

Aspen Sister Cities  
Middle School Student Exchange Programs  
Program Description and Fact Sheet

**What is Aspen Sister Cities**

Aspen Sister Cities is part of Sister Cities International, “a nonprofit citizen diplomacy network that creates and strengthens partnerships between U.S. and international communities.” Locally, the organization promotes strong municipal relationships between itself and its six Sister Cities. Aside from the three Sister Cities with student exchange programs, Aspen has relationships with: Garmisch Partenkirchen, Germany; Davos, Switzerland; and Queenstown, New Zealand.

Our local committee meets at 5:00 on the second Tuesday of each month in the Sister Cities room in the Aspen City Hall. Anyone who is interested in learning more about the organization is encouraged to attend any meeting.

**What is the Sister City Student Exchange Program**

Students in the eighth grade at Aspen Middle School, Aspen Country Day School, and Aspen Community School can participate in a student exchange program with one of three Aspen’s Sister Cities: Bariloche, Argentina, Chamonix, France, or Shimukappu, Japan. Students apply to any of the three programs in the spring of their seventh grade year. They must be in good academic and behavioral standing at their school and they must be taking the language of their exchange or an approved course as is the case with Shimukappu, Japan.

As eighth graders, each exchange program participant travels to the sister city for a period of 10-14 days. While there, students stay with local families, visit the local schools, visit the tourist attractions of the city, learn and practice the local language, and experience local customs and traditions. At a different time, but within the same academic year, our students and their families host students of the same age from the sister city for a similar experience. A more detailed description of each program can be found below.

**Aspen Sister Cities Student Exchange Program Mission Statement**

The Sister Cities International mission statement is to ‘promote peace through mutual respect, understanding, and cooperation - one individual, one community at a time.’ The Aspen Sister City Student Exchange Program supports this philosophy by providing local students with cultural and linguistic experiences and encouraging families to develop interpersonal relationships with each other and their host students.

**Application and Selection Process**

Students apply for their desired exchange program in the spring of their seventh grade year and they must meet the following criteria. They must be in good standing with their respective school and, in most cases, the students must be studying the language associated with the program in which they want to participate (exceptions can be made for students already proficient in either language). This means that students who would like to participate in the Bariloche program must study Spanish and those wanting

to participate in the Chamonix program must study French. There is no language requirement for students interested in the Shimukappu program, but they do attend language and cultural preparation classes before their trip. The applicant and their family must agree to host a student from the desired city for a reciprocal experience and assist in the planning, organization, and implementation of the reciprocal visit to Aspen. The applicant must also agree to participate in group summer fund raising activities prior to the entire exchange experience.

All seventh grade students will receive an introduction to the three exchange programs in March of their seventh grade year. All interested students will then be encouraged to complete a written application form. Those students who apply and receive positive staff recommendations from their school will be invited, along with their parents, to be interviewed by a selection committee. The committee will be evaluating, among other criteria, the applicant's academic standing, independence and ability to live in another culture, ability to be good ambassadors for their family, school, and community, and the family's willingness to host a student from the reciprocal city. The selection committee will then propose a group of students for each program based on the results of the interviews and written recommendations. At that time, the group lists will be reviewed once again by all staff members in students' respective schools for final review and feedback. The number of participants for each program will be limited by logistical constraints agreed upon by Aspen and each of the three sister cities.

After the application and selection process is completed, all applicants will receive written notice of their status in the program. A list of alternate students may be formed for each program in the case that selected candidates withdraw from the program. After the selection process is complete, any communication or questions about the selection process should be directed to the Aspen Sister Cities board of directors.

### **Supervision and Chaperones**

The exchange group will be accompanied by two adult chaperones selected by the administration of the three Aspen schools and conferred by the Aspen Sister Cities committee. While knowledge of the host country language is valuable and prioritized, chaperones will also be selected based on their ability to successfully supervise students in a travel and foreign setting. Parents of current program participants are not selected to act as chaperones for Aspen Sister Cities exchange programs.

The exchange program chaperones will be with the students during the entire time of travel to the host country and once in country will accompany the students to all activities and excursions. They will be available to the host country families and sponsors while not in direct contact with the students. The local coordinators in each country are prepared in case of emergency and have local doctor and hospital information.

