

Memories from Zánka

Zánka, the Hungarian pioneer city, is surrounded by mountains at the entrance of two valleys in the Balaton uplands. On arriving at the camp you may see the impressive tower of the central building even from far off.

The train station. On the first day of the international vacation program, the trains bring flocks of vivacious children. They may not even know the story of the construction of Zánka, which abounds in interesting details. Let's recollect how the pioneer city was born...

After laying the cornerstone in 1969, the surroundings first had to be "tamed." The marsh was drained, the wild ducks were "asked to move", and the Csorsza river was diverted into a new channel. Thus a beach could be constructed in 1970, with a harbor that can receive the biggest boats on lake Balaton.

Pedestrian and motor traffic is completely separated in the 11-kilometer road network of the pioneer city. When the vehicle overpass was built, all danger from traffic was averted. The children are safe.

The first "settlers" of Zánka came in July of 1971. Little did they know how beautiful the completed city would be with its: cultural center, sports stadium, Museum of the Pioneer Movement, and Gallery of Children's Works. The fan-shaped main square.

Hoisting the flag. Life is eventful here in the summer and in the winter as well. Since 1972 Zánka has been training troop leaders, combined with school instruction. When children return after a month, they take home their excellent marks earned in Zánka.

Morning starts with exercise and games. There is ample opportunity to engage in sports, chase the ball, play a chess game with the giant figures on the outdoor chess board, as well as to stroll amongst the many interesting objects of the exhibition about military technology.

There's a shopping mall, a library, a post office and a hair stylist – just like in any "grown-up" city. The life of the pioneer city takes place in stone buildings equipped with all the modern comforts, on concrete-paved streets, and in well maintained parks.

But sometimes one craves the rustic and the romantic... The dwellers of the pioneer city put up a tent, cook in the open air, sometimes go on hikes for several days in order to become acquainted with the surroundings.

Of course, there are plenty of interesting things to see in the pioneer city as well. for example, here is a replica of the 12th armored train from the 1919 Hungarian Communist Republic. The original took part in fierce battles and exciting expeditions.

Art lovers take pleasure in viewing the sculptures and statues displayed next to the main square. The open-air exhibition features the most famous Hungarian sculptors.

Life is eventful and enjoyable in all parts of Zánka. But going to the beach is what makes the children happiest. Boats and water cycles are waiting for them at the shore, and those who take to the water must wear a life vest, even if they can swim!

The sail boats of the pioneer city are always out on the Balaton's water, since gliding along with the wind is the most delightful occupation! The only event which is better than sailing is the Neptune festival, and cruising together with the camp residents.

Zánka does not only belong to Hungarian children: every summer pioneers from all over the world come for the international camping program. They are diplomats of peace and friendship. Although sometimes the hubbub is reminiscent of the chaos in Babel, the children always immediately understand one another through the common language of smiles, music and dance.

The world gathering in 1979, the international children's year, was especially important: forty-four delegations from thirty-four countries arrived in Zánka after wonderful days spent in Csilleberc.

During those weeks our country was the capital of the children's world. The children sang together the anthem of the convention: "The song is the same in all languages, come and join the feast, we don't need more war, what we need is peace..."

Friendships are woven between guests and hosts. Foreign children don't go straight home from Zánka: they spend a few days with Hungarian families all over the country.

The drawing contest is always a big event in the international camping program. Children paint on the pavement, on paper, the walls of buildings – with great zeal and enthusiasm. They often choose peace, international cooperation and friendship for their topics.

The posters formulate the common hopes of the world in the children's language of imagination. They suggest: we need sunshine, peace, games and joy! Bombs, war, squalor, starving and violence should never cast their shadows on the world!

Participants from the meeting march to the peace assembly holding signs and drawings that they have made. They are shaken as they watch the film about Vietnam, and they are horrified as they listen to their Chilean peer speak in faltering voice about the monstrosities he has experienced.

CIMEA Viki, a puppet symbolizing the children of the world, is a beloved friend of children participating in the international camp program. Viki “lives” in the head office of DIVSZ (The World Association of Democratic Youth), but he always appears where the children’s cause is championed.

Then guitars are tuned up, songs resound as child-delegates from Europe, Asia, Africa and South America sing together.

Contests of skills always take place amidst great laughter. How can you march on two wobbling planks together, to the same rhythm? There’s also a sack race, pie-eating and balloon-shaving... who could possibly list all the games? And who wins? Everyone who participates.

Excitement peaks in the sports stadium during a competition or a spectacular show. Sometimes even “special presentations” take place: this South American boy, for example, demonstrated how a sports fan in his country cheers his favorite team.

Of course the others don’t need too much encouragement to cheer or yell from their seats. This is how enthusiastic the children are when they watch the show routines of the airplane circling above the sports stadium, or when the parachutes land precisely on target on the green lawn.

Let’s trade badges or scarves! Write your address on my tee shirt, then I surely won’t lose it, you see, I already have a bunch of them written on it! What’s your name? My name is... You’ll write me, won’t you? And we’ll send each other stamps, stickers, and postcards. And please give my address to others, too!

Blonde and brunette. Curly and straight-haired. A boy and a girl. Freckled and bespectacled. Small and tall. Brown skinned and pale. Plump and skinny. Children. Good friends looking for each other’s hands.

Even the most wonderful camping trip ends eventually, and it’s time to say goodbye. Parting is sad, but the beautiful memories will stay with them.

The end

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