

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

FIJI



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



May 2007

A WELCOME LETTER

The Peace Corps Volunteer experience is not something you try out. If you join us with that mental mode, I can almost guarantee you will fail. One is either committed or is not. So I urge you to be committed to the idea and the experience of Peace Corps. The nature and quality of your experience will largely be in your own hands, but I assure you that my staff and I will be there for you during your 27 months and perhaps longer as you serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Fiji.

Carefully consider the information contained in this *Welcome Book* and the other pre-departure materials you have received. In addition, I am certain if you talk to returned Peace Corps Volunteers, you will hear many times over that you need to be flexible, patient, etc. And I will add one more: that you come here seeking to find joy and have fun in your everyday experiences.

When you join us, you will be given clear information about what is expected of you. You may think you do not have all the resources to accomplish these expectations, but you will have the opportunity to do your best every day. Our staff and Volunteers have put a great amount of thought and effort into preparing for your arrival. We are excited about working with you to enrich our program and to contribute to development in Fiji.

Congratulations on your invitation to join Peace Corps/Fiji.
I look forward to meeting you.

Oghale Oddo
Country Director



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Map of the Fiji

A Welcome Letter **1**

Peace Corps/Fiji History and Programs **7**

History of the Peace Corps in Fiji 7

History and Future of Peace Corps
Programming in Fiji 8

Country Overview: Fiji at a Glance **11**

History 11

Government 11-13

Economy 13

People and Culture 13-14

Environment 14-15

Resources For Further Information **17**

Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle **23**

Communications 23-24

Housing and Site Location 25-26

Living Allowance and Money Management 26-27

Food and Diet 28-29

Transportation 30-31

Geography and Climate 31-32

Social Activities 32-34

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior 34-36

Personal Safety 36-37

Rewards and Frustrations 37-38

Peace Corps Training	41
Overview of Pre-Service Training	41-44
<i>Technical Training</i>	42-43
<i>Language Training</i>	43
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	43-44
<i>Wellness Training</i>	44
<i>Safety Training</i>	44
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	45
Your Health Care and Safety in Fiji	47
Health Issues in the Fiji	47-48
Helping You Stay Healthy	49
Maintaining Your Health	49-50
Women’s Health Information	51
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	51-52
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	52-54
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	55-61
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	55-56
<i>Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk</i>	56-57
<i>Support from Staff</i>	57-60
<i>What if you become a victim of a violent crime?</i>	60-61
Security Issues in Fiji	61-64
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	64
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Safety Support in Fiji	65-66
Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues	69
Overview of Diversity in Fiji	70
What Might a Volunteer Face?	70-71
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	71
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	72-74
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	74
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	74-75
<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	75
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	75-76
<i>Possible Issues for Married Volunteers</i>	76

Frequently Asked Questions	79
Welcome Letters from Fiji Volunteers	85
Packing List	91
Pre-departure Checklist	101
Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters	105



PEACE CORPS/FIJI HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Fiji

The Peace Corps has had a long and highly successful history of service in Fiji. Prior to suspending operations in early 1998, Volunteers served the country for 30 years without interruption. More than 2,200 Peace Corps Volunteers have worked with local communities and organizations in various sectors, including education, business, environmental resource management, health, fisheries, and agriculture.

Notable past achievements by Peace Corps Volunteers include introducing environmental themes into secondary school curricula, small business projects with the Fiji Development Bank and Junior Achievement, and programming with both the Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Women. Volunteers significantly impacted the highly regarded Management Planning Advisors project by training local government staff in organizational and project planning. Their contribution of management skills and tools are still evident in many provincial and district offices throughout Fiji.

In 2002, the government of Fiji requested that the Peace Corps return. An assessment team came to Fiji and found that Peace Corps could once again make meaningful and substantive contributions to the development of Fiji. In late 2003, the program reopened. Volunteers now work in two project sectors: integrated environmental resource management and community health promotion.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Fiji

Peace Corps/Fiji Volunteers are currently working on two projects. A brief description of each follows.

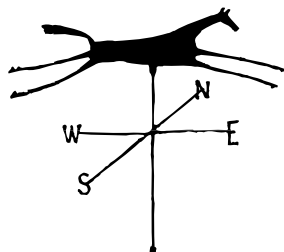
Integrated Environmental Resource Management: The natural environment of Fiji is one of its most valuable and sacred assets. In collaboration with government departments, members of the Fiji Locally Managed Marine Areas (FLMMA), and other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), Peace Corps Volunteers provide educational and technical support on environmental preservation for inter-coastal management efforts and marine protected areas, and they help promote effective ecotourism practices. Volunteers work cooperatively with ministries, provincial and district offices, NGOs, and community members to build capacity and act as facilitators for their communities' involvement in preserving and protecting Fiji's natural environmental resources. Some Volunteers work with teachers and students to integrate environmental awareness activities into the classroom.

Community Health Promotion: In partnership with the Ministry of Health, the Centre for Health Promotion, NGOs, and local governments, Volunteers assist in health education, prevention, and promotion. With an emphasis on prevention, Volunteers work with local Ministry of Health staff to provide workshops and materials to rural areas. Volunteers work closely with schools and youth organizations to promote healthy life-skills training and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Volunteers also help build capacity and community outreach in youth health programs. A key aspect of their work is to improve the quality of health promotion outreach programs to increase health knowledge among youth. Volunteers work closely with youth workers, health staff, and community leaders to improve abilities in information technology (IT), healthy lifestyle practices, and means to enhance livelihoods.

NOTES



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: FIJI AT A GLANCE



History

Fiji became a British Crown colony in October of 1874. In 1970, the nation became self-governing under the British Commonwealth. Fiji was converted into a republic after a 1987 military coup, but rejoined the commonwealth in 1997. A similar pattern occurred when George Speight, a businessman who ignited ethnic tensions, led a civilian coup in 2000. Speight and his men took 45 government officials hostage for nearly two months until the military restored order. The interim president, Josefa Iloilo, was eventually sworn-in by the Great Council of Chiefs in March 2001. In September 2001, general elections were held and the interim prime minister, Laisenia Qarase, was elected to that position. General elections were held again in May 2006, and both the president and prime minister were reelected to their positions. Despite the election, another coup toppled the government on December 5, 2006. Led by Commodore Voreqe Bainimarama, the military peacefully, but forcefully, removed PM Qarase and President Iloilo. On January 4, 2007, Commodore Bainimarama returned executive power to ousted President Iloilo. Fiji is currently under an interim government led by President Iloilo and newly appointed Prime Minister Bainimarama.

Government

The capital and government seat for Fiji is Suva, which is on the largest island in the group, Viti Levu. The government of Fiji is undergoing changes from its major restructuring after the 2000 and 2006 coups.

Fiji's current government is headed by the military as per the 1999 constitution, which is technically still in place. At the time of this writing there had been no firm decision when the country will be returned to a democratically elected system of government.

Indigenous Fijians have a well-developed local system of government, beginning at the village (*koro*) level. Each village is represented by a village headman (*turaga ni koro*), who is elected by the villagers. Villages are grouped into 18 districts (*tikina*) and these districts are grouped into 14 provinces (*yasana*). The Fijian Affairs Board appoints a *roko tui* to head each province.

Indo-Fijians and other non-Fijians are served by district offices that represent ministries at the local level, provide funding for infrastructure projects, and maintain government services. There are 18 districts in Fiji, and their boundaries are different than those of the 14 provinces. An advisory counselor on the district development committee represents districts at the national level.

