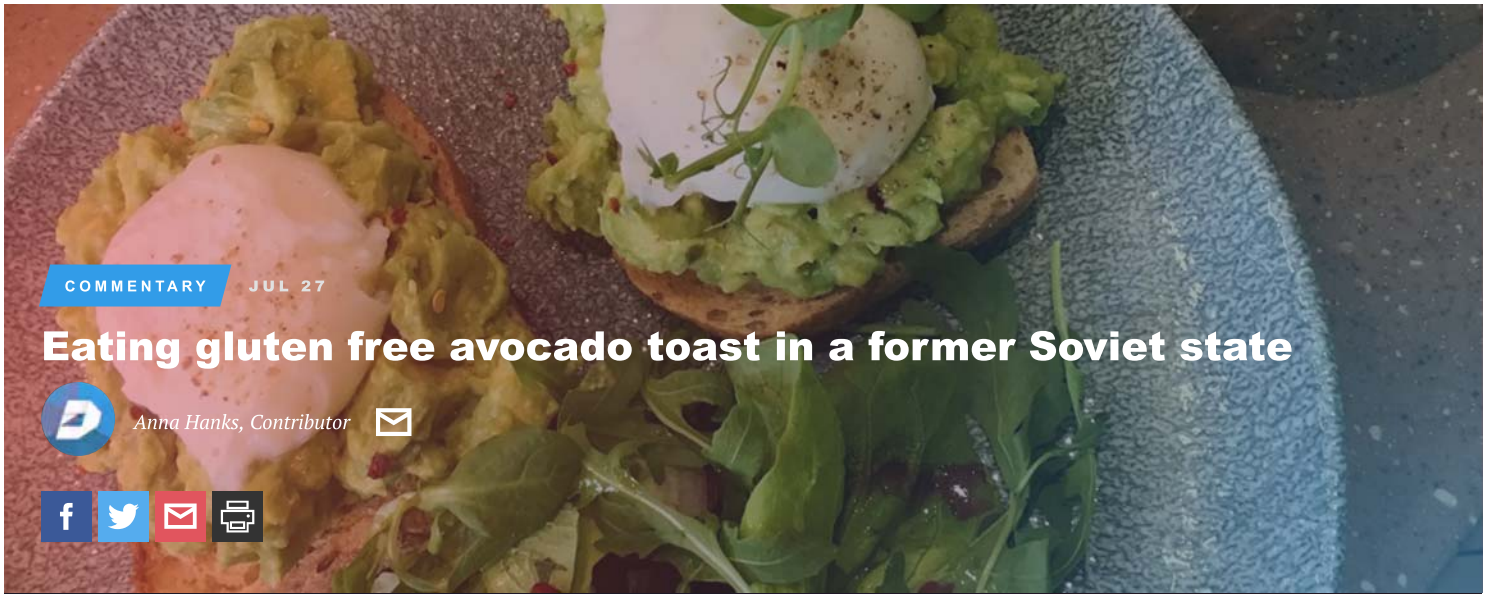




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COMMENTARY JUL 27

Eating gluten free avocado toast in a former Soviet state

 Anna Hanks, Contributor 

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Hanging out at a music festival on the edge of the former Soviet Union, I saw a dude in a Donald Trump costume grooving down to a set from American DJ Grandmaster Flash.

"We're gonna party like it's the '70s," Flash said, in an effort to get the Friday night party going. I hope he meant like the '70s in America, not like the '70s in Latvia, where the only party was the Communist Party. Back then a command to "put your hands in the air" might have been a sign that your partying days were about to come to an abrupt stop.

Things have changed in Latvia since the cold war. Russia is now the cranky missile-toting next-door neighbor, instead of the uninvited squatter when Latvia was part of the Soviet Union.

Nowadays independent Latvia has hipsters, and it's just as bad as the hipster infestations in Portland, Austin or even Brooklyn. You can't throw a handmade Latvian soap without hitting a fancy coffee joint.

By hipsters I don't mean those Soviet-era scenesters who copied Western rock music and distributed it on used x-rays back in Soviet times. Those people are (mostly) their parents.



