

Profile: Anna Truesdale

Tell us in a few hundred words which Camp you were at and what you got up to at camp?

I was placed at Camp Louise, an all-girls Jewish camp in Cascade, Maryland. The camp was pretty big and had an amazing range of activities. We had our own pool with water slides, archery, arts and crafts, folk dance, different kinds of sports (volleyball, kickball, basketball, tennis etc), photography, cookery, dance, nature (where the kids got to help look after goats, chickens and rabbits) and much more. At camp, I was both a General Counsellor and an activities counsellor. This meant I got to spend time in a bunk with 14 girls, as well as run activities on some days in the Arts and Crafts department. I was also chosen to be a Unit Leader Assistant which required me to step up to the leadership role of Unit Leader occasionally as well as assisting the Unit Leader on a daily basis to supervise both counsellors and children in the unit.

Top 3 memories of Summer Camp?

1. The most amazing part about Summer Camp is the people you meet. From the office staff, infirmary staff, the internationals to your co-counsellors, they become more than your friends, they quickly become your family. They're your support network whilst you're there, and I could never have made it through the summer without having such an incredible bunch of people surrounding me.
2. In the first session we had a difficult group of kids. On one of our trips out we went to Hershey Park, an amusement park. I had the 4 quietest kids in our bunk. It was really great being able to give positive attention to them without having chaos going on around me. It also made me incredibly proud when they all went on a rollercoaster with me, despite some of them never having been on one. One of the girls was also terrified of heights, and to see her conquer that fear was incredible.
3. Learning about a new culture/religion. Being part of a Jewish community was amazing. I loved learning the songs, the prayers, the Israeli national anthem, and all about what it means to be Jewish. It was an incredible feeling of community.



Was there a camper that stands out in your mind? If so why?

Every camper had their good and bad moments, and they all had those moments that made you feel immensely proud of them. In the second session, we had a camper who had autism. I was really concerned at the way she would fit in with the other girls, and how she would cope with 3 weeks at camp! But she blew me away. She was up for mostly anything, and the rest of the bunk treated her wonderfully, always including her and helping her out. I'll never forget the way her eyes lit up when Colour Games opened. She was beyond excited!

What are some of the experiences that you had which made an impact on you?

Summer Camp teaches you so much about so many different things, it's hard to choose just a few experiences. I think the hardest and most rewarding part was having to be responsible for the kids 24/7; it was a real challenge. You were a constant role model and always had to be ready to respond to any situation. It was really exhausting. But when you get to the end of the summer and look back at everything you've faced, it's a really cool thought to know that you did it.



Did you travel after camp? Tell us about your adventures – where did you go?

After camp, a group of internationals headed to Florida for a few days in the sunshine. Then I headed to New York to begin my Southern Sun Trek. I can honestly say that those 21 days were the most incredible journey. We drove from NY to LA, going through Washington D.C., Virginia, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Texas, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona, and Nevada. It was a great way to see so much of the country, and see places I would never have known about otherwise. Of course, partying in New Orleans and Las Vegas were definite highlights. I also loved the Grand Canyon, Monument Valley and a place called Zion National Park. We did a hike here called Angel's Landing. We had to climb a ridge with big drops on either side of us, there wasn't a path just these chains we had to grab to pull ourselves over the rocks. So challenging but the best experience!

What was camp food and your accommodation like?

It was food aimed at the kids mostly. They loved when we would have donuts for breakfast, or Pizza and curly fries for lunch. The good thing is that there was plenty of it, and always options too. We had a pretty good salad bar that most of the counsellors liked to visit frequently.

I was really surprised at the accommodation for myself as an in-bunk counsellor. I was lucky enough to have some privacy, with a half wall between me and the kids. However we weren't allowed any doorways or anything between us and them so it made us very open to the kids 24/7. It was perfectly comfortable living arrangements and the counsellor's lounge was fabulous for our time off periods! They had the most amazing couches I've ever slept on! So comfy!

What is something unexpected/different/strange about USA compared to home?

Everything's bigger! I've never seen such huge containers for food! If you've ever been to Wal-Mart then you'll understand. I also found their personalities quite overwhelming at first. They're very extraverted people, happy to share anything and everything. They also expect you to be happy sharing everything too! It can be hard to adjust to.



Did you have a good experience going on Summer Camp with IEP?

Yes! They were fantastic.

What did you value about going to Summer Camp with IEP?

IEP are very supportive right the way through the application process and are always willing to help. I really liked that IEP sent out emails during the summer to check up on us, and I knew that if I really needed to, I could contact them at any stage during my summer. I also loved having the opportunity to meet other summer campers at the orientation. I stayed in touch with some and followed their summer adventures in America too.

Would you do it again?

In a heartbeat.

Did you gain anything from Camp that will benefit you in what you do next?

For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to be a teacher. So needless to say, this experience really gave me a lot of useful learning opportunities. I think it was fantastic for me to work with kids from a very different background to what I've been used to. I also learned a lot about myself, what I'm capable of, what my limits are, and which limits I can break past. .

What is next for you?

At the moment, I am trying to find work. Then I am going to try and save every cent I can so that I can either head back to camp next summer, or I'll head to the UK closer to the end of the year to work there for a while. I've definitely caught the travel bug!



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