The traditional sociopolitical governing system of the Fijian people is the chiefly system. The chief can be male or female, though most are male. The Fijian word for chief is *ratu* for men and *adi* for women. The chief has sovereign power over the people of his or her village. The roots of this lifestyle go deep into the Fijian soul and you will encounter evidence of it at times when you might least expect it. The current government consults the Great Council of Chiefs on issues that pertain particularly to the Fijian people. You will learn more about the dynamics of this during training and throughout your assignment.

The issues between Fijians and Indo-Fijians are historic, complex, and often difficult for outsiders to understand. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will need to be nonpolitical.

Although it is perfectly all right for you to discuss your own American politics, you may not become involved in local politics. It is very important that you not be perceived as an advocate for one group over another as this may seriously impact your effectiveness in your community.

Economy

Fiji's economy is based largely on tourism; however, the sugar industry accounts for about 30 percent of the gross domestic product. Garment manufacturing; gold mining; timber; commercial fishing; and kava, coconut, and other agro-based products also contribute significantly. You may also have noticed bottles of Fiji water cropping up on supermarket shelves throughout the U.S. The bottling of this natural artesian water has become a significant export. Unfortunately, the sugar and garment industries are seriously at risk and could possibly collapse in the near future due to changes in international trade agreements.

People and Culture

Although Fiji is a multi-racial society, all citizens are referred to as Fiji Islanders or Fiji Nationals. There are two major ethnic groups in Fiji—indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians (descendants of indentured laborers and servants brought from India by the British during the colonial period).

According to the Fijian government, the population of Fiji in December 2004 was 840,201, with 54.3 percent indigenous Fijians and 38.2 percent Indo-Fijians. While the last official census showed an increase in population, there has been a 0.3 percent decrease in the number of Indo-Fijians as a result of high international emigration.

Indigenous Fijians have common traits of both Melanesians and Polynesians as Fiji lies within a transitional zone between the two areas. Most Fijians live in rural villages of approximately 50 to 500 people led by a chief, although many are increasingly moving to urban areas.

Christian missionaries have had a profound impact on the religious practices of the Fijians. You'll find that there are many practicing Methodists, Catholics, and other Christian denominations among the Fijian people. The Indo-Fijians are generally Hindu or Muslim, but a small percentage is Christian. Although ancient Fijian religious ceremonies are not widely practiced except in demonstrations or at cultural events, many of the traditional beliefs and stories remain interwoven with the Christian practices.

At your site, you will find your neighbors to be curious and friendly toward you. The degree of curiosity is directly related to the location of your site. The more urban you are, the more likely your neighbors are to have encountered Europeans or other Americans. Out in the villages you are going to be a local celebrity—at least for awhile.

Environment

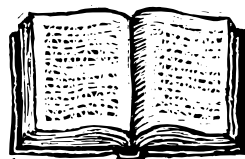
Known as the soft-coral capital of the world, Fiji is blessed with an abundance of overwhelmingly colorful reefs, more than 1,000 tropical fish species, and many interesting and unusual invertebrates. Fiji has more than 300 islands spanning some 1.3 million square kilometers (500,000 square miles) of the South Pacific. Thousands of miles of coral reef thread throughout the islands.

Fiji has a tropical maritime climate. However, due to its steep mountain ranges and the vast area it encompasses, local conditions can range from hot and dry to warm and humid. The cool, dry months are May to October, while the hot and wet season generally lasts from December to April.

Environmental awareness is growing among Fijians—especially in coastal villages where damage to the coral reefs has had a dramatic impact on fishing yields. More than 30 coastal areas have developed marine protected areas (MPAs) to preserve their local environments. Elders are becoming more cognizant of the impact of reckless fishing practices (e.g., using dynamite) and over-fishing. Support from resorts, NGOs, and the government for MPAs has been very positive and the University of the South Pacific’s Locally Managed Marine Area project (led by a returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Fiji) has had an inspiring impact on several coastal areas.



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



We offer a list of websites for you to search for additional information about the Peace Corps and Fiji, as well as to enable you to connect with returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) who have served here. It is difficult to track information as it is moved around on the Web, so please keep in mind as you conduct your search that we try to make sure all these links are active and current, but we cannot guarantee it.

A note of caution: As you surf these sites, please also remember that you will find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to give opinions and advice based on their own experiences. The opinions expressed are not those of the Peace Corps or the United States government. You may also find opinions of people who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. As you read these comments, we hope you will remember that the Peace Corps is not for everyone, and no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Fiji

www.countrywatch.com

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Tashkent to information about converting currency from the dollar to the ruble. Just click on your country of service and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/worldguide/destinations/pacific/fiji

Visit this site to learn all you need to know about Fiji.

www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1834.htm

This site is part of the U.S. State Department, which issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Learn more about Fiji's social and political history.

www.geography.about.com/science/geography/library/maps/

This online world atlas includes maps and geographical information about countries around the world. Each country page contains links to other sites, such as the Library of Congress, that contain comprehensive historical, social, and political backgrounds.

www.un.org/pubs/cyberschoolbus/infonation/

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states of the U.N.

www.fiji.gov.fj

The official site for government of Fiji.

<http://www.bulafiji.com>

This is the Fiji Islands Visitor's Bureau website. While it is geared toward travelers, there is useful information on history and culture.

www.fijitimes.com

Fiji has three daily newspapers printed in English, *Fiji Live*, *Fiji Sun*, and this one, the *Fiji Times*.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/peacecorps2/>

This Yahoo site hosts a bulletin board where prospective Volunteers and returned Volunteers can come together.

www.rpcv.org

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the “friends of” groups for most countries of service, made up of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups who frequently get together for social events and local Volunteer activities.

<http://www.fofiji.org/>

This is the Friends of Fiji website hosted by returned Peace Corps Volunteers from Fiji.

International Development Sites About Fiji

www.crc.uri.edu

Coastal Links Coastal Resources Center

www.usp.ac.fj/marine

University of the South Pacific's School of Marine Studies

www.sprep.org

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP).

<http://www.adb.org/About/default.asp>

Asian Development Bank in Fiji

www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/countr/fiji/index.htm

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division of Sustainable Development

www.undp.org.fj

United Nations Development Programme—Fiji Multi Country Office

www.sidsnet.org

Small Island Developing States Network

www.wpro.who.int/countries/fiji

World Health Organization in Pacific

www.acys.utas.edu.au

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies

www.spc.int/youth

Pacific Youth Bureau

Recommended Books

1. Derrick, R.A. *A History of Fiji*. Suva, Fiji: Government Press, 2001.
2. Lal, Brij V. *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the 20th Century*. HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.2.
3. Geraghty, Paul A. *Fijian: Lonely Planet Phrasebook*. Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications, 1994.
4. Insight Guides. *Insight Pocket Guide Fiji Islands*, 2003.
5. Stanley, David. *Moon Handbooks Fiji*. CA: Avalon Travel Publishing, 2004.
6. Vaisutis, Justine and Mark Dapin, *Lonely Planet Fiji*, Lonely Planet Publications, June 2006.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960's*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000.

2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
4. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
5. Herrera, Susana. *Mango Elephants in the Sun: How Life in an African Village Let Me Be in My Skin*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999
6. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
7. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
8. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

Mail

Airmail leaving Suva takes about 6 to 10 days to make its U.S. destination. However, it takes sometimes twice that for U.S. mail to reach Suva. (Note: The farther you live from Suva, the longer the mail will take in both directions. The additional time may range from one day to two weeks or more.)

