

# Szarvas: 110% FUN!

This summer a group of Russian teenagers visited the world's largest international Jewish youth camp Szarvas in Hungary. 43 participants from Moscow and St. Petersburg spent 14 days having fun, building their Jewish identity, making connections with the peers from around the world.



Russian groups have been participating in Szarvas summer sessions for many years, but two years ago because of several reasons Russia's participation was suspended. In December 2011 three organizations: JDC Europe, ANO "ORT" and ANO "Thiya" on voluntary basis decided to rebirth the project for Russian groups which was done under the umbrella of ORT Russia and Moscow ORT school 1540.

According to the agreement of cooperation

- **ANO 'ORT'** took the responsibility for recruitment of the participants and the staff, creation and preparation of the educational team (madrichim), advertising the project in Russia, preparation of the camp program;
- **ANO "Thiya"** was in charge of the administrative part and all the logistics (transportation, visas, money transfer) and legal responsibility over the trip;
- **JDC Europe** paid the subsidized price of 600 USD/ person, while the other part of the full participation fee which is 1100 USD/ person was paid by the parents.

We decided to take up this project as we find it really essential: it gives a fantastic opportunity for Jewish teenagers to build their Jewish identity, to get vast Jewish knowledge and to feel a part of a huge international Jewish community, which is impossible to do in Russia. We definitely give our kids Jewish atmosphere and knowledge here in our Jewish schools but it

cannot be compared to living in a big Jewish international camp family, which shows how different we are, but how much we have in common.



We consider this pilot year to be a big success, as the session was highly evaluated by all the participants and we managed to achieve a number of our goals. We created a fantastic educational team of a unit head and 5 madrichim from teachers and graduates of Moscow and St. Petersburg ORT schools who did a fascinating job, working on voluntary basis. We had a group of 43 Jewish teenagers, some of whom observed their first Shabbat there in Szarvas, who now coming back from the camp started to teach their parents and teachers Shma and Birkat hamazon. We helped them to come closer to their roots and to enter some Youth Jewish organizations here in Russia. Being impressed by the camp and the atmosphere in the group some of the parents decided to move their kids to ORT school which for us is definitely a big reward and a symbol of trust. All of our chanichim are looking forward to coming back next year which makes us think about working harder and developing ourselves.

We see a lot of challenges for the future. We want to enlarge the number of the participants, find new non-affiliated children, take the kids from other regions (for instance, before economic crisis there was a big group from Kazan and Kaliningrad for whom now the camp is too expensive), find the support for the kids who cannot afford the trip. We think about building a stronger Madrichim team and realize the importance of starting a leadership and hadracha training course (which can be based upon the madrich training we are leading in our schools) for the current and future madrichim. And we realize that for most of the mentioned ambitions we will need to start fundraising. But Szarvas is surely worthy of it!

# About the camp and Summer 2011

The camp Szarvas was founded in 1990 primarily to serve campers from Eastern European countries. In the further years participants began arriving from around the world, including India, Turkey, Israel and the USA.

Now every summer, over 1000 Jewish campers from over 25 countries attend the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation AJJDC International Jewish Summer Camp in Szarvas, Hungary. Russian group is proud and happy to be back as a part of this big Jewish family.



The camp is nestled on the banks of a beautiful river in the peaceful resort town of Szarvas, Hungary. Modern recreational, housing and kosher dining facilities are set to give every possible opportunity for chanichim to meet, celebrate, explore and share experience.

The topic of this year "Take care" was devoted to practical Mizvot. Chanichim learned how to take care of the environment, deal with other people and treat themselves. Looking after plants and animals, avoiding Lashon haRa, respecting the parents, helping the poor – these showed the chanichim the possibilities of incorporating Jewish actions into their everyday lives. To achieve these ends we intended to introduce them to a number of aspects of Jewish life and to examine both the values and the way that they are expressed in practical terms.



