

Visiting the United States of America



Item Code FS260019 May 07 Edition no 2

0845 300 1818

Visits to the United States of America

With the dramatic reduction in fares across the Atlantic, there has been a significant increase in the numbers of Scouts travelling to the United States of America. As one of the largest Scout organisations in the world, the Boy Scouts of America offers a wide range of activity opportunities which can deliver challenge and excitement for our members.

However, as with the differences between British and American English, our styles and approach to Scouting differ significantly and inadequate preparation can lead to a failure to meet the expectations of those groups which travel to the United States.

The purpose of this fact sheet is to draw attention to potential areas of difference and to suggest ways of dealing with those differences.

Structure

The Boy Scouts of America has in excess of 5 million members, organised into four regions. These regions are further subdivided into Councils, which we could equate to something between a District and County/Area in the United Kingdom. The Council is further divided into various Packs, Troops and Posts which, only on some occasions operate as a group with a Unit Commissioner. Most contact by British visitors will normally be with Scout Troops (11 to 17) or Venturing Crews (14 to 20). A majority of Troops are 'chartered' or sponsored by a community organisation or faith community; e.g. Rotary Club, Lions Club, Mormon Church and so on. Venturing Crews may be similarly sponsored, but are more

likely to be affiliated to a particular career path such as the Fire Service, Coastguard Service and so on.

The vast majority of BSA members are male – the BSA Co-ed Program is only at Venturer Post level and even then females may be fairly limited in number. There may be large geographical areas where the only female members are Leaders.

Each Council will normally have a number of paid executive staff whose role is to maintain standards, raise financial support and encourage community sponsorship. Subscriptions are collected by the District and passed to 'National'.

Camp sites

Nationally, the BSA has three National High Adventure Bases at Philmont Scout Ranch, Florida National High Adventure Sea Base and Northern Tier High Adventure Base. At Philmont Scout Ranch some tens of thousands of acres in New Mexico at which are based the national training college for Scout Executives, volunteer Leader Training Courses, a 'dude' ranch for riding, a number of different Scout camping areas and vast areas of wilderness for hiking, climbing and exploring.

Locally, Councils often own a camp site which can range from being a few acres to hundreds of acres. For example, the Greater New York's Council has a number of camp sites, the largest of which is in mid-state New York on Ten Mile Island with an area of 14,000 acres.

The International Office has a directory of all camp sites listed by Council and by State. Copies of relevant contact details can be supplied.

The Scout Information Centre

Gilwell Park Chingford London E4 7QW Tel + 44 (0)20 8433 7100 Fax + 44 (0)20 8433 7103 email info.centre@scout.org.uk www.scoutbase.org.uk

Scout camping

Perhaps the greatest difference between British and American Scouting is in the format of weekend and week camps. In the UK, weekend camps are often used as training experiences, sometimes leading to the award of proficiency badges, while week-long camps are putting into practice all those skills acquired during the year in a less formal environment. In the US, weekend camp-outs are less formal occasions, while the week-long camps are time to acquire specific skills and work towards merit badges.

In the US, camping may be in 'cots' or camp beds on wooden platforms in small tents, sleeping about four to six Scouts. Catering is normally centrally provided in a refectory. Scouts are expected to take their turn on a rota for setting tables, collecting and serving food and clearing up afterwards. Some sites do have patrol cooking, where there will be a fixed menu and you will be given the food during the day. Entertainment may be provided by the campers or staff in a concert of sketches and stunts at a campfire. Expect to be asked to contribute a sketch. There are normally a number of counsellors and semi-permanent staff who will take responsibility for the provision of programme. you will be allocated a Camp Commissioner during your stay, who will help you with your requirements

There will be many rules and regulations to govern how things are organised, particularly those which have an element of danger. You will be required to adhere rigidly to those regulations except where UK rules are stricter. For example: before undertaking water activities, all camps will require that all participants take a swim test to gauge the capabilities of participants. All water activities will use the 'Buddy System' where participants are paired off with someone of the same swimming abilities and only one of the pair can be in the water at any one time. Failure to observe the activity rules could result in your whole party being asked to leave the camp-site.

