



Counselor in Training – SHT Backpacking Trip

Features of the CIT Backpacking Trip

- Participants age 16–17
- Group size: 10–16 participants and 2 leaders, coed
- 8 days backpacking on the Superior Hiking Trail in Minnesota
- Hiking with a heavy backpack (30–60 pounds) most days for up to 12 hours
- Designated campsites
- Opportunities for day hikes
- Hiking up and down hills along the coast of Lake Superior

CIT backpackers venture to the Superior National Forest in northeastern Minnesota, where they'll spend eight days hiking along the rugged, Superior Hiking Trail. While it is characterized by ascents to rock outcroppings and cliffs, with sweeping vistas of the region, the Trail also descends to travel along many prominent rivers, streams, lakes, and ponds and through diverse forest settings. Overlooks of Lake Superior, the Sawtooth Mountains and inland woodlands, lakes and rivers are abundant. The Trail showcasing waterfalls and river rapids, bends and deep gorges where thousands of years of rushing water has cut into layers of ancient volcanic rock.

What you will take away from the trip

The purpose of the trip is to develop group collaboration skills and leadership abilities including but not limited to humility, empathy, awareness, resourcefulness, resiliency, optimism, adaptability, and respect. Participants also gain exposure to wilderness skills including camping, hiking, Leave No Trace, navigation, cooking, and risk management, and explore the ecology of the area. It is our hope that your camper will develop a passion for the outdoors, and continue personal adventures beyond the CIT program.

Each participant will practice giving and receiving feedback, reflecting on their leadership, camping skills, backpacking techniques, and working as a group to overcome challenges. Leaders will teach these skills before gradually turning the leadership of the trip over to the participants. Each day participants will take over more of the daily responsibility of the trip.

Challenges of the trip

The Superior Hiking Trail offers many steep uphill challenges and the trail itself is not level. One of the more challenging aspects of hiking the Trail is the elevation changes. Instead of long climbs and descents found in mountains, the SHT is constantly ascending and descending. This type of hiking is particularly hard on those with knee, back and ankle problems and it is not recommended to go on this trip if you have a history of these musculoskeletal issues.

As a black bear population is present in this area, it is vital to practice safe bear camping principles. Trip groups will keep a meticulously clean cooking area and store food away from where they sleep at night to reduce the chance of a bear encounter.

Depending on the weather, bugs have the potential to be particularly fearsome on this trip. It is recommended that you bring lightweight long sleeve shirts and pants and be able to comfortably hike in buggy, hot conditions. Summer weather can often be hot, humid, and bring thunderstorms.

Time at Camp Olson YMCA

The time spent at Camp allows the group to begin to develop leadership skills and prepare for the time spent on trail. The CIT program is a 4-week program designed to train and practice the great responsibilities that come with being a GREAT camp counselor. During week one, participants are allotted time to have some fun at program areas while also spending time learning leadership and preparing for a week-long venture on trail. The second week is spent on the trail and become members of a functioning unit that work as a team. Members are given the opportunity to experience nature in a new way, learn outdoor skills, practice leave-no-trace principles, lead a group, and self-reflect. Week three is designed to process the trail experience and begin the transition from camper to staffer at Camp Olson, spending time in each program area and participating in counseling sessions. For the finale, CIT's spend their last week in assigned cabins working with campers and learning from experienced counselors.

Participant Expectations

We expect each participant to best support their group and their own growth by maintaining the following:

- Embraces challenges with willingness to learn and grow
- Makes conservative risk management decisions
- Works productively with everyone in the community
- Effectively communicate with or to other participants or leaders regarding potential hazards/risks, personal distress, injury, or need for assistance
- Age-appropriate social skills and ability to self-monitor and make safe decisions when immediate supervision is not possible.
- Accepts feedback by applying and discussing suggestions from others and begins to give feedback.
- Creates a safe and inclusive atmosphere
- Takes initiative in group tasks and self-care
- Be in good physical and emotional health
- Ability to hike 6-12 miles on uneven terrain carrying 30-60 pounds.
 - Start breaking in hiking shoes at least 3 months before the trip!