



International Cultural Exchange Visitors Orientation Overview

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International cultural exchange visitors participate in camp to experience American culture. That experience will be more positive if time is taken to culturally orient the visitor and allow them to discuss some basic tenets of American life both inside and outside of camp. It is anticipated that this orientation will be in addition to the one given by the international visa sponsor or recruiting group. It is suggested that this be done separately from American staff. It can be done virtually before arriving at camp which might help to alleviate some apprehension before arrival. It can also be done in person upon arrival. Consider including a virtual tour of your camp with key places marked also. Use as much or as little of the material as you wish.

The Basics

These are immediate needs and should be addressed right away so adjustment can begin. Much of this information should be included in pre-camp communication and then reviewed quickly upon arrival.

1. Sleeping arrangements and needs — Accommodations and bedding
2. Plumbing — Types of facilities and how to operate
3. Clothing — Climate, altitude, camp uniform, special dress codes such as footwear and swimsuits
4. Hygiene — Showers
5. Laundry — Where, how, and how much
6. Email/internet — Send, receive, privacy, computer access
7. Mail/stamps — Costs, where do they send and receive mail
8. Phones/phone cards — Access to landlines, privacy, hours of use, availability of prepaid phone cards, cell phone reception and use, international apps
9. Money — Review of US currency system, where can they change money
10. Storage of passports, money, and tickets
11. Staying healthy — Rest, jet lag, climate/altitude, wildlife, nutrition, sunscreen, cultural adaptation, and health
12. Driving laws — Licenses, side of the road, etc.
13. Alcohol/substance laws — Minimum age, consequences, camp rules
14. Smoking rules — Camp (and public according to your state)
15. Food — Types offered at meals, snacks, storage of personal food items, availability of international foods
16. Shopping — Access, how can they get personal items
17. Illness/insurance — Taking care of yourself, telling appropriate people you are injured or ill, international insurance specifics such as co-pay and how to submit a claim, workers' compensation insurance
18. Time off — How often, what can they do, when can they leave camp
19. Transportation — Arrival pickup, in camp vehicles, leaving camp options, public transportation

Visa Specifics

1. The BridgeUSA J-1 visa program is a cultural exchange program that is part of a federal program to promote better global understanding. It includes time spent at camp and often time spent traveling in the US. It adds value to the youth development focus of camp, promoting global acceptance and awareness that goes beyond the camp community.
2. Cultural exchange is sharing of culture and learning about each other; spending quality time in activities together; sharing language, customs, traditions, and ideas; learning to accept and value each other's similarities and differences and moving beyond the limitations of political climates to people-to-people interaction.
3. There are two different types of BridgeUSA J-1 visas for camp cultural exchange visitors, the camp counselor visa and the summer work travel visa for support positions. J-1 visas cannot be extended.
 - a. The Camp Counselor visa:
 - i. Allows the visitor to work only in camp.
 - ii. Must work in program/general counselor areas, not support.
 - iii. Can directly supervise campers 24 hours a day.
 - b. Summer Work Travel visa (support positions):
 - i. Can work in non-camp position for another employer after camp obligation is over.
 - ii. Cannot work in a program area at camp.
 - iii. Cannot be responsible for camper supervision.
 - c. Expectations of both:
 - i. Everyone should be committed to the goals of the camp.
 - ii. Everyone should interact with campers and American staff.
 - iii. Everyone should be involved in cultural exchange activities.
4. International visa sponsors are your partners in providing a positive cultural experience for your cultural exchange visitors. Sponsors are required to contact their international visitors on a regular basis and camps should facilitate that contact if needed. Visitors should have the opportunity for contact with their sponsor at all times. Sponsors should be notified of any personnel action or emergencies immediately!
5. Work dates/travel/return home:
 - a. Look at the dates of camp and release dates for each visitor.
 - b. Talk about travel options for camp counselors and the type of support available in researching those options. Review the return home dates of all.
 - c. Have them review their return flight procedures in their agency information to find change of flight information deadlines and procedures for return tickets.
6. Pocket money/social security/taxes:
 - a. Pocket money — Dates they will receive, how they will receive pocket money, and any extra money they will receive after the 63-day period is completed.
 - b. Social security cards are required by US government. Discuss how to get one if they have not already or have not applied. Review what they mean such as tracking of wages and taxes by US government. Review what they don't mean including they are not blanket permission to work in the US.
 - c. Withholding taxes are based on the amount of money they receive. Many of them will be eligible for wage exemptions. If not, they can get back and money withheld when they return home. They will be required to file taxes in the US.
7. Counselor/support positions understanding:

