

## SENIOR CAMP COUNSELOR REFLECTIONS SUMMER 2023

Maddie

I can say, without a doubt, that choosing to spend my summer as a counselor at SCOA was the best decision I've ever made! My time as a counselor was incredibly transformative and gave me so many amazing memories and life lessons to take with me back home. I will truly never forget getting ambushed in a pillow fight by a cabin of 4th grade boys (don't worry, I'm counting on a rematch), playing flashlight tag with the kids during a meteor shower, or when my camper Haruno patiently taught me how to make origami. Being able to play sports with the campers was also amazing, as it showed me we didn't need a common language to have fun and share an experience. No matter where you are in the world, kids are kids, and their energy and excitement was the brightest light in the world to be around. I truly miss the kids every day, and knowing that I made a difference in even a few kids' lives makes me prouder than I have ever been.

While I am so grateful for the memories, a huge part of what made this experience so rewarding was the challenge of the job. Being a camp counselor requires working long days and maintaining high energy to make sure the kids are having fun. We navigated uncertain situations (such as how to run a camp in a typhoon), grew into leadership roles, and took upon a mission of selfness, which was putting the kids above all else. This challenge also brought us counselors together, as we learned to trust and support each other, fostering some of the greatest friendships I've ever had (we still talk daily). I also feel extremely grateful to have built such amazing friendships with the bilingual counselors we worked with, and think it's truly special to have friends on the other side of the world. The relationships I built, both with my fellow counselors and my campers, made all of the hard work SO worth it. If you're looking for a truly special experience to change your life and expand your horizons, then I recommend SCOA with all of my heart.

Taylor

My time at SCOA was a once-in-a-lifetime experience I will never forget. On the way to LAX, I cried to my mom in the car, so anxious about all of the unknowns. Would I be a good counselor, would I make friends, would I have a good time? I had no idea that I was about to have the most incredible weeks of my life. Within days of arriving in Tokyo, I met people who will be in my life forever. I became best friends with the other counselors and had so much fun working with them every day. We were all devastated to say goodbye, and have since had many meet-ups to see each other!

Not only were the other counselors incredible, but the kids were too. I have never met such kind, respectful kids anywhere besides Japan. They loved learning about everything American and were so interested in hearing about the counselor's lives, and we were just as interested in learning about theirs. They taught us about the food we were eating, how to play Japanese games, and how to say some Japanese phrases. I learned so much about myself during this experience and became a better leader and person. I am so thankful to SCOA for this experience and all of the people I met along the way!

Jenner

I have always had a love for kids and sports being an athlete for my whole life so having the opportunity to do so in another country was an experience I could not pass up. Deciding to drop all of my post-graduation worries and forget about myself by serving and connecting with Japanese kids was an experience I didn't know I just wanted but needed. I learned so much about the culture thanks to the native counselors and campers who made me feel so accepted and loved. I had a great time coaching American sports and learning how to be creative in communicating with kids whose native language was different from my own. I had a lot of responsibility to ensure that the Japanese campers had a great experience not only with me as their counselor but with the SCOA organization but as I tuned into my personality and leaned on my fellow counselors for support, the task became that much more fun. I loved being in charge of the campfire as it was a highlight of my whole time with SCOA by constructing a campfire that was memorable by all as we sang and dance together as a family for 4 whole weeks. I truly couldn't be more thankful for SCOA and the impact that it has made on my life. It made me want to travel more and continue working with kids.

Aidan

The Sports Camp of America is truly one of the most captivating and unique experiences. Being able to participate in a cross-cultural exchange with the aspiring youth of Japan is truly amazing. Not only do you get to inspire youth, but you will also have an opportunity to explore and experience the many different areas of Japan. While focused on giving the children an American camp experience, you will also have the opportunity to build amazing connections and lifelong friendships with the other counselors you meet on the job.

The counselor job at SCOA is a moderately challenging but rewarding experience. The job at SCOA is to deliver a multi-day overnight camp to the youth of Japan. You will be working with them in sports as well as various activities throughout the camp. As a counselor, you are with

the kids from waking up to putting them to bed; Usually consisting of waking them up to get breakfast, working with them during sports, eating with them during meals, putting them to sleep with a bedtime story, or having overnight watch duty. Be prepared to work long days whether the tasks are easy or difficult.

Throughout the Camp, there are one-day two-night breaks for the counselors to leave camp and explore the surrounding cities and towns on your own, as well as get some rest and recovery before the next camp dates start!

