

Summer Camp

Summer is nearly upon us. What have you got planned for your students? Have you thought about camping with them? Outdoors all day long, taking hikes, cooking hot dogs over a bonfire, telling ghost stories...oh, yes, and having fun with English! Here, **Kathy Sekioka** and **Peter Lutes** share their experience and advice on camping with children. Perhaps this will give both veterans and newcomers to camping some pointers on what and what not to do.

Kathy Sekioka says...



My philosophy is that kids need a break here in Japan with all the cram school and cultural activities they go to, so I take my students camping

every year in August. The camp is for three nights and four days.

I checked with the prefectural office to find out about all the possible camping places in our prefecture. Many have bedding, meals available in a dining hall, a VCR, a piano, air-conditioned rooms, supportive staff, campfire materials, outdoor game equipment, a pool, a gym, large grounds and woods, camping facili-



ties, and vending machines.

I use one that has outdoor camping places and inside dormitory rooms that are air-conditioned at night. We use the dormitory rooms and the other facilities for seminars to have fun with English. I usually alternate English game activities with sports and handcraft-type things. We do a barbecue on the last night and have American-style food.

If I have less than ten children who want to go, my husband and I can handle it. If there are more, I have extra help. I usually pay one of my staff members 10,000 yen per day or find some willing foreign person in the area who would be appropriate. I have also had advanced students of mine from junior high or high school help out a few times when the numbers were larger.

The children are in elementary school, third grade to sixth grade. We have had between eight and 30 children at one time, but we can support up to 50. I sometimes let first-year junior high school students join. If students want to invite siblings or friends, I don't mind. Some kids want to come back more than once, so I seldom do exactly the same camp schedule twice. That makes it more fun for me, too.

I charge about 7,000 yen per day per child. That covers transportation, an hour-and-a-half trip by slow train; all meals; insurance, which usually costs 500 yen per person and can be purchased from most insurance companies; the cost of extra foreign staff if necessary; and all supplies I must provide. I bring some food for the barbecue, some snacks, teaching supplies, and game materials.

The meals are just regular, low-cost Japanese cafeteria food like curry and rice, spaghetti, etc. I let the facility staff know what meals we will be taking in the dining hall. We eat breakfast there some days. We barbecue only once, but we eat popcorn every night. We make pizza on hot plates one evening, and we eat sandwiches at the beach when we go, usually on the last day.

We do some activities that might require writing like work sheets, postcards home, and handcrafts. We also play ordinary English games, ground golf, and water/pool games. The facility I use has all kinds of equipment, but we bring some, like Frisbees and rocks with writing on them for games in the pool. We usually "hike" to the train station on the last day.

I ask that the children bring bug repellent, writing tools, summer clothes, a raincoat, sandals and sports shoes, 500 yen worth of snacks, and 500 yen in spending money that the students can use for the vending machines.

Kathy's advice for a successful camp

Some Dos:

Check out the facilities thoroughly beforehand and in person so there are no surprises. Make an hour-by-hour plan. Over-planning works best, but be flexible when you carry it out. Build in some free time every day to wind down, and make everything as FUN as possible. I haven't really had any failures except to say that it's important to cut back on activities if the kids get too tired from the heat. Think about the personalities of the kids and make groups that are compatible. Carry a first-aid kit for emergencies, have someone able to be a gofer, and make up your own "camp songs." Make sure your staff understands what they are responsible for, and have someone fluent in Japanese available. Have an awards night, and expect some kids to be homesick.

Some Don'ts:

Don't take things too seriously, and don't be too strict with the kids. Too wide an age span probably won't work out too well. To help avoid homesickness, let the kids call home several times a day if they need to. Don't ever leave the kids unsupervised, especially in the pool or water areas. Don't try to do too much the first time; let it evolve over time.

Don't try to make it like your own childhood camp experience back home. Finally, don't expect to make a big profit, but you should at least break even.

I have been doing these camps for five years and have never had any serious problems other than homesickness. The main thing is to have fun, get along with others, enjoy natural English, and experience camp that is radically different from what usually passes for camp here. Every year there is something memorable, and despite all the work and planning, I'm always glad that we did it again.

Peter Lutes says...



While I was the head teacher at a large eikaiwa in Shikoku, I spent two summers in charge of 3 groups of 150 students each at a government-subsidized camp on the island of

Teishima. Most students were in elementary school, but there were some in junior high school. Each of the six camps was held for two nights and three days.

Due to the large number of students, we needed quite a few teacher/supervisors. We had between six and eight Japanese teachers for each trip, about one per 20 students, and we had about seven foreign teachers. We also hired a registered nurse for each trip.

