

Businessweek | Summer Camp Special

How Summer Camp Became a \$3.5 Billion Industry

Keeping kids busy once school ends—and getting them away from screens!—has renewed interest in a business that’s so much bigger than just cabins and canoes.



By [Kira Garcia](#)

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All those tuition payments add up to make this industry worth about \$3.5 billion, a number that’s been increasing steadily since the pandemic-related losses of 2020. In the US, the industry serves about 26 million campers annually, the equivalent of more than 30% of the total US population of school-age kids. Inflation has made

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Camps Are Evolving

Today’s entrepreneurial camp directors are thinking beyond canoes and lakeside cabins. Specialty camps are welcoming diverse groups, including Spanish-language camps for children from immigrant families and affirming programs for LGBTQ kids. Those functioning as nonprofits are more readily able to develop such niche programs and often raise funds specifically to support and include underserved communities. Nontraditional activities are also flourishing. Want your kid to work on DJ skills, robotics or scuba diving? There’s a camp for that! Specialty programs were the industry’s fastest-growing segment prior to the Covid-19 pandemic and are predicted to be in increasingly high demand from 2023 to 2028.

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There’s a New Focus on Access

Both day camps and sleepaway camps are increasingly seen as essential to children’s education and development. According to the