The local mail system is better than in many developing countries and once you have been assigned to a permanent site, you will be expected to have your mail delivered to your new address. During pre-service training, you may use the following address:

“Your Name,” PCT
Peace Corps/Fiji
Private Mail Bag
Suva, Fiji Islands
South Pacific

Most essential items that are available in the U.S. are also available in Fiji through local stores in Suva and in larger towns. If your friends and family want to send you packages, have them check with their home post office as to what they can and cannot send. Customs agents are diligent about checking for food items and no seeds can be shipped into Fiji.

If the declared value of the package exceeds \$500 (Fijian), you may have to pay an import tax. If you plan to have packages sent to you or if you're sending them to yourself, make sure you don't declare more than \$200 (U.S.) on the box!

The local postal service (Post Fiji, Ltd.) can be contacted in-country at: 0800.330.7966 for more specific questions.

Telephones

Most Volunteers live close to a phone—either a conventional landline or a radio telephone. You may want to bring a cellphone (GSM-capable) for your personal use from the U.S. as service is increasing in Fiji. A few Volunteers own personal cellphones now, but the phone and use can be expensive. (Phone service and access is not covered by your monthly living allowance.) Most businesses will have a telephone, as will some of your urban neighbors. In the bush, people use a “radio phone” (similar to citizens’ band radios). In Suva you can place a collect call overseas 24-hours a day at the main telecommunications center. You can also pay for the overseas call yourself at a current rate of about \$3–\$4 per minute (Fijian). Fortunately, phone service, if available at your site, is generally reliable and connections are reasonably good.

Card-operated pay phones are located everywhere in the urban areas; prepaid phone cards are sold at post offices, shops, and service stations.

Many Volunteers use AT&T pre-paid phone cards (available all over the U.S.) to call home and have found the connection and service quite good. (The charge is approximately 35 cents per minute.) The country code for Fiji is 679; there are no city codes.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

There are several Internet cafés in Suva as well as in some of the other urban centers. Access currently costs \$5–\$10 (Fijian) per hour. You will not likely have access during pre-service training and it may be very limited at your site unless you are in a larger town.

Housing and Site Location

You will be living with a host family during your 10 weeks of training in Fiji. You will soon discover that families are very important to the people of Fiji and that living with a host family can be both enjoyable and challenging. Going into the experience, you should definitely set some learning goals and make sure that you're getting the most out of your host family experience—including language, cultural, and other adjustment issues.

Your living accommodation is intended to be modest and comparable to that of your counterparts and neighbors. As in any country, housing in Fiji varies from place to place in architecture and amenities. Village houses (*bures*) may be constructed of coconut fronds or they may be made of wood, concrete block, or corrugated iron. Depending on assignment and project area, Volunteers will either live in a village, in a government compound, or in a rural housing area. In some cases, Volunteers may share accommodations with another Peace Corps Volunteer and/or with another international volunteer or host country colleagues. Please note that Volunteers may be required to live with a host family for the first few months at their site or all of their service based on site location and/or village resources.

Most houses in Fiji have piped running water, except for those in some rural villages. While rainfall is plentiful, there may be some periods where drinking water is scarce—especially in the western part of the main island.

Traditional houses usually have separate kitchen and toilet facilities. Rural communities do not often have access to electricity, but some houses have solar energy for lighting. Some Volunteers may be placed on outer islands and/or

interior villages where transportation is by small plane, boat, and pickup truck. Most Volunteers travel much of the time on foot, by bus, or small boat at their sites.

The packing list at the back of this *Welcome Book* offers suggestions on what to bring from home. All basic supplies can be purchased locally. After training, you'll receive a settling-in allowance to buy initial household supplies. The Peace Corps staff and current Volunteers will provide information about where the good bargains are, but you are encouraged to explore on your own as well!

A word about pets and other critters: There are a lot of animals in Fiji, and you'll experience the wildlife of Fiji no matter where you're stationed. Some Volunteers choose to have cats and/or dogs, but this can be challenging. Dogs and cats are not treated like they are in the U.S.—they are considered “animals” as opposed to a “pet.” They serve a purpose and are typically kept outside. Volunteers who choose to have a cat or dog are strongly encouraged to wait until they have been at site at least a few months, and to have the pet neutered or spayed. We also encourage Volunteers who have not had pets before to learn basic pet care, as veterinarians are available only in Suva and a few other urban centers.

Outside of the urban areas most people do their laundry by hand either in their homes or at a local water source. You will likely do the same.

Living Allowance and Money Management

During your training period, the Peace Corps will open an account for you with one of the local banks. The Peace Corps will deposit your living allowance into this account each month. There are banking stations and ATMs in all of the urban

centers throughout Fiji. Most banks are open Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Some urban stores also allow you to use your ATM card to make purchases and to receive cash back.

International transactions are commonplace in the banks of Fiji, so it will be no problem getting traveler's checks or overseas money orders if or when you need them. Some Volunteers have found it advantageous to keep a checking account in the States as it's much easier to send a regular U.S. check for things like magazine subscriptions from back home than it is to get money orders from here. If your American checking account has a Visa/Cirrus/Plus debit card (with an international access PIN), you can use it to access extra personal funds you might want to use for annual leave.

Every month, the Peace Corps will deposit a lump sum into your local bank account. It will be enough money to cover modest living expenses with the expectation that your lifestyle is similar to that of your local counterparts. Your living allowance also covers utility expenses that are not covered by your host agency, and a very modest amount to cover in-country telephone or Internet charges.

Fijian money is counted out in dollars and cents. They have 2-, 5-, 10-, 20- and 50-dollar notes (not bills), and 1-, 2-, 5-, 10-, 20-, 50-cent pieces and 1-dollar pieces (no pennies, nickels, dimes, or quarters). The exchange rate between the American and Fijian dollar fluctuates. The rate at the time of this writing is roughly \$1.67 Fijian for every \$1 American. The estimated costs quoted in this *Welcome Book* are in Fijian dollars, unless otherwise noted.

Food and Diet

Fiji has a wide selection of food and many fruits and vegetables are locally grown. Availability is seasonal, but you can often get pineapple, mango, and papaya as well as many other fruits and vegetables. The staple foods in Fijian villages are starchy root crops; namely, *dalo* (taro root) and cassava. There is also plenty of curry eaten in Indo-Fijian communities. Urban areas offer much more variety and you can get very inexpensive Chinese food and even pizza (the local take on it). Suva has a wider selection of restaurants, from upscale to very cheaply priced food stands on the corner—including McDonalds and KFC.

Volunteers receive a local cookbook and will learn how to cook local foods during pre-service training. Volunteers in remote areas will find that their daily selection will be limited and may wish to start a garden to grow their own vegetables. Flour, tinned fish, rice, curry spices, and *dalo* are usually available everywhere. The farther you go from the urban center, the fewer choices you will have.

Cassava is one of the more pervasive root crops to be found in Fiji. Cassava is the root from which tapioca is made. It's white and starchy and tastes something like a textured potato. There's plenty of fish available here—fresh, frozen, and canned. Most villagers (and Volunteers) in coastal areas fish for their own food. Mutton is imported from New Zealand while chicken is raised locally.

Most fresh fruits (mangoes, bananas, pineapples, oranges, passion fruit, guavas, papaya, etc.) and vegetables (cassava, *dalo*, beans, squash, jack fruit, breadfruit, sweet potatoes, Chinese cabbage, English cabbage, chilies, tomatoes, etc.) can be purchased from local open-air markets. Vendors set up their wares on rickety tables and crates or just on the ground, and sell it all “by the heap.”

Shops range from the small corner markets and village shops that sell basic items to large supermarket outlets that offer goods from food to tools. Cost-U-Less, a warehouse store much like Costco, has opened an outlet in Suva, but prices are higher than in most other stores.

