

Reinventing Summer for College Students – and Summer Camps

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By Sara Merken and Jenny Kaufman

Our universities want us to get an internship, but our hearts push us to go back to camp, or to Israel. What's incredible: our camp, Camp Pembroke, is allowing us to do it all. As first-ever participants in the *Dor L'Dor: College Style* program, a partnership between the Cohen Camps and The Jewish Agency's Onward Israel post-Birthright initiative, we are having a summer filled with amazing experiences to add to our resume. Jewish summer camps around the country have been seeking new initiatives to bring experienced counselors back to camp, and the *Dor L'Dor: College Style* is the perfect way to do it. We're truly experiencing the best of everything, and we would recommend it to others in a heartbeat.

For five weeks in between the end of the school year and the beginning of the camp season, *Dor L'Dor: College Style* enabled us to travel, intern, and live in Israel. Then the program brought us back to camp as counselors for the summer. We're grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in this innovative program.

The 11 of us on the program, several from each of the three Cohen Camps, each interned at organizations relating to our field of study in university. We gained work experience abroad, with professional skills that can be applied to future internships and jobs in America.

We interned Sunday through Wednesday, and followed a work schedule as if we were Israelis. Sara is studying Journalism at the George Washington University. She interned at *HonestReporting*, a news organization that monitors media bias from news outlets worldwide. Jenny is studying Movement Science at the University of Michigan. She interned at *Shutaf*, a camp and after school program modeling the value of inclusion for special needs kids, integrating special needs and "typical" children together in a fun, carefree setting. Without *Dor L'Dor: College Style*, many of our group would not have been able to return to camp as counselors this summer; the competitive nature of universities demands internships. Now we each have a global internship on our resumes.

Although the internships were a big part of our experience in Israel, we learned so much from our whole journey. Living like locals in Jerusalem, we absorbed the culture, language, and lifestyle as we never had before. All of us had visited Israel as tourists before, but now we felt as if we were Israeli. Using public transportation, grocery shopping at the *shuk*, and running through the Old City, we assimilated into the Israeli lifestyle. We can bring this personal experience back to share with campers and deepen their own growing interest in Israel.

We also took part in educational programs, organized by *Keshet Israel*, which taught us more about Israel and its history. Some of our favorite programs included: traveling to the West Bank to meet an Israeli settler and a Palestinian who work together to promote peace; going up to Temple Mount and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher; and spending an afternoon singing and dancing with over 40 Holocaust survivors. We learned about the diversity and complexity in Israel – again, new insight we can bring back to camp.

Additionally, we had the chance to meet some of the Israelis coming to the Cohen Camps this summer as staff members, representing Israel as *schlichim*. Being able to get to know them before camp has already enhanced the family atmosphere of the staff at camp.

And now we're back at Camp Pembroke, the all-girls Cohen Camp, with paid summer jobs among our summer sisters. We are so excited to teach campers the things we have learned. We believe that the knowledge we gained on our trip has already found its way into our bunks at camp, and we are trying our best to create educational yet fun programs for campers with the information we received.

The Cohen Camps – which also include the co-ed Camp Tevya and Camp Tel Noar – tell us that their mission includes connecting young people to Israel for a lifetime. Apparently, they also run into a problem that many camps face: losing returning, college-age counselors like us when we our universities recommend we choose summer internships. With *Dor L'Dor: College Style*, our camp found a way to tie our educational needs and interests together with our love of Israel and of camp. Dozens of people contributed to an Indigogo crowdfunding campaign to help fund the pilot program's launch. We feel honored to benefit from all that commitment and generosity, really happy to get both internships and jobs in the same summer, and proud to help campers make their own connections to Israel as a result. We would definitely encourage other Cohen Camps counselors to do this program in the future, and other camps to create something similar.

For more background on *Dor L'Dor: College Style*, please read [*Creating Internships – and Great Counselors, Too.*](#) by Cohen Camps third-generation president Jonathan Cohen.

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