We chose this particular camp for several reasons, not the least of which was the low cost. We charged our students 15,000 yen, all expenses included, though we usually needed to spend less. This fee included the bus and ferry rides to and from the island, equipment rental, meals, insurance, and a special T-shirt we had printed up with the school crest and the students' names. The students wore these shirts every day for easy identification.

We had the option of sleeping in tents or dormitories. We chose tents in order to give the students a more real-

istic camp experience. In Japan, students usually have everything prepared for them, but at our camps, the students had to put up their own tents. Some tents were a bit lopsided, but the students could feel pride in knowing they did it themselves.

We brought food for dinner, sports equipment, flashlights, bug spray, insect-repellent incense coils, a first-aid kit, extra towels, fireworks (check with the campground first), portable CD players, and contact numbers for all the parents. We asked the children to bring a sweater, a change of clothes, extra socks, a waterproof jacket, a thermos, and towels.

Our regular schedule was to have an English program in the morning and sports or other activities in the afternoon. An ideal schedule for the morning would be to have two 45-minute classes, and do some activities using the English the students have studied in class as part of their regular course. Or, prepare the students in class for what they will be studying at camp. For example, if students were learning about insects or plants, they could go searching in the area around the campground for specimens.

Another idea would be to have a scavenger hunt, where the students are given a list of items they have to find and bring back (a yellow leaf, a brown rock, etc.), or have to go to a certain place and find something. A garbage hunt is another good idea, where the students who find and bring back the most garbage win.

All of the English activities depend on the number of students and teachers in each group and the students' level, so plan well in advance. This will also determine what kinds of materials you will need to bring, and in what quantities.

For the sports, we divided the students into groups for teams. The camp facilities included a gymnasium as well as sports equipment, so the groups rotated after a certain time. We played tag football, dodge ball, soccer, basketball, "British bulldog," and other games (see www.gameskidsplay.net for more games). We also went fish-



ing, an event that was organized by the camp staff. We supplied water pistols and water balloons for "fights."

Each night we barbecued food such as hot dogs in the barbecue pits, though we did eat breakfast and lunch in the camp cafeteria. We brought our own food for the barbecues. After dinner, we would either take a night hike up a hill to a shrine, or sit around the campfires and tell ghost stories. On the hike, students would go in small groups. Occasionally teachers would hide in the trees and jump out to scare the students, just to make the hike a bit more interesting.

We rarely had any problem on these camping trips, except for being caught by a typhoon and unable to return on the scheduled date. We had to call all of the parents and explain what had happened. About 20 of the parents became unreasonable about the late return, but since the ferries weren't running, we couldn't do anything about it. We had to stay an extra night and charter a ferry to come and get us the next day. This was the only camp where we lost money, because of the extra expense. Fortunately there were no other groups at the camp at that time, so we were able to stay inside that night.

Peter's advice for a successful camp

Some Dos:

Start with a budget of how much money you want to spend, instead of finding out how much everything costs first and deciding then. If you



have a limit, then it will be easier to choose what you can and can't do.

When making your schedule, decide on the purpose of your camp. Is it going to be English-intensive, or more for fun with only some English? It is harder for young kids to deal with a mixed English and Japanese schedule, so be sure to have separate, set routines. For example, have English activities in the morning and other activities in the afternoon. Also, let the kids fool around without your standing over them all the time. Unleash them, but make sure they are still supervised.

Make sure your schedule is filled, so that no one is standing around doing nothing. Make sure you have back-up plans, in case you are not able to do what you originally planned. This includes food, too. If you have long camps, and have ordered food to be brought in, make

sure there is an alternate plan for delivery in case of bad weather.

Make sure the parents' safety concerns are addressed. Listen to their questions about "What would happen if..." and give them reassuring answers. Better yet, anticipate what might happen, and inform the parents before they ask. Make sure the parents feel that their kids will be safe. Just because this is a school event, it doesn't mean the parents won't worry. Having insurance, or requiring insurance, will also help soothe the parents.

Some Don'ts:

Don't kill time taking roll every morning unless absolutely necessary. In that case, split the students into groups, and have a group leader with a check-off list take roll.

Don't go near the water. There is always an accident waiting to happen.

Many students do not know how to swim well, and many adults do not, either.

Stay away from dangerous athletic courses. The Japanese teachers and parents, and even the children, may think that the courses are usual, but many accidents happen when children slip off high places onto the hard ground underneath.

While Kathy and Peter have told us some good ideas for our own camps, we must remember common safety rules such as those listed above. Make sure the facilities are appropriate for your students' ages, keep everyone hydrated with plenty of water or tea, and have the necessary supervision. See www.gocampingamerica.com/kidspages/ for games to play (especially scavenger and garbage hunts) and ways to be safe, including some photos and explanations about poisonous plants and animals to avoid. Happy camping!

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