



Messages from SCOA Counselors 2012

Shelley

UC Berkeley

My experience at Sports Camp of America (SCOA) exceeded all my expectations. There was never a dull moment during my month in Japan and I learned so much from the campers I worked with and know they learned just as much from me. One of the best parts of SCOA was having to the opportunity to work with the other counselors throughout the month. Not only did they become my family on my first trip overseas, but our relationships have also continued beyond the summer and I am so grateful to have met such amazing, accomplished individuals. It has been four months since I was in Japan and I still have the friendship bracelets the campers made for me around my wrist. These now faded bracelets remind me of the positive impact the American counselors have on the lives of the kids we work with at SCOA.

I am so grateful for my experience in Japan and it really was an opportunity of a lifetime. Japan is an amazing country and this program allowed me to see so many different parts of the island. I experienced everything from the ordered chaos of the Tokyo train system at rush hour, to the tranquility of the countryside in Kyosato, to the amazing view on the top of Mt. Fuji at sunrise. This experience changed my life and it will change your life too if you open your mind to the possibility that a single trip can exceed all your expectations. My advice: Don't pass this amazing opportunity up!

Chris

UC Berkeley

SCOA gave me an opportunity to see a part of the world I have never seen before. Japan is a great country with tons of character and the best way to discover that was through the children. It was great being around and getting to know the kids over the four weeks I was at SCOA. My experience was challenging like when I was trying to understand the kids and the language, but in the end, I walked away with some very valuable life lessons and a passion for Japan! I recommend that anyone who wants to learn about a new culture and to positively affect children's lives apply for SCOA.

Lauren

UC Davis

SCOA was one of the best experiences of my life. I'll admit that it is no easy vacation get-away, but I can assure you that it will be one of the most rewarding and memorable memories of a lifetime. There were times where I

felt more exhausted than I've ever felt before and times where I questioned my own patience and mental health, but looking back, what stood out to me most were the campers' genuine smiles and laughter, and the difference that I was able to make to them. Every day, it was such a treat to watch the formerly shy campers speak up more, act a little goofier, and by the end start to act like their genki counselors! Those transformations and smiles motivated me that much more every session. It pushed me to put more energy into campfire songs, to think of more creative skits, and to try to individually talk to each and every kid in my group. I learned the importance of not only acting upbeat in group situations, but also taking the time to talk to each kid during meals or free time. It made me realize how a simple question of "Is it yummy?" could break a camper out of his/her shell. It was such a pleasure to be part of a program that promotes such a good message and a fun experience for kids.

Additionally, SCOA left me with something: it not only provided me with an experience of a lifetime, but also taught me how to become a better leader. As each session continued, I found myself less nervous and instead, more and more eager to top my performance from the previous session. I kept reminding myself to put myself in the campers' shoes and to try to see what they would be seeing. In other words, I knew that one nervous counselor would equal a group of shy and uneasy campers, so I would have to make the first move! SCOA taught me how to be a better communicator with kids and the power of body language. And most importantly, SCOA taught me that despite the irony, sometimes words aren't necessarily needed to communicate. Lastly, I met a fantastic group of motivated college students and it sparked my interest to go into working with kids in the future, a choice that I never would have imagined my previously shy self making years ago. SCOA taught me how to be more confident, whether it be with kids, my peers, or from a business standpoint. I left Japan not only with priceless memories, but also with a better sense of self-confidence and the realization of how similar we all are despite language barriers and distance. I full heartily support its message to "broaden your horizon" in a fun atmosphere while simultaneously instilling confidence in kids at any age. SCOA is a GREAT program, but be prepared to work hard for long hours to get this ultimate experience! Trust me, you won't regret it!

Frankie

USC

Attending SCOA this past summer left me with a new outlook on the world and a better understanding of Japanese culture. To all of you students that cannot study abroad or cannot afford the expensive flights to and from the place of interest, SCOA will pay for your plane flight and cover most of the food you will eat in Japan. Not to mention a chance to teach younger kids about a sport you love while representing what American culture is like through your personality. If you are a bubbly, enthusiastic, adventurous person, SCOA is an organization you want to be a part of.

Katie

UC Berkeley

My experience as a SCOA camp counselor this past 2012 summer changed my life. Six months later, I find myself reflecting quite often on my time in Japan and think about how unbelievably blessed I am to have had such an incredible opportunity and hold many wonderful memories. Literally speaking, my fellow counselors and I spent six weeks with smiling, laughing, jumping, playing, open-minded and curious children who, in turn, had me doing all the same, day in and day out. And let me tell you, a day of running around and laughing and learning and teaching is exhausting; yet, what on this earth could possibly be better? Tired from a long day of...fun?! Yes please! My experience lead me to some of the most wonderful, driven, and joyful people-the team of counselors-and I made friends I will have forever. J.R. and Keiko were so trusting and allowed us the freedom to teach and spend time with the children in our own ways; the priority was not to make sure the children were behaved, disciplined, and followed rules, but to merely have fun and learn by their own standards. J.R. and Keiko created a mission that was a joy to help work towards, but more importantly, it contributed to

expanding my own horizon, and the horizons of hundreds of children. Helping to bridge American and Japanese cultures was the most unique and special thing I have ever been a part of. Although challenging, the language barrier only made our connections with the campers that much stronger because we were communicating through emotion, gesture, movement, play, facial expression and so forth. As the soccer coach, it made my heart swell with joy when a camper would improve and learn a new move by the end of the week, unable to understand my directions, but having success based only on showing, rather than telling. In addition, we were able to travel around and see many beautiful places throughout Japan that I could only dream of visiting otherwise.

