

Kazakhstan Collegiate Mission Trip 2005

This is the trip summary of the NACC Collegiate Ministry's Kazakhstan Mission Trip. This summary was written by those who embarked on this mission, and each person was assigned a specific day or two to write about. Because of the different people who wrote a summary, the flavor and writing style may shift a bit, but nevertheless, it will still be enjoyable, so enjoy!

Monday-Saturday, June 27-July 2, 2005- Mark Miller

Our trip started out like every other, chaotic. Parents showing up, still packing supplies, making sure we're not leaving too late, saying goodbye to moms and dads, praying, laughing, and already enjoying ourselves. What a great team we had. This year, I was taking a group of ladies with me on our trip to Kazakhstan: Jamie Alongi, Toria Shelnett, Amanda Howard and Lauren Gosnell. Now let me just tell you up front, I was really concerned about the heightened level of estrogen and the possible problems it might bring on this world traveling mission trip.

After we all got packed up, we had a prayer and then Sarah Pinson took us to the Atlanta airport. We met up with the Greens cousin, Becca, took some pictures, made our final goodbye calls to friends and family, and boarded our plane. Our trip to Frankfurt was average. We played games, slept and read on our flight. Arriving very early on Tuesday morning and taking advantage of every opportunity, we took our 6-hour layover and booked it to downtown Frankfurt. We ate breakfast at a local bakery and walked around the town for a couple of hours. We found a river and hung out there in a park for a while, eventually getting bored. Wanting to be responsible, we headed back to the airport, boarded our plane to KZ and slept the whole way there.

We arrived in Almaty, Kazakhstan around 11:30 p.m. on Tuesday night. The Greens were there to pick us up, along with the North Atlanta interns, Aaron McLaughlin and DJ Wells. It was so good to see those guys, plus they helped balance out the estrogen. All our luggage arrived safely and we headed to our KZ home at the Greens house. Of course at this time, we've been traveling for more than 30 hours so we look like death sucking on a cracker. We perked up when we saw everybody (Crystal, Amber, Austin, Randy, Sandra, Carrie, Caitlin, Meesha, Aaron and DJ), but soon crashed right afterwards for a rough night sleep. For the record, it's always amazing how your body tries to cope with the time change. Sleeping in KZ, it's 10 hours ahead of your normal schedule. For instance, we went to bed around 1:30 am in KZ, but that's like 11:30 am the day before for us, so I'm ready for bed, but my bodies telling me it's time for lunch. What in the world? Oh well, you move on and deal with it.

Wednesday, the 29th, our bodies woke us up at about 6am. I could just spit I was so tired. Today, we went to get camp supplies. The best and cheapest place in Kazakhstan to do that was this place called Bearhoka. This place resembles a large outdoor flea market kind of a feel, but it just goes on and on and on. It was nuts, but so much fun. We got our supplies, and then went to the Vroomans (the other American missionary team) and had a great dinner over there. We also celebrated DJ Wells' birthday and had some cake and sweets. We gave him a Kazakhstan T-shirt, which is so cool. That was a fun night of just hanging out and enjoying the company of everyone.

Thursday, the 30th of June, we went to the church and had a staff meeting and made sure we were all on the same page regarding camp. We had some of the Lighthouse kids help us with our crafts, and then headed over to Meesha's house (he's one of the Russian missionaries) and celebrated their daughter's birthday with their family and friends. It was so much fun. We had some Russian cake and we gave her presents. Realizing the night was still young, we went back to the area around the church and saw "War of the Worlds" at a Russian Movie Theatre. It was so fun. We couldn't really understand what they were saying, except when they yelled, but the movie was primarily visual, so we could pretty much keep up with what was going on. I mean honestly, Aliens killing people translates in any language right? It was way fun and such a cool cultural experience. After the movie, our night pretty much slid into home, so we went to bed to catch as many zzz's before the Senior Mission trip from North Atlanta arrived on Friday.

Friday, we picked up the house, and me and my girls prepped for camp and finalized our lessons for what we were teaching. We finished up some crafts, and had a nice dinner at home. The Seniors from North Atlanta arrived safely that night, and the girls stayed back while Randy and I went to pick them up from the airport. It was so good to see them. After a few shared stories and a group prayer, we packed up a rented bus and sent everyone to their corners for the night.

