

## TEACH ENGLISH IN KYRGYZSTAN THIS SUMMER

- Are you currently studying Russian?
- Would you like to practise your language skills and get some valuable teaching experience?
- Would you like to get to know about Kyrgyzstan, one of the most remote and beautiful parts of Central Asia?
- Are you keen to share your culture and to get to know someone else's?
- Are you able to commit to teach English for one month during August this year?

...If yes, then read on!



### Overview

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A group of students and UK language teachers, we have been teaching English to disadvantaged youngsters in a suburb of the capital Bishkek every year for four weeks during the month of August. The project has been running on a voluntary basis for five years and is not linked to any other organisation in the UK. Tuition takes place within the framework of an educational Children's Club called "Sprouts" (called "Buchur" in Kyrgyz) and is located in the building of a state school at the edge of the capital, Bishkek. The club was created by local Kyrgyz activists and volunteers of the civil society with grants from Europe.



The children who attend our lessons are aged from 10 to 18. The classes consist of 12 to 16 pupils and are based on ability and age, from Beginners to Upper Intermediate. We teach mostly in English but knowledge of Russian is helpful. Although all the children of this district speak Kyrgyz at home, most of them know Russian quite well or very well, as is usually the case in the North of Kyrgyzstan.

All children receive regular English tuition at their ordinary state schools from the primary level during the year, so they all know the Roman alphabet and the basics. But those who attend our project are very keen to consolidate and further their knowledge during the summer. They are all enthusiastic. The older teen-agers are well aware that English will open doors to better paid jobs for them in the future. The project might be their first opportunity to hear native speakers. We teach the same children every day, so they benefit from an intensive course.

The children are usually very well behaved and are usually enthusiastic to talk about their culture and to learn about yours. We have hardly encountered any discipline problems.

Because the course takes place during the holiday, we strive to make it appealing. Besides traditional and interactive methods, we also use songs, games and role-play. We give the young people many opportunities to talk about themselves and their aspirations. The older more competent group usually puts on a few scenes from a play in English on the last day (in the past this has included scenes from *Romeo and Juliet* and *My Fair Lady*).

We will arrange for the volunteer students to teach and live in pairs, so that they can support and help each other.



The Kyrgyz organisers of the project also like to have two English courses set up for themselves, one for Beginners and one for competent speakers. So there is the interesting possibility of teaching adults as well for some of the sessions. We usually teach from 9 am to 4 pm., 5 days a week.

## **Living arrangements and costs**

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### Accommodation

Student volunteers from the UK live with local families, where they are taken very good care of. This is where some knowledge of Russian is most useful, because the parents' generation, on the whole, will have no knowledge of English. At week-ends, the host families often organise parties, picnics or visits to their relatives in the countryside or the mountains, which offer opportunities for discovering new areas further afield.

## Costs

It is estimated that the flights, the visa, the insurance and the board-and-lodging amount to approximately £1100. You will not be asked to pay any money to the organisers of the project in Britain; you manage your own budget.

There is no financial support for the project. Volunteers are expected to find their own resources, either privately or by applying for grants themselves from their universities or other organisations.



The Kyrgyz people are hugely hospitable and are very reluctant to accept any money to cover their expenses in food and laundry, as it is strongly against their tradition. But, given their economic situation, it seems fair that volunteers should attempt to contribute in some sensitive way to the household. An estimated value of £ 180 has been included in the overall estimated costs indicated above.



## Languages

In Bishkek Russian is the dominant language in public places, especially in the city centre, and is spoken by many families at home. In the neighbourhoods where we tend to work, the population has usually moved to the city relatively recently and is more likely to speak Kyrgyz at home. In Bishkek to be bilingual is the norm. In the villages and in the families who will be hosting the students, Kyrgyz is the ambient language, so you won't be improving your Russian by immersion, but your family will be quite happy to communicate in Russian with you. The school-children you would be teaching will mostly be Kyrgyz-speakers but there again, they will be quite happy speaking to you in Russian and receiving explanations of English vocabulary or grammar in Russian.

## Personal safety

The country is generally safe for young foreign volunteers and welcomes foreigners. You should be aware of general issues of personal safety, and be alert to the risk of pick-pockets in densely crowded places (markets and buses). It is very easy to change money in Bishkek and other towns (better to bring USD or Euros than pounds sterling), but note that it is still primarily a cash-only economy. There are plenty of cash machines in Bishkek.

## **Entry requirements and selection**

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In order to qualify to take part as a volunteer you should:

- Have completed at least your first year of University in the UK by July 2011.
- Have been studying Russian for at least a year at University and/or be able to demonstrate competence equivalent to AS level.
- Have native or near-native English speaking ability. Participants who have not grown up in an English-speaking country may be asked to take part in a telephone interview.
- Be committed to teaching in the project for four full weeks in August 2011.