(Anna Hanks)



Now Latvia has grown a set of full-on food-truck going, Instagram-obsessed, vinyl record producing, indie-music listening, mason-jar using, locally-made fixie-riding, brunch-going, locavore-leaning hipsters, many of whom weren't even born when Soviet times ended. A bunch of these hipsters were at the Positivus festival in Salacgriva, Latvia, in the middle of July. The festival is similar to the Austin City Limits Music Festival, only without the heatstroke and cowboy hats.

The Positivus festival had an Alice in Wonderland vibe, as fairy lights and pastel colored pop ups abounded. The media tent boasted a Harry Potter themed sign in English to "Clean up after yourself * house elves don't work here." I understand the sign: Fairytale settings nearly always have house elves.



COMMENTARY

9 things you should never say to someone who is grieving

During the Friday of Positivus I had the best fish 'n' chips I've ever had, sold out of a Ye-Olde-New-Englande version of a seaside fish'n'chips stand. I was thrilled with my dinner, which I ate listening to a cover of the REO Speedwagon song "Keep On Loving You," by the hip Brooklyn based group Cigarettes After Sex. The food was lovely, the cover was lovely, and I was all "ye haw" when I found out that the band had originated in El Paso.

Earlier I had browsed the festival stalls, looking at some miniature teacup earrings that might be useful for impromptu tea parties and pondered buying some locally made socks made specifically for right and left feet. I considered a locally made wooden bow-tie, but I felt it would only bring out the wrinkles on my neck.

My Positivus experience was more Riga based, though the festival is about an hour-and-a-half away from the capitol city. I hornswaggled access to the festival bus to sleep in a city bed instead of camp at the festival. On Saturday morning back in Riga, I bumbled out of my hotel in search of caffeine, and I was flabbergasted when my squinty eyes found a sign reading "Slow Food Served Fast" that yielded delicious gluten-free avocado toast with non-dairy milk for my coffee.



(Anna Hanks)

In perfect hipster fashion, my take-away coffee cup had a picture of a fox in a bow-tie.

I toted my second infusion of caffeine to a punk rock bar in Riga, telling my favorite Latvian-American bartender from D.C. about how great the Pixies show at Positivus had been the night before.

Sitting at my friend's bar, I wondered about the Cold War that we had all suffered through. Had all the trouble and effort and deaths during really been worth the effort? Had it just meant that Latvian hipsters could sit in the forest and listen to twee music?

It's astounding that a mere 25 years after the end of the Cold War, I'm at a festival where the guards and dogs are keeping people out, because I remember the days when such things were keeping people in Latvia. I was shocked that I couldn't get any more of those fabulous fish 'n' chips because the line was impossibly long, just like Franklin's BBQ in Austin. Just a quarter-century before, people standing in line for food in Latvia was necessity, not choice.

I suspect that modern Latvian hipsterdom is an embrace of American-style freedom, but a rejection of mindless consumption.

It's an embrace of what's made in Latvia, created in Latvia, yarn-bombed in Latvia, just like beard oil proudly proclaiming that it's "Made in Brooklyn." It's a rejection of fast fashion and global marketing.



(Anna Hanks)

If you'll excuse me, I've got to go put on a vinyl record from a Latvian indie record label called I Love You while I wash my new "lefty" and "righty" socks.

Maybe I should have bought some of the Latvian made felt slippers from the vending machine in the Riga airport to keep my new socks company in Texas.

Anna Hanks is a writer in Austin. She wrote this column for The Dallas Morning News. Twitter: [@annainAustin](#)

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2 DAYS AGO

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 By Letters to the Editor



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Why we shouldn't rush to tear down Confederate monuments

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Profit By Nicole Stockdale

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We asked Dallas to read 'Evicted'; here's what you thought about it

The 11th annual Points Summer Book Club discussed Matthew Desmond's piercing "Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City." We debated the causes of eviction, the effect on children, how to view landlords' role, and what this discussion means for a city like Dallas.

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