Let me just tell you that we still haven't seen the majority of the teens yet. I mean, we've seen a few around the church building, but we missed the teen Tuesday night Bible study and church was a day away still, so we're going through withdrawals of our Kazakh and Russian teens. Well Saturday proved to be a good day, because we just played all day. We went to a place close to the church called Gorky Park, which is like a scaled down version of Six Flags. I mean really scaled down, like 2 rides and a fountain. We canoed on the lake, hung out, soaked up some sun, took pictures, connected, reconnected, and shared the bond of being believers in God's kingdom. Saturday was so much fun. It was exhausting being outside all day, but so much fun. That

night, Austin, Randy and I, went to pick up the last of the Americans coming over to KZ from the states. Brad Chitty arrived safely, but went straight to bed. We made fun of him for being a wimp from the jet lag, totally realizing that we went through the same thing 4 days earlier, but nevertheless, he still deserved it. Apparently he took the verbal abuse pretty well because he fell asleep in about 5 minutes. Nice job Brad. So now, all the Americans are safe and sound in Almaty, Kazakhstan: Jamie, Toria, Amanda and Lauren from my group, the North Atlanta interns, Aaron, DJ and Brad, and the Senior group and their chaperones. This was going to be a great trip, and guess what? That whole estrogen concern of mine, not even remotely a problem. Nice job ladies, nice job!

Sunday, July 3, 2005- Jamie Alongi

Today we all got up and went to church. This is the first time we got to see most all of the Kazakh teenagers, so we spent a long time socializing and catching up with as many people as we could before the service started. Ken Snell taught the sermon, and he did a wonderful job. Even though there was of course no air conditioning and there were only several oscillating fans, the worship was still intense and joyful, with people swaying, dancing, jumping, and clapping. After the service, Amber and Crystal Green performed their concert, to which a few people who hadn't come to church before came, including the shopkeeper from down the street, to whom Crystal and Amber have been evangelizing for a long time with no positive outcome. The concert went over well, and many people were singing along with the words on the screen.

After the concert, the seniors and a bunch of the Kazakh teens went shopping at the Tzoom, which is a KZ version of our mall. We girls and Mark decided to head back to the Green's house to put the finishing details on some of our camp responsibilities, such as the Jew/Gentile wristbands, the crowns for Heaven Day, and an outline of each of the days we were responsible for at camp (Apostle Day [Tuesday] and Heaven Day [Friday]). The rest of the day was spent packing and getting things ready for camp!

Monday, July 4, 2005- Jamie Alongi

We woke up pretty early this morning to get our luggage out to the charter buses by the Green's house. We then went to the church to pack up all the canteen food and snacks and other supplies for camp. We recreated the somewhat infamous assembly line in getting all the supplies on the buses from the church closet. For some reason the line didn't go quite as smoothly as it did last year, but all the packing eventually got done and everything miraculously fit onto the two buses. With that, we all got on the buses and left.

The drive up to camp is about 2 hours or so, and most people spent this time sleeping due to the early morning wakeup. When we arrived, we hauled our stuff up about two flights of stairs just to get to the hotel where we were staying, and then up two more inside the actual hotel. When I say "we", I actually mean that mostly Kazakh boys were carrying our stuff, and the girls were following their suitcases and their suitcases' carrier, not exactly knowing what to do. Chivalry is not dead, apparently!

After room assignments had been figured out, we all met in the Zal (the auditorium/meeting place of the campground) and went over basic rules of camp, and received a booklet outlining the timeline of each day. This day's theme was the Tribes of Israel. All of the girls, Mark, and the interns from North Atlanta headed up a tribe and wore a different color sash. Everyone was split up into our tribes and then given a walking stick. We then started the climb up The Mountain. I capitalized it because, 1) I'm aware of no other name for it, and 2) it is one of the most excruciating and physically exhaustive hikes I've participated in. I've been told it's worth it though (last year I got sick before we reached the top and had to turn around) – there's a beautiful lake at the top of the mountain surrounded by wildflowers. It really is gorgeous (I've seen pictures!). This year, though, we decided to have our lunch of some sort of sausage sandwich, cucumber, tomato, and carbonated water at a midway point up the mountain. We found a pretty decent spot near a farmer's garden. Cows and horses both moseyed by during our lesson time. Each tribe paired up with another tribe and we went around to different stations, learning about different aspects of Judaism, such as sacrifices (complete with burn-it-yourself lamb meat) and the Torah. After about 15 minutes at each station, most went back down to camp, while an adventurous few trekked all the way up the mountain and swam in the lake.

