

Researching the Right Camp for Your Child : A Blueprint for the Year

Often times, parents come to us too late in the season to find the perfect summer experience for their child. In many cases, the only session in which their child can participate – nestled between baseball season, the family vacation and school starting - is already filled up. The best way to avoid this situation is to plan your summer early. Done right, the process of finding the right camp can take an entire year's worth of research, but the reward is great.

Here's a blueprint:

DO THE RESEARCH (January - May 2008)

With over 11,000 camps in the United States, it is important to come up with a list of questions to guide you. By doing so, you can narrow the possibilities to a manageable few.

What do I want in a camp?

Single sex or co-ed?

Religious or non-denominational?

Sports-oriented, nature-oriented or a mixture of both?

Close-by camp within driving distance or am I comfortable with a plane flight?

Do I want lakes or mountains (or will just a river do)?

1, 2 or 4 weeks in length?

Is the culture or personality of the camp competitive or nurturing?

Are activities required or is there free choice by interest?

[This article assumes the reader is trying to decide on a traditional camp experience. If you are looking at specialty camps and/or teen programs, there is a whole different set of questions to consider]

To do this research, it is helpful to –

- Talk to other children and parents. Referrals from other families with camp experience are a great way to get the real scoop. Remember it is sometimes difficult to recognize when your child may need a different program than his or her best buddy.
- Watch DVDs & talk to your children. This is especially helpful for children to learn what camp is all about and can easily enable you to discuss camp with your child in order to assess their readiness. Children enjoy seeing the campers and the activities. When talking to your child about their interests, be open to the unexpected.
- Search the Internet. The Internet is full of camp "Yellow Pages" that offer links to a camp's web site. You can search by region or camp focus. If using this method, it is a good idea to use additional references from the camps, as well as an independent advisory service.
- Attend a camp fair. Schools, malls, and community centers sponsor annual fairs to allow parents to see many programs in a central venue. Usually present are directors of overnight camps, day camps and teen programs. Check your local parenting publications.
- Talk to camp directors. Each director should have a clear sense of what children should gain from their experiences and how to go about teaching these skills. If the director cannot adequately answer your questions about camp philosophy, home communication or supervision, then it is probably not the right camp for you.
- Talk to a Camp Advisor. TIPS ON TRIPS & CAMPS is a wonderful resource to use in locating the perfect program for your child. Tips on Trips can help a family compare programs, obtain references, determine the right questions to ask directors, and, ultimately, find the program that suits each child. Tips on Trips and Camps, Inc. is a FREE advisory service, specializing in overnight summer experiences for children ages 7-19. There are 16 consultants world-wide, placing thousands of children in quality overnight programs each summer. Tips consultants provide consultations by phone, email or in person to determine the needs of the family and then provide videos and brochures by mail. Tips consultants evaluate residential summer programs through interviews with directors, personal visits to programs in the summer, and feedback from recent participants. They stand behind the programs that they recommend to families, representing programs of the highest quality.

CAMP VISITS (Summer 2008)

Based upon your research, try to narrow your camp options and choose a few programs to go and visit. All camps gladly receive guests, if you schedule an appointment. If you are considering camps in your home state, you can plan a day or overnight trip to an area and then stop in to see the camp. If you are looking at camps in a different region, you could plan a family vacation near to the camps you wish to visit. Most camps are located in

beautiful areas near state parks, mountains, or resort areas, so these visits can be fun for the whole family. You could even plan your family's vacation AT a camp and take advantage of a family weekend. These visits can help your child acclimate to the environment of the camp and make the decision to leave home a lot less scary. And, your first-hand observations of the facilities, the activities or the dining hall routine can help you know if this would be the right place for your child!

Early Bird Discounts (FALL 2008)

Once you have determined which camp suits your child, you can take advantage of early bird discounts. These discounts usually hold the cost of camp down to the previous year's tuition or take a few hundred dollars off the price of residential camping. And, when your neighbors are stressing out about what their child will be doing in the coming summer, you will be sitting pretty with your child already enrolled!

SUMMER 2009 – The Best Summer of Your Child's Life

Camp provides an opportunity for growth that should not be under-estimated. It is an integral part of a child's educational and social development, providing a haven from our technologically and academically driven society. It certainly is not a vacation in the strictest sense of the word. Since there are programs to fit the needs of any child, I encourage you to explore the range of options available to you. The camp experience is an opportunity that cannot be replicated elsewhere. Happy camping!

About the Author

Beth Brody, is a [camp advisor](#) with Tips on Trips and Camps. Tips on Trips and Camps is a camp information and referral service that helps parents choose the right summer camp programs for kids ages 7 to 18.

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