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But life at the camp is not only education it's non-stop, brimming with singing, swimming, sports, dancing, eating, learning, drama, building, creating and international friendship. The main part of the Szarvas day is filled with various activities scheduled together with participants from the other countries. Three-four activity slots take place before lunch, and three take place after. An extravagant

camp-wide night activity rounds out each Szarvas day. An important part of Szarvas experience for Russian group was mifgashim (meetings with participants from the other countries) which combined ice-breakers, personal discussions, shared activities and plenty of socializing time. Mealtimes were a highlight of the day, with multi-lingual chants and cheers emanating from various tables around the communal dining hall.



Szarvas welcomes participants from all Jewish religious and cultural backgrounds, providing a supportive environment that makes everyone feel comfortable. The camp provides kosher food, prepared under full-time supervision, and is Shomer Shabbat. This year in the camp some of our participants experienced their first Shabbat, fasted on 17<sup>th</sup> of Tammuz, sang their first Birkat hamazon, found out what

Shma is. And we are happy to realize that now these kids bring Jewish life back to their families, schools, communities.

The program this year also included trips to beautiful historic Hungarian cities: 2-days tour of Jewish Budapest and a site-seeing day in Seged. We were pleased to have Shabbat dinner in Budapest JCC and to visit the Dohany Street Synagogue - the world's second largest synagogue and by far one of the most magnificent.



We strongly believe that Szarvas will become a big part and a strong resource of Jewish education and upbringing in Russian Jewish schools. We hope to come back to the camp next year and continue the never-ending Szarvas story!



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# Feedbacks

And the feedbacks of chanichim and madrichim speak for themselves:



At first, I want to thank all madrichim of Russian unit for their work Szarvas gave me a lot. At first I became more self-confident, sociable, I feel less shy. Secondly Szarvas made me feel like a Jew. This is great, that, basically, in the camp there are only Jews. This makes us a team, a team of 500 people. I learned more about the history of the Jewish people. Naturally, in the camp, I found a lot of friends from different countries, from Russia, America, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Now I can travel freely to them :) And this is great, that now I can meet my Szarvas friends at school, because now I'm studying at ORT school in Moscow. I like it very much :)

Also, I learned about the peculiarities of people from different countries. I never would have thought that the Americans are so friendly and kind. How many people say: "it is impossible to describe what Szarvas camp is, you just need to go there". I cannot describe the atmosphere in the dining room, where everyone reads the prayer or singing Israeli songs, it's just impossible. Also, I cannot describe the meeting of the Sabbath, when we read the prayer Leha Dodi in complete silence. It's great - all I can say about it. Now my big dream is next summer. Because everyone knows how to split the year: Winter, Spring, Szarvas, Autumn. I really want to go there again, because there's a great atmosphere and just good people.

WE LOVE SZARVAS, YES WE DO, WE LOVE SZARVAS, HOW ABOUT YOU?!

Olga Melikhova, ORT school 1540, Moscow



First of all I should say that Szarvas is the best camp in my life! I was in different countries at different ages with different counselors, but I got nothing comparing to satisfaction I've got in this Hungarian place. I go there not for the first time, to be precise - for the third. The first association I have with Szarvas is SUMMER! Now I can't imagine

my life without two-week vacation in Hungary. It is absolute freedom, it's not that there are no rules and we are allowed to do everything we want, it's absolute liberation and comfort during the whole travelling. Szarvas is a Jewish camp, thus we have to celebrate the holidays, pray, follow the rules, but all this happens in a very interesting and sometimes funny way. For me it's a great chance to be closer to my roots, my religion, to the Jewish world. In Moscow I have little chance to observe Shabbat, read Birkat hamazon after each meal and here in camp it's so easy and comfortable to do it, that you get used to it and try to continue doing it after the camp. Szarvas allows you an enormous number of various activities! Dancing, singing, madrich-times, swimming pool, art, Israeli corner, sport and a lot of other things! Everybody can find something for his taste, though it's very hard to emphasize one thing from this long list, especially because some of the activities take place together with chanichim from the other countries, which makes them more interesting and useful! One of the advantages of the camp is projects. This year I participated in the project "drums" and first I thought that we are going to play the drums but when I found out that we are going to play the tomtoms I wasn't sad at all, because I've never done it before. For the first time I learned the notes, cycles, rhythm that are used while playing. It was amazing! «Dum-tak-tak-dum-dum-tak» - said the best teacher - Boaz on our classes. I canoed for the first time, rode the horses, took shower in a common shower singing Kalinka-Malinka. The camp is international which gives fantastic opportunity for developing and practicing English (and by the way not only English but also Hebrew, Estonian, Turkish and many other languages!) But if you want to speak native Russian you also don't have problems with it.

