

YOTA Camp: Empowering the Next Ham Generation

An Argentinian operator was inspired by the program's peer-led approach to learning and enjoyed connecting with other young hams.

Bianca Montenegro, LU9YBM

I had the incredible opportunity of attending the 2024 Youth on the Air (YOTA) camp (<https://youthontheair.org/camps>) in Halifax, Nova Scotia. I initially became a ham in 2023 because I come from a family of them, but I was pleasantly surprised by how much I enjoyed the hobby once I became more involved. Attending YOTA camp not only helped me to improve my technical skills, but it also ignited a deeper interest for the hobby within me. It entailed 1 week filled with learning, operating high-end equipment, and connecting with other young operators from around the world.

Benefiting from Youth Leadership

A standout feature of YOTA camp is its strong emphasis on designing an environment for young operators to step up and lead. Camp organizers set a goal of ensuring that at least 50 percent of the sessions each year are led by young hams — and they exceeded that goal at the 2024 camp. Having a focus on youth leadership is incredibly inspiring and empowering to campers. Getting to watch my peers take charge, share their knowledge, and guide others through complex topics was an unforgettable experience. It wasn't just about learning from experienced operators; it was about learning from those who were at the same stage of their ham radio journey. This peer-led approach made the learning process more relat-

able and accessible, especially for someone like me who is relatively new to the hobby. I hope to be able to be a part of the camp's youth leadership in the future.

Expansive Learning Opportunities

Another one of YOTA camp's goals is to encourage every camper to make at least one contact using the call sign VE1YOTA. This was a significant milestone for me in my ham radio journey. I was apprehensive about using the radio, mainly because of my limited experience, but the supportive atmosphere and encouragement from fellow campers and staff helped me overcome this and make my first contact! The thrill of that first successful contact sparked a newfound confidence in my abilities and fueled my desire to make more; by the end of camp, I had made several contacts.

Campers were able to operate using high-end gear like Icom IC-7300 and IC-7610 transceivers, as well as Heil Sound's Pro 7 headsets. I had previously only operated with a basic setup at home, so using this state-of-the-art equipment was a game changer. The clarity and precision of the gear allowed me to reach countries and operators I have never been able to contact before from my home station. Operating with this equipment opened my eyes to the potential of what



Bianca Montenegro, LU9YBM, operating VE1YOTA during the camp's POTA activation on Georges Island. [Ethan Rushton, KO4VXD, photo]



Bianca Montenegro, LU9YBM (on the left), and Ruth Willet, KM4LAO (on the right), during the YOTA camp closing ceremony, where Bianca won an Arrow antenna. [Sam Rose, KC2LRC, photo]



YL YOTA campers: (back row, from left to right) Bianca Montenegro, LU9YBM; Ariel Blum, VE2SZU; Katie Campbell, KE8LQR; Mia Boudreau, VA1ALO; (front row, from left to right) Grace Lea, KE3G; Cynthia Squires, KK7TLD; Hope Lea, ND2L, and Wintta Ghebreyesus, VA3WGY. [Sam Rose, KC2LRC, photo]

I could accomplish in the hobby with the right tools and knowledge. It also motivated me to continue learning and improving my skills, knowing that there is always room for growth in the world of ham radio.

YOTA camp offers a wide range of activities and learning opportunities that go beyond making contacts. I participated in my first Parks on the Air® (POTA®) activation, which was an exciting and challenging experience; soldered for the first time, building a simple code practice oscillator and a manual Morse keyer that I can use with my radio at home; learned and practiced CW; discovered satellite communications, and participated in an Amateur Radio Direction Finding (ARDF) fox hunt. Each of these activities broadened my understanding of the hobby and provided me with new skills that I'm eager to develop.

Fostering a Community for Young Hams

One of the most impactful aspects of camp for me was the sense of community and camaraderie that developed among participants. YOTA camp is not only about radio; it's also about connecting and spending time with other young hams. We explored downtown Halifax through a tour on an amphibious vehicle (which works on land and on or under water), watched the Argentina-Canada Copa América football match, and visited the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic and His Majesty's Canadian Ship *Sackville*.

I connected with young hams from different parts of the world, each one bringing their own experiences and perspectives to the table, and was inspired by all the female operators I got to meet.



Bianca Montenegro, LU9YBM (on the left); YOTA Camp Director Neil Rapp, WB9VPG (in the middle), and Theo Pastrana, LU1XOP (on the right), holding the Argentinean Radio Club's (Radio Club Argentino) flag signed by all the camp attendees. [Sam Rose, KC2LRC, photo]

By the end of the week, I had gained more than just new ham radio skills — I also built new friendships. The sense of belonging to a global community of young hams is something I will carry with me; it's a reminder that no matter where we come from, we all share a common passion that brings us together.

Looking Ahead

I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to attend YOTA camp and am excited to continue my journey in ham radio with the skills and friendships I gained from the unforgettable experience.

As I look ahead, I am eager to apply what I learned at camp to my own ham radio activities. Whether it is participating in more POTA activations, improving my CW skills, or experimenting with new equipment, I know that the joy for ham radio that YOTA camp ignited in me will continue to grow. The experience has shown me that ham radio is more than just a hobby — it's a lifelong journey, and I can't wait to see where it takes me next!

Bianca Montenegro, LU9YBM, is 23 years old and currently finishing her studies to become an English translator. She's been a licensed ham since August 2023. Bianca is a member of Radio Club General Roca, LU3VAL, and Radio Club Argentino, LU4AA, and is chair of the YOTA commission of LU4AA. In December 2023, she participated in her first YOTA Month and made more than 100 QSOs with hams in seven countries: Argentina, Chile, Brazil, Mexico, the United States, Costa Rica, and Jamaica.

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