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Arts and Life

“Exploradores de Monterey” summer camp educates local youth in arts, culture and science



California State Parks / California State Parks Museum Technician Elizabeth Fisher shows campers a photograph collection housed in the archives at the Larkin House in Monterey.

Over the past two weeks, young people from all over Monterey County have been participating in a new camp called Exploradores de Monterey, which staff say is an evolution of a long-running summer program in the area called "Los Niños."

In this summer camp run by California State Parks, kids have been making art, learning about science, immersing themselves in different cultural traditions and more this summer at the Monterey State Historic Park.

Staff say the Exploradores de Monterey — “Explorers of Monterey” — summer camp is open to young people within and outside of the county, and the goal is to get local kids interested in art, history and science.

"It's just been a lot of fun to watch the kids have a fun time doing things that that are hands-on and 'old school,'" said California State Parks' Richard Fletcher. "The parents when they come in, and the kids are on stilts and they don't want to leave, are surprised — they're like, "Oh wait, you're not playing a video game and you don't want to leave yet?""



California State Parks / Campers learn local history at the Exploradores de Monterey summer camp.

This is the first time the camp is using the name “Exploradores de Monterey” instead of the prior name, “Los Niños.” According to Fletcher, the change happened during the camp’s off-years from COVID. It was meant to make the program sound more fun and interesting, he said, but also to preserve the connection to the area’s Spanish and Latinx heritage.

“It started off as Los Niños to give a nod to the original Spanish influence on Monterey. When we were reimagining the camp, we wanted to stick with a Spanish name, but didn't know exactly

what to go with. We thought 'Los Exploradores' was a fun, kind of light-hearted name that also encompasses the idea of what we want to do with exploring nature and history," Fletcher said.

Ashley McCausland, a guide trainee at this year's camp, said there's a wide range of activities kids do here like wax candle-making, nature journaling, and more.

"We go whale watching off of the Fisherman's Wharf, and at the very last day of our camp, there's even a treasure hunt," she said.

McCausland said it's also important that kids have cultural experiences. "[Like] arts and crafts based on cultural history such as tie dying with natural dyes and learning how to orient and create maps. They even get to experience some of our historic items up close while going behind the scenes with our museum staff," she said.

Another guide trainee, Julia Madden-Fulk, participated in the old Los Niños camp as a fourth grader. Now, she guides kids through a very similar experience.

"It's my first time working it, but we definitely heard some some good feedback from kids appreciating the camp. Lots of them are interested in the history," she said.

Madden-Fulk said working with the youth here has been gratifying.

"It's really inspiring to see young scholars touring our different houses or museums, asking really wonderful questions and deep questions about what they're looking at. So I think they really do understand the significance of a lot that they're learning about," she said.



California State Parks / Campers receive certificates of completion at their "graduation day" on the last day of camp.

Fletcher said help with transportation costs could help State Parks make it easier for kids from all over the area — even outside of Monterey County — to attend the camp.

That includes young people from more rural areas like King City and Salinas, or from communities throughout Monterey County with less access to resources like this.

"We're really excited to see where it goes," he said. "We'd love to get some more campers signed up from all over the county."

Fletcher said the campers got to see an ocean sunfish, some sea otters and breaching whales earlier this week, and today was their treasure hunt and graduation ceremony. He said they even received a "cool" Los Exploradores patch.

The camp has now finished its two weeks this summer, but it's expected to return next year. More information is available [here](#).

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