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Hosting an International Junior Ranger Camp together with EUROPARC

The EUROPARC International Junior Ranger Camps are a well-loved tradition for the International Junior Ranger network. It is a chance for the young to represent their parks and programmes and to learn more about European nature conservation in a fun, hands-on way. Every year, the EUROPARC Federation welcomes volunteers to host the park. These can be, but are not limited to Parks already running a Junior Ranger programme.

Responsibilities

EUROPARC will work together with you, the host, to create a fun, memorable and high quality camp. Upon official agreement to host the camp, the parties involved (usually the host, EUROPARC and any funders playing a hands-on role) will sign a Partnership Agreement in which it states which organisation leads on which tasks.

Briefly, the staff at the EUROPARC federation will help guide and give advice across the organisation. They will send at least 1 representative to the camp to help facilitate. EUROPARC will also take care of the announcements, registration process and administration leading up to the camp. In addition, EUROPARC will also run a half-day mentors' workshop, write a camp report and post on social media.

The host is responsible for gathering the funding, creating a programme and implementing it, and organising the pick-up and drop-off to and from a public transport point or airport.

The participating parks will cover their own transport to and from the communicated pick up point from which they can travel home using public transport.

Funding

Depending on the scope of activities, a camp can cost around 20 000 euros and costs around 3 weeks of full-time organisation and staff salaries. It usually takes 1-2 staff to organise the camp with additional help from rangers or outside event organisers.

Participants

Usually the camp hosts 10 – 15 teams of 1 Mentor and 2 Junior Rangers including a local team. The host should also limit the number of their Junior Rangers joining to ensure that they mingling with the International Junior Rangers.

It is possible for additional local Junior Rangers and Youth+ers to be given roles of responsibility or join for some day activities.

Timing

A good timeline for the planning process is

- October: confirmation, signing of the Partnership Agreement, announcement of the location
- December: Announcing the date of the camp (to allow local programmes to schedule their camps before or after)
- January: Announce when the registration will open, send out brochure
- February: Open the registrations for applications
- March: have all the paperwork completed, final confirmations sent out, travel plans booked
- May: have the programme completed to create a packing list and homework task
- July: Camp
- August: Camp report and photo album completed



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Camp dates

The camp is usually 7 days with arrival and departure on Saturdays or Fridays. The camp is usually in the 2nd or 3rd week of July.

Programme

As the host, you have freedom with the programme. There are a few standard events in an International Junior Ranger Camp. These are:

1. An international food sharing night (usually on the first or second night, once all have arrived)
2. Poster presentations of their Park and Programme (best done at the beginning of the camp)
3. Mentor workshop, a half day without the Junior Rangers where the mentors share and learn
4. Group Photo (time it for a day with good weather, nice location and all wearing “uniform”)
5. Handing out certificates (can be formal with politicians or informal showing)
6. Introduction to EUROPARC (can either be in a formal opening ceremony or with certificates)

Something yet untested is to include a group welcome session where a code of conduct is made all together. This can help mentors address any cultural differences or understandings, creating a safe space for all, and hold Junior Rangers accountable. Things to include is: possible bedtimes, room cleanliness, languages used, where to go for some “alone time”, how to be nice in online groups if they make a whatsapp group.

A second suggestion is to have an introduction to the space and teach the recycling rules, address whether drinking water is available from the taps, whether plants can be picked for games or tea etc.

The programme should be a mix of:

- Getting to know each other (more on the first days)
- Learning about local nature
- Assisting in the management of the park (example of a regular Junior Ranger activity)
- Having fun/outdoor sports
- Free time (more at the end of the camp) and space for dancing/singing

The Junior Rangers really like to work. Do not be afraid to give them serious tasks to do, but also consider that if the weather is not great (cold wind, rain etc.) then it can become a slog quite quickly. Ensure that there are enough tools or have a clear rotation of tasks so all get a chance with the “cool” activity.

If dividing into smaller groups, try and split up teams in the first days and in the last days you can let them divide themselves as the tight friendships form.

Always have the next days programme hanging somewhere visible with clear times for meals and instructions on what to pack.

Mentors at the camp

The Mentors like to be involved in the camp activities. This can either be as a participant or they can be given leadership roles. The first night (or the second if some teams arrive very late) the mentors meet to discuss their tasks, assign “on duty” days, and share any considerations or medical conditions to be aware of.



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Some possible activities for mentors include:

- Supervision of Junior Ranger chores (usually a pair are “on duty” per day)
- Leading icebreakers
- Skills sharing (like teaching survival skills, art or nature quizzes)
- Coffee making duty
- First Aid duty
- Time keeping for events
- Sending the Junior Rangers to bed

Give the mentors a break as well by making it clear when they can relax. Some activities such as swimming/trying local wine, can only happen out of sight and without the Junior Rangers. This can happen spontaneously or be planned into the schedule with discretion.

