

VACATIONS

Summer camp offers specialized pursuits

Fencing club in Beijing provides academic courses, physical training for youngsters who are on holiday

By ZHAO XINYING
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Beijing resident Wang Qiang was happy when he finally found a satisfactory summer camp for his 7-year-old daughter.

In the eyes of the loving father, a camp organized by a fencing club in Beijing's Chaoyang district that provided a wide range of activities each day was the best choice for his daughter, who took up fencing as a hobby two years ago.

Wang hoped his daughter could refine her fencing skills and have a happy summer vacation by getting involved in a series of other interesting activities.

He eventually got what he wanted at a camp organized by Wanghaibin International Fencing Club, which is named after China's former world-class foil fencer Wang Haibin.

Starting in late July, the six-week camp offered daily courses on fencing skills, physical training, English and drawing. In addition, the children were taken out each week for events including horseback riding and indoor skiing.

Chang Shan, one of the camp's course designers, said they had considered children's academic needs as much as possible when deciding the content of the camp.

"At school, children need instruction on acquiring knowledge, guidance in doing homework, a certain amount of physical exercise, and some extracurricular activities.



Fencing coach Sun Mengyao helps a youngster to adjust his equipment before he starts to practice with another child at Wanghaibin International Fencing Club in Beijing in July. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"So we arranged the camp following the same structure, making it familiar but more interesting for the kids. A major difference is that fencing runs through almost all the courses as a theme," Chang said.

He gave examples in physical training and English courses. "Our physical training, it's tailored for fencing. And the English courses are not general English, but have some content related to fencing."

Wang Meng, CEO of the

club, said the camp was arranged in this way to meet the demands of children and parents for special and high-end summer camps.

He said summer camps, especially those with common subjects or themes, have been popular among Chinese children and their parents for years.

"Under such circumstances, there's a demand for some new types of summer camps that not only have a special theme but also integrate some lesser-known themes and activities," he said. "Fencing,

skiing and horseriding are such activities."

Wang Meng said the camp gathered about a dozen participants, most of them children between 6 and 8, with some interest in fencing.

"The camp's theme was fencing, a sport that is known and appreciated only by a small group of people in China, so the number of participants was not big," he said, adding that there are no more than 30,000 people nationwide involved with fencing.

"We hope to attract more

children in the future to spread the culture of fencing among the younger generation," he said.

To add to the appeal of the summer camp, the club invited Luo Pingbei, the former coach of the Beijing fencing team, to give lectures on fencing theory and rules to the young campers.

Luo, 67, said he wanted to tell the children about his work experience and teach them some basic knowledge to stimulate their interest in the sport, which is not so well known in China.

"I hope through my teaching that these children will understand the rules of fencing and get to know the history and culture behind it, so that when they watch fencing matches they will feel a sense of participation, just like an insider."

Wang Qiang said his daughter enjoyed the camp. "Miaomiao told me she had a great time. She likes fencing, and was also happy to join her peers in all the activities, whether it was skiing or horse-riding. All these made her excited," he said.

OVERSEAS STUDY

Austrian college seeks students from China

By SU ZHOU
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Management Center Innsbruck of Austria, a university amid the Alpine mountains, is trying to attract more Chinese students.

It has enrolled about 1,000 international degree-seeking students and 350 international exchange students from all over the world, including some 20 Chinese exchange students.

"We are eager to receive more students from China as we highly value ambitious people from this wonderful country," MCI's Daniela Koeck said.

"We have extended the Global Scholarship program to China, allowing Chinese students to enjoy tuition discounts of 25 percent, 50 percent and 75 percent or, in exceptional cases, even 100 percent," Koeck said. "There are several activities and plans to attract more students from China."

More than 459,000 Chinese students studied overseas last year, an increase of more than 11 percent year-on-year, the Ministry of Education said. Their top choices were the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore and South Korea.

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Last year, MCI started an undergraduate program in business administration. Mainly delivered online, it allows students from abroad to take classes in a more convenient way. The program will launch an English version next year.

MCI has also introduced a global online MBA program which starts in the autumn. The global executive program leads to a master's degree in business administration.

Although Austria is not a top choice among Chinese students, Koeck said MCI is still competitive due to a strong practical focus.

In the recently published Trendence Graduate Barometer Europe 2015, MCI was rated higher than both the Austrian average and the European average.

"All MCI study programs benefit from a strong focus on practical relevance, an effective international mix of faculty from academia and relevant industries, a project-based design, optional semesters abroad, the availability of internships throughout the world, and MCI's emphasis on service," Koeck said.

"Every week, guest speakers from all over the world enrich MCI's curricula. Close collaboration with the business community ensures that MCI graduates are much sought after on the employment market," she said.

The most popular major for Chinese students overseas is business management. However, it is getting harder for these students to find satisfying jobs after returning to China.

MCI's degree programs include a one-semester internship in the business world toward the end of the study program to help in this regard.