The exchange chaperones will have emergency contact information for the parents of all exchange participants. In case of emergency in country, the chaperones will contact the exchange coordinator and parents to communicate all necessary information. In case of family emergencies in Aspen while participants are in country, the family should contact the student exchange coordinator to facilitate communication with the host country.

During pre-trip orientation meetings, student behavioral expectations will be discussed by the exchange chaperones. In an extreme case of failure to comply with program behavioral expectations, the chaperones may elect, after communicating with the participant's parents, to return the participant to the United States before the scheduled date of return. In such a case, all additional costs involved in such a return will be paid by the student's family.

Chaperones are required to attend all meetings in preparation for the exchanges. They must also assist in hosting the foreign teachers and students in the U.S. They should also attend and/or instruct preparatory classes for their exchange group.

### **Family Expectations**

As a participating family, a foreign student will stay in your home for approximately 10 days to two weeks. You are expected to provide sleeping arrangements and meals, and to accept the student into your family just as your child will be received abroad. You must also be prepared to deal with the emotional issues that sometimes occur as a result of being away from home (home sickness, eating issues, cultural differences and language barriers). However, support is available around the clock by program coordinators from both countries.

Each host family is responsible for getting that student to school each day, any sack lunches necessary, and taking care of the foreign student during non-school hours. This includes after school and weekends. There may be after school options such as the Recreation Center for swimming and skating. Families are free to structure this time however they see fit for their families. There may be some group activities planned on the weekend that are optional.

Each Aspen family (participating student and at least one parent) is required to attend all planning meetings and help organize activities for hosting foreign students. Each family will be given at least one task to complete as part of their obligation to the program and while parents are not expected to help chaperone students around when exchange students are in Aspen, it is helpful to have parent volunteers help out when possible.

Parents are also encouraged to attend language and cultural classes if they are able to fit these into their schedule. Parents who are able to do this report that they feel much more prepared for hosting students from other countries and they develop a bond with other families in the exchange program.

### **Student Expectations**

Aspen students are expected to represent Aspen, their respective schools and the United States as ambassadors. Keeping up on school work and making good choices both in school and out in the community is part of the commitment to the program. Students will learn about cultural traditions and behavioral expectations in their preparation classes so that they can be gracious visitors in a foreign environment. After students return from the country they visit, they will be asked to give a very short presentation about their experience to the Aspen Sister Cities committee at their monthly meeting.

Each program now has a required cultural/language preparation class that takes place six afternoons (after school) before each group leaves on their trip. Either a teacher

or chaperone is contracted to teach this class in an effort to help participating students get to know each other, prepare them for the cultural differences of the place they will visit and teach basic language skills. While every effort is made to avoid conflicts, there are times where students will have to miss other planned after school activities to participate in these classes. The cost of these classes is included in the overall trip fee.

Students must make the Sister Cities Exchange Program a very high priority for the entire year. From the first organizational meeting through the last obligation as a host family, students must plan to be involved and committed. This sometimes means making difficult choices between this program and other extra curricular activities such as sports practices, music lessons, school plays and family functions. It is important to think through all of these variables before committing to the program with a non-refundable deposit.

### **Program Costs**

After acceptance to the program, students must understand, sign and return the program academic and behavior contract along with a non-refundable participation fee of \$500, which includes a two-year membership to Aspen Sister Cities. Passports should be obtained or updated at this time.

Each student must raise a minimum of \$200 through the Ducky Derby Fundraiser that summer by selling at least 40 ducks. This money covers hosting expenses when the foreign groups visit Aspen.

The actual program expenses vary year to year based on flight and transfer expenses and chaperone airfare coverage. Every attempt is made to keep the trip costs under \$2,000.00, but some programs are more expensive than others. Each participating student is expected to raise \$350 individually throughout the year towards their own program fee. Scholarship funds are available and can only be requested in writing by the application deadline in April. This information and form can be found at [www.aspenk12.net](http://www.aspenk12.net) under Aspen Middle School Exchange Program.

### **Bariloche, Argentina**

Each October, a group of eighth grade students from Bariloche come to Aspen. They stay in the homes of students selected to participate in the program and their visit is ten to twelve days long. While here, the students visit all three schools, visit Aspen tourist attractions, and sometimes spend time in nearby desert areas. One weekend is set aside for host family activities to be designed by each participating family. Most of these students come with very good English language skills, but the host families are encouraged to help them further develop these skills. All participating families will be expected to assist in planning and implementing of this visit and parents are needed to help chaperone various activities.

