

COUNSELORS' REFLECTIONS 2024

Taylor

I was so thrilled to be able to come back to Japan for a second summer, and it was just as amazing as I expected. It is such a rewarding experience and it was so exciting to see so many familiar faces from the year before. The culture and people never cease to amaze me and I left in absolute awe of the country. Working with an incredible team of athletes left me with so many lessons and amazing memories yet again, and it is an experience I'll never forget!

Brooklyn

For this past summer of 2024 I'm so grateful to say I was a senior counselor for SCOA again! Being a counselor for SCOA in 2023 was so special and memorable and being able to come back for 2024 was super rewarding and unique in so many ways as well! I'm so appreciative to my first summer at SCOA because it really made me learn how to work and connect with all the children and other counselors that this time around coming back felt like a breeze. This summer was extra special because it was the first time the Senior Counselors got to experience a home stay with a Japanese Host Family. While I was super nervous to go and stay with a family I've never met before who also speak a completely different language than me, I ended up having an amazing time. Words can't explain how much gratitude I have for the Kido family for inviting me into their home and giving me a piece of their culture one-on-one! I quickly realized too, while staying with a host family I got to experience what life might be like for a camper coming to SCOA. This left me with a brand new perspective and outlook that I didn't have last year! The homestay is truly an irreplaceable experience that I'll cherish for the rest of my life.

Last year I was super fortunate to work with all age groups at SCOA so coming back I was able to see so many familiar faces every session! This was by far the most rewarding aspect of SCOA for me this summer. I will never forget running out for our first counselor intro and looking into the large group of children and seeing a little hand excitedly wave right at me! Even though I had been gone for a whole year and had so many things happen, right in that moment I remembered all the memories I shared with that camper from the previous summer. Then shortly after, I discovered she remembered them as well. When signing up for SCOA I knew that being a counselor was important for not just the counselors but the campers as well, as we are in a position to leave an everlasting impact. Then to see my campers return and remember me proved this so!

Going to all the way to Japan and attending SCOA isn't always easy but I have always left

being proud and happy that I went. To other student athletes thinking of applying, I hope you do! You never know what SCOA can have in store for you! Take the leap and cross that bridge, as SCOA can leave you with a journey filled with memories and friends that'll last a lifetime!!

Lincoln

SCOA was a very irreplaceable experience for me. I was not sure what to expect when I came to Japan, but was left with so many memories that I will never forget. Every day was exciting knowing that I was in Japan and had the opportunity to work with Japanese children. It was fun to experience their culture and see the joy that they had at camp. The first week of camp a bit rough for me, but by the end of it, I was having fun leading the Hokey Pokey in the middle of a big circle of kids.

I also made many friends with other collegiate athletes and people from outside of the United States. As we all spent so much time together, by the end, it felt like we all had known each other for months, when in reality we only spent five weeks together.

Other than camp, one of the biggest things that left an impact on me was the homestay program. The homestay was a once-in-a-lifetime experience where we got to truly live in another culture and how these Japanese kids grew up. I stayed with the Miyabayashi family for 2 nights. Nobody in the family spoke fluent English, but it was such a treat staying with them. They gave me a real authentic experience that I don't think I would have ever gotten without SCOA. I appreciate how kind the Miyabayashi family was and words will never express how thankful I am to SCOA for giving me that experience.

Maki

Being a SCOA counselor is truly an unparalleled experience that I could not be more grateful for. I wasn't exactly sure what I had gotten myself into when I first said "yes" to this experience, but it quickly became evident that it was going to be tremendously rewarding. Looking back at our 6 weeks together, seeing our growth from the first day of training to the school sessions to the last camp session is astonishing. There were so many lessons learned about communication, accountability, flexibility, leadership styles, etc. that we all navigated with the support of one another. Times weren't always easy, but giving the kids a big hug and hearing that they had fun and want to come back next year genuinely made all those times completely worth it. Countless laughs were shared at the lunch table, campfires, and—my personal favorite—counselors versus campers kickball games. I look back at all these memories with a smile on my face and am excited to create more through my friendships with the other counselors. This experience has tested the boundaries of what I thought I was capable of, and I am eternally grateful for the person I am because of it!

Kunle

Spending my summer at SCOA was transformative. I forged unforgettable memories, developed valuable leadership skills, and formed lifelong friendships with campers and fellow counselors. Working with diverse youth taught me that kindness and shared experiences transcend cultural boundaries. The challenges of the job strengthened my resilience and selflessness. SCOA gave me a second family (host family) and a broader perspective on the world. This experience shaped me into a better leader and person, reminding me that growth lies just beyond comfort zones.

