

## **ACE IN CHINA**

**This program is organized by VIA.**

**Program Dates:** July 14 – August 4

(Students will arrive on-site July 14 and depart August 4. Dates subject to change up until point of departure.)

### **Service Focus**

Coaching sports camps and leading education-focused workshops to local village children in a minority population area of Yunnan Province in Southwestern China.

### **Program Leader**

Samantha White, Program Director, [Samantha@viaprograms.org](mailto:Samantha@viaprograms.org)

Samantha is the ACE in China Program Director. This will be her third year leading the program. She is also a doctoral student in the Department of Childhood Studies at Rutgers University-Camden. Her research focuses on historical and contemporary studies of children, youth, and sport. Samantha uses her academic background to design effective and ethical international service experiences.

Patrick Arnold, Director of Programs, [Patrick@viaprograms.org](mailto:Patrick@viaprograms.org)

Patrick leads VIA's programs from the San Francisco office and works with students during the pre-departure process. He spent time teaching in China after graduate school and travels regularly to the region to join VIA's programs. Patrick has been spent more than 10 years as an international educator and has been on the VIA staff since 2010. He enjoys coaching students through cross-cultural learning moments and is always happy to share a book or podcast recommendation.

### **Program Overview**

The Sports and Environmental Leadership Program will convene a cohort of Duke and Stanford student-athletes for a three-week program that promotes youth development through sports and fosters a greater commitment to environmental protection among ethnic minority youth in underserved communities on the Tibetan Plateau.

To carry out the program's service-learning focus, student-athletes will join VIA's partner, China Exploration and Research Society (CERS), in expanding its community education activities as part of an evolving environmental protection strategy. Developing youth leaders with environmental awareness in rural regions where traditional livelihoods have been disrupted will help increase understanding in local communities about the importance of protecting wildlife habitat.

Student-athletes will also have the opportunity to learn from CERS researchers about the unique ecology of the Tibetan plateau, habitat preservation efforts for endangered species and the challenges facing traditional cultures.

In addition to developing sports skills and teamwork, the program will illustrate how sports can be a springboard for environmental action and will encourage youth from Tibetan and other ethnic minority communities to become strong advocates for a healthy environment.

### **Service Opportunities**

Each summer, CERS delivers an English education and environmental science program to youth in ethnic minority villages. Student-athletes from Duke and Stanford can add to this curriculum by promoting sport and physical activity for local youth. Student-athletes will run sports camps, teach English language lessons, and support other projects at CERS. Possible projects include wetland cleanups, creating display galleries, and reducing CERS's environmental footprint. The entire group will contribute to the projects and camps as a team.

### **Program Requirements**

**Language & Other Prerequisites:** No specific foreign language or technical skills are required for students to participate in this program. Students will have linguistic and cultural support throughout the program from VIA and CERS staff. A background in Mandarin Chinese is helpful, but not required. A background or interest in teaching or coaching is very helpful.

**Personal Competencies:** For all programs, VIA seeks participants who embody the following characteristics:

- **Learning mindset** – seeks to frame all situations, including challenging and difficult ones, as an opportunity for learning and growth.
- **Empathy and cultural sensitivity** – effectively and respectfully communicates and interacts with people of different ages, races, religions, and cultures; demonstrates curiosity about the lives of others without judgment.
- **Commitment to honest and ethical behaviors** – actively seeks to understand and adhere to the values, policies, procedures, and protocols of ACE and their host organization/community; lives up to commitments and promises they make to others.

### **Program Details**

Description of Community:

The program site is located in Yunnan Province, located in southwest China, which is unrivaled for its diversity of land and people—from the lush tropical southern regions bordering southeast Asia, to the deep valleys and high mountains of the north, where the Yi, Tibetan and Lisu people live. At least 22 minority groups live in Yunnan today, the greatest concentration of minority nationalities in China, weaving a rich and interesting tapestry of traditional culture and modern life.

Shangri-la (which in Tibetan means “sun and moon in heart”) is a small, but rapidly expanding town on the Tibetan Plateau at an altitude of 9,800 feet. Outside of the town the landscape consists of rolling hills, larger mountains, and expansive forests. Summer is the rainy season, and high temperatures can reach 90 degrees and lows can drop to the 40s.

