

Danube Day 2008 in Ukraine

Biggest ever celebrations spread the Danube Day message far and wide

The biggest celebration to date, the Danube spirit reached across the country: from west to south; near the origins of the mighty Tisza River to the end of the even mightier Danube; from villages nestled in the rugged Carpathian landscape to urban areas of the Delta flatlands.

Izmail, the largest Ukrainian delta port, was the setting for events in the south, attracting 1000 people. With a focus on green technologies, over 700 people visited the city's Culture House for an exhibition on "Green Innovations for the Sustainable Development of the Lower Danube (Prydunav'e region)." NGOs and businesses presented green projects on organic agriculture, energy supply, sanitation, wastewater treatment, irrigation, river projects and nature conservation. Local residents also attended seminars on sustainable technology.

Cultural and natural wonders were also highlighted. Eight folk groups, 157 performers, celebrated the traditions of the diverse nationalities living in Izmailskiy. Vibrant songs, dances and brilliantly colourful costumes linked today's Danube with its past, reminding people why their region is so special. This was also highlighted by a "Treasures of the Danube" photo exhibition. Children were the focus for many events: 58 Izmail pupils entered the Danube Art Master contest; others got creative at outdoor painting and craft classes and Vylkove Danube Club carried on the great work of previous years, cleaning up delta river banks.

The Upper Tisza Basin events emphasized the link between the Tisza and the other Danube rivers, stressing the bond between the peoples of the region and those from the wider Basin. The village of Dilove near Rakhiv, Zakarpatska Oblast, once again hosted the main festivity with an event that truly captured the Danube spirit. As in the south, poignant and beautiful songs were performed proudly by local children dressed in stunning costumes. The sight of their smiling, laughing faces captured the essence of Danube Day. Engaging the interest of this generation was a key goal. In the run-up to the festival, youngsters across Zakarpattya had been busy collecting rubbish from riverbanks and planting trees as part of a "Protect Your River" campaign. At Dilove, pupils presented their hard work and schools assessed to have carried out the best project received prizes.

The judging of the Danube Art Master competition also took place: the coveted title going to Mykhaylo Pitsura from Rakhiv, whose "Sister is hurrying to her brother" collage of natural materials portrayed the Tisza flowing to meet the Danube. Throughout the day, the children's enthusiasm for their Danube neighbours was clear and was encouraged through activities such as the "Tisza, the Danube's Younger Sister" Song Festival.

Official activities also stressed the rivers' international nature. Guests from Romania, Slovakia, Hungary, the Netherlands and Belarus joined local authority and state officials and those from NGOs, academia and the ICPDR to mark the 5th Danube Day, sharing a giant Danube cake. Well over 1000 people directly enjoyed Ukraine's Danube Day; however events had a much wider impact due to significant local and national media coverage.

"The Danube feeds us, treats us and gives us water. We must be grateful for all the Danube gifts."

Tatyana Semenovna Repkina, Head of the Izmail City Administration Department for Culture.

"Lets make sure that in the future our children know that fish don't just live in aquariums."

Nadiya Tropina, pupil of the Rakhiv School no. 1.

Danube Day Partners

MAMA-86 NGO (Kyiv) • *Dobra volya* south Ukrainian NGO (Izmail) • MAMA-86 (Tatarbunary) • *Vidrodzhennya* NGO (Tatarbunary) • Danube Biosphere Reserve (Vylkove) • Danube Eco Club (Vylkove) • Danube Youth Club (Vylkove) • Black Sea Department of the Ukrainian Ecological Academy (Odesa) • Vernadskiy Ecological Youth Centre (Odesa) • Izmail City Administration - Department for Culture • Tisza Working Group of the ICPDR • Ministry of Environmental Protection • Western Centre of the Ukrainian Branch of the World Laboratory • Zakarpattya Water Management Board • Rakhiv and Tyachiv Rayon Administration • All Ukrainian Ecological League NGO (Zakarpattya) • Local schools • Coca-Cola Hellenic Ukraine.

The Danube rivers: let's use them – not abuse them!

For general information about the 14-country Danube Day celebrations, view www.danubeday.org or email the International Commission for the Protection of the Danube River: jasmine.bachmann@unvienna.org.