

and loneliness. But few miners use them, says Alan, as long shifts leave little time for much other than sleeping and eating. After 12 hours of isolation, another worker says, "You can't remember how to talk to people."

The pseudo-towns that house miners across the Arctic have a strict no-alcohol policy to avoid accidents. Staff are searched for contraband at the airfield. But "a little bootlegging" happens anyway, Alan says.

Arctic employers would love to attract more female staff, but few want to work in a frozen wasteland. Agnico Eagle, Canada's biggest mining company, reckons only 15 per cent of its workforce are women. This is normal

## Firms that want to dig or drill must import a workforce from thousands of kilometres south.

for the industry – the atmosphere in Arctic camps is rather macho. Kathy Lane, a woman who used to work at Deadhorse, an oil complex in Alaska, is reluctant to get into specifics. "Let's just say everyone knew who you were, but the men got to stay anonymous."

Commercial mine workers are flown in and out every fortnight. (Alan spends his time off in Florida, gorging on sunshine.) The productivity of fly-in, fly-out workers is low, however. Canadian Arctic construction workers are a third less effective than their counterparts down south, found a study in 2023 by the University of Western Australia. This may be because the lifestyle makes them glum, and perhaps also because they are under-managed. Since it is impossible to bring families to the camp, almost no one's boss lives on site, so easy fixes often go unnoticed.

The men in exploration camps, who take samples before commercial mining begins, are the most isolated of all. Nathan, Connor and Eg, the geologists with the coyote problem, were dropped with three helicopter-loads of kit at a camp in Canada's Northwest Territories in March. They have barely left since.

Between the coyote, the storms and the summer wildfires, there have been plenty of bad days, costing their employer a bundle of cash. But on a good day, the wilderness is glorious and the mood is lively. The men control their own timetable, unlike at a tightly scheduled mine, and booze is allowed. Working here is a little more dangerous, and a little more fun. Many of the workers bring their own kit, and can make \$US300,000 for a long season. Unlike mine workers, few have families.

All eight Arctic governments prop up polar business. The state is the biggest employer in Canada's three northern territories, and public subsidies outstrip mining revenues. Greenland gets two-thirds of its budget from the Danish state. Russia subsidises a coal mine to buttress its spurious claim to parts of Svalbard, a Norwegian archipelago.

The Arctic resource rush has, unsurprisingly, affected the nearest towns. In Whitehorse, the capital of Canada's Yukon territory, property prices have soared as outsiders pour in. Mining firms, eager to soothe the local First Nation population, offer lots of jobs but find few takers. At a job fair run by Kwanlin Dun, a First Nation group, only 20 jobseekers turned up to meet 200 would-be employers. Most young locals already have jobs, says Adrienne Hill, a First Nation spokesperson, and few think the trade-off of more money for grim working conditions is worth it.

Besides, as in previous gold rushes all over the world, there is money to be made providing services for miners, from selling shovels and steaks to leasing helicopters and tow trucks. There is an old Greenlandic saying: "We do not care if they find anything, as long as they keep looking." They surely will.

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THE ECONOMIST

*This is attracting those people who work so hard and are under a lot of stress.*

Kim Williams, owner



Oliver Scheuring with owner Kim Williams, right, in the Frequency Lab in Newtown. PHOTO: PETER RAE



Ten sonic waterbeds fitted with speakers are spaced evenly around the room in Frequency Lab. PHOTO: PETER RAE

## Sonic waterbed offers sound sleep, no jet lag

### Comment

Michael Smith



I'm a bit of a sceptic when it comes to alternative therapies, so when a friend asks me to join her for an immersive experience in Sydney's Newtown that she promises will "blow your mind", I am wary.

I have tried sound therapy and meditation and found the crystal bowls and Gregorian chants all a bit tedious. But my friend is promising an experience that is way more immersive and high-tech involving a combination of sound, light and vibration therapy – and something called a sonic waterbed.

Given I have not been sleeping well and feel a bit run down I agree to join a 90-minute Saturday session at Frequency Lab, a large studio just off Newtown's King Street offering a "multisensory healing experience".