- a. Separate by this grouping to establish support network.
- b. Discuss differences/questions about visa regulations in camp and for after camp participation.
- c. Discuss difference in camp procedures regarding camp roles.
- d. Discuss ways to reach out to each other to overcome isolation barriers

Cultural Awareness

Be sure to set the stage in this section by encouraging honesty, respect for each other's opinions and confidentiality in regard to the discussion outside of the room. Limit the number of Americans in the room to create an environment in which the international cultural exchange visitor feels more comfortable sharing their true feelings. This is again designed to be a guided discussion.

1. Language
 - a. Role of sarcasm in American culture and how it relates to other cultures especially European
 - b. Language similarities and difference
 - i. Even English speakers talk a different language
 - ii. We learn each other's language by identifying common terms or phrases, necessary terms and slang
 - iii. Common words in one language can be offensive in another
 - iv. Slang words should be appropriate around children
 - v. Support to language learning — asking for help
2. Have a map of the USA available. Explore the location of camp, the location of where they entered the US and some major attractions such as New York City, San Francisco, Disney, and Grand Canyon. Talk about the size of the country and hours of travel.
3. What make our views different are our perspective views of the world. This is called ethnocentrism and it impacts us in many ways.
 - a. If time, have each person draw a map of the world and compare them.
 - b. Talk about how our experiences, values, beliefs, behaviors are the center of our world, and relate to the way we interpret new things including our willingness to accept new cultures and perhaps ability to fully enjoy the camp experience.
4. A stereotype is a fixed mental picture of a group that is oversimplified and not based on individuality. It is often based on prejudice, may be critical and judgmental, and is based on perception, opinions, feelings rather than reality or actual knowledge. Breaking down stereotypes is an important part of cultural exchange.
 - a. What do you know about Americans?
 - i. Have each person share one thing they feel they already know about Americans
 - ii. Discuss them, gently try to influence the stereotypes, and be prepared to laugh about it
 - iii. Show how those thoughts bond the international visitors
 - b. What do you think Americans know about people from your country?
 - i. Have each person share one thing they think Americans may know about people from their country
 - ii. Discuss them, have them suggest ways they can gently try to influence the stereotypes, and again, be prepared to laugh about it
 - iii. Expand the discussion for all countries represented — i.e. what do you think people from Sweden know about people from Australia?

- iv. Show how people from other countries represented may share some of the same thoughts as Americans. How does this affect their ability to work together?
 - c. What do you hope to learn and share?
 - i. Have each person share one thing they'd like to learn about American children and adults.
 - ii. Have each person share at least one thing they'd like others to learn about people from their country.
 - d. How do American movies, TV, and the internet relate to learning?
 - e. How does social media influence what we think and learn about each other?
- 5. About America — This format is designed as a guided discussion.
 - a. American education system
 - i. Not as complete in basics as some other countries in K-12 especially science and math
 - ii. American students are not as good with geography, international affairs, and history as some other countries
 - iii. Secondary education quality is very high with a significant number of international students
 - iv. Everyone can go to college — two-year or four-year, but can be expensive
 - b. American newspapers/media
 - i. Not as much international news as many other countries
 - ii. Often reflects politic views
 - c. American discipline of children
 - i. There are regional and cultural differences
 - ii. Corporal punishment is frowned upon (and some state laws are very strong on this issue)
 - iii. Boundaries for children are not always clear
 - iv. Children may talk back to adults more than in other countries — may be considered rude
 - v. Respect for elders not as evident as in some countries
 - vi. Challenges of the immigrant population and the role of children caught between two worlds
 - vii. Relationship of discipline issues to camp life
 - d. American consumerism
 - i. Difference between the “haves and have nots” getting greater
 - ii. Relationship of economics to camp life
 - e. American food patterns
 - i. Breakfast food and habits
 - ii. Role of salads, fruits, and vegetables
 - iii. Use of junk food, soft drinks, carbohydrates, sugar
 - iv. Bread, processed foods
 - v. Fast food
 - vi. Supermarkets
 - f. American music
 - g. Role of music in American life
 - ii. Music as an inclusive force
 - iii. Role of music in camp
- 6. Camp Awareness