"Students will also do their bachelor thesis focusing on a specific problem at the company where they do their internship. All these and many further elements contribute to the high employability of MCI graduates around the globe," Koeck said.

"MCI also supports students and graduates with startup support and other entrepreneurial services and activities," she said.

TIBET

Region takes to schooling, but process will take time

By DAQIONG
and LUO WANGSHU in Lhasa

Education in Tibet was once considered a privilege for nobles only.

For 73-year-old Tenzin, a former slave, the echoes of that tradition hit home: He didn't have a chance to enter school until he was 16 years old.

"I left home before sunrise and came back after sunset, herding sheep for my master. There were more than a thousand sheep and only two shepherds," the native of Xigaze said, adding that he never thought of attending school at the time.

"It was another life, not for people of my kind," he said.

In 1951, the year he turned 16, he witnessed the peaceful liberation of Tibet. Tenzin attended a government-run adult school in his early 20s to learn how to read and write.

Now the former slave has three grandchildren, the eldest of which has graduated from a university.

"In old times, slaves were not allowed to learn," Tenzin said.

The change in Tenzin's life is a drop in the ocean for the improvement of thousands of Tibetans' lives brought by education over the past 50 years.

According to the Education Bureau of the Tibet autonomous region, more than 95 percent of Tibetans were either illiterate or semi-literate before 1951.

In 1965, the region had 56,000 elementary school students and 1,359 middle school students. More than 12,000 students attended adult schools, according to the bureau.



Phurbu Dondrub

The bureau's figures also show that through last year, almost all school-age children attended elementary and middle school, nearly 60 percent received early childhood education and more than 73 percent attended high schools. The average time for receiving an education in the region has grown to eight and a half years.

Free education

"To further encourage children from herders' and farmers' families to go to school, the region has provided 15 years of free education, from kindergarten to high school," said Zhu Yun, vice-head of the region's Education Bureau.

The regional government began waiving urban students' tuition and other expenses in the compulsory education period (from the first to 9th grades) in 2007 and also provided free textbooks and new homework books to students.

In 2011, high schools began to be cost-free. In 2012, this policy was extended to urban kindergartens.

Since then, students who



Students attend a biology class at the Lhasa Jiangsu Experimental School in the Tibet autonomous region in March. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

receive their education in Tibet from kindergarten to high school, regardless of whether they attend a public or private school, have been able to enjoy free education.

A total of 575,000 students are benefiting from the policy, the Education Bureau said.

Phurbu Dondrub, an 11-year-old boy from a herdsman's family in Ngari prefecture, is benefiting from the free education policy and is enjoying school.

"At school, I can play with my friends, have a better and warmer place to stay and have better food," Phurbu said.

As a fifth-grader, Phurbu has seen changes in the school's facilities.

"There was no playground or basketball court when I was in the first grade, and the classroom building only had

one floor," he said, adding that the school built a new sports field and a two-story teaching building in the past year.

Because Phurbu's family lives on herding and must move around to find fresh grass for yaks and sheep, Phurbu became a boarding student in the fourth grade last year.

He quickly adapted to his new life and likes sharing a dormitory with seven other classmates.

Phurbu has about five months of vacation each year and helps his parents to graze yaks and sheep during these holidays.

"We have eight yaks and more than 500 sheep. My little sister and I are able to herd when we are at home, but I prefer to go to school rather than herding," he said, adding

that his parents also support him in getting an education.

Difficulties

In the view of his principal, Pema Tashi, Phurbu is a lucky child from an open-minded family.

"The biggest headache for schools in remote areas is lack of parental support. Parents often trouble teachers and keep their children home for herding," he said, adding that the local education bureau has released a series of preferential policies to reward students with good academic achievements. The aim is to promote students' willingness to go to school.

Before being promoted to principal at Kunsha Township Elementary School in Gar county, Pema Tashi taught in another township in

Ngari prefecture, Menshi township, which also is a herding area.

"Students sometimes skipped classes and went home. I once walked about five hours to chase students. Students ran fast because they were very familiar with the area, and I could only chase them blindly," he said.

"Students' family tents were moving around in different seasons, and I was not familiar with where they were. I was soon lost and there was no mobile phone signal. I had to move around to find a signal in order to connect with the school and ask them to locate me. Finally, I was able to connect with the school and they sent a vehicle to pick me up."

To increase students' willingness to attend school and improve parents' awareness about sending their children to get an education, the principal often rides his motorcycle to herding areas for PTA meetings to persuade parents about the importance of education.

"Some parents think education is useless because they can make money through grazing sheep or yaks," he said. "Children won't starve if they don't go to school. In addition, children provide an extra labor force for herding at home," he said, adding that parents' ideas about education are changing, but slowly.

"It is not a one-day or even a one-year job. Compared with my school days, it is a huge improvement but it still needs time," he said.

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Palden Nyima contributed to this story.