Federica

Reflecting on my experience as a counselor at the SCOA camp in Tokyo, I realized that the language barrier, which could have been a major concern for many, did not worry me at all. Coming from Italy and having moved to Los Angeles last year, I had already faced the challenge of adapting to a new language and culture. This time, while navigating both the Japanese culture and my role as a counselor trying to bring the American culture to Japan, I found myself more comfortable and confident. The support of the other counselors made the process smoother, transforming what could have been a challenging experience into something enjoyable and enriching. One of the most rewarding aspects of this experience was realizing how much of an impact you can make on others, even within a short amount of time. Working with the kids at the camp, I could only hope that in some way, I was able to inspire them or contribute positively to their lives. Whether it was through sharing stories, offering guidance, or simply being present, teaching them sports and playing with them. Their curiosity about the little details of our lives, like our favorite colors or flowers, and their excitement when we shared similarities was very cute. I am incredibly grateful for the friendships I formed with the other counselors, especially the bilingual ones who helped bridge any communication gaps. Before starting this journey, I was anxious about whether I had made the right decision, but now I am thankful for the opportunity. It is not every day that you get to immerse yourself in a new culture while making an impact on young lives and forming lifelong friendships. Saying goodbye to the kids was especially hard, but their enthusiasm and interest in our lives left me with lasting memories. This experience not only expanded my perspective but also reaffirmed the value of stepping outside of my comfort zone. It was a unique opportunity that I wouldn't have found elsewhere.

Elliot

Being from Iowa I didn't expect to be a camp counselor in Japan and certainly didn't expect everything else that came with the experience. Mainly, the people I would meet and the

perspective I would gather. The kids at camp were always very entertained and exciting to be around. It never failed to amaze me how they saw the world differently than I am used to. The shop clerks we would meet on our days off often made me feel the same way.

However, SCOA wouldn't be the same without the counselors. The counselors were easily my favorite part of SCOA. Waking up every day, going to breakfast, and seeing the amazing people you got to share this adventure with was what made the experience truly worth it. You would be surprised how close you can get to people you have only known for 5 weeks.

Hiking with the kids through the forest near Keep and eating Yakiniku on the second floor of a building in Tokyo were some of the truly awesome things I got to do with the counselors. SCOA was a life-changing experience and one of my most cherished memories.

Clare

My time at SCOA was incredibly special. It was amazing how well I got to know my group of kids in just three days! Each session was so different. I also made some wonderful friends among the other counselors, all of whom shared a passion for making a positive impact. This experience taught me so much about Japanese culture!

Logan

My time at SCOA this past summer was definitely a once in a lifetime experience. I was able to make so many memories with the kids and the other counselors. Being able to travel to Japan and know that these kids have been waiting all year to go to SCOA, is an amazing feeling. One of the best memories I have of my time in Japan is the homestay program that we were able to be a part of. This past year SCOA hosted a mini camp experience in English at a Japanese elementary school. The SCOA counselors were able to stay with families from the school and we were really able to feel immersed in the Japanese culture. Even after the camp was over, I was still able to stay in touch with the family that hosted me, and I still feel connected to Japan. Being able to partake in being a senior counselor with SCOA has really changed my life and has allowed me to experience some very memorable things.

Makenna

Whether it was watching every camp session's talent show, taking the kids on scavenger hunts, or losing my voice (scream) singing campfire songs, being a SCOA senior counselor this past summer was one of the best experiences I've ever had.

Although most days were long and tiring, seeing the campers having fun is what helped me keep a positive attitude and high energy. I was so happy to see campers who originally came in quiet and reserved stepping out of their comfort zone and leaving camp with new friends and smiles on their faces. I was inspired by their willingness to experience a new culture and meet new people. I even cried a couple times while saying goodbye because the bonds we created were so special to me.

Coaching youth sports in another country was also really insightful. Even though I was there to teach the campers, I feel like I learned just as much from them in return. Especially since I'm majoring in Asian American Studies, this unique cross-cultural exchange was a really valuable experience for me. Working with the other counselors also felt really rewarding because we all learned a lot and did our part in producing a memorable experience for our campers. We had so much fun exploring Tokyo together once camp ended too!

Overall, I loved my time in Japan so much. I'm so grateful to have had this opportunity, and I will cherish the friendships and memories I made through SCOA for the rest of my life.