Depending upon where your site is located, you may find yourself cooking on a small two-burner gas stove, kerosene, or an open fire. Gas stoves are more common in urban areas and the kerosene burners in the bush.

Yaqona is the Fijian name for a non-alcoholic drink made from the roots of the kava plant, which is a member of the pepper family. The roots are ground and made into a sort of muddy-water looking drink that turns your tongue temporarily numb and has something of an “earthy” taste. (Some say it tastes like water that twine has been soaked in.) It has a pleasant, calming/relaxing effect on the body and may make some people slightly drowsy. It is a ceremonial drink—the ceremony is called *sevusevu*—and it has great significance to the Fijian people. You will see *yaqona* offered at virtually every event of any significance and at many ordinary events. You will also see people (mostly men) drinking it in the markets, at taxi stands, at work, and at most social gatherings. Though of indigenous origin, many Indo-Fijians also drink it but in less ritualized settings. As a Volunteer, you will be involved in many ceremonies and significant events, which means you’ll be drinking your share of *yaqona*. You will get used to it, and possibly become fond of it. It is considered impolite to refuse the first *bilo* (smooth, half-coconut shells especially used for drinking *yaqona*), but after the first, you can either drink more or not. (But be forewarned: Fijians will be delighted if you drink more than one!)

You will learn much more about *yaqona* and the *sevusevu* ceremony, Fijian protocol/etiquette, and Indo-Fijian customs during your training.

Transportation

Most of the time, you will travel by foot. Look to the right! Fiji is a former British colony and everyone drives on the left side of the road. There are buses to nearly every community in Fiji, except for the outer islands. The bus prices are great: in-town fares are under a dollar. Local buses (the ones that travel in and around town, or those that stop at every stop along a longer route) generally do not have glass windows. If it rains you unroll a plastic flap that's designed to keep most of the mud out of the bus. Express buses that connect urban areas usually have glass windows and may have air conditioning.

There are also mini-buses (small vans) that carry passengers among the main urban centers and around villages. Until recently, they have not been regulated and have tended to be overcrowded and poorly maintained. Volunteers are strongly advised not to ride in them unless this is the only mode of transportation to your site.

Taxis are numerous in Suva and they seem to make up the bulk of the traffic on city streets. Rides within town are usually governed by meter, whereas longer trips are negotiable. Most rides in town will cost between \$2 and \$5, depending on how far you are going.

Fiji is a country composed of islands. Chances are very high that you will travel by boat at some point during your service. The larger islands have regularly scheduled service, but all schedules in Fiji are subject to last-minute changes. Many of the villages on outer islands have local boat captains to bring villagers into the larger centers for shopping or to catch a ferry to Suva. There are also punts in some areas for crossing rivers. Volunteers serving in Fiji should be comfortable both on and in the water, as many assignments will require periodic boat travel. If you are uncomfortable with your swimming skills or

have a fear of water, please contact the Pacific country desk unit at Peace Corps headquarters to further discuss this issue prior to accepting your invitation to serve in Fiji.

There are two international airports, Nadi International Airport in the western division and Nausori International Airport outside Suva. Many of the outer islands have airstrips for periodic Air Fiji and Sun Air flights and/or private planes.

Geography and Climate

Fiji is composed of 332 islands with a total area of 18,376 square kilometers. Fiji is located between 15 and 22 degrees south latitude and 177 west to 175 east longitude. There are four main islands: Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Kadavu, and Taveuni. Fiji is located just at the edge of the International Date Line, so it is one of the first countries in the world to see the dawn of each new day! Fiji is 12 hours ahead of Greenwich mean time, which means that it is generally 19 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time, and 16 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. Daylight Savings Time is not observed in Fiji.

The main urban centers on Viti Levu are those that are usually labeled on maps of Fiji (e.g., Suva, the capital, Nausori, Korovou, Rakiraki, Tavua, Ba, Lautoka, Nadi, and Sigatoka). The main urban centers on Vanua Levu are Labasa and Savusavu. For the outer islands, the port town is generally the main trade center.

The weather in Fiji is “mainly fine with some scattered showers, especially over the eastern parts of both the main islands.” This is a typical weather report that is aired every two hours on radio Fiji. It is usually steamy and hot here from November to April during the rainy season. Generally, it will never get cooler than the low 60s (to the low 50s in the winter in the hills) and never be any hotter than the 90s. Many

people wonder during the rainy season (i.e., most of the time on the eastern side of Viti Levu) if their laundry will ever dry out. Refer to the packing list for some detailed suggestions for things you could bring to be comfortable in this weather.

Social Activities

Fiji has an absolutely beautiful natural environment, which draws many tourists to the resorts that are located throughout the islands. Although Volunteers are considered “on duty” 24-hours a day/seven days a week, every Volunteer receives 24 days of vacation per year of service. Even in remote areas, villages and settlements usually have social events nearly every weekend in which Volunteers may choose to participate.

Big parties surround events, such as a new Volunteer’s arrival in town, weddings, New Year’s, birthdays, etc. When a Fijian or Indo-Fijian child turns one year old, there’s a big family birthday party to celebrate it. The same goes for the 21st birthday. Occasionally, for important events, there will be a traditional dance performed called a *meke* or an all-night dance party called a *taralala*. Hopefully you’ll encounter a *lovo* (feast) and/or *taralala* in your training village. There are quite a few festivals between July and September, many of them fundraisers. The Hibiscus Festival in Suva is especially popular and takes place in August. Nadi hosts a *Bula* (“Welcome”) Festival in July, and nearby Lautoka hosts a Sugar Festival in September. In addition, there are many Christian, Hindu, and Muslim celebrations throughout the year.

Sports, such as cricket and rugby, are very popular here. Rugby is to Fiji as football is to America, except that it’s easier to get an autograph from a local hero here! Fiji’s seven-man team is often considered the best in the world. Many Volunteers jog or walk for exercise. While exercising, women generally wear *sulus*, skirts, or knee-length shorts depending upon their site.

There is an Olympic-size pool open to the public in Suva and Labasa, as well as opportunities for swimming at local beaches. Volunteers are expected to observe local customs for dress as well as for using an area that belongs to a particular village; in Fiji, there are very few areas that are truly public places, even if there is not a town or home in sight.

There are many activities available to fill your leisure time at site. Some Volunteers learn to socialize more; others spend their time introducing their hobbies to their new local friends. Some Volunteers have taught aerobic classes (which go over surprisingly well here!), taught local kids new songs, or established a weekly craft night. Volunteers may also find themselves learning some of the local handiwork skills, such as mat making. Others rediscover their love of reading. If you like to read, bring some good books, as they are expensive to purchase locally. Paperback books are available in many local stores and the University of the South Pacific (located in Suva) has a fair selection in its bookstore. There is also a public library in Suva in which you can borrow books for two weeks at a time, which may or may not be viable for you depending upon the location of your site.

Consider keeping a journal of your stay here in Fiji. It's not only a great way to document your experiences and accomplishments, but it's also great to use and review when filling out your quarterly reports!

Fiji has 3 major television stations and 12 radio stations. Suva, Lautoka, and Nadi all have cinemas that carry first-run Hollywood movies. (Some movies have even had their premier screening in Fiji.) In the villages, Volunteers may find themselves invited to a common building to watch an old movie, which someone rode into town on a horse to rent, on a VCR powered by a gas generator!

During vacation time, many Volunteers choose to explore other areas of Fiji. There are accommodations ranging from the typical inexpensive “backpackers lodge” on the beach to very expensive resorts catering almost exclusively to tourists. Often, resorts have nice, if overpriced, restaurants, shopping, and will be overrun with tourists in the high travel season. Less expensive properties are often much quieter and more relaxing.