The rest of us had a few hours of rest and relaxation before dinner at 6, and we used this time to shower and rest. After dinner, we all met in the Zal again to pray with our tribal groups. We then had a lesson, taught by Steve Vrooman, as a Jewish high priest. (Randy Green also made an appearance as Moses.) After that, a cross was brought out, and we were all told to write our sins down on an index card and nail them to the cross. After everyone was finished, we had praise & worship, and then it was Kazakh night, an opportunity for the Kazakhs to impress us with cultural dances and make fun of us by making us eat really gross food. First came the dances, complete with intricate costumes and handkerchiefs and fun music. Of course, everyone had to join in the dance after a few minutes. Then we all went downstairs into the cafeteria for a buffet of Kazakh gourmet, ranging from the gross (horse meat and horse milk) to the not so bad (some sort of gummy candy and their version of Rice Krispie Treats). Since us girls had already had the "pleasure" of trying horse meat and horse milk, we were luckily exempt from having to try some again. The seniors were not so lucky, they had to be

initiated. After we were dismissed to go to bed, the college kids decorated the Zal to look like a marketplace in Jerusalem – fabric covering the windows and the stage, etc. We did a nice job with what we had to work with.

Tuesday, July 5, 2005- Jamie Alongi

Today the college kids started a morning Bible study of Acts 9-14 with Mark. We had several questions to answer and sections to read and then discussed them. These Bible studies were amazingly insightful and such a good way to start each day. It was so good to know that other people went through the same things you did while you were away at school, that it wasn't only you who felt weird without a youth group or something along those lines. After discussion, we'd pray for the day, us and our Kazakh friends.

After the Bible study, we started Apostle Day by splitting up Jews and Gentiles. We had given each person a red or blue sash the previous night and told them to wear these sashes to breakfast the next morning. We wanted to demonstrate the tension between the groups at the very early stages of the church. Aaron McLaughlin, DJ Wells, and Brad Chitty each donned a guard outfit and acted as enforcers throughout the day, letting Jews get privileges inside the church and whatnot. These privileges started at breakfast. Only those with blue wristbands were allowed into breakfast right when they got there. Only when nearly every Jew had arrived and been seated for breakfast could the Gentiles eat.

After breakfast, we met in the Zal for some worship time, letting the Jews sit in the front and making the Gentiles sit in the back. The Jews were told to be very respectful throughout worship and to hold back from clapping and dancing around, which was very hard for most everyone to do. The Gentiles were allowed to be as crazy and loud during worship as they wanted. After worship, we split the two groups up. Lauren Gosnell and I (Jamie Alongi) were the leaders of the Jews, and Amanda Howard and Toria were leaders of the Gentiles. All four of us were dressed in appropriate attire, which was fun of course. We then went over the general "identities" of the Jews, while the Gentiles were going over the same thing. We told them how Jews were treated, how they were educated, etc. We then told them that they weren't allowed to talk to someone in the Gentile group all day. This was, of course, pretty impossible, but most people tried to abide by it anyway, which impressed me. After canteen snacks were passed out (Jews first, of course), we all went down to get our lunches and walked down to the river just outside of camp. While there, we had a Jewish meeting, basically asking what they thought about the exercise so far and how the tension between the Jews and the Gentiles might have affected the first century church, etc. We then walked back up to camp for free time, where Lauren, Toria, Amanda, Mark, and I all set up for our big Communion that night.

After dinner, which was segregated Jew/Gentile again, the Kazakhs and seniors had prayer time with Randy and Sandra outside. When prayer time was finished, we all went back outside to a grill and burned our Jew/Gentile sashes, our "identities" of the day. Then everyone received a white shirt with the Ichthys, symbolizing our unity in Christ. We college kids and interns went inside to prepare for communion while the Kazakhs and seniors outside were lined up Gentile, Jew, Gentile, Jew, and so on, so that when they sat down in groups for communion, the theme of unity would be emphasized. The college girls and the interns were leaders of the communion, and we all sat around on fabric rugs, each with a plate of communion bread, grape juice, and a washbasin for hand washing. Mark explained to everyone what communion meant to the first century church, and what it meant to be truly unified and "one" in Christ. Then each group leader prayed for the bread and then the wine. It was a very touching moment, and I think everyone learned from it.

After that, it was time for American night. We watched a slide show we'd put together comparing the media's portrayal of American life with reality, which included pictures of all the American teens hanging out and our worship service and college class and etc. Then we watched a step routine performed by the senior girls, followed by an introduction to the song, "The Cha-Cha Slide" which everyone participated in. It was a blast. Finally it was time for the Smores. After several (gross) marshmallow eating contests and probably too many Smores, we called it quits and headed for bed.

