

Souvenir from Latvia

A Nice Place, Indeed!



Courtesy of Niceplace

What's the first thing you usually say about a place that you liked, after you visit it? When asked, most people respond with the phrase, "It's a nice place." The owners of Nice Place (www.niceplace.lv) on Laipu iela in the Old Town have turned that tiny little phrase into a tantalizing concept, making their teeny little gift shop in the heart of the Old Town into their very own little nice place, filled with nice little things.

When I travel, I always try to look for a different kind of souvenir, not the same mass-produced t-shirts, mugs and magnets that you can see at every corner kiosk or souvenir shop. It is for that reason that Nice Place immediately appealed to me from the moment I walked in the door – it's not your average souvenir shop at all.

Owner and designer Zane Ernštreite has taken all of the wonderful customary things that Latvia has to offer – the traditional patterns that are part of the national costume, and monuments, such as Milda (the Freedom Monument), and played with them, changed their colours and personalities, making them come to life, instead of being the same old insipid images that we have grown used to. For example, one of their t-shirts shows Milda engulfed in fluttering butterflies, or depicts the three stars breaking free from her hands and flying away. In other t-shirts national patterns have become more vivid by showing them in bright pink, red and orange, instead of the more sombre muted tones.

T-shirts are not all that this shop offers – quirky postcards, all printed on recycled paper from the only recycled paper factory in Latvia. Mugs, magnets, pins, canvas bags – you name it, but they are all original in design and make. Ernštreite's husband actually has some Liv blood in him; the Livs are an ancient Latvian tribe, and ethnic

group with its own language that is currently dying out. Nice Place has an entire section of their store devoted to Liv merchandise, including an ad hoc book about the culture that was put together by a Liv schoolteacher in the 1930s. The copy available for purchase is a colour reprint of that book, consisting mostly of photographs and drawings, and is available in three languages – English, Latvian, and, of course, Liv. They even offer t-shirts proclaiming a "Līvõ Republic," as well as a "Latgolys Republic," recognising the culturally and linguistically distinctive southeast region of Latvia known as Latgale. The Nice Place souvenir shop exceeds its modest title. Its atmosphere immediately captivated me the moment I entered. I think that the owners have truly captured a playful spirit and positive energy that is often kept hidden by Latvians, who are usually conservative when it comes to outbursts of emotion. Nice Place sets those positive emotions free, but in an eloquent and refined, not brash, way. It depicts Latvia as the nice place that it is, and its unique designs offer the change to take back something truly original from the inimitable Latvia.

By Amy Bryzgel

Souvenir from Estonia

Handmade Ironwork

It happens to the best of visitors: after spending just a day or two in Tallinn's Old Town they get caught up in the area's 15th-century vibe, its gritty, Hanseatic-era architecture, its overall 'medievalness'. But



David & Thomas