

KOFOLA

Even better than the real thing?
Czechia

“To me, Kofola tastes like cola with mild herbal notes and a hint of spice,” says Veronika Polyakova from her perch at Bohemia House, a north London bar that serves Czech drinks and food.

Kofola is a survivor of the soft-power battles waged during the Cold War. In 1959, in a bid to find an alternative to Coca-Cola and Pepsi, the Czechoslovak Research Institute of Medicinal Plants in Prague developed a homegrown cola.

“Czechs’ love for Kofola is a blend of nostalgia and taste,” says Polyakova, assistant manager at Bohemia House, which serves Kofola on tap. The beverage is still sold across Czechia (and to the Czech diaspora) and is one of the few soft drinks that have withstood the encroachment of Western brands. As it didn’t try to imitate Coca-Cola too closely, it was able to compete when trade opened up after the fall of the Soviet Union. And since then the brand has prospered. “We have grown from a small Czech company into one of the largest producers of soft drinks in Central and Eastern Europe,” says Kofola Group CEO Jannis Samaras. The brand is now helping nearby countries nurture their own soft drinks. “In addition to the Czech Republic and Slovakia, we are developing traditional brands in Slovenia and Croatia,” says Samaras.

Back at Bohemia House, Polyakova pulls a pint of the deep brown, aromatic drink. “Czechs choose Kofola for its connection to their heritage and the sense of comfort it brings,” she says. — SZ



PRIVATE DOG PARKS
Barks and recreation
USA

In August 2023 the US Chamber of Commerce published an article on its website about the economic significance of the pet humanisation trend. “A growing number of Americans think of their dog or cat as a member of the family,” the article notes. Naturally, these pets need exercise, which requires space. While many public parks in the US have dog runs where they can be safely let off their leash, these taxpayer-funded amenities aren’t enough for an increasing number of dog owners.

The market has found a solution: private dog parks are expanding across the US. The most advanced are in large cities, where a scarcity of green space is combined with a concentration of high-income dog owners.

In New York, the bar for luxury dog runs is set by the Soho Grand Dog Park, part of

the Soho Grand Hotel in Lower Manhattan. “Each area has different ‘discovery moments’ for the dogs to engage and play,” says Briana Stanley, vice-president creative director at GrandLife Hotels. “There are big boulders to jump on, a dog bath to cool off in during summer, and circular benches to run around.”

The dog park was originally intended for hotel guests travelling with pets but was opened to residents due to popular demand. It can be enjoyed by non-guests for a \$1,700 (€1,600) annual fee.

Meanwhile, on the West Coast, DOG PPL bills itself as “Los Angeles’s first canine social club”. The park has specially engineered grass, obstacles and hydro play stations for the dogs, as well as sustainably sourced coffee and wellness shots for the humans. All this for \$120 (€113) a month, provided that all dogs are up to date on vaccinations and, dauntingly, can “pass a social”. — HRS

HOW TO MOVE A RIVER

Changing the channel
Canada

Snaking across Toronto’s once-industrial eastern skyline are the swooping silhouettes of four sleek new bridges. Designed by UK-based practices Entuitive, Grimshaw and Schlaich Bergermann Partner, and assembled in Nova Scotia on Canada’s Atlantic coast, they are, for the time being, the most visible fixtures of one of the largest urban-development projects in North America: the regeneration of Toronto’s port lands.

Once work is complete, the area will include 29 hectares of public parkland, 13 hectares of habitat for wildlife, new roads, bus routes and housing for up to 25,000 people. Its centrepiece will be the riverbed spanned by the new bridges. The area is currently dry but construction is nearing completion on one of the most ambitious renaturalisation projects ever undertaken in a city of Toronto’s size: the rerouting of the mouth of the Don river, one of the city’s major natural waterways.

“We’re taking the river from something that’s artificial and isn’t really functioning as a healthy ecological system, and putting it back, as close as we can, to its natural condition – to allow it to do what it naturally wants to do,” says Mira Shenker, director of communications and public engagement at Waterfront Toronto, the tri-government body that’s undertaking the redevelopment of the port lands.

The lower Don river, which runs south from Toronto’s network of ravines into Lake Ontario, was for decades the way that industries dotted along its banks – abattoirs, tanneries and distilleries – flushed away their waste. To that end, it was rerouted from its natural course to enhance its function as a channel for industrial effluent into the lake. By 1969 the river had become so polluted that some organisations declared it dead.

Decades later, Waterfront Toronto’s project is allowing populations of bald eagle and mink to return to stretches of the river’s renaturalised banks. Eventually residents will be able to boat, paddle and



fish in the water. “What has been created is a natural way for the river to move and to carry floodwater, and to stop it from running off into the surrounding neighbourhoods,” says Shenker.

Constructing natural flood protection infrastructure of such complexity has not been attempted before, she says, and other cities prone to harsh or unpredictable weather will closely watch what happens in 2024, when the river’s renaturalised course is flooded and the Don, once again, finds its flow. — TLE

PHOTOGRAPHER: TIMOTHY O’CONNELL. IMAGES: RYAN WALKER, VID INGELEVIC. ILLUSTRATOR: OCEANE MEKLEMBERG