

# Summer camp proves a hot ticket among young students

Chinese students are flocking to United Kingdom to learn and grow

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On a warm summer day in the peaceful city of Cambridge, a group of teenage Chinese students are hosting a charity barbecue lunch to fundraise for East Anglia Children's Hospice.

Big smiles appeared on their faces, as they saw weeks of preparation turn into a meaningful and enjoyable gathering, which also raised more than 1,000 pounds (\$1,300) for the charity they get together to support.

That scene took place in August last year at a summer camp hosted by Cambridge Centre for Languages. The program, spanning around a month, offered students intensive training in English and understanding of British culture. Daily academic lessons are balanced with fun activities including dancing, singing, sports activities and weekend trips to famous British attractions.

"We craft the program to give students an authentic glimpse into the quintessential British culture, which is rich in history, arts, culture, literature, technology, and a lot more," said Laura Chen, principal of Cambridge Centre for Languages.

For Chinese students, such experience-based summer camps are a welcome break from their heavy academic burden and exam results-driven classes at home. Many are also encountering tasks for the first time that enhance social skills, creativity and teamwork. Organizing a charity lunch is one such example.

Many Chinese students are away from home for the



Students gather for summer school in the UK. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

first time, and the experience of taking care of their own schedules, food, laundry and other life details in an unfamiliar country while also being in a foreign language atmosphere is quite a coming-of-age experience.

"The kids come home transformed," said Qian Jingjing, head teacher of Wuhan Foreign Languages School, which sends secondary school children to the UK, US, Japan, France and Germany every year.

"90 percent of our parents tell us that their children become more grateful for their parents' love and care. They realize that no matter how much their homestay parents love them, it is only their own parents who would bother to cook them a bowl of egg noodles in the middle of the night when they say they are hungry."

In recent years, overseas

summer study camps have become very popular among Chinese students. In July and August, crowds of Chinese students can be seen gathering at popular tourist attractions, including the likes of the British Museum, the Tower of London, the Palace of Westminster and the Globe Theatre.

Such a trend is perhaps not surprising considering that the UK and the US are the top two most popular summer camp destinations, together hosting around 60 percent of outbound Chinese students, according to estimates by New Oriental Education & Technology Group.

On the surface, such summer school programs do not differ too much from what British students get in school during term time. But in reality, such seemingly normal programs can be very eye-opening experiences for Chinese students coming to the UK.

"For the first time in a long while, I feel that I can forget about exam results and piles of homework. I loved sitting on the grass, looking at the sky and reflecting about life," said Wu Jiaming, a 14-year-old girl from Fujian.

In drama class, she played Romeo in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and eventually discovered a passion for acting.

"That was my first time trying out acting. It was such a magical experience, it allowed me to see the world from a different person's perspective," Wu said.

Han Yuxuan, a 15-year-old boy also from Fujian, says he learned to appreciate life's little surprises.

"That day, we received a little assignment, which asked us to take a picture together with a local Cambridge person. I approached the owner of a pop-up food stall outside Cambridge City Hall and asked in English if I could take a photo with him. He answered me 'Yes' in Chinese. I was pleasantly surprised," Han recalls.

Han exchanged contact details with the pop-up store owner on WeChat, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, and the two friends still send each other greeting messages during significant festivals such as Spring Festival.

For students like Wu and Han, such unique experiences are treasured memories in their journey into adulthood. Similar experiences are sure to be shared by many more Chinese students for years to come.

The Chinese travel booking agency Ctrip forecasts that the number of overseas study trips made by Chinese students this year will reach about one million, and these trips will together trigger 30

billion yuan (\$4.53 billion) of spending. This forecast represents a 50 percent growth on the number of overseas study trips in 2017.

Ctrip, which released these figures in April in its 2017-18 Study Tour Market Report, said, China has 180 million students from kindergarten to high school, and around 5 percent of these students are thought to participate in summer schools, both domestically and internationally.

In three years' time, Ctrip forecasts 10 percent of these students will participate in summer camps.

Some summer camps are organized by Chinese secondary schools and universities for their own students. Others are hosted by third-party education organizations, such as New Oriental Education & Technology Group, EF Education and Pearson Global Study Tour.

## Tailor-made

Meanwhile, many niche players are also emerging into the market, offering tailor-made programs that focus on music, drama and sports, among other things.

The London etiquette establishment Debrett's runs a summer camp program focusing on teaching young children British etiquette, which regularly attracts Chinese students.

UK-based CC Education is running an all-girls luxury camp in the British county of Hampshire, offering unique cultural activities such as horseriding, cooking, painting, flower arrangement dance, music, and arts and crafts.

CC Education is also launching a new program called Mum and Me next year, to target Chinese and other Asian students who have limited experience of being away from home. The program allows mothers to enjoy their

own activities, such as shopping, and join their daughters after they finish class.

On average, an overseas summer camp trip costs around 29,000 yuan (\$4,380), which is significantly more than a domestic study trip that costs on average 4,200 yuan, according to Ctrip data.

Wang Qingsu, a parent, says he feels overseas study trips are definitely more attractive for parents who can afford such trips. His 11-year-old daughter Angela Wang attended a UK summer camp last year.

"The trip allowed my daughter to improve her English, broaden her vision of the outside world, and develop an ambition to apply for university overseas later," Wang said.