In April of the same academic year, our students travel to Bariloche for ten to twelve days. While there Aspen students live with families of eighth grade level students. However, since our students travel to Argentina during the beginning of a new academic year in Argentina, they will not be staying with the same students that visited Aspen during our fall. In Bariloche, our students will attend Spanish language classes conducted by teachers contracted by Aspen Sister Cities. They will also visit three local

schools in Bariloche as well as all the tourist attractions of the area. They will have, at least, one free weekend to spend with their host family.

Participants are expected to integrate to the best of their ability with their host families and follow all host family expectations. They are expected to faithfully, attend their language classes and make their best effort to improve their Spanish language skills. They are also encouraged to build strong interpersonal relationships with all of the members of their host family

The cost of the program is mostly limited to travel expenses (airfare, transfers, travel insurance and various taxes). Over the past years the cost for the Bariloche program has been under \$2,000, but the actual cost of the next exchange will depend on airfare and tax increases. Once in Bariloche most expenses will be paid for by Bariloche Sister Cities Committee, the host families, the three participating schools, and the Bariloche city government. Group airfare will be purchased from Aspen to Bariloche (approximately 24 – 27 hours of travel time) through Buenos Aires. Local as well and international travel agents and airlines will be asked to submit bids for air travel packages. Selection of the best bid will be made by the student exchange coordinator based on price, travel itinerary, and dates. In addition to their travel costs, the participants will only be asked to take spending money to cover personal purchases and expenses while in Bariloche. Chaperone travel costs will be divided amongst all group members and be included in the total trip fee.

### **Chamonix, France**

For almost twenty years, Aspen students have exchanged with French students from the *Roger Frison Roche* School in Chamonix, France. This program varies from year to year. Full exchanges are when no more than 15 local students receive students in their homes in October and then visit Chamonix the following April. Every other year, however, smaller groups 8-10 students from Aspen will visit Chamonix without receiving Chamonix students in their homes here. We call these partial exchanges and the 2010-2011 school year is one of these types of years.

During full exchange years, all participating students get to know each other via email before the French students arrive in Aspen in mid-October. Students from the Chamonix area come to Aspen for 10-12 days. We try to have the visit coincide with the Aspen School District's 4-day fall break in October, so participating families need to plan accordingly. Just like the Bariloche program, Chamonix students visit all three schools, visit Aspen tourist attractions, and sometimes spend time in nearby desert areas. One weekend is set aside for host families to share experiences with Chamonix students as they wish so no formal activities are planned. Local activities might include a visit to the Smuggler Mine, hikes to Crater Lake or around Ashcroft, a jeep tour up the backside of Aspen Mountain, watching a school football game and/or an excursion to Glenwood Springs.

The plan for full exchange and partial exchange visits to Chamonix are the typically the same. Aspen students fly into and out of Geneva, Switzerland and participate in activities in and around Chamonix. Some of these include school visits, skiing, a hike to Switzerland, a tram ride to L'Aiguille de Midi and excursions to neighboring areas. Students will also have at least one free weekend to spend with host families.

Since this exchange is language based, participants in the Chamonix program are expected to practice their French as much as possible and to fully integrate with their host families so that interpersonal relationships can develop. Developing lasting bonds and preparing students to be global citizens is an important goal of this program.

The cost of the program is mostly limited to travel expenses (airfare, transfers, travel insurance and various taxes). Over the past years the cost for the Chamonix program has been under \$2,000, but the actual cost of the next exchange will depend on airfare and tax increases. Group airfare will be purchased from Aspen to Geneva. Local as well and international travel agents and airlines will be asked to submit bids for air travel packages. Selection of the best bid will be made by the student exchange coordinator based on price, travel itinerary, and dates. During the years of full exchange, most expenses in Chamonix will be paid for by Chamonix Sister Cities Committee, the host families, the three the participating school, and the Chamonix City Government. During partial exchange years, the money raised through Ducky Derby will cover all expenses in Chamonix. In addition to their travel costs, the participants will only be asked to take spending money to cover personal purchases and expenses while in Chamonix. Chaperone travel costs will be divided amongst all group members and be included in the total trip fee.