The reefs that surround most of the islands here are teeming with wildlife, offering excellent snorkeling and diving opportunities. If you own your own snorkeling equipment, considering bringing it along or sending it to yourself. There are many dive shops that offer SCUBA (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) training, certification and equipment rental.

There are also several nearby destinations that Volunteers may also want to consider, including Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu, which are easily accessible by plane from both Suva and Nadi.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Fiji is a warm and welcoming place where foreigners are a familiar sight. What distinguishes Volunteers from tourists is their knowledge of and respect for Fijian and Indo-Fijian customs. Volunteers receive extensive training on culture and the important part it plays in community life.

The atmosphere in Fiji appears somewhat relaxed, slow and perhaps less formal than what you may be used to in the U.S. However, do not assume that the informal atmosphere allows for informal dress. Just as in the States, people dress differently in various situations. Volunteers are encouraged to carefully observe what others are wearing—how professional people dress for work and social occasions. Learn what these standards are and follow them.

Being sensitive to Fijian dress norms, which lean toward the more conservative, will increase your effectiveness as a Volunteer. Volunteers are expected to dress and appear appropriately—both on and off the job. Volunteers who are sensitive to the cultural norms will gain respect and acceptance more readily. This respect is integral to an enjoyable and meaningful Peace Corps experience. Generally, a clean, unrumpled, somewhat low-key appearance works well in Fiji. In Suva, a more fashion-oriented style is typical; in rural areas, most people dress in more traditional, conservative clothing.

For women, dress is conservative and women cover up a lot more in Fiji than in the U.S. Ankle-length skirts are recommended. It is best to have them wide enough to sit comfortably on the floor with legs covered. Full dresses or skirts with modest tops and sleeves are very appropriate. These are easily purchased in Suva if needed. One-piece, loose fitting dresses with no waistband are also very good for hot weather. Wearing shorts in public is inappropriate except at resorts or other tourist areas. Miniskirts, short-shorts, tank tops, plunging necklines, midriff shirts that expose your belly, and strapless tops are inappropriate.

Men are also expected to dress conservatively. Long hair or untrimmed facial hair on men is considered unprofessional to Fijians. Nice slacks and shirts are the most appropriate attire, as are dress *sulus* (men's skirts). Men often wear long pants in public, and shorts are worn when doing outdoor activities in the village such as gardening, or for sports and hiking.

Nice-looking sandals are appropriate for both men and women. For those Volunteers who may work in an office setting, especially in urban locations, flip-flops are not acceptable at work. It is considered very rude to wear any type of hat inside of buildings and may be considered offensive to wear them in

a village. Bathing attire for women should be very conservative (bikinis are only acceptable on resort beaches); local women wear T-shirts and wrap-around skirts (*sulus*) while swimming.

For most of the year, the climate will be hot and humid.

Neutral-colored cotton clothing works best in this environment. One of the paradoxes of packing is that while lightweight clothes are the most comfortable to wear, the laundering process (do-it-yourself with scrub brushes and harsh soaps) favors sturdy items. Bright colors will fade in harsh sun and light colors will pick up curry and mud stains. Consider bringing some medium-weight cotton-poly blends that will survive the washing, sun, and climate without looking worn out in the last months of your stay.

Personal Safety

More information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is outlined in the Health Care and Safety chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and occasional incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although many Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal safety problems. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help Volunteers reduce their risks and enhance their safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Fiji. At the same time, each Volunteer is expected to take primary responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

Peace Corps/Fiji has developed a local emergency action plan that covers most contingencies. This will be discussed in more detail during pre-service training. In the event of a stateside emergency involving a close family member, the Office of Special Services at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., can get a message to you. In addition, if your relatives hear or read something concerning Fiji that gives them reason for concern, they can contact either Office of Special Services or the country desk unit for updated information. Emergency contact numbers are listed in the back of this book.

Rewards and Frustrations

While the vision of a tropical island in the South Pacific may capture your imagination, romantic notions of this lifestyle may quickly wear thin as you adjust to the heat and humidity that descend on Fiji for six to eight months of the year. Other challenges include the occasional cyclone; the incessant ants, cockroaches, and mosquitoes that you will likely encounter; the “island fever” that can arise from living in a relatively small community where everyone knows what everyone else is doing; and the seemingly *laissez-faire* attitude that some people exhibit toward work and change. The island lifestyle, tropical climate, isolation, and lack of work-related resources and materials call for individuals who possess good health, stamina, self-reliance, flexibility, and a positive attitude. You will need to adapt to a pace of life that, though not unique to the Pacific, may be quite different from what you are accustomed to in the United States.

Some individuals are surprised by the fact that, when joining Peace Corps, they become subject to the norms of their local in-country agencies, as well as those of the Peace Corps. As an employee of a host agency or institution, your professionalism will be counted on in order to respect policies your supervisors

have established for their staff. Although you may be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will ever experience—you will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your counterparts with little guidance from supervisors. You may also work for months without seeing any visible impact or without receiving any feedback on your work. This is the nature of development work. It's a slow process and often results are only seen after the combined efforts of several generations of Volunteers. You must possess self-confidence, patience, and maturity to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

Peace Corps has a highly successful history in Fiji, and most Fijians fondly remember Volunteers living and working in their communities. Now that Peace Corps has reentered Fiji after a five-year absence, Volunteers play both a technical assistance and a diplomatic role. When citizens of Fiji interact with Peace Corps Volunteers, their impressions of America are formed by those interactions. Your ability to serve as a competent professional and a tactful “ambassador” will affect both the image of Peace Corps as an agency and of Americans in general. This is a significant responsibility for all Volunteers worldwide and will become part of Peace Corps/Fiji's continuing legacy.

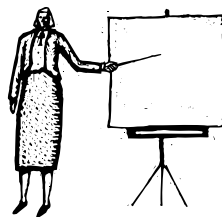
The goodwill and hospitality of the Fijian people and the richness of their culture, the beauty of the environment, and the challenges offered by your work can make your life as a Volunteer exciting and rewarding.

Peace Corps service requires dedication, a “can-do” attitude, commitment, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of humor. It will be an emotionally exhausting and demanding experience. However, it is an opportunity for personal as well as professional growth and fulfillment, and the rewards are likely to far outweigh the challenges.

NOTES



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Training is an essential part of your Peace Corps service. The goal is to provide you with the necessary support, information, and opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will enable you to live and work effectively in Fiji. In doing so, we plan to build upon the experiences and expertise you bring to Peace Corps. We expect that you will approach your training with an open mind, a desire to learn, and a willingness to become involved. Peace Corps trainees officially become Peace Corps Volunteers after successfully completing training.

The 10-week pre-service training lets you learn new skills and practice them as they apply to Fiji. You will receive training and orientation in components of language, cross-cultural communication and adaptation, development issues, health and personal safety, and technical skills pertinent to your specific assignment. The skills you learn will serve as a foundation upon which you build your experience as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Fiji. You will have plenty of opportunities to experience local culture and customs on your own while living with your host family and during community-based training.

During the first few days of pre-service training, you will stay together at a central training facility where you will receive vaccinations and be introduced to basic language skills and to the cross-cultural adaptation process. After this initial period, you will shift to another training site to begin the next phase of training. During this phase, known as community-based training, the group will split up and live with host families in small villages. The host family experiences will help bring to life some of the topics covered in training and provide a

chance to practice your new language skills and to observe and participate in Fijian culture. The host family experience is intense, but it can be one of the most rewarding aspects of your service in country.

