

Elizabeth Bohringer
Croatia

Hello my name is Elizabeth Bohringer and this summer I traveled to Croatia for a month-long Lions' exchange. While in Croatia I spent two weeks with two different host families and then traveled for a 10 day camp with 29 other exchange students from around the world. Both of my host families were amazing and I truly got to experience different sides of life in Croatia. Both of my families lived in Zagreb, the capital, but they lived very different lives. In my first host family I lived in an apartment with two older host sisters. Activities with this family included spending days at their beach house, touring modern art museums, and lots and lots of shopping. In my second host family I lived in a four-story house on the hillside overlooking the city with four younger host brothers. With this family I was able to do lots of touring of local sights and was able to try all of the amazing Croatian cuisine. I will be forever grateful for the kindness and compassion that was given to me by both of my host families.



After two weeks of living with host families, I traveled on a five hour bus trip with 29 other exchange students to the coast for my camp. The camp is located in a small beach town called Porec and we stayed at a large resort in apartments. Everyday activities at camp included swimming, volleyball, crafts, and team building exercises. On some of our more structured days, we were able to sightsee in nearby cities, go on boat trips, and even meet the mayor of the neighboring city, Pula. For our humanitarian project, we visited a local elementary school and met with school officials before helping to paint and restore their fencing. Some of the camp's main focuses were immersing campers in the Croatian culture as well as creating strong bonds between campers from different cultures. At this camp I was able to make amazing friendships that I truly believe will last a lifetime. My Lion's camp experience has helped me gain an understanding and appreciation for other cultures and has helped to make me a more global citizen. Thank you for this amazing opportunity!

Cassidy Schnell
Campo Italia

In July, I attended my second Lions Youth Exchange Camp, which this year took place in Italy! Campo Italia explored Milan, Rome, and Sicily, and there were 56 campers from 37 different countries from 6 continents across the globe! It was an amazing experience to learn about so many different countries and cultures at the camp! Campo Italia revolved around the theme "Mediterranean- A sea of integration between peoples". We had one camper from Guinea who helped us all understand and feel the importance behind the camp theme this year. He is 19 years old, only one year older than me,



and he bravely shared his story about immigrating to Italy from Africa. His tale told some hard truths I could never imagine living through at such a young age, but despite the fact that he has seen life at some of its hardest moments, I can confidently say that he was one of the kindest and most poetically talented young people I've ever met in my life. Without him at the camp, we all would've gotten less out of the camp theme. I'm so thankful I was able to take part in this camp because I learned a great amount about places I've never been taught before through the best way- friendships.

Our camp began in Milan by attending the National Lions Convention. There were thousands of Lions in attendance, including a group from Wisconsin that I found at the convention's parade! My camp led the beginning of the four-hour long parade in Milan, and I had a blast seeing every country's culture represented through flags, costumes, dances, music, and more! My camp also was part of the convention's flag ceremony, in which we waved flags from every country that has a Lions Club. There were so many flags, it really shows how much Lions have an impact on the whole world. It feels incredible to be able to say that I'm a part of such a huge and wonderfully diverse community of peoples with the Lions Club.

A few days after the Convention, we explored some of history's most beautiful architecture in the grand city of Rome. So much about Rome was spectacular. Every time I thought "nothing could get more beautiful than this", the camp would go tour another place and I would be proven wrong again and again.

After our stay in Rome, we flew to Sicily (my favorite part of Italy, and where the majority of the camp took place). In Sicily, we did tons of fun activities like swimming in crystal-clear sea waters, dancing in the rain, and hiking the Etna Volcano (which we saw erupt two days later from afar!). The camp became closer and closer every day through activities like these, until soon it became too hard to say goodbye. I had my host family stay after the camp in Sicily as well. My host brother was a boy I met in my Lions YCE last year in Germany, which shows that camps like this build strong friendships that persist and continue to last despite the distance. My host family taught me amazing things, such as how to make homemade pasta and how to speak "un po italiano" (a little Italian), and they truly did make me feel at home in Italy. The only thing I would change about my experience with the Lions YCE is that it could've lasted longer.

There's nothing that I recommend more than these Lions Youth Exchange Camps. I cannot praise them high enough, and to understand how life-changing they are... you just have to experience it for yourself!



Emilie Reese
Switzerland
Lake Geneva & Beyond



For my Lions Club Youth International trip, I had the opportunity to travel to the beautiful country of Switzerland. Although in Switzerland they speak four languages (French, German, Italian, and Romansh), I only stayed in the French speaking part. I do not speak French, so at some points I could not follow the conversations of my host families, but everyone spoke pretty good English too. During my host family visit, I stayed with two families. One was a house in Cologny and the other was in Coppett. These are towns outside of the city of Geneva, which is where the European part of the United Nations lies. I mainly traveled all around the Lake Geneva region during

my month long stay. Both families were super nice and fed me super good food--way better than American food. Some things Switzerland has that America doesn't: apricot ice cream, no air conditioning (because they actually care about the environment), and they don't have ice in any drink. Everyday, a different lady from the Ladies Lions Club of Geneva picked me up and took me someplace to do something. From biking in the countryside, boating on Lake Geneva, swimming in Lake Geneva, eating at many restaurants, hiking the Alps, or just exploring the city, I felt like I became so comfortable with the area that I felt like a local.