All in all, I learned a tremendous amount not only about the Japanese culture, but also about myself. As much as I taught these absolutely amazing children, they taught me just as much and showed me the value of patience, kindness and how communication and learning stretches far beyond mere words. I will forever look back and smile on my experience with SCOA, the fantastic trip and traveling, the friendships, the incredible feeling of teaching through actions, the days spent with smiling children, and the opportunity to become a better person.

Shana Johnson

UC Berkeley

The SCOA Japan Summer Camp was such an amazing experience that words couldn't truly express. For me the most uplifting aspect of the program is the interaction you have with the children. Before going to the camp I was expecting to be the teacher and the campers to be the students. However, after reflecting on the trip and my experience I realized that the campers taught me just as much as I taught them. I certainly didn't expect to learn as much as I did. I learned some of the language, the culture, experienced new foods, and customs. Interacting with children that speak a different language is an exhilarating challenge. As the summer progresses you learn that language is not the only form of communication. Facial expressions, body movements, and overall attitude become extremely important when interacting with the children. On top of that I have made lifelong friends with the other camp counselors. I really couldn't have asked for a better experience and to top it off it was in various locations in Japan!

I would recommend this camp for anyone who is enthusiastic and can think quickly on their feet. This camp is for someone who is willing to work hard, but also open to broadening your horizon and embarking on a thrilling life changing experience. Overall it was a great experience and if I could do all over again I would!

Megan Heneghan

UC Davis

My experience at SCOA is difficult to put into words. My interactions with the kids made every day special at camp. No matter how stressful the counselors became about making sure the sports and activities ran smoothly, the expressions of joy and excitement on the kids' faces erased any tensions I had during the day. I enjoyed every moment with the kids. They were always so excited to talk to the counselors and participate in sports and activities. They all were so eager to learn the English language and American culture. As we taught them our culture and values, we were able to learn a lot about their lifestyles, and even goals and dreams for the future. You will never truly understand the differences in our cultures until you have experienced it firsthand with an organization like SCOA.

SCOA not only gave me the opportunity to work with kids and cross a great language barrier, but also to experience the incredible culture of Japan. I had the time of my life sightseeing in Tokyo, and during the downtime we had in Izu and keep. Being a counselor at SCOA was hard work, but the experiences and relationships I built ultimately changed my life.

Kenny

Wesleyan

SCOA is a great program where you make forever lasting friendships and experiences. The month that I spent in Japan working for SCOA is one of the best summers that I ever had hands down. The program does an excellent job in bringing the brightest and interesting counselors together from all over the country. I learned so much working with my unique peer counselors who all had so much to bring to the camp. As I faced unforeseen challenges working in a foreign environment, these people became my life-support. I left SCOA with friends that I knew as well as my family. If this isn't enough to convince future counselors to apply, I suggest that people apply because the kids are so adorable. If you like kids, this program is for you! Japanese kids are honestly one of the cutest kids out there. Those who come to SCOA camp come open to learn and interact with the counselors. Even though initially shy, these kids are all over you after the first day. Best of all, you get to really know the kids in your group because you're with them for the most part of the day. I recommend this program to anyone who love kids, is looking for a forever lasting experience and relationships.

Abigail Selya

UC Davis

SCOA is a unique opportunity that enables you to dive into an amazing cross-cultural experience. I loved working with the children and making s'mores around the campfire. I found the most rewarding part is learning that language is not a barrier. They understood through gestures when we taught sports and were able to perform in skits. Having a variety of camps at several locations enables you to gain a better understanding of Japan as a whole. The food was absolutely incredible and the locations of the camps are all very beautiful. Being a part of the TOMODACHI initiative camp and getting the opportunity to speak with people who were victims in the tsunami is something I will never forget. At SCOA you are chosen to represent the USA and for many of these children it is their first experience with a person of a different nationality. It is not an easy job; the hours are long and if you do not love working with children I do not recommend it. But sharing my culture with them and learning about theirs has been amazing. I would recommend taking some extra time to travel around because while you are at camp you are there to work.

Lyndsey Hancock

Southern Utah

My experience with SCOA this past summer was one I will never forget. I got to meet some amazing people and connect with the children I taught on such a different level. The language barrier wasn't as hard as I expected and the food wasn't bad either. It was hard at times but in the end it was very rewarding.

I learned more from the children than they did from me and I'm truly blessed to have had the opportunity to go over and work for SCOA. I went over there not knowing anyone and I left with some lifelong friends. I still talk to some of the kids via email and Facebook and it's fun to see how much you touched their lives. If I could I would do it all over again. By far one of the greatest experiences of my life!