But the most important thing is our beloved madrichim! Each one of them is worthy of special respect. Because they teach us to love the Jewish culture, attracting us by different stories, parables and games. They are our advisors and friends.

I can write about and describe each detail in Szarvas for a long time but I won't have enough words. So I just want to thank madrichim and everybody for my fantastically spent time! Whatever is said – Szarvas is the best Jewish camp for teenagers from all over the world.

Anna Orlova, Educational Centre 218, Moscow



Szarvas... A magic word "Szarvas" became a password for many Jewish kids and teenagers not only from Russia but from other countries as well. My daughter has been a participant of summer sessions in a Jewish camp Szarvas for several times. And each time coming back to Moscow she talks about the trip with fascination and sadness. I can say for sure that the camp begins already in the train "Moscow - Chop". Communication with friends and acquaintances with new children help to take a many-hours train trip easily. And each time the camp meets its old and new friends with happiness.

Camp program is very many-sided and various. A large number of various activities help children to find their friends, enlarge their knowledge in Jewish history and tradition, take up a new creative activity, improve their English, try new sport activities.

One of the peculiarities of the camp – a very good team of counselors! They are well-educated, have a vast number of ideas and positive thoughts. Good atmosphere and mutual understanding in the camp depend a lot upon them and their work.

I hope that my daughter and many other Jewish children many more times will have an opportunity to feel the unique atmosphere of this amazing camp.

**SZARVAS CAMP FOR EVER IN OUR HEARTS!**

Alla Aleksandrovna Floyer, Anna Orlova's mother

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Szarvas gives me a huge source of energy enough for the whole year. New acquaintances and emotions. In Szarvas I always have an opportunity to practice my English and it's a very good experience. Szarvas gives me new knowledge not only about Jewish life but about the world in general (for example, our topic this year was Take care). Of course, dancing, singing, cheers in the dining hall, peulot, madrich time, swimming-pool, sport and really EVERYTHING are my favourite moments in Szarvas. And because of all these things I want to come back there, it is like my second "summer home".

How can I describe our "New Russian Szarvas?" This year was much better than the previous one (2009). Our group became friendlier and crazier. Everything had a better organization. All the madrichim were great, experienced, cool. And, I don't know, everything was better. In Budapest we lived in a good hotel, and it is also a big plus.

*Aleksandra Shwartsman, ORT school 1311, Moscow*



Camp Szarvas gave me a lot. In addition to well spent time I opened a lot in myself. I overcame my shyness, opened some talents in myself. I got some experience for my everyday life and the "madrich experience" important for me because I attend madrich training course. I somehow changed my understanding of the world. The sign on the t-shirt was made in a very correct way "Winter. Spring. Szarvas. Autumn." Szarvas is like a small life. I was never bored in the camp. I always got bright impressions. I got acquainted with many people from different countries. It was my first Szarvas and on my way I didn't know what and how would gonna happen and I was a bit embarrassed, but already on the first evening the camp justified my expectations. Next time I won't lose a minute.

