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Kandersteg International Scout Centre



KISC | Kandersteg International Scout Centre is located in the beautiful Bernese Oberland.

Kandersteg International Scout Centre

Incredible Scout experience in beautiful Switzerland

Several years ago we had the pleasure of visiting the amazing Kandersteg International Scout Centre (KISC) and being shown around by some lovely young volunteers who came from all over the world. Our boys enjoyed exchanging badges and scarves and seeing what is involved to operate this incredible place which provides so many experiences and connections for its staff and visitors.

Kandersteg (65km south of Bern) is located in the beautiful Bernese Oberland, situated along the valley of the River Kander, west of the Jungfrau Massif. It can be easily reached by road and rail, and even an international airport isn't that far away.

Kandersteg offers spectacular mountain activities and a fantastic view of the Blumlisalp Massif, hiking trails, mountain climbing and, in winter, downhill and cross-country skiing. Kandersteg is a peaceful, picturesque holiday resort of around 1300 inhabitants and with its well-maintained and beautiful wooden chalets, it has kept its village character.

At the southern end of the village you will find the Kandersteg International Scout Centre (KISC) which provides lodges, chalets and campsites on 17 hectares of land (29,150m² is woodland) and is open to Scouts year round, as well as non-Scouts for most of the year. In 1908 a chalet was built as accommodation for the engineers and construction workers of the Lotschberg tunnel (the 14.6km north-south rail linking Switzerland and Italy). After the tunnel was opened in 1913, the chalet remained empty.

After the resounding success of the first World Scout Jamboree in 1920, Lord Baden-Powell (founder of the Scouting movement) mentioned that he would like to have a permanent place where Scouts from all over the world could get together. In 1921, when the founder of the Scouting movement and current Chief Scout of Switzerland, Walter von Bonstetten, stumbled across the empty and derelict chalet in Kandersteg, he felt that it could be the meeting place Baden-Powell had wished for.

In 1922 Baden-Powell accepted von Bonstetts' invitation to visit the chalet and immediately felt it was the perfect place to build his dream and on February 12, 1923, the Association of this International Scout

Home was founded. On April 12 that year the chalet with 4,673m² of land was purchased.

The first Scouts welcomed to Kandersteg were from England and the Netherlands, probably as both of these countries had financially contributed to the purchase of the chalet and land. In 1929 the Association bought the land surrounding the entrance to the Lotschberg tunnel as the main campsite area. Over 14,000 trees were planted and hundreds of metres of water pipes were laid between 1937 and 1939. In 1977, the present name, Kandersteg International Scout Centre, was adopted.

In 1950, the centre recorded the number of overnights at 22,000 and by 2009 this number had increased to 75,000 and is still steadily rising. A chalet extension was opened in 1996 and in 2009 the Kander-Lodge and the group house Sunneblick were added to KISC to improve the indoor facilities. Over the years Scouting organisations from all over the world have paid for renovations to various rooms in the chalet, so there is a Dutch Room (1930), Italian and Scandinavian Rooms (both 1952), a Canadian Room (1957) and many more. The facilities offer 350 beds and, in addition, can accommodate 1200 campers.

Over 12,000 Scouts and Guides from over 50 different countries visit the centre each

year, as well as people not involved in the scouting movement. During the summer months about 1000 guests per day stay at the centre, enjoying over 130 different activities based around three main themes of International Friendship, High Adventure and Eco Adventure.

The staff team at the centre is managed by full-time operational and general directors, supported by long term and short term staff. Over 100 Scouts and Guides work at KISC to provide guests with the best possible service and experiences to ensure that they enjoy their stay in the Bernese Oberland. Staff members are identifiable by the pink t-shirts they wear, which is why they are known as 'Pinkies'. Their work varies greatly – hike guiding, running the laundry, cleaning toilets, serving meals, cooking heaps of burgers, sorting out hundreds of ice creams before they melt, selling t-shirts, performing campfire sketches in front of large crowds, showing visitors around... the list is endless!

Knowledge of a few languages can be useful, and staff need to 'be prepared' (the Scout motto) to work in any area. The short term staff (STS) work as volunteers for a season. They will receive full training at the beginning of their season. All STS receive full board, accommodation in the chalet and basic amenities. During the summer

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Kandersteg International Scout Centre



KISC | Staff, affectionately known as Pinkies, outside the Scout Centre.

months about 30 STS work, while only 10 are required in the other seasons.

The long term staff (LTS) have specific jobs and are responsible for certain areas, and are also the link between the different STS groups and the seasons. During the summer months there are around 30 LTS, and during the rest of the year about 15.

There are three main requirements to become a member of the staff team at KISC – be a Scout or Guide registered with a National Scout Organisation, be at least 18 years old and have the ability to communicate in English.

So if you're a Scout or Guide in New Zealand why not give some thought to being a 'Pinkie'... unique experiences and wonderful opportunities, live in a beautiful village in the Swiss Alps, make new international friends in a multicultural environment, use the days off to travel around Switzerland and enjoy a weekly staff night out and staff day out ... and naturally a pink t-shirt! This really is one of the hidden gems of the Scouting movement!

Marianne Drummond



KISC | Raising the flag in 1953.



KISC | Flags outside the building in recent years.