Most camps will have a wealth of traditions and ceremonies and you should pay appropriate respect as failure to do so may offend your hosts.

In particular, respect for the flag of the United States must be shown at all times, including the flag raising and lowering ceremonies and during the renewal of the Oath of Allegiance. A US flag which touches the ground will often be burnt as it has been disrespected. In parallel, failure to pay appropriate respect to the Union Flag or other flags of the United Kingdom will be frowned upon by your hosts who will wish to show their respect for you, your country and your flag.

Insurance and health issues

Some camps have recently been requiring all participants to undergo a medical examination in advance of arrival. A set form is provided and requires your own doctor's signature. This can cost around £20 for your family doctor to complete, so you may wish to negotiate a bulk rate with one doctor. A waiver relating to injury resulting from pre-existing medical conditions has to be signed. It is our understanding that this waiver does not apply where injury is caused by the negligence of individuals or through faulty equipment. However, it does draw attention to the importance of health and safety and how each one of us is responsible for health and safety issues.

Scout Insurance Services provide an inclusive travel policy, which will cover most eventualities regarding health and other travel related items. There are often fears that health costs will not be adequately covered by this Scout policy. That is not the case. However, providing evidence of insurance cover is very important to medical practitioners and hospitals in the United States, so copies of the policy and its cover details should be carried at all times by all members of the party.

Girls in Scouting

Venturing is about 50% female and there are many female Leaders. However because BSA has been traditionally male at Troop level age and below, facilities may not be provided for girls or their facilities may be isolated from the main facilities. This is most obvious at camp sites. In

one case, a British Scout Unit was refused permission to use a camp site because they had female members – and this was when they arrived at the entrance to the camp with their host group. On another occasion, a group of female Scouts was isolated from their own group and the rest of the camp. They were forced to use sub-standard facilities and, because of the isolation, were frightened.

It is very important to clarify if girls are catered for at the camp site you choose to visit. This needs to be done at an early stage. You need to be very clear in stating that the girls in your party are Scouts – not Girl Scouts – and that you operate as one unit, not a male section and a female section. You will also wish to specify what your requirements are regarding the girls in your party. This should include equal treatment of all members of your party, camping together as one group – not separating the girls away from the boys except for sleeping arrangements.

The International Camp Staff Programme

Scout Association members aged between 18 and 30 can join the staff of a Boy Scouts of America summer camp for 6 to 8 weeks. The camp provides accommodation and food. Participants also receive a salary (averaging \$800) which will be on a scale relating to their skills and experience. It is hard work but the experience of a lifetime!

Further information from the Information Centre or www.scoutbase.org.uk/inter/index.htm

Contacting the Boy Scouts of America

For last minute contacts with BSA, it is simplest to wait until arrival in the area in which you will be staying. Telephone Directory Enquiries and ask for Boy Scouts of America. You will be given a choice of District Councils and the Council Executive will be able to provide local contacts. Alternatively, telephone International Directory Enquiries, tell them which city/town and ask for Boy Scouts of America.

If you are seeking longer term contact, write to the International Commissioner of the Boy Scouts of America. Forward your letter to the International Office at Gilwell Park for endorsement. Failure to comply with this international etiquette may result in your request being returned to the International Office to confirm that the request is legitimate.

Be very specific about your requirements, giving dates, numbers, gender, accommodation requirement, catering requests and programme expectations. Do not use jargon or abbreviations. Be very precise and use simple terms to avoid any confusion.

Summary

- BSA offers a wide range of opportunities for our members.
- Establish contact **AT LEAST ONE YEAR** early and share with the host campsite your expectations. Remember they don't understand how we run summer camps
- Do not use jargon and spell out your specific requirements to ensure that everyone understands.
- Talk to those who have been to the United States before.
- Tell your ACC/AAC(International)
- Take out Overseas Travel Insurance.
- Make photo copies of all passports and paper work and give copies to all the leaders going and your home contact
- Make it clear that girls are members of your group.
- Their summer camps are for badge work only, not run as a summer camp in the uk. be as flexible as possible with your programme.
- Down load all the fact sheets from the campsite web page you are going to, it will give you all the information you need.