Booming business opportunities, however, also create challenges. One big issue is the quick emergence of many different summer camps onto the market, and many parents and students can feel confused as to which camp to pick.

Some camps are actually hosted by tour operators, meaning the camps are dominated by tourism experiences with little academic importance.

"In China, this market is difficult to regulate. The existence of tourism-based study trips is not a problem because some students may prefer such trips. But these trips should not be marketed under the disguise of learning-based camps," said Qian.

Luckily, students signing up for British summer camps would find the market easier to navigate, as the government agency British Council keeps a list of accredited summer schools, which it regularly monitors for quality.

Summer camps without official accreditation can still operate, but they just have a harder task to do when persuading customers about their quality.

Most students return home

## Summer in UK nurtures confidence

For 11-year-old Angela Wang, the experience of two weeks of summer camp in Cambridge last August helped change her from a very introverted child into one with a more outgoing personality.



I made many friends and felt more comfortable to express my views ..."

Angela Wang, an 11-year-old summer camp student

"In Cambridge, everyone is so friendly, even strangers would say hello to me," she said. "I made many friends and felt more comfortable to express my views in class and when I'm with friends. I opened up myself more, and became a bit more outgoing. I came back to China as a slightly different person, and I like my new self a lot."

During her time studying at the Cambridge Centre for Languages, Wang took English lessons every morning. Her afternoons and evenings were dedicated to a rich selection of activities, including drama, dancing, singing, watching films, and participating in sports. Her most memorable activity was making a beautiful mask that she wore for a masquerade ball, which she attended and where she sang and danced with friends.

"That was my first time making a mask. It was such a fun and creative process," she said. Despite the brevity of the experience, Wang fell in love with Cambridge.

"The trip has broadened my horizons," she said. "I have set a goal for myself to attend Cambridge."

And she said she greatly appreciated the chance to practice her English.

"I find English a beautiful language, and the more I learn, the more I enjoy it. I am grateful that the summer camp gave me an opportunity to practice English in an English-speaking country for the first time."



Angela Wang (second from left) with friends. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

with sweet memories and everlasting friendships, but some disappointments are unavoidable.

Zhang Shuji, a Shanghai University student who attended a summer camp hosted by King's College London, said she was disappointed upon realizing her classes are not taught by KCL's faculty members.

"I was slightly disappointed because, originally, I wanted to interact with KCL professors so I can gain a better understanding of whether I would like to apply to this university for my master's degree," said Zhang.

"It was later that I realized our classes are taught by academics freelanced by the school to teach the summer program. In the end, I didn't mind too much, because the teachers were very professional too," she said.

In most cases, summer school programs in the UK are not taught by the host institute's own teachers, because these teachers take holidays in the summer months during school holidays.

Another common complaint, of course, is the lack of flavor and diversity of British food.

"We ate potatoes almost every day in the school canteen, and I could hardly taste any flavors in the potatoes. In the last week of the camp, we really couldn't survive the boring food anymore, so we ended up going out to a Chinese restaurant every day," said Wu.

## Average cost of summer camp trips

29,000 yuan (\$4,400) per trip for overseas summer camps

4,200 yuan (\$630) per trip for domestic summer camps

## Average age of Chinese children on their first camp

Overseas summer camps

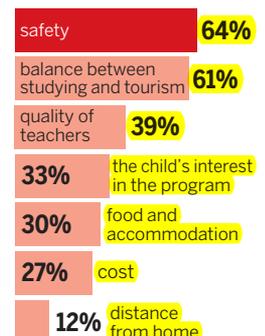


Domestic summer camps



## What do families look for when picking the right camp?

Percentage of surveyed families who would take these factors into consideration, when picking summer schools:



Source: 2017-2018 Study Tour Market Report, by Ctrip

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## Mentor sets student on the right track

Chen Yixin considers new friendships to be a key takeaway from her British summer camp experience in 2016.

"In particular, I developed a special bond with a guest lecturer, who is a programmer based at Silicon Valley, and who led our course on the US' tech start-up sector. She became a great friend and mentor, and instilled in me a fascination for this sector," said Chen, a third-year student at Shanghai University. Her role model inspired her to apply for a master's degree in the US.



I am amazed by how such chance encounters can build up great connections."

Chen Yixin, a third-year university student

"She is very supportive and gave lots of useful advice," said Chen. "We even met up again last summer when I went to the US for a holiday. I am amazed by how such chance encounters can build up great connections."

Chen's summer school camp program, which was organized by Shanghai University, included four weeks of classes split between Oxford and Cambridge. In Oxford, she studied economics. In

Cambridge, she learned about technology.

She also appreciated the opportunity to get to know more about the UK during the summer camp, which struck her as "a unique mixture of the historical and the modern", and she found the lessons informative.

One memorable class assignment was a research project about the European refugee crisis, an academically challenging project that also opened her eyes to an interesting and controversial subject, and allowed her to develop critical-thinking skills.

But, on the downside, she found it a little disappointing that most of her classmates at the summer camp were Chinese.

"I would have preferred to have some local classmates, to get a more British experience," she said.



Chen Yixin tries out British afternoon tea after class. She attended a summer school camp to the UK, organized by Shanghai University in 2016. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Students in drama class at Cambridge Centre for Languages summer camp. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY