



*Konichiwa*



*Willkommen*



*Bonjour*

*Ciao*



**Camps  
Speak an  
International  
Language**



*Hola*

*Peace and Cooperation*

Linda Grier Pulliam

There's a passionate debate going on — whether men and women should share child-rearing responsibilities — even if it means the father sometimes stays at home. Native American, Nigerian, Kyrgyz, Israeli, Bosnian, Azerbaijani, and American teens each express their points of view. And it's only 9 a.m. at the Global Youth Village, a leadership camp for adolescents thirteen to eighteen.

Stepping into *Waldsee*, a visitor is immediately immersed in the German-speaking cultures of Europe, complete with Alpine huts, saunas, and a fairy tale forest called *Marchenwald*. Villagers play *fussball* and create *buntglass* (stained glass), along with traditional *schwimmen* and *kanufahren* (swimming and canoeing) at the beach. Even meals include *wiener schnitzel* and *schokolade fondue*. And how far do campers travel to *Waldsee*? Only as far as Bemidji, Minnesota, to one of six authentic Concordia Language Camp villages — French, Norwegian, Finnish, Russian, Spanish, and German.



### The Universe Just Got Smaller

Despite the cameras, computers, telephone hookups, and technicians that had commandeered the dining hall, all eyes were fixed intently on the large screen. This was the setting in 1998 when Seacampers in Big Pine Key, Florida, and their eleven Russian friends made history by participating in a direct satellite communication link with the Russian Space Station *Mir*. For twenty “goose bump” minutes, campers at the marine science camp posed questions through a staff translator to cosmonauts.

These exchange visitors provide a unique opportunity for American children to have cultural exposure to new customs, languages, and activities by living and playing with the children and adults who become an intrinsic part of the multicultural tapestry of camp. Dick Thomas, director of Chewonki in Wiscasset, Maine, finds that the lives of his campers are enriched by this experience, as they realize that the United States is not the center of the universe. “International staff brings a symmetry and energy to the total staff,” according to Thomas. Chewonki, like many other American camps, also hosts campers from other nations. Families of international children appreciate the diversity of the camp community as well as the opportunity for immersion in a safe, secure American tradition. One outcome of the exchange program is invariably a greatly improved

perception of the United States and its citizens by international participants.

Cultural exchange programs authorized by the United States Department of State, host over 22,000 young adults from as many as forty-five countries each year as counselors, instructors, and support staff in American summer camps. Under the auspices of international placement agencies that recruit and orient participants and obtain J-1 visas, camps serve as sponsors for these talented, highly skilled visitors. Each one undergoes a rigorous screening process that includes police background checks, approval by the American Embassies in their countries, endorsement by immigration authorities, and verification of skills in particular program areas.

### Pass the *Pelmeni!* — Festivals with an International Flavor

Many camps go beyond simply including international staff and campers in their community. Culture festivals are popular, with cabin groups and counselors representing different countries through costumes, flags, food, folktales, songs, crafts, and games. Working with the camp food service, Russian *pelmeni*, Norwegian flatbread, Mexican *fajitas*, or other ethnic dishes may make an appearance at special theme meals. Campers often discover that many of their traditional camp songs

actually have origins in other countries or are sung with slightly different words. Even the game of “Rock, Paper, Scissors” is played by children around the world.

For children with an interest in a more intensive international experience, specialized camps provide cultural immersion without leaving the security of the U.S. borders. The American Camp Association’s parent Web site: [www.CampParents.org](http://www.CampParents.org) “Find a Camp” feature allows families to easily locate a camp with a “language study” or “international culture” focus.

### Camp’s Global Reach

Some camps, as well as many national youth organizations, also sponsor exchange trips abroad. During the past decade, Chewonki has offered trips to Australia and Russia with the advantage of allowing participants the familiarity of the camp experience in another country. Since 1911, the YMCA has been building global citizens and is active in 110 countries with thirty million members worldwide. Through programs such as “Global Teens,” internationally minded teenagers from New York City participate in a one-year program that includes three weeks of summer overseas travel. “Go Global” provides opportunities for young adults, age eighteen and up, to work in YMCA programs abroad. As an official non-governmental organization, the YMCA also hosts an annual United Nations Conference for volunteers and youth members.

Since 1948, the IFYE program (International 4-H Youth Exchange) has provided opportunities for young ambassadors ages sixteen to twenty-five, to live and work in host families in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Pacific. The 4-H Labo program for Americans ages twelve to seventeen includes a one-month home stay in Japan and also recruits American families and camps to host IFYE or Labo youth.

### The Bridge to Understanding

From the colorful flags hanging in a camp’s dining hall, the lilt of the Irish receptionist who answers the phone, the display of African drums, or even the introduction to a child’s counselor, Tarik, Fiona, or Rodrigo, camp is a global village. Peace Poles, with plaques in eight languages proclaiming, “May Peace Prevail On Earth,” rise in the center of many camps and in the national office of the American Camp Association. Camps and their young ambassadors play an integral role in sowing these seeds of peace.

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