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CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Summer Camp

Summer vacation starts in July in Japan, but in America, it starts in June. So right now, American children are in the middle of their summer vacation. In the [August 2022 issue of CIR's Corner](#), I introduced a few American summer topics, so this month, I will introduce another one: summer camp.

Summer vacation for American students is quite long, and lasts from mid-June to early September. On the other hand, working adults only receive an average of 11 days of paid time off per year. Therefore, parents can't always supervise their children during the summer. Summer camps are popular so children can have a safe and meaningful summer vacation.



Cottages lined up at a typical summer camp.

Summer camps offer various programs to children of all ages, but as the name suggests, nature programs with outdoor sports such as hiking and swimming are common. Some summer camps have overnight stays, and some are just "day camps." They usually last for about a week or two. The people in

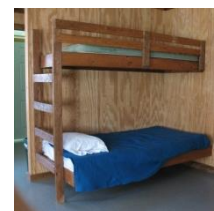
charge of the summer camp are called "counselors." Many high school and college students work as camp counselors for their summer jobs, since they have long summer vacations as well.



Children horsing around in the water with their camp counselor.

I went to summer camp almost every year. When I was a young elementary school student, I went to "Bible Camp." Every day we did bible study, and we played games and made arts and crafts inspired by bible stories. It was fun.

Bible Camp was just a day camp. I went to an overnight camp for the first time when I was nine years old. For one week, I stayed in a cottage with a comfortable bunk bed, and spent time in the forest with other children. This was a summer camp to give underprivileged children living in low-income areas of the city a chance to experience nature. Summer camp can be quite expensive, but thanks to programs like this, even poor children like me can go.



A bunk bed. Some summer camps provide bedding like this.

When I was in middle school, my friend invited me to go to her church's "Girls' Camp." I attended three years in a row. This time I didn't sleep in a cottage, but in a wooden open-air shelter. There were no beds or mattresses, just a flat wooden board to spread out our camping mats and sleeping bags. The roof protected us from the rain, but since there were only two walls, we were practically sleeping outside. There were many bugs, and the nights were cold. We worked together to make all of our own meals, which we cooked in a Dutch oven over a campfire. The bread, chili con carne, and lasagna were especially delicious. For toilets, we had outhouses without running water, and for showers, we had to walk a very long way. Instead of showers, most of us got clean by swimming in the river every day. However, many rivers in Washington state flow from the melting glaciers of the Cascade Mountains, and are extremely cold. Even though the days were scorching hot, a few girls came down with hypothermia every year. We were roughing it, but it made us all stronger.



I slept in a similar shelter during "Girls' Camp."

Middle schoolers at Girls' Camp slept in shelters and had access to some amenities, but after completing three years of camp and starting high school, campers were required to go on the "4th Year Hike." The girls hiked through the mountains all day and slept in tents at night, of course without toilets and showers. The purpose was to "strengthen the girls' testimonies." I wasn't religious, and a strenuous hike definitely wasn't going to make me a believer, so that's where I drew the line. I decided to stop going to Girls' Camp after middle school.

In high school, I was done with overnight summer camps, but I did participate in a day camp that was more like a part-time job. This was another program for underprivileged youth in the city, and it lasted for about three or four weeks. Every morning, a school bus picked us up, and we drove about 30 km east of Seattle to a forest owned by the school district. First, we learned about Washington's native plants. Then, we applied that knowledge to carry out various tasks. For example, we searched for invasive plants, such as ivy, to cut and remove. We used GPS to map the locations of native trees. It was hard work, but since I made some new friends and a little pocket money, it was a great experience.



The Cleveland Memorial Forest is owned by the Seattle School District. Students of Seattle's Cleveland High School purchased the 131-acre (53-hectare) plot of land in 1944. It cost \$300. They planted over 10,000 trees there in order to honor their classmates who had died serving in World War II.

Summer camp is an unforgettable experience for many Americans (and Canadians, I was told). Summer vacation in Japan is busy with homework and school clubs, but if my daughter ever has a chance, I would love to send her to summer camp.★



The best part of summer camp: ghost stories and girl talk around the campfire.

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