

# Extreme adventures for an unusual summer

BY ALEXA HINTON  
 ahinton@nashvillecitypaper.com

Summer camps are an American phenomenon.

Of the world's camps, 85 percent are in the United States with half of the remaining 15 percent of camps run by Americans in other countries. And, camps are gaining in popularity. In 2005, 5.5 million kids attended summer camp; in 2007, that figure skyrocketed to more than 7 million.

These numbers prove not only that Americans have perfected the traditional overnight camp and all its outdoor glory, but they've mastered the specialized experience that lets campers check reality at the door and step into extreme adventures.

"Kids don't want to spend a week floating on a raft on a lake or making key chains," said Traci Hainsworth from Pali Adventures, a California camp that offers fantasy camps like Rock Star Camp and Secret Agent Camp.

"Kids want to do something they can't do at home and really develop talents and see where their interests lie."

Here are some of the most unusual camps in the state and region:

## SPACE CAMP

Huntsville, Ala.  
 spacecamp.com

For aspiring astronauts or those fascinated by the night sky, this is the camp for you.

Space Camp, Space Academy and Advanced Space Academy are designed to give kids ages 9 to 18 the feel of being an astronaut in training at NASA. In state-of-the-art simulations, youngsters will take a spin in the three rings of the Multi-Axis trainer just like the Mercury astronauts used to learn how to flip their space craft down during re-entry into the atmosphere; take steps in the 1/6th Gravity Chair, which is what the Apollo astronauts used to prepare for their trip to the moon; strap on NASA's version of a jet pack — the Manned Maneuvering Unit (MMU) — and maneuver around

a cushion of air.

Kids will also sample space food, build and launch their own rockets, learn to sleep in space and even how to go to the bathroom in space.

"We use the space curriculum as a vehicle to get youngsters excited about math and science, so that they understand why math is so important and why math is the universal language of the planet," said Al Whitaker, the spokesman for Space Camp. "But if you are a 12-year-old and asking what Space Camp is, it's a place where you'll have a blast, get together with strangers from all over to see what it is like to train like an astronaut, spend time in a space shuttle orbiter and mission control, and see how tough it is to go to space, but how much fun it is once you get there."

## SOUTHERN GIRLS ROCK & ROLL CAMP

Murfreesboro, Tenn.  
 sgrrc.org

For the girl who aspires to be the next *American Idol*, Southern Girls Rock & Roll Camp is a no brainer.

In addition to live performances by local and national acts, the girls-only day camp offers instruction in guitar, drums, bass, keyboard, vocals and electronic music as well as workshops in songwriting, recording, photography, music history, arts and crafts, screen-printing and magazine-making taught by women musicians and women in the music industry.

The girls create their own rock band and spend two hours a day in band practice, collaborating on a song to perform at the final showcase. At the end of the week, campers take home a professionally recorded DVD of their performance.

Campers do not need prior experience, just a die-hard desire to jam.

## MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE CAMP

Erwin, Tenn.  
 mtnadventureguides.com

This is not your cushy overnight camp with screened cabins and mess halls serving hot meals. At Mountain Adventure Camp, kids pitch their own tents and whip up

meals over campfires for a real taste of life in the outdoors.

Daylight hours at the seven-, 14- and 18-day camps are heavily packed with adventurous activities including extensive whitewater rafting of three different rivers, back-packing, rock climbing, caving and mountain biking. A highlight of the experience is spelunking through Worley's Cave, a "wild" cave, which means that it is not lit or paved, picking up dirt and mud as they explore the cave's stalagmites and stalactites.

Longtime outdoorsman Richard Bulworth, who climbed the ranks from camper to camp counselor, then river guide to camp owner, runs the camp.

"My mom used to get a little weepy taking me to the airport each summer for camp, and I used to get a little weepy leaving camp at the end," Bulworth said.

## CAMP EVERGREEN

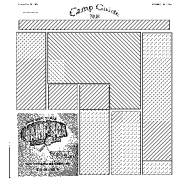
Cheatham, Tenn.  
 963-4732


For youngsters who have lost a close friend or family member, life looks different when dealing with a tragedy and letting go for a carefree summer alongside jovial peers. That's why Alive Hospice created Camp Evergreen.

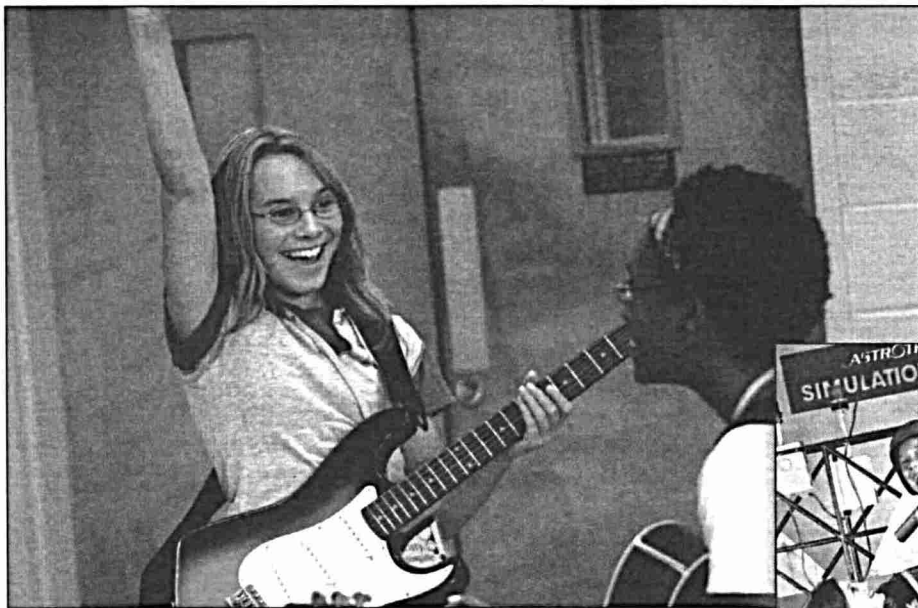
At this free summer camp, bereaving children engage in a variety of activities focused on addressing their feelings such as charades to identify emotions related to their loss; art projects like creating masks that depict their inner thoughts as well as memory boxes fashioned from mementos and pictures; and a balloon release. And, just like any other camp, there's swimming, sports, beading, painting and movie watching.

Nicole Jesser, an Alive Hospice children's grief counselor and Camp Evergreen counselor who has been with the camp since it started 14 years ago, sees children return multiple years.

"It's wonderful for the children to be able to meet other children who have lost a loved one, so that they



don't feel alone and it's a great opportunity to understand what normal looks like as far as their feelings," Jesser said. "It's a safe place to share what they are going through. And, they have fun." 



Many camps now offer extreme opportunities kids can experience nowhere else.

(left) Courtesy of Southern Girls Rock & Roll Camp.  
(Below) Courtesy of U.S. Space and Rocket Museum

