

ZAH Z-CAMP 2026

Report

July 24–26, 2026

**A weekend of community, competition, creativity, ethics, faith, teamwork and fun,
built around the FIFA / World Cup theme.**



Introduction

For three memorable days this summer, the Zoroastrian Association of Houston once again came alive with the energy, enthusiasm and laughter of our young people as ZAH Z-Camp 2026 brought together 72 campers and 19 Young Adult Camp Counselors for a weekend of friendship, learning, competition, creativity, sports, food, faith and fun.

Held from Friday, July 24 through Sunday, July 26, 2026, this year's Z-Camp continued a tradition that the Houston Zoroastrian community has proudly supported for the past 14 years.

What began as an effort to create a meaningful summer experience for our youth has grown into something much more significant. It is a place where friendships are formed, leadership skills are developed, Zoroastrian identity is strengthened, and successive generations of young Zoroastrians learn that community is not simply something we inherit, but something we build together.

Perhaps the greatest testament to that philosophy is that, for the seventh consecutive year, Z-Camp was planned, organized and executed by our Young Adult Camp Counselors (all under the age of 30) who were former Z-Campers themselves.



These 19 counselors did far more than simply supervised campers during the weekend. For approximately two to three months preceding Z-Camp, they worked together to develop the theme, design the program, create activities, organize teams, coordinate catering and meals, plan logistics and operations, establish safety and security protocols, prepare materials, manage schedules and ensure that dozens of individual pieces came together into one seamless camp experience.

Their work represents precisely what Z-Camp hopes to achieve, which is young Zoroastrians taking responsibility for creating meaningful experiences for the generation coming behind them.

A World Cup Comes to ZAH

With FIFA World Cup excitement building across North America, soccer World Cup provided the theme for Z-Camp 2026. Throughout the weekend, campers were organized into country teams, creating an immediate sense of identity, friendly rivalry and belonging. But the World Cup theme was much more than decoration.



It became the thread connecting virtually every part of the program, from sports and ethics to cooking, fashion, marketing, engineering, culture and international event planning. Campers were challenged not merely to represent their assigned countries, but to understand them, promote them, defend them and ultimately persuade everyone why their country deserved to host the next World Cup.

Behind the fun was a carefully designed educational experience encouraging participants to communicate, collaborate, think critically, solve problems, lead and present confidently before their peers.



Friday — Welcome, Friendship and Community

Z-Camp began Friday evening with registration at the Zoroastrian Heritage and Cultural Center in Houston, Texas. Rather than immediately moving campers into a formal program, the opening evening was deliberately designed around relationship-building.

The Atrium quickly filled with conversation, laughter and activity as campers participated in icebreakers, soccer, board games, cards, table tennis and carrom. For returning campers, Friday evening was an opportunity to reconnect with friends. For newcomers, particularly those who may not have known many people when they arrived, the informal activities provided an easy and welcoming environment in which to meet others. Dinner extended the opportunity for fellowship, followed by additional games, icebreakers and social time.



This seemingly simple part of the weekend serves an important purpose. One of Z-Camp's fundamental objectives has always been to help young Zoroastrians develop friendships beyond their immediate school, family or existing social circles. Those relationships can become the foundation for lifelong involvement in our community.



Saturday — The Heart of Z-Camp

Saturday was the most intensive day of Z-Camp 2026, combining ethical discussions, professional perspectives, team competition, cooking, creativity, culture, sports, family fellowship and religious observance. After breakfast, counselors reviewed camp expectations and introduced a clever yellow-card/red-card system, using the football theme to reinforce appropriate behavior, sportsmanship and mutual respect.



Country teams were then formally established, captains selected and team identities developed. Activities such as Human Knot and "(Don't) Cut the Rope" immediately required campers to communicate and work together. Each country even had its own football music, adding to the atmosphere and helping transform groups of individual campers into teams.



Sports, Ethics and Difficult Questions

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Z-Camp is that young people are not simply entertained, they are challenged to think. Using the familiar world of sports as an entry point, campers explored

contemporary ethical questions surrounding sports betting, corruption, sportswashing and college athletics.

Through mock trials and debates, participants had to consider different perspectives, formulate arguments, defend positions and listen to opposing views. The format allowed campers to wrestle with questions that do not necessarily have simple answers.



