

HUJ

NEW INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEERS OF HUJ PROMISE TO COME BACK AGAIN.
THE EXPERIENCES ONES CLAIM THEY WERE PART OF THE BEST CAMPS

The article is published by “Azg” newspaper on 30/08/2024

HUJ Work Camps in Armenia: A Summer of Lasting Memories and Cultural Exchange

This past summer, an extraordinary gathering of international volunteers came together at the Voluntary Service of Armenia (HUJ) work camps. Representing a global mix from the Czech Republic, Serbia, Mexico, France, Spain, Estonia, Germany, and Hong Kong, they embarked on a two-week journey of cultural exchange, hard work, and friendship that would leave a lasting impact on both the participants and the local communities. The group's story, as captured in the "AZG" newspaper, reflects the spirit of connection and shared purpose that characterizes the HUJ's mission in Armenia.

These camps, part of the HUJ's broader mission to foster understanding through service, invited volunteers to engage in community projects, learn about Armenian heritage, and build friendships that transcended language barriers. For many, the experience left a profound impact, inspiring a strong desire to return to Armenia in the future. Both newcomers and seasoned volunteers praised the opportunity to immerse themselves in Armenia's unique culture while contributing to meaningful projects that served the local community.

A Diverse Group with a Shared Purpose

From the moment they arrived, volunteers were struck by Armenia's rich tapestry of history and its people's warmth. Each volunteer brought their unique background, perspectives, and skills to the table, and this diversity quickly became a source of strength. Their common purpose was to contribute to the Armenian community, but each person brought a unique outlook shaped by their own cultural experiences. This diversity fostered deep discussions, insights, and a shared sense of purpose.

For volunteer Kristýna from the Czech Republic, the camp provided a unique window into the Armenian way of life, especially through the warm hospitality she encountered at every turn. "People here don't hesitate to invite you into their homes and offer you food, tea, and conversation," she shared. Her Serbian friend, Nikola, agreed, adding, "I've been to other work camps before, but Armenia is different—the connections feel deeper, the history feels older, and the people's passion for their culture is contagious."

Building Bridges Through Shared Projects

Throughout their stay, the volunteers engaged in various projects focused on environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community development. The manual work involved ranged from cleaning up public spaces and renovating community centers to participating in events aimed at promoting Armenian culture and history. Each task brought its own set of challenges, but overcoming them together created a strong bond among the volunteers. Every project completed represented not just an improvement for the local community, but also a collective achievement for the group.

For Marie from France, the physical labor was both exhausting and fulfilling. "We weren't just cleaning up or painting walls," she said. "We were building memories, learning patience, and discovering a sense of teamwork that felt like family. Knowing that our work would have a lasting impact on the community gave every task added significance."

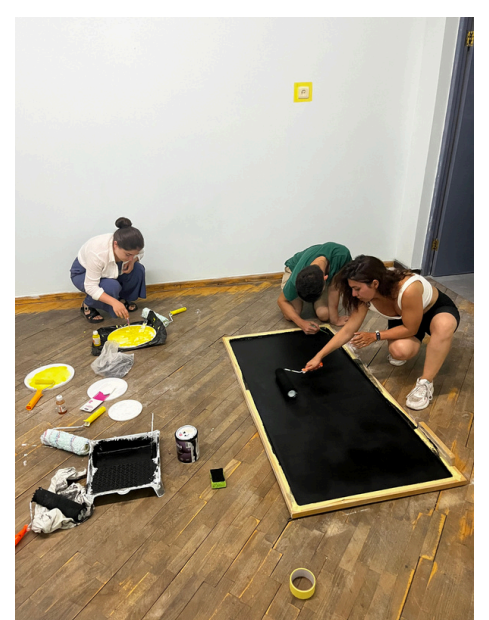
Meanwhile, Carlos from Mexico reflected on the environmental work they did, noting how deeply rooted Armenians' respect for nature and the land is. "I was impressed by the emphasis on preserving natural resources," he commented. "Through our work, I came to see how connected people here are to the landscape, and it made me more aware of how I approach nature in my own country."

Discovering Armenia's Heritage

Part of the HUJ experience included excursions to historic sites and cultural landmarks, where volunteers had the opportunity to explore Armenia's ancient history and rich traditions. Visits to places like the Garni Temple, Geghard Monastery, and Lake Sevan were among the highlights, giving volunteers a deeper appreciation of Armenia's place in world history.

Angela from Hong Kong found these trips deeply inspiring. "There's a feeling of spirituality that's difficult to put into words," she reflected. "Walking through these ancient sites, you realize that Armenia has a story going back thousands of years, and we're just a small part of it. It's humbling and awe-inspiring."

Similarly, Estonian volunteer Kai found herself drawn to Armenia's folk traditions and music, which she described as "hauntingly beautiful and full of emotion." She shared how a local woman taught her to bake lavash, Armenia's traditional flatbread. "It wasn't just about learning a recipe—it was about connecting with the past, feeling part of a long tradition, and appreciating the way Armenian culture has preserved its heritage over centuries."



Lifelong Friendships and Cultural Exchange

Despite their different backgrounds, the volunteers quickly bonded over shared experiences, late-night conversations, and even language barriers, which they overcame through gestures, laughter, and patience. The international environment created by the camp led to unique exchanges, with volunteers learning from each other's languages, customs, and perspectives. Sofia from Spain spoke about the joy of learning bits of Armenian alongside her fellow volunteers. "Every day, we'd pick up a new word, learn a phrase, or share something from our own language," she said. "It was beautiful to see people from such different places laughing together, helping each other, and supporting one another."

The experience of living together, cooking meals, and sharing stories from their lives was one that none of the volunteers would forget. Newcomers and seasoned volunteers alike found common ground, and each individual's unique background contributed to a mosaic of cultural exchange.

The HUJ Spirit: A Commitment to Return

For many, this summer's camp was just the beginning of a long-lasting relationship with Armenia and HUJ. Some of the seasoned volunteers described how they'd already been part of HUJ camps in the past and were thrilled to return. The sense of community and purpose found in these camps is a rare experience that keeps them coming back year after year.

Experienced HUJ volunteer Lukas from Germany explained, "I've been to other camps across Europe, but there's something different about Armenia. Every time I come back, I feel a stronger connection to the people and the culture here." Newcomers like Sofia echoed this sentiment, expressing their eagerness to return next year and continue the relationships and projects they started.

A Journey of Cultural Discovery and Personal Growth

The HUJ's summer work camps go beyond volunteering—they represent an opportunity for personal growth, cultural discovery, and community building. Through these two weeks, each volunteer not only contributes to the local Armenian community but also gains insights and memories that will last a lifetime. The camps foster understanding and empathy across cultures, leaving an indelible mark on both the participants and the communities they serve.

As the volunteers prepare to depart, many find it hard to say goodbye. For most, Armenia has become a second home, and HUJ a second family. Reflecting on their experiences, many of the volunteers shared a common wish: to return to Armenia again someday. Their time in Armenia was more than just a camp; it was a journey of the heart, one that bridged cultures and left each person changed for the better.

This article captures the impact of the HUJ work camps and the stories of the volunteers, whose experiences speak to the enduring power of cultural exchange and service.