## Selection Process

In order to be considered for a place on the project, applicants should first make contact with the UK organiser, Claire Reeves at [claire.reeves5@btinternet.com](mailto:claire.reeves5@btinternet.com). You will then be sent a detailed Application form which you are asked to fill in, some Selection material and two contractual documents.

Candidates will be selected on a "first come first served basis".

The Selection material consists of:

- Your CV ( wait for the detailed questionnaire)
- A 1000 words statement of purpose detailing your motivation for the project.

- Four tasks showing how you would teach certain topics (wait for the list)
- A Russian language reference from one of your tutors.
- A character reference from someone outside your family, for instance someone you have worked or volunteered with. Those letters should be-mailed directly to me.

All Application and Selection material should be sent electronically to my address:  
[Claire.reeves5@btinternet.com](mailto:Claire.reeves5@btinternet.com)

The last complete Application should reach me by Monday 9 May.

When you have sent your complete Application and Selection material, you will then receive an **Acknowledgement**.

I will forward your application to the NGO Erayim and recommend it on its merits.

All applications are subject to acceptance by the NGO Erayim. You will be notified whether you have been selected within a fortnight of applying.

If you are selected, you will receive an **Acceptance Letter**.

### Commitment

In order to be accepted on the programme you will have to agree to the UK Organiser's **Terms and Conditions** and to a form of **Contract** between you and the NGO Erayim.

After you have been selected you will demonstrate your commitment to the programme by sending

- a copy of your confirmed flight details
- and a copy of your repatriation medical insurance

within three weeks of you receiving the Acceptance Letter.

## Background to the project

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### The “Sprouts” Club or “Buchur” in Kyrgyz

The club was created in 2003 to enhance the educational, cultural and sports opportunities of children living in a deprived suburb of the capital called Ak-Orgo (20,000 inhabitants). It is financed by the German charity “Bread for the World” and the Swiss “Jonas Foundation”, but entirely run by the Kyrgyz themselves. Throughout the year the club runs English and Chinese language courses, a chess club, an art club, a “komuz” (traditional guitar) club, a folk-dance club, a foot-ball club, an embroidery club, a tai-chi club, an ecology club and a Kyrgyz language magazine published by the children.

“Sprouts” is considered a beacon of excellence and attempts are under way to replicate the scheme in the adjoining communities.

### “Erayim”

Erayim is the organisation which created the “Sprouts” Club.

Женское Общественное Объединение Эрайым

The NGO Erayim (Non-governmental Organisation) is a local not-for-profit organisation created by graduate Kyrgyz women in the early nineties in response to the collapse in state support that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union of which Kyrgyzstan had been a part. Their mission is to further economic development, civil society and Kyrgyz culture. In particular they have facilitated the creation of several hundreds of self-help groups and small enterprises throughout the country. They have created a micro-credit bank to support small entrepreneurs. Further information can be found on their web-site at: [www.erayim.org](http://www.erayim.org)

I got involved with Erayim and “Sprouts” through our daughter Madeleine Reeves, when she was a lecturer in Sociology at the American University in Bishkek in the years 2000-01. I myself am a retired foreign language teacher of Swiss origin. I have lived in England for the last 40 years.

### New developments

Up till now there were only three of us English speakers teaching in Ak-Orgo. But the response from Russian departments in British universities has been such that we are now able to enlarge the programme under the aegis of Erayim, as had always been their wish. Our Kyrgyz partner would like to replicate the Ak-Orgo project in two or more localities further from the capital. This corresponds to Erayim’s general policy of spreading their successful methods to the regions. So for instance, you might be teaching either in a large leafy village 75 km

west of Bishkek or in a locality 260 km east of the capital on the shore of the famously beautiful Lake Issyk-Kul. We would arrange for you to teach and live in pairs. You would be hosted by members of the self-help groups and their well-established frame-work of support.

### The Kyrgyz Republic

Kyrgyzstan is a small country (5 million inhabitants) in Central Asia. It was part of the Soviet Union until 1991, when it gained independence. The first few years after independence from the Soviet Union were extremely difficult, because the country was no longer getting any state support for its education, health service or infrastructure. Although living standards have declined dramatically in recent years, education remains highly valued and many parents are eager for their children to learn English.

Kyrgyzstan is nominally the only democracy in Central Asia, although there are still serious issues about corruption, human rights and the freedom of the press. The country was rocked by civil unrest in April 2010, leading to the overthrow of President Bakiev. The provisional government that replaced him offered the people a more parliamentary constitution which was widely accepted by the electorate in June, despite violent events in Osh in the South of the country. Parliamentary elections took place in October 2010 which were generally deemed fair by the OSCE observers. The situation has stabilised since then. Our project only takes place in the more stable regions in the North of the country

### Civil society

Civil society was a new concept for a former republic of the Soviet Union. The adults who have created Erayim, the teachers of the various "Sprouts" clubs and your future hosts are all pioneers of this new society, where initiative, freedom of expression, community development, the fight against corruption and the rule of law are vibrant values.