The training goals and assessment criteria that each trainee has to reach before becoming a Volunteer will be clearly articulated at the beginning of training. Evaluation of your performance during training is a continual process, characterized by a dialogue between you and the training staff. The training staff, along with the permanent office staff, will provide feedback throughout training. If you are able to successfully complete pre-service training, you will then swear-in as a Volunteer and make final preparations for your departure to your permanent site.

Training is intense and sometimes stressful. The best advice we can give you is to maintain your sense of humor and try to get as much out of pre-service training as possible. We believe all the information and experiences you encounter will be valuable to your effectiveness as a Volunteer.

Technical Training

The technical orientation will give you a general overview of your work in Fiji by building on the skills you already have and by helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs and issues of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Fiji experts, and community members will conduct the orientation sessions. The orientation places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you already have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical orientation includes sessions on general environmental, economic, and political situations in Fiji as well as strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your program's goals and will meet with the Fijian agencies and organizations that invited Peace Corps to assist them.

You will be supported and evaluated by experienced Fijian trainers and Peace Corps staff throughout training to build the confidence and skills you will need to undertake your activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are the key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills will often be critical to your job, will help you integrate into your host community, and can ease your personal adaptation to new surroundings. Therefore, language training is the heart of the training program. Experienced Fijian and Hindi language instructors give formal language instruction in small classes of four to five people. Fijian and Hindi languages are also introduced in the health, cross-cultural, and technical components of training.

Your language training utilizes a community-based approach. You will have classroom time and be given applied assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family to learn the language. Achieving basic social communication skills is vital and prior to swearing-in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your two years of service. A tutoring allowance is available to you during your first year at site. Language proficiency interviews will be conducted to assess your language skills at end of pre-service training and at the end of your service.

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a host family. The experience of living with a host family is designed to ease your transition into community life. Families have gone through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of the pre-service training program and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Fiji. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-culture and community development will be covered to help improve your skills of perception, communication, and facilitation. Topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, and traditional and political structures are some examples.

Adjusting to another culture requires three basic skills: the ability to predict the behavior of host country nationals; the ability to not react, to “accept” without judgment, the behavior of host country nationals; and the ability to adapt your own behavior to conform to host country expectations. We do not expect you to be someone you are not; rather, we expect you to take the difficult course of finding ways of being true to yourself within the local cultural norms.

Wellness Training

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. Volunteers are expected to practice preventive healthcare and to take responsibility for their own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues you may encounter while in Fiji. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other STIs are also covered.

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces risk in your home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and learn about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented an ongoing training system that provides trainees and Volunteers with continuous opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills.

During the two-year Volunteer term of service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings follow.

- *Early Service Training*: provides an opportunity for Volunteers to enhance their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for approximately three to six months.
- *Mid-Service Training*: Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- *Close-of-Service Conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews Volunteers' respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length and design of these trainings are adapted to each post's needs and conditions. As these trainings are mandatory for all Volunteers, you will need to coordinate these periods away from site with your counterpart organization. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN FIJI



The Peace Corps' highest priority is the health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Fiji maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, radiology, dentistry, and access to some specialists, are also available in Fiji. If a Volunteer's health needs cannot be met in Fiji, the Volunteer may be sent to Australia or to the U.S. for further evaluation and treatment.

Health Issues in Fiji

With careful adherence to the preventive measures you will be taught, it is possible to remain healthy throughout your service in Fiji; many Volunteers have done so. However, standards of hygiene and food handling may be lower, and sickness is more common than in the United States. Although there is a great deal you can do to minimize risks, Volunteers may suffer from gastro-intestinal disorders, upper-respiratory infections, skin infections, and other medical problems from time to time.

Below is a summary of some of the more common health concerns in Fiji. You will receive more in-depth information on prevention and treatment during your pre-service training.

Insect-borne diseases: Fortunately, unlike many Peace Corps countries, Fiji is malaria-free. However, malaria is present in neighboring countries, such as Papua, New Guinea; the Solomon Islands; and Vanuatu, so you will need to consult with the medical officer for appropriate medications before

traveling to these areas. Mosquitoes do transmit dengue fever in Fiji, which occurs in all of the Pacific Island nations. There is no preventive vaccine for dengue and the only measure that can be taken is to prevent mosquito bites. You will receive as much insect repellent as needed during your stay in Fiji as well as a mosquito net.

Food and water-borne diseases: Diarrhea, dysentery, and hepatitis A are common throughout the Pacific and are transmitted through contaminated food and water. You will be vaccinated for hepatitis A upon your arrival in Fiji. These illnesses are more common during the rainy season or after a hurricane. Intestinal worms can also be a problem in rural areas. Additionally, some reef fish may be unsafe to eat.

Other Diseases: Hookworm can be contracted by going barefoot. Additionally, tuberculosis is an important health concern in some areas.

Water safety and encounters with marine life: It is best to ask about local marine hazards before venturing out. In general, some wildlife to look out for are sharks, rough coral that often result in infected wounds, fire coral (which can deliver a powerful sting), sea snakes (not often encountered), jellyfish, sea lice, certain stinging fish, sting rays, sea urchins, and crowns of thorns (starfish). Dehydration, cramps, strong rip currents, decompression sickness (from diving), are all health risks involved with working and swimming in open waters. You will be given specific information regarding marine hazards during training.

Minor health issues: Sunburn, blisters, fungal infections, insect bites, colds, flu, and skin rashes are common to visitors in the Pacific. Minor health problems can usually be addressed with supplies from your medical kit.

Helping You Stay Healthy

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Fiji, you will receive a medical handbook. During training you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and medical needs. The contents of the kit are listed below.

During your first several weeks in Fiji, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, during this time, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as we will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for new shipments to arrive.

You will have a dental and physical exam at the end of your first year of service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Fiji will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Fiji, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept a certain amount of responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The old adage, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" becomes extremely important in areas where medical diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Fiji include taking preventive measures for the following:

- Dengue Fever, which requires strict adherence to the use of barrier methods such as mosquito nets and insect repellent to prevent mosquito bites.
- Gastrointestinal problems, which require you to filter and treat your water and to eat only properly prepared foods.
- Overexposure to the sun, which includes wearing sunscreen, a hat (see guidelines regarding cultural norms surrounding the wearing of hats), and sunglasses.
- Skin infections, which require treating all minor wounds promptly before they become infected.
- Hazardous marine life and water safety, which requires that you avoid touching any sea creatures, wear a personal flotation device when traveling by water, and be alert to changes in the sea and weather patterns.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illness and injuries.

Abstinence is the only certain choice for prevention of HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV or other STIs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue during the pre-service training.

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent unplanned pregnancies. The medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer.

Women's Health Information

Pregnancy is a health condition that is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions requiring medical attention, but may also have programmatic ramifications.

The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

Feminine hygiene products are provided through the Peace Corps Medical Office, although you should bring a three-month supply of any products you will require during training. If you require a specialized product please bring a two-year supply with you.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer provides Volunteers with a first-aid kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that might occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the Peace Corps medical office.

