

FAQs and Helpful Information

VISA QUESTIONS

1. Is the J-1 visa open and operating for Summer 2026?

Yes. The IENA Camp Program for Summer 2026 is open and operating for the upcoming season (June-August).

Each year, thousands of international students participate in the U.S. Department of State's J-1 Camp Counselor and Support Staff programs. These programs are long-standing cultural exchange initiatives designed to promote mutual understanding, professional development, and international cooperation.

2. Important clarification regarding misinformation

Please be aware that inaccurate information has recently circulated on social media regarding U.S. Embassy operations, visa suspensions, or the cancellation of the J-1 visa program.

- A brief administrative pause occurred in June 2025 to implement enhanced social media vetting procedures at U.S. Embassies and Consulates worldwide.
- The J-1 visa is a non-immigrant visa. Recent media references to restrictions on immigrant visas for certain countries do not apply to the J-1 Exchange Visitor Program sponsored by IENA.

3. IENA as your official J-1 BridgeUSA visa sponsor

IENA is a designated sponsor of the U.S. Department of State's BridgeUSA J-1 Exchange Visitor Program. Through our global camp program and overseas recruitment partners, IENA:

- Monitors and complies with all current visa regulations
- Maintains an established working relationship with the U.S. Department of State
- Provides comprehensive guidance for the visa application process, including DS-2019 issuance and embassy interview preparation

4. Could the J-1 program be paused or cancelled before summer?

The BridgeUSA Exchange Visitor Programs were established in 1961 under the Fulbright-Hays Act to promote international cultural exchange. Over the past six decades, these programs have continued under multiple U.S. administrations and enjoy bipartisan congressional support.

The only broad interruption occurred during the COVID-19 border closures in 2020 for public health reasons. Outside of that period, the programs have operated consistently and continue to be recognized for both their diplomatic and economic contributions to U.S. communities.

5. Is it difficult to obtain a J-1 visa?

Generally, no. IENA and its overseas recruitment partners guide participants through each step of the process, including:

- Completion of program requirements
- Issuance of the DS-2019 form
- Scheduling and preparation for the in-person U.S. Embassy or Consulate interview

Important timing note:

Once instructed, applicants should complete all requirements promptly (within 1 week). Because all applicants must attend an in-person interview, delays in completing the required steps will affect appointment availability.

Social Media Vetting:

U.S. Embassies and Consulates will review your current and past social media accounts. At the time of your interview, your accounts must be set to public and remain so until your visa is issued and your passport has been returned. Content should be appropriate and respectful.

Interview:

Most J-1 interviews are brief (often approximately five minutes), though timing may vary by location.

DURING THE SUMMER

1. What support do I receive from my sponsor?

Under the J-1 program, participants receive continuous sponsor support both before departure and throughout their stay in the United States. IENA provides 24/7 assistance for questions, emergencies, or any issues that may arise during the program.

2. How do I get to camp?

Your camp will provide detailed arrival instructions, including transportation from the designated airport. Some camps offer direct pickup, while others provide clear guidance on meeting points or local transport. IENA and its camps have successfully supported participant arrivals for over 30 years.

3. Is my visa status legal while I am in the U.S.?

Yes. The J-1 visa is an official U.S. non-immigrant visa. Applicants are vetted at a U.S. Embassy or Consulate, including identity verification and biometrics. Upon arrival in the U.S., Customs and Border Protection officers conduct a standard entry review to confirm visa status.

4. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

All travelers encounter immigration officials upon entry to the U.S. (as is the case in most countries) The customs official's primary focus is on individuals without lawful immigration status or those violating visa conditions.

Participants who comply with J-1 program rules and maintain valid status have no reason to worry. IENA and participating camps are experienced in supporting participants should questions arise. Most participants have no further interaction with immigration authorities beyond arrival and departure.

5. Overall safety for J-1 participants

Each year, hundreds of thousands of J-1 participants complete their programs safely and successfully. U.S. camps provide staff training and orientation upon arrival, and IENA offers:

- 24/7 emergency support
- Pre-departure orientations
- Cultural adjustment guidance

CAMP EXPERIENCE – SUMMER 2025

1. How was Summer Camp 2025?

Summer 2025 was a successful season, with approximately 10,000 international participants working at U.S. camps through IENA. Participants entered the U.S. without issues, experienced no Immigration and Customs Enforcement -related problems, and enjoyed positive camp and travel experiences.

2. Was travel difficult in Summer 2025?

No. Summer 2025 was one of the smoothest travel seasons in recent years. Camps provided clear arrival instructions, and transportation processes operated as expected.

INFORMATION FOR PARENTS

We understand that sending a young adult abroad can raise questions and concerns. IENA has operated this program for over 30 years and has supported hundreds of thousands of international participants worldwide. Comprehensive placement, visa sponsorship, and ongoing support are provided throughout the program.

CAMP SECURITY AND SAFETY

U.S. summer camps follow guidance from the American Camp Association (ACA), which provides nationally recognized standards for:

- Risk assessment and emergency preparedness
- Staff training and child protection
- Coordination with local emergency services

ACA-accredited camps maintain structured safety protocols and communication procedures to support both campers and staff.

TRAVEL DURING THE 30-DAY GRACE PERIOD - BEFORE & AFTER CAMP

Is it safe to travel before or after camp?

Yes. Thousands of J-1 participants travel during the 30-day grace period each year. Many travel with friends made during the program.

Standard travel safety practices apply, including:

- Traveling in groups when possible
- Sharing itineraries with family or friends
- Using licensed transportation
- Securing valuables
- Researching accommodation and neighborhoods
- Knowing emergency contacts

Travel safety guidance is covered during pre-departure orientations and is available in the J-1 visa guide via your Hanover account.

CAMP PLACEMENTS

Is it harder to get placed at a camp?

Not necessarily. Preparation and flexibility significantly improve placement outcomes.

Placement options include:

- In-person job fairs
- Virtual hiring events

Tips for success:

- Accept offers promptly when appropriate
- Complete your application and documents early
- Remain flexible regarding location and role
- Work closely with your overseas recruiter

There are ample camp opportunities available, and early preparation remains the key to success.