*Dmitriy Masyouto, ORT school 1540, Moscow*

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*It was my first time in this great place – The Szarvas Camp. In the beginning I thought that there would not be enough free time to communicate with people from foreign countries. But it was ok because in each part of the program we could get acquainted with them. In The Szarvas I met lots of new friends and practiced my English (like my mother wanted).*

*Elena Desyatova, Gymnasium 73, Saint Petersburg*



*What made this year in Szarvas so memorable for me? I think everything. This summer I got acquainted with very interesting people from all over the world. It turns out that I have already been invited to another country! And it so great and amazing! Now I can communicate with native speakers and improve my English. I've learnt a lot about Jewish traditions. It is essential for me as we don't keep traditions in my family. Thanks to Szarvas I try not to waste water, watch my words, and it will help me in my future job. I started to spend more time with my mother and the family in general. I realized all this from this year's topic "Take care!". I liked very much the game style in which all the information was given, there were no boring lectures we are tired of. Our madrichim were extremely kind. We were often late, not much, but late. And they were tolerant to that, but probably were sad. But I know for sure that they were not indifferent towards us and the knowledge that we managed to get. This year even Shabbat was different, it was more emotional. I remember everything, each tiny detail. We were so worried about the photocameras, as we wanted to observe Shabbat. Remember how we didn't have time to write down the wishes on the balloons. And it was a bit sad.*

*I think Szarvas is a place where I would go without any double thoughts. If I was asked "Will you go to Szarvas?" – I'll answer without any hesitation "Yes!"*

*Szarvas 2011 was calmer. All the participants were balanced and very interesting. Each in his/her own way. I haven't been to camp for 2 years and a lot has changed. I can't describe it with the words what exactly but I feel it. Everything has become much better. The atmosphere is unbelievably positive. Sasha, our director is an incredibly kind and cordial person. I've never met anybody like him. He even*

allowed me to paint the wall in one of the rooms and I will do it next year if of course I will be included in the group.

Russian group was fantastic. I hope we'll come back to the camp next year and only to one session, yeah! I think that Szarvas is what really changes people. For the better, surely :)

*Victoria Orlova, pedagogical college, village Tomilino, Moscow region*



Szarvas has a very kind atmosphere. All the information is presented in a very interesting way, the program is very rich, and you learn a lot of things. I found a lot of friends there both from Russia and abroad.

Most of all I liked our walk to the river after Havdala. I celebrated Shabbat in such a festive way for the first time and I liked it a lot. I also enjoyed canoeing.

I would love to come back to Szarvas as it's very interesting there and it's a lot of fun, everybody is friendly and you can expect help and support from anyone, in the camp you can express yourself in a creative way and meet a lot of interesting and gifted people.

*Masha Ryabtseva, Gymnasium 171, S.-Petersburg*



I really liked the camp. Szarvas camp is great, I found new friends and met old ones. It was a good theme of the camp, we learned it a lot more about mitzvot. Activities, games, programs were fine. Of course medrichim and unit leaders helped with their work. I very much like to go next year.))

*Misha Peaseman, ORT school 1540, Moscow*

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Szarvas is an unforgettable camp! Here you really relax and always find a lot of new friends. Fascinating activities for any taste: dancing, singing, art and a lot, a lot more. It's never boring there as you are always busy with something interesting. Every day I was waiting for Madrich time and Peula as during these activities we socialized with our madrichim on very interesting topics. The camp is international and it's its big advantage. Children from different countries relax there but we all are like a big family. And that is why I like Szarvas. I've already been in Szarvas for 4 times and each time I had some new experience. I want to come back there next year very much in order to learn more fascinating things, get acquainted with interesting people and relax in a proper way!

Yuliya Bauman, ORT school 1311, Moscow



Szarvas - the word that contains tons of emotions and experiences. And of course only positive ones. Personally mine are only positive. This camp, madrichim, absolutely everything spread out warmth, kindness and fantastic mood that cannot be spoiled by anything. I just remember Szarvas and a smile appears on my face. It seems impossible to express with the words the experience we had in the camp. To understand it you have to go there. Szarvas is not only good people but also amazing activities: peulot connected with the topic of the day which are never boring, games, sport, swimming pool, dancing...

Szarvas is endless communication not only with the people from your native country but also with the guys from other countries. It is very interesting to learn how people live abroad, which habits they have, what they enjoy. Because they are different. And also it's a good day to practice English :) For sure, those who have been in Szarvas will recommend you to go there, and I am one of these people.