Medical Kit Contents:

A Few Minor Adjustments (book)

Ace Bandage

Acetaminophen 325 mg (Tylenol)

Adhesive Tape

American Red Cross First Aid and Personal Safety Manual

Antacid Tablets (Tums)

Antiseptic Antimicrobial Skin Cleaner (Hibiclens)

Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B Ointment

Band-Aids

Butterfly Closures

Calamine Lotion
Cepacol Lozenges
Chlorine dropper bottle
Clomtinazole 1% antifungal cream
Condoms
Dental Floss
Di-Gel tablets
Diphenhydramine HCL (Benadryl): 25 mg tablets
Hydrocortisone cream 1%
Ibuprofen 400 mg. (Advil)
Insect Repellant Stick (Cutter's)
Iodine Tablets (Water Purification Tablets)
Lip Balm (Chapstick)
Oral Rehydration Salts and Gatorade
Oral Thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Pseudephedrine HCL (Sudafed): 30 mg tablets
Robitussin-DM Lozenges (Cough Calmers)
Scissors
Sterile Gauze Pads
Tetrahydrozaline Eye Drops (Visine)
Tinactin Cream (Tolnaftate)
Tweezers
White petroleum jelly
Zinc oxide

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since the time you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or the Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid taking duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and take it to your pre-departure orientation. If you do not bring documentation of your immunizations from your doctor, they will be re-administered in-country. Also, please note if you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for their cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment. To ensure your health during your service, please understand that there are immunizations that you will be required to take in order for you to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Not complying with the requirements set forth by post will make you ineligible for service.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth-control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, we will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. Johns' wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, although it might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about your on-hand three-month supply of prescription drugs. Also, with new stricter security checks at airports it is advised that you carry your prescriptions in your checked bags and have documentation from your doctor in your carry-on luggage.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pair with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace it, using the information your doctor in the U.S. provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. To reduce the risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease, we discourage you from using contact lenses during your Peace Corps service. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary healthcare from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service healthcare benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age and/or preexisting conditions might prevent you from reenrolling in your current plan when you return home.

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems. In addition, more than 84 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2004 Peace Corps Volunteer Survey say they would join the Peace Corps again.

The Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you. This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety. All of these sections include important safety and security information.

The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest and most secure way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control.

Based on information gathered from incident reports worldwide in 2004, the following factors stand out as risk characteristics for assaults. Assaults consist of personal crimes committed against Volunteers, and do not include property crimes (such as vandalism or theft).

- Location: Most crimes occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). Specifically, 43 percent of assaults took place when Volunteers were away from their sites.
- Time of day: Assaults usually took place on the weekend during the evening between 5:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.— with most assaults occurring around 1:00 a.m.
- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 82 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 55 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Forty percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.

Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk

Before and during service, your training will address these areas of concern so that you can reduce the risks you face. For example, here are some strategies Volunteers employ:

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

- Know the environment and choose safe routes/times for travel
- Avoid high-crime areas per Peace Corps guidance
- Know the vocabulary to get help in an emergency
- Carry valuables in different pockets/places
- Carry a "dummy" wallet as a decoy

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

- Live with a local family or on a family compound
- Put strong locks on doors and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk

- Leave irreplaceable objects at home in the U.S.
- Follow Peace Corps guidelines on maintaining home security

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

- Make local friends
- Make sure your appearance is respectful of local customs; don't draw negative attention to yourself by wearing inappropriate clothing
- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Travel with someone whenever possible
- Avoid known high crime areas
- Limit alcohol consumption

Support from Staff

In March 2003, the Peace Corps created the Office of Safety and Security with its mission to “foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability of all Peace Corps’ safety and security efforts.” The new office is led by an Associate Director for Safety and Security who reports to the Peace Corps Director and includes the following divisions: Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security; Information and Personnel Security; Emergency Preparedness, Plans, Training and Exercise; and Crime Statistics and Analysis.

The major responsibilities of the Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security Division are to coordinate the office’s overseas operations and direct the Peace Corps’ safety and security officers who are located in various regions around the world that have Peace Corps programs. The safety and security officers conduct security assessments; review safety trainings; train trainers and managers; train Volunteer safety wardens, local guards, and staff; develop security incident response procedures; and provide crisis management support.

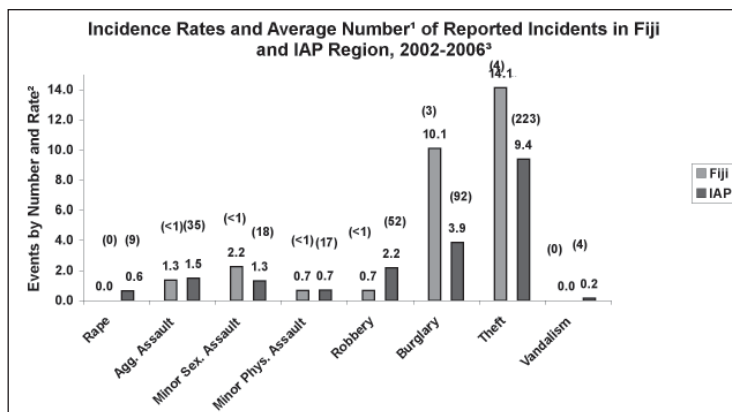
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure that the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff provides support by reassessing the Volunteer's work site and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Fiji as compared to all other Inter-America and Pacific (IAP) region programs as a whole, from 2002–2006. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

To fully appreciate the collected data below, an explanation of the graph is provided as follows:

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way

to compare crime data across countries. An “incident” is a specific offense, per Peace Corps' classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.



¹The average numbers of incidents are in parenthesis and equal the average reported assaults for each year between 2002–2006.

²Incident rates equal the number of assaults per 100 Volunteers and trainees per year (V/T years). Since most sexual assaults occur against females, only female V/Ts are calculated in rapes and minor sexual assaults. Numbers of incidents are approximate due to rounding.

³Data collection for Fiji began as of 2002

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS) Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS), and Crime Incident Reporting Form (CIRF); the information is accurate as of 03/22/2007.

The chart is separated into eight crime categories. These include vandalism (malicious defacement or damage of property); theft (taking without force or illegal entry); burglary (forcible entry of a residence); robbery (taking something by force); minor physical assault (attacking without a weapon with minor injuries); minor sexual assault (fondling, groping, etc.); aggravated assault (attacking with a weapon, and/or without a weapon when serious injury results); and rape (sexual intercourse without consent).

When anticipating Peace Corps Volunteer service, you should review all of the safety and security information provided to you, including the strategies to reduce risk. Throughout your training and Volunteer service, you will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of violent crimes. The Peace Corps will give you information and training in how to be safe. But, just as in the U.S., crime happens, and Volunteers can become victims. When this happens, the investigative team of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is charged with helping pursue prosecution of those who perpetrate a violent crime against a Volunteer. If you become a victim of a violent crime, the decision to prosecute or not to prosecute is entirely yours, and one of the tasks of the OIG is to make sure that you are fully informed of your options and help you through the process and procedures involved in going forward with prosecution should you wish to do so. If you decide to prosecute, we are here to assist you in every way we can.

Crimes that occur overseas, of course, are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities in local courts. Our role is to coordinate the investigation and evidence collection with the regional security officers (RSOs) at the U.S. embassy, local police, and local prosecutors and others to ensure that your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country. OIG investigative staff has extensive experience in criminal investigation, in working sensitively with victims, and as advocates for victims. We also, may, in certain limited circumstances, arrange for the retention of a local lawyer to assist the local public prosecutor in making the case against the individual who perpetrated the violent crime.

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust and second, contact the country director or the Peace Corps medical officer. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect. Country directors and medical officers are required to report all violent crimes to the Inspector General and the RSO. This information is protected from unauthorized further disclosure by the Privacy Act. Reporting the crime also helps prevent your further victimization and protects your fellow Volunteers.

In conjunction with the RSO, the OIG does a preliminary investigation of all violent crimes against Volunteers regardless of whether the crime has been reported to local authorities or of the decision you may ultimately make to prosecute. If you are a victim of a crime, our staff will work with you through final disposition of the case. OIG staff is available 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week. We may be contacted through our 24-hour violent crime hotline via telephone at 202.692.2911, or by e-mail at violentcrimeline@peacecorps.gov.