## Brooklyn

This past summer I was given the opportunity to work as a Senior Camp Counselor for the Sports Camp Of America. Going to Japan and participating in SCOA is an opportunity of a lifetime that is so incredibly rewarding and special in so many different ways. Nothing could have prepared me for what the summer was going to bring and I wouldn't change my experience for anything. SCOA is a program that brings in 16 strangers from college sports teams all over the United States and encourages them to establish relationships through the challenge of overcoming language and cultural barriers. While working for SCOA we had one goal in mind for each session we had which was, "doing it for the children". No matter what happened, how hard things got, we kept this thought in our minds daily to remind ourselves that we were involved in something much greater than ourselves. Being a counselor for SCOA puts you in a position where you could influence children and their futures! We wanted to show these children that it's okay to be loud, silly, and different. We also displayed how language and cultural differences don't separate people from establishing friendships and relationships. At times there were both counselors and campers crying at the end of sessions because strong bonds were made in just a small amount of time. At SCOA, we teach the children words in English and they teach us words in Japanese. We both are working together to build this concept of teamwork, communication, and trust with people we've never known before. The campers learn to work with their teammates (fellow campers in their team) in winning competitions, creating team names, or forming team chants. This takes a lot of communication through both the campers and counselors, so both parties have to work together to understand each other in order to fulfill their goals. Trust is a huge part in SCOA and something that campers establish with counselors and counselors with each other as well. The parents give us their trust in sending their children to camp so all the counselors work super hard to make sure that the children have the best experiences. Being a senior counselor, we understand that what we do has a large impact on all our campers so we create a bond and trust with each other right away. So no matter what happens we can rely on each other for just about anything to make sure the children are safe, happy, and having fun. SCOA will forever hold a place in my heart and has

taught me so many new things about myself, and life. For future counselors wanting to apply to SCOA, I hope you take a leap of faith and trust me when I say SCOA is something you won't want to miss out on. You will come to SCOA with no idea of what is in store but will leave with a whole new perspective on the world and potentially yourself. It won't always be easy and will definitely be very hot, but SCOA will leave you with memories and friends that you will never forget making every bit of it worth it. Make sure to smile big, laugh loud, and cross that bridge

Megan

My time as a SCOA counselor last summer was, without exaggeration, one of the best experiences in my whole life. I had wanted to go to Japan since I entered college. When I heard about this fantastic opportunity during my senior year, I immediately jumped onto my laptop and started my application. But I had never left the country before and was nervous to spend five weeks running a sports camp with kids who spoke another language alongside 14 other college athletes I had never met before. Now, looking back, I had absolutely nothing to worry about. I made solid and meaningful connections with the kids and became best friends with my fellow counselors during my time in Japan. The hours were long, but making a difference in these kids' lives while working alongside my friends made the days go by in a flash. The junior and bilingual counselors also helped us tremendously, and I'm so blessed to have met them as well. Everyone involved in SCOA was so welcoming and made my fears of traveling to a different country dissipate instantly. On our off days, we had time to explore Japan and immerse ourselves in the local culture. We ate at a local soba restaurant in Hokuto, explored the streets of Shinjuku, and so much more! My camera roll was flooded with all the memories I had created during this unforgettable internship. J.R. and Keiko have created a remarkable camp that I am so blessed to have been a part of. If you're not afraid of hard work and are up for a life-changing adventure, cross the bridge and apply to be a SCOA counselor.

Aaron

No amount of training can truly prepare you for the experience of working with kids. You can do your best to predict or to analyze, but they will never fail to surprise you. This past summer at SCOA I had the privilege of working alongside some of the most talented individuals I've ever met. We were thrown into the fire together the second we began training, and honestly it was terrifying not knowing what to expect from the month that followed. We sweat through the long and hot days, the kids who couldn't sleep, the kids who wouldn't sleep, and the kids who would rather catch grasshoppers all day than play dodgebee—but we did that together, too.

SCOA isn't easy. In fact, it was one of the most challenging things I've ever done and I know I'm speaking for more than just myself. But it was also one of the best things to ever happen to me. The family we created, who we laughed and cried alongside, the beautiful culture we were immersed in, and the kids—the bright, ridiculously funny, and infinitely mischievous kids—filled my experience in Japan with so much love. I am proud and grateful to have been a SCOA counselor for a summer that will stick with me for the rest of my life.

Tyler

My experience with SCOA was incredible. As someone who loves traveling, learning about new cultures, sports, and working with kids, this was a great opportunity to wrap all of those things into one experience. There are no words to describe the joy that comes from knowing that you had a positive impact on the kids you are working with. Making connections and seeing the kids that you're working with have fun makes the experience truly priceless. Something else that I got out of my experience with SCOA were lifelong friends and relationships with the other counselors that I will cherish for the rest of my life. Overall, between getting to work with the kids, getting to visit and learn about Japan, and the connections that I made, SCOA was one of the best experiences I have ever had and I would highly recommend it to anyone with similar interests.

Cam

My time as a summer camp counselor with SCOA was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Creating meaningful connections with diverse student-athletes from across the United States to provide Japanese youth with an unforgettable summer camp experience was one of the BEST decisions I have made. It is not every day that you get to be a part of something so much bigger than yourself, but being an SCOA counselor shows you how much impact you can truly make. From never-ending water balloon fights to showing off your best moves at the talent show, this opportunity is so unique not only for the kids but also for the counselors. Being an SCOA camp counselor has taught me that there is no barrier that will stop people from building relationships, strengthening communities, and making lifelong memories.