

SENIOR CAMP COUNSELOR REFLECTIONS SUMMER 2019

Victoria

SCOA Camp truly was a special, once in a lifetime experience. There really is no other opportunity that allows you to travel to a foreign country with 15 strangers and share your love of sport, all while overcoming language barriers. SCOA forces you to break out of your comfort zone and put yourself out there in ways that might not typically be in your character. The kids are absolutely amazing and the interactions we have leave positive impacts on both us and them.

Being able to experience the beautiful culture of Japan first handedly for an extended period of time gave such significance to the whole trip. The locals that I met on this trip were genuinely some of the nicest, most sincere people I have ever interacted with in my life; they all welcomed us with open arms. I also can't say enough good things about other counselors; I am truly lucky to have met them all! The people were definitely a highlight of this trip, as well as the amazing food and beautiful scenery. I made memories that will last a lifetime!

James

As a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer, I believe in authentic cross-cultural connections without any imbalance of exchange. I have researched many programs across the globe and was elated to find SCOA. After speaking with the co-founders, I decided that SCOA's mission aligned with my beliefs and I signed up for the 2019 summer camp. Overall, it was an excellent experience. I was able to partake in the Japanese culture by enjoying the cuisine (at camp and on off days), getting to know Japanese children, counselors, and staff, and as well as learning some cultural norms and customs. In addition, I shared my language, culture, and some customs and traditions such as s'mores at the campfire and American Football. I was prepared for long days as I had previous experiences being a camp counselor, but the days always flew by. J.R. and Keiko have their program and they run it well which made things easier on us and ultimately provided the kids an experience of a lifetime. For me, SCOA was a great and rare opportunity to travel, teach, learn and share and it is a decision I am glad to have made! I feel much more connected to my Japanese counterparts at home and abroad and hope to continue to cross the bridge!

Michael

Japan was the opportunity of a lifetime; I had a phenomenal experience! I went in super nervous, but ready to take on the challenge. With every session I got better and better with making the activities more fun and engaging for the kids.

The days were very long, but the other counselors around me held me accountable and were there to lift my spirit whenever I didn't feel well. I loved connecting with all of the kids. The worse part was at the end of each session when we would say goodbye to our group of kids that we built a relationship with.

Overall, I am extremely grateful for this program and encourage anyone who loves kids and has a passion to impact those around them to apply!

Amanda

Having the opportunity to go to Japan this summer and work for SCOA was both extremely nerve racking, but an absolutely amazing experience. I was SO nervous before I left; I was traveling halfway across the world, by myself, to meet a group of people I didn't know (but, later on would turn out to be some of my closest friends). Once I got there, all my nerves went away. The group we had this year was absolutely amazing, everyone got along and we all worked so well together that our transition from training to actual camp was super smooth.

SCOA was an amazing opportunity for me to share what I love with an amazing group of kids. Knowing that I had the opportunity to change some of these kids' lives made me give my 110% every day. I was nervous that not many kids would be into cheer/dance, but I was fortunately mistaken! Not only did I get a ton of great kids, but I also got handfuls of boys too (which was a pleasant surprise!). Teaching cheer/dance, I definitely had to be on my toes; things are constantly changing and I definitely had to be creative because things don't always go to plan! SCOA was a challenge that has helped me grow so much and I would do it again with no doubt in my mind. GLEE was a program that I loved doing! Working with the older kids was a blast, but also challenged me in different ways. GLEE allowed me to really make a connection with these kids and I was able to break most of them out of their shell and really get into it (I loved seeing the boys get into being the T-Birds from Grease). I also love that the cheer/dance kids get to perform in front of all the other kids at the end of a session. Seeing the smiles on these kids' faces and knowing that their having fun definitely makes you feel like you're making a difference.

SCOA will definitely put you to work. I promise you; you'll be working from the morning to the night and everything in between, but it is an experience that is unlike any other. Between making up choreography, figuring out free time or helping JR and Keiko (or any other counselor) with anything that went wrong, I can say that SCOA is definitely a creative challenge. However, if you have the right personality and drive to do it, I promise you, you CAN (and you'll be great)! SCOA a challenge that has helped me grow so much and I would do it again with no doubt in my mind. I have learned so much from my time in Japan and I really have made some amazing lifelong friends. If you are up to challenge yourself, I would recommend this camp for you. I promise, you won't regret it. Cross the bridge!