Should college athletes be treated differently when it comes to sports betting? What happens when enormous amounts of money influence athletic competition? What responsibility do athletes, organizations and host countries have? Where do we draw the line between commercial opportunity and ethical responsibility?

These discussions encouraged campers to move beyond simply having an opinion and instead learn how to reason, articulate and defend that opinion respectfully. Age-appropriate programming ensured that younger campers could participate meaningfully without being overwhelmed by topics intended for older participants.



Learning from Professionals — The WZCC Panel

The morning program was further enriched through a WZCC panel session connecting the world of sports with professional experience in event planning, marketing and business. Campers explored what actually goes into organizing and promoting major sporting events and were challenged to think practically about creating a successful sports watch party.

The session helped demonstrate that an event spectators may experience for only a few hours can require weeks or months of planning behind the scenes, a lesson that applied equally well to Z-Camp itself! It also gave our youth exposure to professionals from within the Zoroastrian community and demonstrated the value of connecting education, career experience and community service.

Our Youngest Campers Take the World Stage

While older campers tackled ethics and event planning, the elementary-aged group embarked on their own World Cup journey. The children learned about their assigned countries, presented their national flags and explained the meaning and symbolism behind them, combining geography, history and cultural awareness in an accessible way.

Their program also included traditional outdoor favorites such as sack races, lemon-and-spoon races and other games, ensuring that learning was balanced with plenty of movement and laughter. One of Z-Camp's strengths is that age groups can follow different tracks when appropriate while still remaining part of one larger camp community. And nowhere was that more apparent than at mealtimes.





Food, Fellowship — and World Cup Strategy!

By lunchtime, everyone reunited for a delicious Mexican meal. Meals at Z-Camp are never simply breaks between activities. They are some of the most valuable community-building moments of the weekend. Tables were filled with conversation, teasing and laughter, although this year there was also some rather serious strategic discussion.

With World Cup points at stake, campers were already calculating how their country could maximize its scores and move to the top of the standings. Friendly competition had officially begun.



Mock Trials and Debates

After lunch, teams moved from learning about ethical issues to defending positions themselves. The mock-trial and debate sessions focused on college sports betting, athlete eligibility and the broader consequences of gambling within competitive sports. Teams had to organize their thoughts, determine who would speak, anticipate opposing arguments and present their positions convincingly.



The rotating format enabled several teams and age groups to participate simultaneously while providing opportunities for campers to observe and learn from one another.

Beyond the subject matter, these sessions developed skills that will serve our young people throughout their lives: public speaking, critical thinking, teamwork, respectful disagreement and confidence.

Iron Chef — Learning Independence Through Food

The afternoon brought one of Z-Camp's perennial favorites, the Iron Chef. At first glance, Iron Chef may appear simply to be a cooking competition. It is intentionally much more.

Cooking is an essential life skill, particularly as our young people eventually leave home for college, work or independent living. Z-Camp therefore uses the excitement of competition to introduce campers to the basics of preparing food for themselves.



The challenge was differentiated by age. Our youngest campers prepared mini pancakes. The middle group was challenged to transform the humble hot dog into an elevated stadium creation, while the older youth prepared either innovative stadium food or a dish representative of their assigned country.

Teams had to plan, divide responsibilities, manage ingredients, work within a time limit, maintain cleanliness and ultimately present their creation.



The objective was not to produce future Michelin-starred chefs, although we certainly would not object, but to give our young people the confidence to know that when they eventually leave for college, the kitchen is an option besides takeout!





From the Kitchen to the Runway

Following Iron Chef, snow cones and snacks provided a welcome break before creativity moved in an entirely different direction. One of the campers (7-year-old) said “this was the best Z-camp activity they have done so far, can we have it again tomorrow”?

The snow cones were a relief to the not so young as well besides the campers in this sweltering Texas heat and everyone had their fair share of the snow cones.



Teams were challenged to design their country's international players and fan looks, including home and away uniforms, supporter attire, chants and even dance routines. This exercise brought together imagination, culture, teamwork and performance. Campers had to decide how their country's identity could be represented visually while also preparing to present their ideas before an audience.



Let the Games Begin!

No World Cup-themed Z-Camp would have been complete without soccer.

The evening shifted the focus to physical activity with planned soccer stations including a skills course, penalty shootout and "Twins", along with other recreational activities. Table tennis and carrom were available as indoor alternatives, ensuring that even unpredictable Houston summer weather could not derail the program.