### **Shimukappu, Japan**

Now more than twenty years old, the Shimukappu program is the longest running student exchange and several important qualities separate it from the other middle school programs. Due to the size of the Shimukappu region, this is a smaller exchange with 8-10 students participating each year and it is geared towards adventurous students who want a very different cultural experience. Students must be open to communication challenges, dramatically different foods and strong cultural differences. Furthermore, the timeline for this program is very fast: students travel to Japan in October and then must immediately prepare to receive students from Shimukappu in January. For the right student and family, however, this program is an amazing experience.

Participating students start their school year with cultural and language classes before visiting Japan. On top of the fall outdoor education trips and typical after school activities, this extra expectation can be quite demanding. Yet, in early October all of the hard work pays off when the students travel to Japan for approximately ten days. In Japan, students will visit local schools, stay in a Japanese hotel, visit an onsen (traditional bath house), the Viz (a large wave pool), and be fully immersed in Japanese culture. Students will also spend at least one full weekend with their Japanese host family and learn the fine art of charades in order to communicate.

Around the second week of January, Shimukappu students and their chaperones will visit Aspen. Their lead chaperone, Corey Lucks, is actually an Aspen native who has lived and worked in Shimukappu for nearly ten years. Corey's participation, along with Aspen Middle School teacher and Japanese speaker Kamala Marsh, helps make the exchange run smoothly. Just like with the other exchanges, Japanese students will participate in activities in and around the Aspen area. In this case, though, students will also be able to ski.

Because Japanese is not offered in Aspen schools, the Shimukappu exchange focuses more on culture than language so taking a foreign language in school is not

required. However, just like with the other programs, students are expected to fully integrate themselves into lives with their Japanese host families while in Shimukappu and they are encouraged to develop strong interpersonal relationships with their host students and their families.

The cost of the program is mostly limited to travel expenses (airfare, transfers, travel insurance and various taxes). Over the past years the cost for the Shimukappu program has been under \$2,000, but the actual cost of the next exchange will depend on airfare and tax increases. All expenses in Shimukappu will be paid for by Shimukappu Sister Cities Committee, the host families, the participating school, and the Shimukappu City Government. Group airfare will be purchased from Aspen to Sapporo which is the nearest city to Shimukappu on the island of Hokkaido. We have a long-standing relationship with All Nippon Airlines (ANA) and use their travel services to get students to and from Japan. In addition to their travel costs, the participants will only be asked to take spending money to cover personal purchases and expenses while in Shimukappu. Chaperone travel costs will be divided amongst all group members and be included in the total trip fee.

#### **Student Exchange Program Timeline:**

Mid- March: Informational meetings for seventh graders and distribution of applications  
April: Applications due/ Interviews  
May: Student selection and mandatory orientation meeting  
June: Non refundable participation fee due  
July: Ducky Derby Fundraiser  
August: Ducky Derby Festival and Japanese classes begin  
Sept: Chamonix/Bariloche meetings begin  
Japanese culture/language classes and preparation for trip  
Oct: Aspen students travel to Japan  
Chamonix and Bariloche students visit Aspen  
Nov-Dec: Shimukappu students present at Sister Cities (ASC) meeting  
Aspen students prepare to host Shimukappu students  
Jan: Shimukappu students visit Aspen  
Feb: Chamonix and Bariloche culture/language classes begin and preparation for trips begin  
April: Aspen students travel to Chamonix or Bariloche  
May or June: Chamonix and Bariloche students give short presentations at ASC meeting

#### **Aspen Sister Cities Contacts:**

Sister Cities President, Don Sheeley	<a href="mailto:aac@rof.net">aac@rof.net</a>
Sister Cities Vice President, Pat Fallin	<a href="mailto:patfallin@msn.com">patfallin@msn.com</a>
Student Exchange Coordinator, Georgina Levey	<a href="mailto:glevey@aspenk12.net">glevey@aspenk12.net</a>
Bariloche Coordinator, Griff Smith	<a href="mailto:griff@sopris.net">griff@sopris.net</a>
Chamonix Coordinator, Francesca MacPherson	<a href="mailto:francesca20001@hotmail.com">francesca20001@hotmail.com</a>
Shimukappu Coordinator, Karinjo Devore	<a href="mailto:karinjoaspen@aol.com">karinjoaspen@aol.com</a>

