

12 Questions: Choose the Best Summer Program for your Teen

Don't know what to ask summer adventure programs? Here are 12 smart questions you should ask when selecting the most enriching summer program for your teenager, and answers from Adventure Treks, a summer wilderness program for teens.

1) How involved is your director?

The director sets the tone of a program. Many adventure program directors manage from an office far removed from the activities. Few directors will actually get to know your son or daughter personally. From a quality control perspective, it is imperative that directors spend time in the field supporting instructors and being involved in day-to-day operations.

At Adventure Treks, Director John Dockendorf visits every trip, meets every student and is directly involved with the instructors throughout the summer.

2) What is the medical training of your instructors?

Industry standard medical training for backcountry instructors is a Wilderness First Responder (WFR) or EMT certification. Wilderness First Responder certification means the instructor has passed an 80 hour intensive course, focused first on prevention and treatment of backcountry emergencies. Many programs (and The American Camping Association) require only Wilderness First Aid certification. This is generally inadequate for extended backcountry travel.

Adventure Treks requires all instructors to be trained at a Wilderness First Responder or EMT standard.

3) What is your instructor to student ratio?

For a backcountry adventure trip, the maximum instructor to student ratio should be 1:6. Lower ratios mean a safer experience, better supervision, more opportunities to learn, and better interaction with role models.

At Adventure Treks the instructor to student ratio is always 1:4 or lower. We have 6 instructors on every trip, not just 2.



4) What is your average instructor age and/or experience level?

Instructors should be a minimum age of 21 years old. The complex responsibility of leading back country trips and the maturity needed to work with teenagers is best handled by older, more mature instructors who have graduated from college. It takes several years to gain the wealth of experience needed to become an expert wilderness instructor. In order to maintain program continuity, safety, quality and consistency, a successful program needs at least a 50% instructor return rate.

At Adventure Treks the average instructor age is 27 years old, insuring plenty of experience. Virtually every Adventure Treks instructor has a college degree. In 2008, 43% of Adventure Treks instructors had obtained or were working towards a graduate degree.

At Adventure Treks the average instructor return rate is 76%. Typically an instructor spends 3 or 4 summers at Adventure Treks.

5) How many instructors will be on my son or daughters trip?

Most programs have two to three instructors per trip. When students get sick or special situations develop, managing a group when you only have two instructors becomes very difficult.

At Adventure Treks, a typical trip features six instructors. With six instructors there are a greater number of role models and a greater chance that your child will really connect with one or several instructors. A six instructor team makes better decisions, keeps a more watchful eye on safety and has more instructors available to be actively involved with the students. Six instructors are better able to model a sense of community, inclusiveness and kind-



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ness and offer more opportunities for creativity.

6) Are the students who attend your program carefully screened?

One student attending for the wrong reasons can negatively affect an entire trip. Few teenagers are perfect, but every program should check references on students and spend time prior to the summer ensuring that students will be motivated and will contribute to the program.

Adventure Treks requires an essay and two references for every new student. Adventure Treks is in no way a program for troubled youth, and does not accept students with behavior issues or any problems with drug or alcohol use.

7) What is the student repeat rate?

A summer experience should be so amazing that virtually every student wants to return. A typical return rate for wilderness adventure travel programs for teenagers is 20 - 25%. NOLS and Outward Bound's repeat rate is 10 - 15%

At Adventure Treks, typically between 50 and 60% of students return for at least one more summer.

8) How long has your program been in operation?

There is no easy, best answer for this. Some new programs have tremendous energy; some established programs have gone stale. Generally a program should have been around at least ten years to have an established track record.

Adventure Treks has been working with teens in the outdoors for over 30 years and operating programs in the Western US for 16 years.

9) Is the program licensed and permitted?

To operate on public lands (National Parks and Forests) a program must possess Special Use Permits and file an operating and safety plan with the appropriate land management agency. Not all summer programs operate legally.

Adventure Treks owns permits in the places they visit and has an extensive collection of Special Use Permits

10) How much do you use outfitters?

All programs use outfitters for activities that need extra safety expertise like whitewater rafting, sea kayaking and ice climbing. Outfitters should be chosen carefully and have a long term relationship with the program as well as a reputation for safety and professionalism. Do make sure that the use of outfitter staff compliment the existing adventure program instructors rather than replaces them for the day.

Adventure Treks has long-term relationships with the finest outfitters Adventure Treks instructors operate in full collaboration with the outfitters to maintain the best community experience for their students.

11) How do I know this is a good program? Is American Camping Association Accreditation (ACA) important for trips like these?

ACA accreditation is generally not relevant for wilderness adventure travel programs. None of the best wilderness adventure programs for teens are ACA accredited including Outward Bound or NOLSACA. Though ACA accreditation

is a good general screen when choosing a traditional summer camp, ACA standards, especially for first aid are insufficient for most wilderness programs.

Adventure Treks exceeds every relevant ACA standard and also uses standards from AEE, the USFS, the NPS, Peer Review, America Outdoors and the Wilderness Risk Management Conference to provide a professional experience for its students.

We encourage you to talk with our references, Adventure Treks students and their parents, to find out more about Adventure Treks. Call or email for references in your area.

12) What are the added costs of your program?

Many programs have hidden costs: gear rental, equipment deposits, airport pick up fees, and require you to pay extra for some meals.

At Adventure Treks, it's all included! You pay for your tuition, plane ticket, clothing and boots, and a few personal items. There are no hidden taxes, charges or fees. In fact, Adventure Treks even includes the use of all of your outdoor gear for free, a savings of up to \$500.

Want more information about Adventure Treks?

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