Sonya Dryashina, School 1475, Moscow



I liked Szarvas very much and I want to come back there again, although I am not sure it will be possible.

Among all the activities best of all I enjoyed madrich times and peulot and next year I would love to come to the second session very much.

After szarvas I went to another Jewish camp in Lithuania, and comparing to Szarvas everything was different. And only in this camp I realized how much I liked everything in

Szarvas: the tastiest kosher food, because of which I gained 5 kilo, Birkat hamazon, the longest Shabbat ceremony, all the Jewish songs and dances, all the people including foreigners, all the things without which I can't imagine Szarvas.

Margarita Ayrumyan, School 734, Moscow



*Szarvas gave me a lot. To begin with, it gave me a lot of friends who gave me their smiles every day in Szarvas! I also can't but mention Jewish traditions and observing Shabbat – it was unforgettable! Madrichim, writheads and the camp director are amazing people. They constantly entertained and amused us, and taught us new but interesting things. Szarvas has the atmosphere of mutual understanding, fun and kindness! Plenty of interesting activities, swimming pool, football, basketball and a lot more! Everybody who was in Szarvas dream of returning there. And I am looking forward to going to Szarvas next summer!*

Lia Kharitonova, ORT school 1311, Moscow



Hi☺ This year I went to Szarvas as a madricha of Russian Golan. I've never been in Szarvas as a chanicha, so it was my first time at all and... it was great! I've been in camps before, but this one was so different. First of all, because it was an international camp. It gave me so much communicational opportunities, new people and also pre-camp helped a lot. It's important to mention, that while pre-camp I felt as I was a chanich, because we had so many lectures, activities etc. And it was cool, because I found out lots of new things☺ What about the session, even with the bad weather it was perfect) I enjoyed my group and working team, at the end of the camp we became very close. I think that one of the best activities at the

session were Unit evenings and Mifgash meetings. Both madrichim and chanichim liked it) Szarvas was the best part of my summer! And I hope that I'll be back next year!!!!☺ Misss u!

*Inna Menkina, madricha, Moscow*



I've been at Szarvas twice as a chanich 2 and 3 years ago. It was a good experience to work as a madrich, I looked on Szarvas, not only as on summer vacation and rest, but as on work with nice and interesting people. This year I chummed up with other madrichim, who worked in Szarvas when I was a chanich.

The theme of year, named Take care was very good and useful, because after the camp has ended, I figured out that guys from Russian group took some information close to heart. Also I learned a lot about kosher meal and ways how to make it kosher or check it. It was useful for me, because I keep kosher style.

I love Szarvas, people there and for sure will come back:)

*Ilia Tarbeev, madrich*



Szarvas is undoubtedly a unique place. A place where madrichim give birth to creative ideas, and love to their culture is born in kid's souls and minds. Having a big experience of work in various Jewish organizations in Russia I can say with 100% confidence that there are no analogues to Szarvas. And there are many reasons for that – firstly, I'd like to mention high level of the preparation of the camp theme!

Detailed developed program helps madrichim to prepare peulot on high level!

The second difference of Szarvas program from Russian camps lies in the combination of American idea of harmonic personal development and the idea of intellectual development of kids, so important for Europe Jewish community.

The third and probably the most essential distinction of Szarvas is its multicultural which allows to create the things that won't be created within one country. Acquaintance with the other world – the culture of the other country, language practice, enlarging the number of international Jewish contacts – these are the obvious things that children get from the international camp.

The last but not the least and probably the most important is the enthusiasm and readiness of the whole staff – madrichim, unitheads and central staff – to show, tell give the kids maximum knowledge about the culture which was lost by their parents in Russia. I should say that I've never seen a secular camp that is more Jewish! And it's an inexpressible feeling when you help your chanichim to understand how to meet and observe their first Shabbat.

*Vasily (Maxx) Bardadymov, madrich, Moscow*

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