Most of the program will take place at the CERS multi-purpose center ten kilometers outside of the town of Shangri-la. Its Tibetan-style wooden structure stands at the foot of a hill next to a protected pine and fir forest overlooking the nearby Napahai Black-Necked Crane Nature Reserve. Gongbing, a Tibetan village that is home to about sixty families, is within walking distance. The three-story CERS main building encompasses over 1,500 square meters of space devoted to the Society's education, exploration and research. In addition to a dormitory and kitchen, there is also a library and a small museum and gallery.

#### Housing and Meals:

Students will stay in shared dorms at the CERS center for the entirety of the program. Students will have access to showers, electricity, washing machines and dryer, and western-style toilets (for most of the program). While at the CERS center, meals will be served in the center dining area. While in Shangri-la, students will eat at local restaurants. Most of the meals will be Chinese food, but some western options can be found in Shangri-la. In general, most dietary restrictions and preferences can be accommodated.

#### Communication:

Students will be provided with feature phones and local SIM cards for SMS and voice communication. Students will have Wi-Fi access during the orientation and program wrap-up in Shangri-la and throughout the program at the Zhongdian CERS Center. Students should be aware that internet speeds may be slower than in the U.S. and that not all websites and phone apps can be accessed while in China.

#### Transportation:

Students will be met at the airport when arriving in Shangri-la. They will be escorted to the airport at the conclusion of the program. When traveling to the project sites, students will travel in CERS vehicles or with hired vans. While at the project sites, students will be able to walk in the villages. Shangri-la is a small town, and students can easily walk to most locations.

#### Athletic Training Facilities:

There is one local gym facility with weights and cardio machines which student-athletes will have time to use around twice a week during the three-week program (about a 20 minute drive from CERS). Additionally, the program sites are located at elevations that range from 8,000-10,000 feet above sea level, with limited air pollution and include excellent opportunities for running, hiking, basketball, and soccer, though swimming facilities are not common. There are many accessible places for students, including female students, to safely run. The terrain includes well-paved and low-traffic roads and scenic trails through nature reserves. Local people don't often run, but there are no cultural taboos against running.

#### Opportunities for Reflection:

A core part of VIA's experiential education curriculum includes reflection. Staff will lead regular group reflection activities throughout the program, and also provide students with opportunities for reflection on their own, including writing, photo and video activities. Topics will include a focus on the role of visitors to communities, best practices in engaging in ethical service and deconstructing cross-cultural interactions. The program ends with a final reflection and

evaluation.

#### Enrichment Opportunities:

In addition to the service activities, there will be significant opportunities to learn more about how local communities are adapting to the rapid pace of social change. Students will learn how CERS environmental science researchers balance ecological and cultural preservation. Students will learn about the research conducted by CERS staff through talks and films. Students will also have the chance to conduct their own research and write an article that will be included in a newsletter published by CERS. Students will participate in cultural enrichment excursions that introduce students to the rich history of Shangri-La and the Yunnan Province. VIA's decades-long relationships in the community will allow students to get to know individuals and their families during the program.

#### Suggested Resources to Learn More:

Goldstein, Melvyn, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon* (1999)

Osnos, Evan, *Age of Ambition: Chasing Fortune, Truth, and Faith in the New China* (2014)

Hessler, Peter, *Country Driving: A Journey Through China from Farm to Factory* (2010)

Sinica Podcast

#### Miscellaneous:

Students should be aware that the program takes place at an altitude of approximately 10,000 feet and that some individuals are sensitive to living and traveling at high altitudes. Additionally, students should be aware that the program will be alcohol-free in order to ensure the best possible experience for partners, community members and students.

ACE in China blog: <https://aceinchina.weebly.com/blog>

CERS Newsletter (with stories of the 2016 ACE in China participants):

[http://www.cers.org.hk/images/stories/downloads/cers\\_1804.pdf](http://www.cers.org.hk/images/stories/downloads/cers_1804.pdf)