Leah

This past summer I was a senior counselor with Sports Camp of America (SCOA) in Japan that taught English through the immersion of an American sports camp. Let me tell you, it was one of the best experiences of my life. What is special about SCOA is that the Japanese kids come to the camp to participate in something that is generally unusual for Japanese people. There is a saying in Japan that states "the nail that sticks out gets hammered down". However, these families believe that it is important to be different and unique. And so, it was our mission to help these kids succeed.

As a senior counselor, our role was to engage with children and be a support system for them. We go through extensive training. Not knowing any Japanese, we utilized the Total Physical Response Method to communicate through movement, repetition, demonstration, and positive feedback. Although I was speaking English, I had to be aware that most of the kids weren't proficient English

speakers. At first, I had so many questions. How can I teach English through sports? How can I communicate through movement and facial expressions? But most importantly, how can I create a long-lasting relationship with a language barrier?

However, with the support from the other AMAZING counselors, J.R, and Keiko you will be able to step out of your comfort zone, be creative, and be a leader. I can't articulate how amazing and special the kids are. Even though you are working like 10 hours days for 5 weeks straight, you do it for the kids. You develop such a strong and meaningful connection with the campers that drives you to give them the best experience possible. Not only were the kids learning about America culture, but I was learning about their culture. They taught me different Japanese sayings, games, anime, food. The list can go on. The benefit camp in Rikuzentakata touched my heart the most though. I have never met community so giving even after losing everything by the 2011 tsunami. This was an eye-opening experience for me where I learned that doing small acts of kindness goes a long way.

Being a part of SCOA was truly an amazing experience. I'm still in touch with the other counselor (we are all best friends) and we always talk about how we want to go back to Japan! If you want to be challenged and have an opportunity of a lifetime, I highly recommend joining the SCOA family.

Melissa

To sum up my experience with SCOA into one word, it would be incredible. It was truly an experience of a lifetime and I am extremely grateful I was selected to be a part of it. To have had the opportunity to travel around Japan and make a difference in the lives of kids from a different culture than my own was remarkable. I looked forward to each and every day during the camp sessions with the kids. From starting the day with songs to wake everyone up, to spending the days outside playing various sports, made me feel like I was having just as much fun as the kids were. I had so much fun bonding with them, even though we didn't speak the same language. I honestly could not wait for the breaks between each session to be over because I had the most fun when I was with the kids. There was such a cultural exchange, and I have learned so much from the kids. They showed me the correct table mannerisms and how they get ready for the day. I always find it so funny that they were teaching me, the adult, the proper ways to act while eating at the dinner table. This entire experience changed my perception of the world and made me a stronger person; To learn that we're more alike than different, and that a language barrier doesn't need to stand in the way to make a lasting connection. The hardest part of the whole trip was building an incredible bond with the kids and having to say goodbye after three or four days. I still have the origami made for me and a letter written in Japanese by a few of my campers. I could not believe that I was able to build such an amazing connection with the kids, but I think it was because I wasn't afraid to act like a kid with them. The most rewarding part of the entire experience was seeing how shy and nervous all of the kids were on day one, and then finding a way to connect with them and make them smile by day two. Thank you J.R. and Keiko for giving me this experience of a lifetime."

Sabrina

This past summer in Japan was the most unforgettable experience of my life. SCOA gave me the opportunity to jump completely out of my comfort zone and learn about a culture in more ways than

being a normal tourist could have ever given me. From the campers, to the families, to my co-counselors, and the multiple places we got to travel, I fell completely in love with Japan. There are so many moments I can look back on that I loved, but my favorite moments were singing campfire songs on the last night and reading bedtime stories to the little ones after a long day of fun. Seeing the campers meet us in the beginning and being shy, to then opening up and being our best friends by the end of camp was the most rewarding part. Even though it was hard work at times, by the end of the day it was worth all the smiles and laughs I got to share with the kids. Learning about the campers' lives and Japanese culture was the most fulfilling part of the entire program and the kids changed my life forever. Not only did I grow personally through this program, but also made friendships and memories that will last me a lifetime.

I look back at all my photos and videos from my time in Japan and I am so grateful that I got to experience this once in a lifetime opportunity. From the kind people, to the delicious food, and the gorgeous sceneries, Japan was the most amazing country and I miss it already. I made the best of friends and would recommend everyone if given the chance to take the leap and join this one of a kind program. I am so thankful for SCOA and plan to go back to Japan in the future and explore more of the country and even teach English there one day!