In 2024 we tested a Mentor’s whatsapp group which worked very well for coordinating travel, pickups, pictures and changes to the programme.

Brochure and Packing list

It is important to have some things clearly stated in the brochure even if the camp programme is not yet finalised. These are:

1. Whether it will be a “camping” camp or if they will have beds
2. Whether they need to bring sleeping bags and pillows
3. Where the best pick-up point is. This can be an airport or a train station.

EUROPARC has a standard packing list. This will be sent to the host for checking and any additional items which may be needed/not needed (e.g. lunch boxes or swimming clothes).

Guide for Mentors

We also have a standard guide for mentors. This will also be reconfirmed with you depending on your preferences. Some camps have been clear “no alcohol” even for mentors. Others have allowed some mentors to remain on duty while others can try local beers or wines. This is at the hosts discretion.

Presentations

The Junior Rangers come with beautiful posters and marketing material. It is important to consider how and where these can be hung up for the duration of the camp. In the past, these presentations have been digital. Since 2023 we have switched it to be poster style with the groups split into presenters and audience style speed-dating. Each group presents for about 10 minutes to about 4-5 small groups. This allows them to learn about one another’s parks and improve their public speaking skills.

Venue (“Home base”)

The venue choice is up to the host. It can be inside or nearby the Protected Area(s). It can be rustic to luxury as suits the host’s budget. Tenting is possible, but consider sourcing the tents locally to reduce the luggage for those traveling by plane.

EUROPARC would like to emphasise that sustainability is taken into account when choosing a venue. This includes having clear recycling bins and organic waste separators. It may also play a role in distances to the planned activities or distance to the nearest pick-up location. The cutlery and crockery should be reusable as much as possible.



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Meals

EUROPARC asks that the menu should include as many vegetarian meals as possible. Ensure that the Vegan, Gluten-free and lactose-free diet people always have enough food. Make clear announcements about everyone leaving their food alone and possibly they should be first in the queue.

For the international food sharing night – have a vegetarian/vegan meal planned as well as most of the food brought to share has animal products. Make the meal planned very light as there is a lot of food to taste (50% is sugar so don't plan any sitting still/listening activities for afterwards).

Risk Assessment

It is important to create a risk assessment for the camp and each activity. Accidents do happen and it is important to know what to do in response. Additionally, some countries need additional certification for their own participation:

- Any swimming activities need to be supervised by not just a lifeguard but also a swim instructor level person.
- Some parks have an online system where they need to upload the proof of qualifications of instructors for any “dangerous/adventurous” activities (e.g. rock climbing, Stand up paddleboarding). Make sure the mentors have the programme at least 2 months in advance so they can let us know if they need this information.
- Will have to do a risk assessment for adventurous activities (need qualifications of the professionals leading the activity and their own risk assessment for the UK Teams)
- Make sure all dangerous tools are safely stored away. Junior Rangers should not be using any axes or scythes without proper safety instructions and supervision.
- Have a detailed programme including vehicles and transport worked out ahead of the camp and double checked the night before
- Have a backup plan for if it rains on at least one of the days

Media

We encourage the hosts to highlight this event within the local community. It is good PR to invite the park director, the mayor or any high-level person for either an opening ceremony or when the certificates are given out. We have also promoted inviting radio stations and TV stations on exciting days to promote the event.

It is also possible to create a nice camp video. This is not done by EUROPARC and can be covered by an enthusiastic mentor. There are videos on YouTube as examples. One suggestion is asking Junior Rangers – “What were your favourite moments, what did you learn, What should a park attend the Junior Ranger camp?”

Merchandise

As part of the camp there is usually a T-shirt, Hoodie or Cap with all the logos and the date and location of the camp. A T-shirt is the most common choice but creativity is allowed. Some smaller camps have also done water bottles or lunch boxes.

Certificates

EUROPARC can help design the certificates (if the host wants to this is also possible). The host then has to print them out and sign them.



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Additional Links and examples

International Junior Ranger Camp videos:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQ5EpXSjq8M&list=PLKEpwCCKG_FVZe9Jp53z-g7JjL4xTP95m&index=6

Past International Junior Ranger Camps:

<https://www.europarc.org/young-people/junior-ranger-programme/international-junior-ranger-camp/>

Example of a camp report:

<https://www.europarc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/IJRC-Report-2023-small-compressed.pdf>

For examples of activities and presentations, see the photo album:

<https://myalbum.com/album/Y2z6Q8ADVbepZf/?invite=6757209f-e676-4a1a-aefb-a8c06e0105d2>