The emphasis throughout was not solely on athletic ability, but on participation, teamwork, sportsmanship and having fun together.

Parents Join the Camp Family

As the evening sports sessions concluded, parents, relatives and guests began arriving for the much anticipated "Camp Dinner with Kids." This is an important part of the Z-Camp tradition because it allows parents and the broader community to share, even briefly, in the experience their children have been enjoying throughout the weekend.





Everyone gathered around the tables for a wonderful Thai dinner prepared by a Zoroastrian Michelin-starred restaurant (ya sure), providing yet another memorable culinary experience. The evening was filled with conversation as campers shared stories from the day and families experienced firsthand the camaraderie that makes Z-Camp special.



The resulting International Fashion Show from the T-shirts the kids designed for their country became one of Saturday evening's high-energy highlights, with teams proudly displaying their designs accompanied by music, chants, movement and plenty of team spirit.

Midnight at the Atash Kadeh — Our Spiritual Anchor

Following one of the busiest days imaginable with debates, cooking, sports, fashion, food, laughter and competition, the atmosphere changed after dinner and the fashion show

At midnight, campers gathered at the Atash Kadeh for the Ushahin Gah BOI Ceremony. The contrast was intentional and meaningful. Z-Camp seeks to demonstrate to our youth that being Zoroastrian does not exist separately from their friendships, education, careers, sports or social lives. Our faith can remain at the center of all of them.



After a day filled with noise and activity, coming together before the sacred fire provided a moment for reflection and spiritual connection. It served as the unmistakable Zoroastrian anchor of the weekend, reminding everyone that while Z-Camp celebrates friendship, creativity and achievement, the deeper bond connecting us is our shared heritage, values and faith.

Sunday — Bringing Everything Together

Sunday morning began with breakfast, a recap of Saturday's adventures and, importantly, an update of team points. The competition was far from over as the teams now faced their largest strategic challenge. Why should your country host the next FIFA World Cup?

Campers had to consider what would be required to host one of the world's largest sporting events. Stadiums alone would not be enough.

Teams had to think about transportation, hotels, infrastructure, security, marketing, tourism, cultural attractions, logistics, finances and the overall visitor experience.

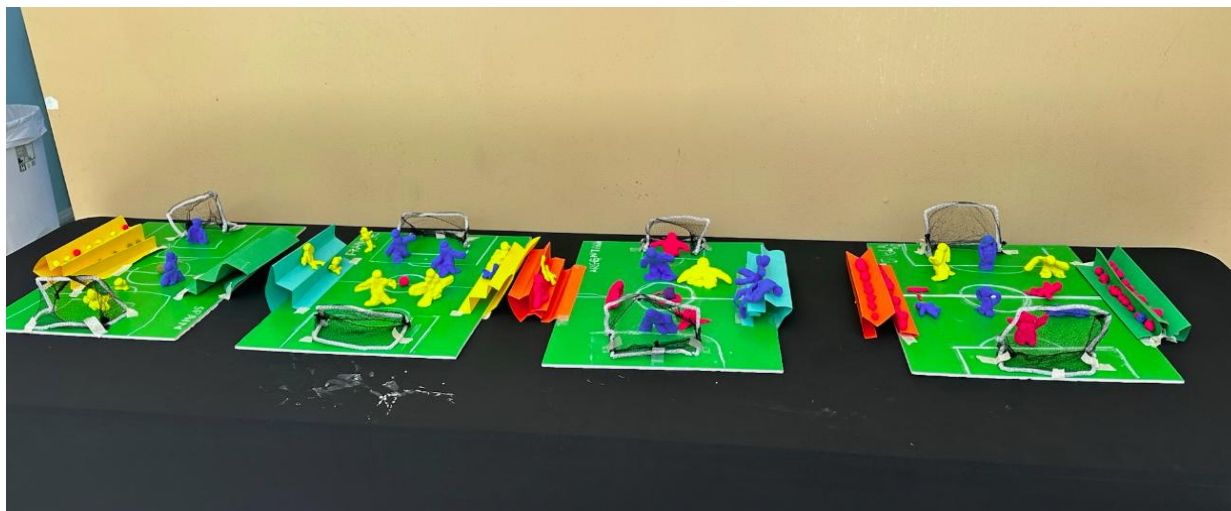
In many ways, this became the capstone exercise for the weekend. Campers had to draw upon lessons from the WZCC panel, their experience representing their countries, their teamwork and their presentation skills to build a persuasive case.