### **Practicalities**

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#### Dates

We will be teaching from Monday 1st August till Thursday 25 inclusive. Volunteers are expected to arrive no later than Friday 29 July in time to attend an induction session on Saturday 30 July and to commit to the whole period of teaching.

## Travel

There are direct flights to Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan with BMI ([www.bmi.com](http://www.bmi.com)), and flights via Istanbul, Moscow or St. Petersburg (airport code FRU). Volunteers are responsible for purchasing their own flights and for informing the organisers of their anticipated arrival time in Manas airport, Bishkek. The earlier you book your flights, the cheaper they will be.

## Induction

On Friday 29 July you might want to rest from a sleepless night on the plane and get to know each other and your hosts.

On Saturday 30 there will be a training session and an opportunity to visit the capital.

On Sunday 31 you will travel to your destination away from the capital.

## Visa

A visa is essential for UK citizens to enter Kyrgyzstan and it is your responsibility to obtain your visa before arrival. It costs £60 for a month and £ 120 for six months, even if one's stay is only for a few days more than a month. Visas can be obtained from the Embassy of Kyrgyzstan in London ([http://www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk/kyrgyz-embassy/Consular\\_Section.html](http://www.kyrgyz-embassy.org.uk/kyrgyz-embassy/Consular_Section.html))

NGO Eraym will provide you with the necessary invitation.

## Further travel

You might wish to prolong your stay after the end of the teaching, but do ensure that you have the right visa. You will do this at your own risks.

## Insurance

It is your responsibility to provide for your own medical and travel insurance. It is a requirement of the project that you have a comprehensive repatriation medical insurance, as medical care locally might not be of a standard that one would accept in case of a serious emergency.

## Health

It is your responsibility to get the appropriate inoculations. I recommend the NHS web-site. Go and have a chat with the Travel Surgery nurse at your local GP, well in advance of the trip, as some courses of vaccinations require to be spread over a few months. Some are free.

## Sanitation

Schools and the majority of private houses only have primitive pit-latrines in the courtyard or garden. Flats and offices have flushing toilets.

## Food and Water

August is a time of abundance in Kyrgyz homes and gardens. You can look forward to home-baked bread, rice, potatoes, pasta; lamb and beef but no pork; courgettes, aubergines, tomatoes, peppers, cabbage; melons, water-melons, apples, pears and grapes; apricots and peaches sweeter than you have ever tasted.

Water is never safe to drink. You will be offered tea (safe boiled water) everywhere. Bottled water can easily be bought in most places. Always have your next un-opened bottle of water with you when you travel or teach.

## Electricity

There can be planned or unexpected breakdown in distribution. Appliances and sockets may be unsafe. Always have a torch with you at night.

## Weather

Temperature is between 25 and 32 degrees Celsius; but very pleasant because the air is dry; hardly any rain. It could be much cooler at night in the mountains, if you are invited to go there.

## Transport in Kyrgyzstan

Ak-Orgo is linked to the capital by trolleybus and minibuses in 40 minutes.

The other means of transport in the country at large are the buses, the regular minibuses and the private taxis. Taxis are even used to cover long distances of several hundred km between towns. Some have unacceptable standards of safety as regards tyres, broken windscreens, etc, whereas minibuses are regulated. Private cars and taxis rarely have safety belts. Roads are generally dangerous where they are busy, in towns and in the proximity of localities, but are very quiet on long stretches in between towns.

Erayim itself was given an excellent and safe 4 x 4 Toyota "people carrier" by a European development aid agency in order to carry out its work in the mountainous regions, but the car only has safety belts in the front seats.

Volunteers will travel at their own risk. They might occasionally need to insist on obtaining a better taxi than the one on offer.

## Pocket Money

Food and souvenirs will seem cheaper than in Europe. You might want to pay for some petrol now and again, if your hosts take you on trips.

## Educational material

A sufficient number of copies of the text-book "Headway" from Oxford Univ. Press at different levels is available in Ak-Orgo and we will seek to obtain more textbooks for this summer's project. We also have a large collection of laminated interactive language games published by Longman. More will need to be photocopied and prepared for the various locations and you might be asked in good time to help with that.

However the best teaching materials are the ones you feel comfortable with, so volunteers are encouraged to collect pictures, photos, calendars, comic strips, songs, games, jokes and poems, which they feel could be used as teaching aids. It is possible to photocopy at the Erayim office and in the towns, but this needs to be planned in advance as there will be no more possibilities once you are in the villages.

### Behaviour and sex

We would expect that volunteers will behave with professionalism, be sensitive to the local mores, traditions and expectations and certainly not engage in any liaison with pupils under the age of 18.

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If after reading this description of our project, you feel that it matches your interests and aspirations, please send me an e-mail and I will send you the Application form, the Selection material and the two contracts.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Claire Reeves

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