

# Profile: Natalie Looyer

## Hometown:

Christchurch, New Zealand

## Program:

Summer Camp USA

### Tell us in a few hundred words which Camp you were at and what you got up to at camp?

I was at Kamp Kohut in Maine, situated on Lake Thompson. I was an outdoor education instructor during 'class' time and a bunk counsellor at all other times. It was very full on and we only had an hour off each day which made it even more awesome because we were so involved. On the bunk counsellor side of things I was in a bunk with 10 - 12 eleven to thirteen year-olds and three other counsellors. During bunk time and rest hour we spent a lot of time with the campers making friendship bracelets, playing cards, tossing balls or throwing Frisbees around outside.

As an instructor we had six different classes each day and we would have to construct a class-plan consisting of the activities and skills that the campers would learn for that period. Many activities at Kohut had 'levels' and the campers worked hard to reach certain goals and levels put in place. Every Wednesday was a 'trip day' where the campers went off site for a day hiking, canoeing, mountain biking or just exploring the beach. The day ended with ice cream at a local shop, and an enormous campfire where everybody got to sing their 'trip songs' and also some well-practiced traditional favourites.

Another great Kohut tradition were the great camp dances, where everybody would dress up to a theme and have a grand old disco dance in the hockey rink. It's a known fact that the counsellors enjoyed these more than the campers! Kohut was split into two four-week sessions, and at the end of the session, there would be a big competition where the whole of camp would split into four teams and compete for points in all of the activities they had learnt skills in. The campers took this very seriously but had a lot of fun with it and the beginning of the competition was made a huge deal of and nobody knew when it was going to 'break' (or start). First session the competition broke at 6am by music blasting down the bunk lines and a helicopter flying overhead. I had never seen children so excited about anything before!



### Top 3 memories of Summer Camp?

1. Watching the excitement of the children when the all-camp competitions broke.
2. Watching the campers gain skills and learning from what I was teaching them in terms of climbing and getting into the high ropes.
3. This one has to go to the incredible lifelong friends I made at camp and all of the fun times we had teaching together, sharing great moments with and becoming like a close family.

### What are some of the experiences that you had which made an impact on you?

I was very interested in studying teaching before coming to camp and now having had that experience it has made me feel a lot more confident of what I want to do and it gave me an indication of how I work with children, what ages I feel I have more influence over, etc. I learnt that I have a much more effective personality when teaching/instructing children rather than being the babysitter in the bunk. Another great thing was that I was the youngest counselor at Kamp Kohut and I was surrounded by other teachers with much more experience than me, so I had a huge wealth of influence and support around me, and I could learn from their methods.



### **Did you travel after camp? Tell us about your adventures – where did you go?**

I stayed in the USA for a month after camp. I spent three days at a friend's house in Maine, and then I travelled down the East Coast camping in Virginia with some friends. I saw the 'Mall' and all that it beholds in Washington DC, checked out Harry Potter World and Universal Studios in Orlando & Florida. I flew across the country to California and saw the usual sights in LA, Disneyland, and then I spent two weeks with a friend just outside of LA, camping, climbing and road-tripping. All the friends I stayed and travelled with were all people I'd met at camp.

### **What was camp food and your accommodation like?**

It was very good – there was always plenty of everything, fresh fruit and salad all the time and lots of choice at every meal.

All the international staff were supplied with bedding and bathroom linen, cleaners came in every day to clean the bathrooms in the bunks. It was part of the everyday schedule to have a bunk clean up after breakfast, which the campers were judged on and rewarded at the end of the week with an ice-cream outing if they scored the highest!

### **Were there any times that were hard?**

My first few days at camp were hard because it took me a while to fit in and find the people that I bonded well with. After that, I didn't feel homesick once. Also because camp was so full on and we were on duty from 7.30am till 9.30pm everyday, there was a lot of tiredness and exhaustion, but it was a great learning curve to deal with the tiredness and I just kept reminding myself that this was my big summer camp experience and it would be over before I knew it.

### **What is something unexpected/different/strange about USA compared to home?**

Something that is different is just the people – they are very different to New Zealanders in their general personalities and the way they interact with you. It's hard to explain but the people are just different.

### **Did you have a good experience going on Summer Camp with IEP?**

Yes, IEP was very supportive and I felt like I had good support behind me if anything may have gone wrong. The email contact while I was away was nice too.

### **Would you do it again?**

Yes, I am considering returning to Summer Camp USA if I am invited back to Kohut.

### **Did you gain anything from Camp that will benefit you in what you do next?**

A huge amount of experience and skills in my desire to study teaching. I feel like I am a step ahead in the field already!

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### **What is next for you?**

Maybe another overseas gap year before I hit university...but I would like to study English and Classics once I get there.