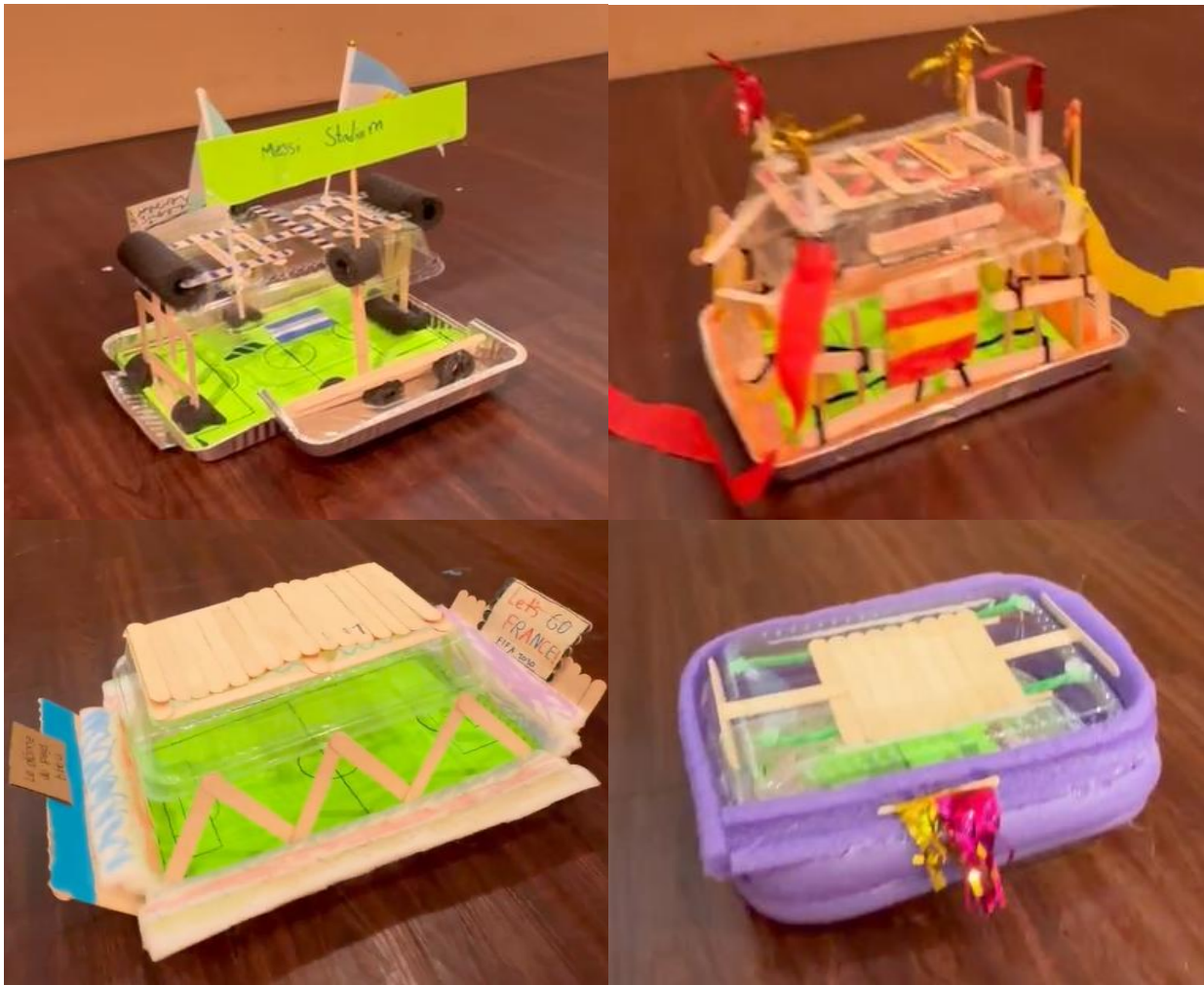
Impossible Engineering — Making the Impossible Possible

The morning also included a substantial two-hour "Impossible Engineering" challenge, introducing a STEM and problem-solving dimension to the weekend. Participants were required to think creatively, work within constraints and collaborate toward solutions.