Frequency Lab's founder Kim Williams (not the ABC chairman) meets us inside where we relax in the lounge for a 15-minute rundown. Williams, an entrepreneur who has

worked in the wellness industry for decades and ran Newtown's Buddha Bar Healing Clinic for 12 years, discovered the technology behind Frequency Lab while holidaying in Bali in early 2024. She flew back to Bali to meet its creator Laurent Savra, a French DJ and events organiser turned "sound healer", with a pitch to bring it to Australia. "I just walked out of there and thought, I have to open this in Sydney," Williams says. "I was blown away by the science of it. I had done some sound healing in the past, but this is much more immersive."

Since opening, Frequency Lab has attracted a corporate crowd including executives and airline cabin crew, which was a change from customers attracted to the "spiritual side" of her last venture. "Overall this is attracting those people who work so hard and are under a lot of stress."

Inge Charles, a Qantas international flight attendant for 27 years, has been battling jet lag for decades. She has been to Frequency Lab five times because it helps her recover more quickly. "Exhaustion is an occupational hazard," she says. "Yoga and meditation involve too much effort and are a little too New Age for me."

Williams is the first to joke about what she calls the "woo-woo" side of the wellness industry and says the science behind the new therapy is real.

She says the waterbeds are fitted with speakers running down our spines and around our heads, which means the frequencies from a combination of live instruments, singing and a backing track will pulsate through the water and into our bodies.

The frequencies stimulate brainwave activity to create different states ranging from deep relaxation to high-level cognition, she says. Frequency Lab then adds two other elements into the mix: light frequencies to stimulate the pineal gland and vibrations to stimulate the body.

As I slip off my shoes and follow Williams into the dimly lit studio I am feeling sceptical, excited and nervous.

The room is large and decked out with high-tech lighting, acoustic panelled walls and an array of traditional instruments including two large gongs, a table of crystal bowls and wooden pipes and drums, sitting alongside a modern DJ station. Ten beds fitted with speakers are spaced

evenly around the room. I plonk down on a bed at the far end of the room and the sloshing water beneath me takes me straight back to the waterbed craze of the late '80s.

The feeling of weightlessness is strangely soothing.

There is a blanket if it gets too cold and an eye mask if the lights become too intense.

I close my eyes and the music starts. Deep choral harmonies interlaced with a didgeridoo, gongs, crystal bowls, trickling water and jungle sounds. When the vibrations start, I initially think it is my stomach rumbling, but then I realise the sound really is reverberating through my whole body. It's not an unpleasant sensation.

The lighting is the intense bit. Your eyes are closed, but different colours and shapes are strobing across my vision.

Weirdly afterwards, my friend and I discuss having seen different colours and patterns even though we are technically experiencing the same thing.

I am definitely on a journey of some kind now. I feel like I am floating in space and, at times, hurtling through tunnels of light or ascending into the heavens.

Perhaps it is the soundtrack, but I start imagining I am in a jungle and then on a beach.

At one point, I am experiencing a photo montage of my entire life in reverse from that morning to my childhood as the faces of friends and relatives (both alive and dead) flicker in and out.

I lose track of time completely and that I am lying on a waterbed in Newtown (the room is soundproofed against the traffic noise outside).

It is not until the end of the session that I am plucked back to reality, mainly because that trickling water soundtrack is reminding me I need to go to the toilet.

I am surprised by the intensity of the experience.

Maybe it's the placebo effect but for the rest of the day I feel oddly "reset". That night I sleep better than I have in weeks, a full nine hours without waking up once.

I'm still not completely sold on the science, but Williams says there is evidence that frequency vibrations trigger cellular regeneration, increase blood flow and are good for chronic pain and sleep. Light and sound therapy has been trialled on mice as a potential treatment for Alzheimer's.

All I can suggest is try it out for yourself and see. **AFR**

Michael Smith's therapy session was courtesy of Frequency Lab. He returned for a second, paid, visit.