Wednesday, July 6, 2005- Amanda Howard

Today was our third day at camp which was "Present Day." It is amazing to look back and see how God had planned the lessons for this day to prepare the teens of Kazakhstan for the law recently passed. That law in its simplest form basically hinders evangelism in KZ. We spent most of the day praying for the country of Kazakhstan and encouraging each other to open our hearts and be instruments for the Lord. We spent personal time in prayer and found encouraging verses to write on a mural we created to hang in their church. This was the most encouraging day and it taught us all to have faith in the power of Christ to change this world for Him.

Thursday, July 7, 2005- Amanda Howard

Today was "Judgment Day." We discussed the signs of the end of time and encouraged the teens to have faith and not be fearful. For lunch, we walked to the fish farm where we all caught our own trout to eat, and everyone really enjoyed that. One of the most influential parts of the day was a game that we played that resembled some feelings that may be present in the end. Everyone was handed a piece of paper with a fellow camper's name on it. Throughout the day, one must find the person whose name they had received, get them

alone, and recite a verse to them, therefore killing them. The game was difficult because you never knew if your friends were already dead, if they were trying to protect you, or if they too were trying to kill you. We discussed false prophets and other difficult aspects of the end of time, and this game was evidence that it is difficult to know who we will be able to trust. I think we were very successful in preparing everyone for what it may be like in the end.

Friday, July 8, 2005- Amanda Howard

This was probably one of the most unforgettable days of my life. I saw a glimpse of heaven and God created an atmosphere beyond our expectations. As heaven day, the teens of North Atlanta worked together most of the day to create an earthly representation of how we imagined heaven. During the day, we took a trip to the waterfalls, and in the evening we attempted to show the people of Kazakhstan a glimpse of heaven. Earlier in the day, everyone created a gravestone from a large envelope. This represented how they wanted to be remembered when they die. Before entering "heaven", everyone walked through the graveyard to find their grave and collect a white robe that was waiting there for them. They were then instructed to enter the downstairs of the auditorium where it was completely dark and they filed in one by one. They met Aaron at the top of the stairs and were then instructed to enter heaven where they were greeted by many smiling faces and given a crown. It was the most amazing thing I have ever seen! The room was filled with tin foil covering the walls reflecting the brightest lights we could find. There was an area to take communion or study the bible. From the moment someone entered heaven, they were embraced with hugs and smiles as everyone joined in worship to our King. As people, we tried to create something only our minds imagined, but God took our plans and made an atmosphere that we never thought possible. It amazes me to think that our experience was only a grain of sand compared to how the real heaven will be, and it encouraged me to reach out to everyone around me when I returned home. How could you not want everyone to experience eternity with our King?!

Saturday-Monday, July 9-11, 2005- Lauren Gosnell

Saturday morning was filled with mixed emotions. Everyone was exhausted and excited to get back to the city but also, leaving the routine of camp and realizing that the trip was coming to an end was definitely bittersweet. One bus break down and countless bottles of Fanta later, we were back in Almaty. With everyone anxious to get souvenirs for family and friends, it was decided that we should go to the Green Market and the Tzoom for everyone's shopping needs. The Green Market is a huge open-air marketplace filled with traditional Kazakish items like hats and bags while the Tzoom is much like an American mall with electronics and t-shirts. Some members of the group opted out of the souvenir hunt for some much needed rest and relaxation in the form of manicures and air conditioning.

Later on that night, everyone met up with the kids from the Light House and the church for Chinese food and it was absolutely delicious! This meal was much appreciated after a week of camp food and it was a great end to an awesome week. Sunday morning brought church and an excellent lesson from Mark and Ken Snell. Afterwards, a group of us went to lunch with some of the teens and hung out for most of the day.

That night, the North Atlanta team gathered at the Green's house for b-b-q, singing and a time to re-cap the week. This was great because it gave everyone a chance to express and to hear how God had been working all week long in everyone's lives. We all made sure to thank the Greens for their hospitality and then it was time to head over to the church for a final goodbye to the Light House kids. Of course there were tears and hugs and many promises to keep in touch but there was also a feeling of peace and of assurance that God would bring us all together again in times to come. After a final prayer and millions of "paca" hugs, the team boarded the bus and headed off to the airport. There was no doubt in any of our minds that God had blessed the trip and everyone on it beyond our expectations. There also wasn't any doubt that we all were planning our trip back for next summer.

On behalf of our trip to Almaty, Kazakhstan, our whole mission team would like to thank everyone who supported us for this trip. However you contributed, through your prayers, financial or moral support, we thank you very much for the blessing that this trip was to us. God worked in incredible ways and showed His glory at every turn and twist. He is a wonderful God.

Thanks,

The 2005 Kazakhstan Collegiate Mission Team:
Jamie Alongi, Toria Shelnut, Amanda Howard, Lauren Gosnell and Mark Miller