- a. Sexual harassment in the American culture
 - i. Definition — unwanted advances often with real or perceived power issues
 - ii. Acceptable boundaries
 - iii. Interpret definition and boundaries to camp life
 - iv. Discuss relationship to their cultures
 - v. Consequences
 - b. Child abuse in the American culture
 - i. Definition - Behavior perceived to be abusive by the child that can be physical, emotional, sexual, verbal or neglect and inflicted by an adult or another usually older child.
 - ii. Acceptable boundaries
 - iii. Discuss appropriate camper/adult contact and two-person supervision as it relates to your camp.
 - iv. Discuss relationship to their culture
 - v. Consequences
 - vi. Bullying
 - c. Supervision situations - male and female roles
 - i. What is the role of women in their cultures
 - ii. Discuss challenges of supervision based on cultural values
 - 1. Is it easy for men to be supervised by women?
 - 2. Do men supervisors expect as much from women?
 - 3. Interpret to the situation in camp
 - d. Camp culture/traditions/legends
 - i. Define your camp culture and purpose of traditions
 - ii. Share songs, stories, ceremonies, etc.
7. Adjustment
- a. Homesickness
 - i. Everyone experiences it, both adults and children. It can translate into physical symptoms.
 - ii. Stay involved in activities and with other people.
 - iii. Try to substitute camp things for support/familiarity from home.
 - iv. Stay in contact with home but not to the extent that it isolates from camp life.
 - b. Wellness
 - i. Get enough rest and build up your stamina. Eat well balanced meals and be willing to try new foods. Understand the need for carbohydrates at altitude and increased activity.
 - ii. Keep taking medications regularly.
 - iii. Maintain good hygiene.
 - iv. Take care of things when they are small/just beginning so don't become major health issues.
 - v. Pay attention to how you react to stress, what you normally do to relieve stress, and what can you do in camp to relieve stress.
 - c. Staying in contact with home
 - i. Use phone, email, mail, parcels
 - ii. Stay connected to help reentry and provide for support in times of stress
 - d. Realize you are beginning a life changing experience

- i. That means taking a personal risk, setting a goal and working toward it, and pushing yourself sometimes to new limits. Will you really not want to go home?
- e. Being yourself
 - i. Being yourself will reduce stress
 - ii. You were chosen for skills and attitudes you already have but it's OK to work on making yourself better in ways you would like
- f. Inclusion
 - i. Describe a time you experienced exclusion or feeling left out
 - ii. Describe a situation in which you felt inclusion or feeling part of the group and identify the factors that made you feel included
 - iii. Inclusion is a two-way process. Identify steps you can take to reach out to Americans staff, campers, and other international staff.
- g. Stages of cultural adaptation
 - i. Adaptation will progress from a skeptical view of the experience to more and more ownership of a new place.
 - ii. This does not always progress in a sequential pattern — may take giant steps backwards at times and then leaps forward.
 - iii. Discuss where you are now and how you can support each other.

Action Plan for Cultural Exchange

Staff can be grouped by country or region of origin.

Develop plans for sharing:

1. Culture in camp activities/special events
2. Culture in specific camp job
3. And learning language
4. Culture informally