Engineering challenges teach an important lesson that extends far beyond STEM: the first idea does not always work. Teams must experiment, fail, adjust, communicate and try again.

That process of problem, attempt, failure, adaptation and eventual solution is one of the most valuable forms of experiential learning.





The Final World Cup Bid

After lunch came the culmination of the weekend's country competition: the formal World Cup Host-Country Presentations. Teams presented their cases for why their respective countries should be selected to host the next World Cup.

What had begun Saturday morning with a country draw had evolved over the course of the weekend into something much more sophisticated. Campers had learned about their countries, built team identities, competed together, cooked together, designed together, debated together and now had to stand together and persuade an audience. It was an appropriate finale to a weekend built around leadership and collaboration.

Finale and Awards Ceremony

Z-Camp 2026 concluded Sunday afternoon with the Awards Ceremony and Acknowledgements. Awards recognized achievement and competition, but the closing ceremony was equally about recognizing effort, participation, teamwork and sportsmanship. Because ultimately, Z-Camp is not about which country finishes with the most points.



The greater victory is seeing young Zoroastrians leave camp with new friendships, greater confidence, stronger connections to their community and positive memories associated with their Zoroastrian identity. At 3:00 PM on Sunday, July 26, another Z-Camp officially came to an end. The memories and friendships, however, continued well beyond the weekend.

Conclusion

One of the most important stories of Z-Camp 2026 happened largely before a single camper arrived. For approximately two to three months leading up to camp, our 19 Young Adult Camp Counselors met, planned and worked to transform ideas into an executable three-day program.



For the seventh consecutive year, these young adults assumed responsibility for conducting and executing Z-Camp. That deserves special recognition. Z-Camp is often described as a youth program. In reality, it is also a leadership development pipeline for our community.

It takes a community to Build a Camp. An undertaking of this scale cannot happen through the efforts of any one individual or group.

ZAH extends its heartfelt appreciation to all our Sponsors and Donors whose generosity makes it possible to provide quality programming, meals, activities, materials and experiences while keeping Z-Camp accessible to families of all strata.

Their financial support is not simply a contribution toward a three-day event. It is an investment in the next generation of our Zoroastrian community.

We offer equally heartfelt thanks to our many volunteers, who give generously their time and talents, often quietly and behind the scenes. Whether helping with registration, food, setup, cleanup, transportation, supplies, supervision, religious activities, logistics, safety and security, or the countless unexpected needs that arise during a camp weekend, every volunteer contributes to its success.

Our gratitude also goes to the parents and families who entrust their children to Z-Camp, encourage them to participate and support the program year after year.

And finally, we thank the entire ZAH community. For 14 years, this community believed in Z-Camp.



You have supported it financially, volunteered for it, cooked for it, sponsored it, sent your children to it, encouraged your young adults to lead it and helped it evolve from year to year.

The long-term strength of a community cannot be measured only by its buildings, institutions or membership numbers. It must also be measured by whether the next generation develops a genuine sense that this is my community, I belong here, and I have a responsibility for its future.

The FIFA World Cup may have provided this year's theme, but the real goal was much larger: Building confident young Zoroastrians who understand their heritage, value their friendships, develop the courage to lead and recognize that the future of our community will someday be in their hands.

Judging by the enthusiasm, creativity and leadership witnessed at Z-Camp 2026, that future is already taking shape.

Memories — Photos & Videos

The photographs and videos from Z-Camp 2026 capture only some of the laughter, competition, creativity, friendship and memorable moments of the weekend.

Z Camp 2026 - iCloud Photo Sharing.

We invite everyone to enjoy the memories, share them with family and friends, and celebrate another wonderful chapter in the continuing story of ZAH Z-Camp.



ZAH Z-Camp 2026 Young Adults Counselor team

Darius Tamboli, Katie Master, Yazad Sidhwa, Rayhan Nariman, Natalya Haveliwala, Freya Daroga, Rayomand Katrak, Zubin Master, Kyle Jensen, Jeh Mory, Zaal Mory, Nerius Mehta, Nikita Engineer, Friyana Sidhwa, Alyssa Tamboli, Rhea Engineer, Natalya Mehta and Noshir Khumbatta (midnight BOI)
