the lipstick index, right? How, during times of economic hardship, consumers buy small luxuries such as cosmetics to boost their mood? Well, now we've identified the brand spanking new joy index. Not only are we suspending disbelief by fixating on ▶

mythical beasts, we're also indulging our inner child to take our mind off Trump, Syria, the passing of so many creative geniuses and basically everything else that's wrong with the world lately.

Within four days of launching last November, Nintendo's NES Classic Mini console sold out across the UK. Kidult activities are on the rise – we can't get enough of London's recently opened Ballie Ballerson, a cocktail bar-cum-adult ball pit, and the Natural History Museum has experienced a huge demand for its grown-up bimonthly sleepovers, which include a three-course dinner, breakfast the following day, live music, a chance to explore the exhibitions, a science or comedy show and an all-night movie marathon. Then there's *La La Land*, the all-singing, all-dancing, isn't-life-swell Oscar frontrunner that's got us all strapping on our tap shoes and dressing head-to-toe in yellow.

So what's going on? Why have we all turned into joy-seekers? Wasn't 2016 – the year celebrities hastily instructed lawyers to prepare wills, populism reared its ugly head and 'Hiddleswift' entered the love lexicon – the death knell for happiness? 'When people are feeling down they're more likely to look for rewards in terms of consumer behaviour,' explains Michelle Baddeley, a professor of economics and finance at UCL and author of *Behavioural Economics: A Very Short Introduction*. 'We impulsively seek rewards, especially in stressful conditions. There are parallels here with addiction: people are more vulnerable when they're experiencing difficult personal circumstances. The most everyday example is overeating when stressed.'

In other words, we're spending our money on feel-good purchases to escape the horror show that was the past 12 months. There's proof that retail therapy got us through the shock of the US election – just weeks after Trump's victory, online sales on Black Friday were up 7% from 2015, with the high street doing particularly well. M&S reported a rise in Christmas clothing and homeware sales for the first time in two years.

But what are we spending on to perk ourselves up? Baddeley cites colour as an emerging trend: 'A lot of designers have used exuberant colour in their spring/summer '17 collections – bright candy pinks, yellows and neon, and there's been a revival of flower power and acid florals.' And forget having a few highlights to lift flagging spirits

WE IMPULSIVELY SEEK REWARDS, ESPECIALLY IN STRESSFUL CONDITIONS

– glow-in-the-dark locks, pioneered by US-based colourist Guy Tang, are tipped to be the next big thing in hair.

Colour and pattern are also making an appearance in the home, with consumers demanding cheering, whimsical motifs to brighten up their living spaces. Last year, John Lewis revealed an increase in requests for all things flamingo – from cups to fairy lights, while the company's sales of hummingbird wallpaper rose a staggering 94%. In 2017, we can look forward to 'playhouse interiors – fun furniture resembling building blocks or climbing frames that's designed to increase creativity,' says Hayley Ard, head of consumer lifestyle at innovation research company Stylus. 'Design Academy Eindhoven graduate Mandy van der Heijden has come up with a collection of brightly coloured classroom furniture,

made for jumping, spinning, rolling and climbing.'

We're getting our kicks through experiences, too. Last year saw a spike in spa treatments – London's Rosewood Hotel claimed a big increase in bookings for its signature treatment, which includes an additional massage for deep relaxation, while beauty concierge app Ruuby said bookings soared by 30% in the weeks following the EU referendum. There was a 40% rise in long-haul holiday bookings at Kuoni and, in October, cinema trips were up 50% on the previous year. And who could forget Pokémon GO!, the augmented reality phenomenon that hauled us out of our Brexiteal crisis. Over the coming months, novelty gyms, such as R2R's spin studio on wheels, will be where it's at, according to Ard.

We're determined not to let the state of the world get us down. And with good reason, says Miami-based joy strategist (yep, professional happiness-spreading is now a thing, folks) Inés Battistini. 'Looking for the joy in life allows you to be more present in the moment, develop deeper and more meaningful relationships and gives everything more colour.' Following a health crisis and divorce, Battistini quit her accounting job in 2011 and now coaches clients in how to lead a more joyful, fulfilled life. She started calling herself a 'joy strategist' in 2016. 'I felt such a failure at the time, but my quest to find happiness led me to my purpose, which is showing others how to navigate their potential, find clarity and heal wounds.' She says a positive outlook 'really does make a difference. For many, the past year had a lot of lows, but it's important to be optimistic about the future.'

Just the fact that the job 'joy strategist' – a consultant to help you find your happiness – exists is another point on the joy index. 'Regretting the past isn't helpful,' says Battistini. 'Instead, we should be reflecting on the things that happened, see what worked and what didn't work and find out a way to move forward.' A happiness consultant may seem like a somewhat nebulous job title, but in uncertain times, holding on to joy can be tricky. Perhaps we need people like Battistini to help us get our groove back?

Of course, we can't Pollyanna our way out of every situation. Sometimes, finding the silver lining can be pretty damn hard. But maybe joy is a bit like unicorns – believe it exists and you'll see it everywhere. ■

HOW TO ADD MORE JOY TO YOUR LIFE

Life coach and joy strategist Inés Battistini on staying upbeat

- Get to know yourself. What do you really want? What lights you up? Then get creative. Discover new experiences. Maybe learn a skill or take dance classes.
- Practise gratitude, even when you're having a horrible day. Keep a diary by your bed and jot down a couple of things you're thankful for every night. You're less likely to lie awake mulling over all the things that didn't go well that day.
- Make self-care part of your daily routine. Light some candles, take a long shower, put on some bright lipstick, buy fresh flowers or go for a walk. Small acts can make a big difference.
- Realise that it's OK to say no sometimes.
- Smile. It really does work.