

Drawing youngsters back out to the wild

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In the hopes of providing youngsters with a one-of-a-kind holiday experience, the Forestry Bureau of COA launched its first-ever summer camp in 2012, in which student volunteers got up close and personal with the nation's mountainous terrain and rolled up their sleeves to help clean up the land.

“This is a rare opportunity for the younger generation to be immersed in an all-natural environment,” An officer of Forestry Bureau pointed out. “Only then will they understand the importance of ecological conservation and environmental protection, which of course is the main objective of this summer event.” By targeting the younger generation, environmental awareness will spread through their participation in the Forestry Bureau's summer camp. Participants will not only gain a better understanding of the role and functions that the Forestry Bureau plays in safeguarding the nation's natural resources, they will also gain access to some of Taiwan's most spectacular scenic spots, witness the island's unique flora and fauna collection and behold world-class natural wonders, she added.

The year's group of 50 volunteers, comprised of both Taiwanese nationals and foreign enthusiasts, first underwent a two-day basic training camp that outlined the ramifications, ethics and scope of responsibilities related to the program. Basic training was followed by advanced biology courses related to wildlife and natural resources, and then seminars on sightseeing techniques and tour-guiding practices. Upon completing their training, volunteers were sorted by their interests and sent either to one of the 8 Nature Centers or to one of the 18 Forest Recreation Parks located within the nation's borders.

The bulk of these summer interns' job responsibilities comprised of providing information to tourist groups, assisting agencies with event preparations, patrolling the park grounds and observing the natural environment. Whenever visitors book a guided tour, students would accompany veteran national park workers and help answer questions; their remaining time was split between assisting the Nature Center or Forest Recreational Park with conducting activities and cleaning up the park grounds. Foreign volunteers are further enlisted to help copyedit and rectify the English used in national park signs. All volunteers also helped to promote the splendor of the nation's mountains and forests through the 21st-century way – blogging. The creation of an online journal designed entirely by a fresh set of young minds and updated with daily entries on the fun and experience of working in the mountains has definitely boosted the nation's international profile, Chief Secretary Lin concluded.

Aside from the newly launched summer camp dedicated to local and foreign visitors, the Forestry Bureau has other year-round volunteer programs that recruit tour guides, trail preservation experts and business professionals. The unique insights and ideas proposed by the student participants will provide the basis for similar events in the future, the Bureau noted, pledging that it will continue its efforts in drawing youngsters back out to the wild and recruiting more enthusiasts to help preserve the nation's natural beauty.

(Data Source: Council of Agriculture)

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