



VEGAN CAMP for KIDS COMPLETES TWENTY YEARS

By Danny Cohen (age 11) and Chelsea Cohen (age 13)

Camp Exploration just finished its twentieth winter camp season of totally vegan camp programs for kids. Last summer was its twentieth summer of camp programs. These camps are perfect for vegan kids, but through its years, hundreds of kids have attended and then chosen to go vegan.

AVS trustee Andy Mars founded these camp programs, after years of directing the camps of others, to provide what he believed could offer so much more to the best growth of each individual child. Andy and the great other counselors like Fumani, Jenny, Marissa, and Melissa are always helping campers learn and grow as people in so many ways. They respect us and help us become more responsible and respectful people.

For campers with specific religious needs, the camp provides for that. At the SNOWvernight Camp this winter, a number of us Jewish campers asked to do a Friday night service together in our cabin. During the summer, when Amad, who is

Muslim, was a camper, Andy fulfilled his parents' request for him to stop at a mosque to pray, and a couple of us joined him. During Nisei Week in August, the day camp toured a Buddhist Temple and learned from one of the monks there.

Campers also have different diet needs. Of course everything is always totally vegan, and it is easy to serve the Jewish kosher diet and the Muslim halal diet. For campers who have nut allergies or are gluten-free, the camp provides for them too.

The camp food is always amazing. We love it! Many campers say they wish they could eat like this always. While the programs, trips, and activities are well planned and so much fun, we've joked that we could just hang out making and enjoying food all day. Campers have the choice of helping to make the food or not. Themed meals are always fun, like Indian night, Italian night, Mexican night, and Middle Eastern night.

One of the most popular meals includes rolling veggie sushi. We can choose to roll in asparagus,

avocado, baby corn, bamboo shoots, carrots, cucumbers, edamame, mushrooms, peppers, radishes, seaweed, spinach, sprouts, ume, water chestnuts, and more. The camp has rolled sushi from deep down in Carlsbad Caverns on the Alien Adventure in New Mexico to way up high at Angels Landing at Utah's Zion National Park during the Hikers' Heaven overnight camp.

When out on adventures in between meals, Camp Exploration has many snacks to enjoy. Each week starts with a load of fresh fruit from Andy's "Mars Farms" where he grows fifty different kinds of fruit. We also enjoy store-bought treats, popcorn, roasted seaweed, trail mix, and more. Of course, roasting vegan marshmallows and making s'mores at the campfire is one of the best treats. At Camp Exploration, we never go hungry.

Over the winter there were the usual choices of a week of SNOWvernigh Camp, Magic Mountain Overnight Camp for New Year's Eve, and Travel Day Camp programs. This coming summer there will be the Amusement Park Adventure Overnight Camp; the Mountain Retreat Overnight Camp; the Summer Program for Advancement, Challenge, and Enrichment; and Travel Day Camp programs.

It is great going to a vegan camp. Neither of us were vegan when we first went to Camp Exploration. We didn't even know what vegan meant then. We never felt pressured or pushed to go vegan. We asked questions; we got answers. The messages were clear but not like forced in our faces.

Enjoying so many good foods really helped. For kids who are not vegan, this is a great chance to try new things and learn and think. For kids who are vegan, there could be no better camp. Having so much great vegan food is big, but also it is big to get to be in a little vegan world for a week. This is the way the whole world should be. We at least get to enjoy it for a week or more during our summer and winter vacations. It strengthens us for the important choices we make.

Camp Exploration helps us, helps animals, and helps the world. Hundreds of campers have gone vegan because of Camp Exploration, and hundreds of campers have been supported to stay vegan because of Camp Exploration. Think of the thousands of animals who have been saved because of Camp Exploration, and think of the millions of animals who are saved by all of us vegan kids now throughout our lives. We can't wait until summer camp, and we hope that there will be many more.

The Camp Exploration programs are based in Encino in Los Angeles California. Most campers come from California, but some have also come

from Arizona, Connecticut, Montana, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and Washington. Campers have also come from other countries like Canada, Israel, Japan, Korea, and Russia. Wherever kids come from, they say this is the best camp on the planet. Camp Exploration may be run by Dr. Andy Mars, but it really is the best camp on Earth!

See Camp Exploration (a.k.a. Vegan Camp) at VeganCamp.org or CampExploration.org, where for twenty years the V word has not been used but instead the food has been described as "healthy, conscious foods" to which no parent has ever objected.