After two weeks of host family stays, I went to the Lions Club camp exploring Lake Geneva and beyond. The camp was incredible, it was so cool to see the differences in everyday living between countries. My closest friends at camp was a girl from Estonia, a girl from Germany, a girl from Holland, and a girl from Turkey. It was interesting to see how people from around the world viewed America as well. At camp, we explored Geneva, explored Nyon on a very difficult bike tour, ate a lot of pizza and chicken, went to Migros a lot, went to a cheese factory, went to a music festival (Paleo), visited Lausanne, had a cooking day, went rafting, and went to the vineyard. I ate a lot of chocolate on this trip because that is one of the Swiss specialties. It was hard to get up at 4:30 am to say goodbye to my friends, but we plan to meet again soon in the future. I hope we do. I would highly recommend this program to anyone who wants to travel the world, experience new cultures, and make lifelong friends. Don't be afraid to adventure off by yourself; it's all worth it in the end and you will have gained a different perspective of the world and of yourself.



Kate Wright
Germany
Camp Saar

Last summer, I was grateful to be one of the students picked to participate in the Lions Club International Youth Exchange program. Given my family's German roots, I was excited to have been accepted into Camp Saar.



Growing up in small-town Wisconsin, I never had the opportunity before to travel abroad affordably. I was nervous to journey to a country I knew little about; to my surprise, the atmosphere was almost identical to the Midwest! There were countless hayfields, bratwurst stands, and tractor-induced traffic jams waiting for me that would often remind me of home.

Our camp explored Saarbrücken, the capital of Saarland, Germany, and ventured over the French border to the city of Metz. Both cities offered historical and cultural attractions that I truly appreciated, including stunning cathedrals, museums, and restaurants. My favorite activities were dragon boating and hearing the presentations on each camper's home country.

The members of my camp and host family were some of the kindest people I have ever met. They made my transition to Germany stress and worry-free. I was thankful to be a part of their life, even if it was only for two weeks. Meeting campers from all parts of the globe opened up my perspective on different topics like politics, healthcare, and education. I learned about dozens of different cultures and traditions, as well as many aspects of German life. I continue to keep in touch with many of the campers and hope to see them again someday. I would recommend this trip to anyone who wants to travel abroad, especially to Germany. My time in Camp Saar was a once-in-a-lifetime experience I wouldn't trade for the world.



Kaylee Franz
Finland



My time in Finland was an amazing experience. For starters my host dad didn't speak much English. It was like playing charades. During my time with my host dad I learned how to pronounce the Finnish language. I learned a few words in Finnish like, thank you, please, sorry and excuse me. It was also amazing to see how much nature is in their culture. I also found it surprising, for me as an American, how open they are about their bodies. When they go into the Sauna they go in naked, even with strangers. I tried going to the Sauna naked once just to try it with my host mom and the other girl that was staying with the host family, but it was not for me.

Camp was an experience that will never be replicated. Not only did I get to learn about Finland, but I got the chance to meet 25 people from 13 other countries. There will never again be the chance for me to be able experience this outside of the Lions Exchange Program. I made three good friends that I will visit in three different countries and many other friends that I enjoyed spending the week with and will stay in touch with. Not only did this help me see and understand other cultures but showed me the perspective that others have of other cultures and ways that I can learn from others and ways I can teach others.

Luci Bakken
Italy



This summer was not only my first time participating in the Lion's Club International program but also the only opportunity I've been given to travel abroad. Throughout my life, few experiences have impacted me to the extent that my trip abroad to Italy did. Both of my host families were more than welcoming and truly showed me what life in Italy entailed, from cuisine to daily activities. I was able to explore the mountains all the way to the Swiss border and the historical architecture and monuments in Milan and Verona.

One of my favorite parts of this trip was participating in the Valtellina Camp, where I met 14 other young people from around the world. For two weeks we worked together to conquer the Swiss Alps, forming everlasting bonds in the process. Through this experience, we were able to learn more about Northern Italian history and culture, and in doing so we exchanged knowledge about our own customs and lifestyles. Lions Club International gave me and every member of that camp the opportunity to bond over learning and gain an awareness of cultures and people across the globe. Not only did I take away a greater understanding of the world around me, but I formed international friendships that I plan to maintain for the rest of my life.

