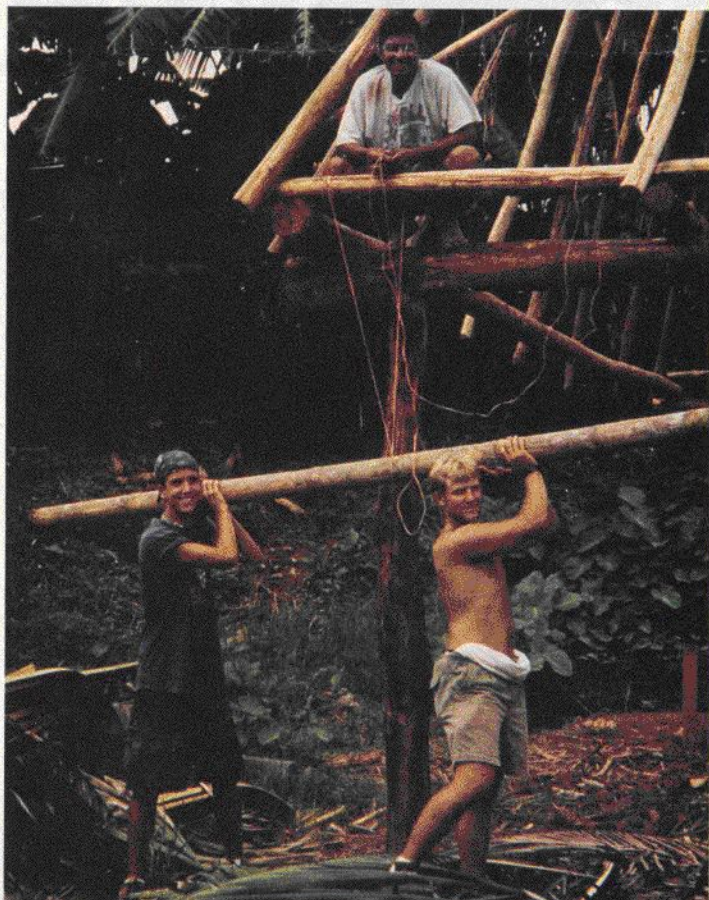


BEYOND SUMMER CAMP

Now is the time to plan for your teen's special-something summer. From outdoor adventure to international travel to community service, here are some of the best programs.



Instead of jobs at the mall and weekends at the pool, teens are taking on the world in summer adventures like this construction project in Costa Rica.

Phoebe Randel was struggling. Twice she failed to scale the cliff with the other teens in her backpacking group. "I was so upset with myself," the Connecticut high school freshman says of that summer day in California's Kings Canyon National Park. "Everyone was encouraging me. I tried one more time, and I made it. That trip showed me how much more I can do."

This summer, tens of thousands of parents will send their teenagers off in hopes that they, too, will discover something important about themselves and the world while sailing in the Caribbean, living with a French family, building houses for the poor, or studying on a university campus.

Parents pay as much as \$7,000 for these experiences, though many programs offer substantial financial aid. "It's not all rich kids. Kids save for three years to go," says Chris Yager, who oversees expensive programs to Asia. "Parents might have a beat-up car in the driveway, but this is what they want to spend their money on."

More parents than ever are eagerly signing their teens up for programs, according to Susan Greenberg, who edits the 1,800-page annual guide, *Peterson's Summer Opportunities for Kids and Teenagers*. The book and its Web site (www.petersons.com) list more than 2,500 different programs — three times as many as a decade ago.

There are nearly 15 million high schoolers, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Working parents are no longer comfortable leaving teens to their own devices, but camp won't cut it for a generation enrolled in organized summer programs since preschool. "I wanted the summer to be about self-discovery, becoming a leader, and having a good time," explains Sadie Phillips, a Los Angeles high school senior who spent last summer doing community service in Israel.

No trip or experience is guaranteed to be a rousing success, however. Phillips, for one, was disappointed in her program's staff and organization, **TURN TO PAGE 83**

BY EILEEN OGINTZ THE AUTHOR OF THE SYNDICATED COLUMN "TAKING THE KIDS" AND FIVE BOOKS ON FAMILY TRAVEL, OGINTZ IS ALSO THE MOTHER OF THREE, INCLUDING TWO TEENAGERS.

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though she made wonderful friends. Other kids may not bond with their group or realize exactly what they are getting into, physically or emotionally (see Choosing Smart, page 85).

Though no one program will suit everyone, here are several that get high marks from experts, parents, and teens alike.

LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE

ACTIONQUEST sends teenagers to live aboard 51-foot yachts in Australia, the Galapagos, the Caribbean, or the Mediterranean, honing their skills sufficiently to earn internationally recognized sailing and scuba certifications. Longer programs offer high school or college credit. Three-week trips average \$4,000. (800) 317-6789; www.actionquest.com



Interlocken students go for a mountain goat's view.

CHOOSING SMART

Talk frankly with your child before you fork over several thousand dollars. Does he want to go? Is she ready to spend the summer with strangers? How does he cope with challenges? How long does she want to be away? Most importantly, what does your teen want to do? Be sure this is an experience he wants, not one you wish you'd had.

Ask a lot of questions about the programs. How many teens are in each group? How does the organization recruit and train staff? How long have they been in business? Ask for a sample itinerary and procedures for handling an emergency — or an uncooperative child. What are the consequences for underage drinking, etc.? How many youngsters are sent home each summer?

Request phone numbers and e-mail addresses for past participants and their parents. Get their perspectives and encourage your teen to do the same. — E.O.



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