Security Issues in Fiji

Serving safely and effectively in Fiji may require that you accept some restrictions to your current lifestyle. Volunteers attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but receive far more negative attention in highly populated centers, where they are anonymous. In smaller towns, friends and colleagues will look out for you. While whistles and exclamations are fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention.

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As is true anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Fiji. You can reduce your risk of becoming a target for crime by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking advance precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions, especially in large towns, are the favorite work sites for pick pockets.

Motor vehicle accidents are the greatest risk to your safety in Fiji. Bus and taxi are the most common modes of motorized transportation in rural areas. Volunteers should not travel on roads and highways at night because of the risk of accidents. Volunteers should wear seatbelts whenever available. Choosing larger buses in good repair is wise. Volunteers should also avoid traveling by mini-buses as they are generally overcrowded and less safe than regular buses or taxis.

Unfortunately, pick pocketing and purse snatching have become more common in the urban areas of Nadi and Suva in markets, bus stations, and other areas where crowds are present. Volunteers traveling through these areas may be perceived and targeted as tourists. Homes in these areas may also become a target for robbery. Money and other valuables should be kept secure. While unusual, theft can occur even in rural villages. Houses should be kept locked and valuables should be kept in a locked trunk when you leave your village. Violent crime is very rare in rural villages, but it is a growing concern in larger cities, particularly in Suva. There are certain high-crime areas (which will be pointed out to you) that must be avoided. In cities, Volunteers should travel in groups of two or more at night.

In rural areas, children will be curious about you and your lifestyle and may “borrow” small items for closer inspection. Volunteers should carefully consider whether or not to bring

more expensive, tempting items such as laptop computers and fancy cameras. The Peace Corps has established minimal housing criteria that sponsoring villages/organizations must meet to minimize risks. You will be advised on proper home safety during pre-service training.

Foreigners, including Volunteers, have been targets of sexual assault in Fiji and other countries in the Pacific. Alcohol consumption and cross-cultural differences in gender relations are often associated with sexual assaults, and the assailant is often an acquaintance of the victim. Volunteers who take seriously the training provided by Peace Corps/Fiji regarding sexual assaults can minimize their risk. Volunteers are urged to report all assaults and threats of assault to the medical officer so that appropriate support can be provided.

Volunteer assignments and recreation may involve considerable interaction with the marine environment, including travel by boat. Peace Corps/Fiji requires Volunteers to know how to swim and be comfortable on and in the water. As many boats in Fiji do not come equipped with life vests, Volunteers are issued one upon arrival in-country and are required to have it with them whenever they are in a boat/vessel. Other marine hazards, from coral cuts to poisonous water snakes, will be discussed more specifically during pre-service training.

Tropical cyclones are common between November and April with one or two generally affecting Fiji each year. A sizeable one struck one of the larger islands of Vanua Levu late in 2002 and caused significant damage. However, there is usually ample time to prepare for these storms and we will discuss appropriate precautionary measures for you and your community during pre-service training.

Most local crimes and assaults involve alcohol use either by the victim or the perpetrators. Any individual's use of alcohol that repeatedly places the individual at risk or results

in discredit to him/her or to Peace Corps is considered unacceptable and the individual may be asked to leave Peace Corps. If, in the opinion of the medical officer, a Volunteer is abusing alcohol, that individual may be medically evacuated to Washington, D.C., for assessment and counseling.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your house is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Fiji, do what you would do if you moved to a large city in the States: be cautious, check things out, ask lots of questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Fiji will require that you accept some restrictions to your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and in their sites, but they receive far more negative attention in highly populated centers where they are more anonymous than in smaller towns where “family,” friends, and colleagues will look out for them. Keep your money out of sight. Use an undergarment money pouch, such as the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. You should always walk at night with a companion.

Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training And Volunteer Safety Support in Fiji

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your two-year service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Fiji's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Fiji office will keep Volunteers informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be offered in a newsletter and in memoranda from the country director and the safety and security coordinator. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, Volunteers will be contacted through the emergency communication network.

Volunteer training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Fiji. These sessions will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Ongoing safety training will be offered throughout your two-year service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of the pre-service training.

Site selection criteria are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for the Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective role in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is carefully inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe and secure housing and work sites. Site selection criteria is based in part on any relevant site history, access to medical, banking, postal

and other essential services, availability of communications, transportation, and markets, different housing options and living arrangements and other various support needs.

During your pre-service training, you will also learn about Peace Corps Fiji's **detailed emergency action plan (EAP)**, in the event of civil or political unrest, or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site after swearing-in as a Volunteer, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, Volunteers in Fiji will gather with other Volunteers at a pre-determined location until the situation resolves itself or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

In order to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers **immediately report** any security incident to the safety and security coordinator or the medical officer. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner. In addition to responding to the needs of the Volunteer, the Peace Corps collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to all Volunteers.

NOTES



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with our host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to see that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent years. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race, and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other, despite our many differences. Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal.

In other ways, however, our diversity poses challenges. In Fiji, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyles, background, and beliefs will be judged in a cultural context very different from our own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics considered familiar and commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in certain host countries.

Outside of Fiji's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles of other countries. What is viewed as "typical" cultural behavior or norms may also be a narrow and selective interpretation, such as the perception by some that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. Foreigners justly acknowledge the people of Fiji for their generous hospitality; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to differences that you present. We ask you to be supportive of one another.

To ease the transition and adapt to the ways of your host country, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises with how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, women trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions will need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limits. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Fiji

The Peace Corps staff in Fiji recognizes adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance while you are in-country. During pre-service training, sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. We look forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of cultures, backgrounds, religions, ethnic groups, ages, and sexual orientations and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who will take pride in supporting each other and demonstrating the richness of the American culture.

What Might A Volunteer Face?

One challenge for Volunteers from less-represented groups may be the lack of a common background with other Peace Corps Volunteers in Fiji. Some Volunteers who may need additional support include those who are older than the majority, those who are considered minority ethnic groups, and those who are homosexual. If you are in such a category,

you should come prepared to cope with being one of a few or possibly the only senior, African American, Native American, Hispanic American, Asian American, or homosexual in your training group or even in the country.

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Though women hold positions of authority and responsibility In Fiji, it is not as common as in the United States. Gender roles in Fiji are strongly defined. Women generally have traditional responsibilities that center on the home. These include caring for the family and working long, hard hours to prepare food, obtain water, and raise children. In addition to this heavy workload, women do not enjoy the same level of equality as women in the United States. However, women also have tremendous influence in villages and are often the backbone of community development efforts. At any rate, female Volunteers may face initial difficulties finding acceptance and credibility at work. It is incumbent upon female Volunteers to accept this reality and to work to earn the trust and respect of their counterparts and community members.

Volunteer comment:

“I am a foreign, young woman living in my own house in a culture where this is extremely rare and unusual. Respect from certain groups must be earned with a sense of humor and a willingness to stand up for oneself. [My] strategy is to understand that certain challenges are backed by many years of tradition. This is cultural, not personal.”

“Every day I face the challenge of lack of respect for women. I’m struggling with how much can be attributed to ‘cultural differences’ when it comes down to feelings of individual human beings. Where do you draw the line between accepting culture and trying to empower women to change what they know is unacceptable treatment in the ‘culture’ of any human being? I’m still learning every day and working on this issue.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Most Fijians assume that all Americans are European in origin, and this can cause confusion and curiosity. African-American Volunteers may be dealing with stereotypes projected in the media (especially hip-hop culture) and therefore may be called the "N" word. At the same time you will have the opportunity to be accepted because you can pass for a Fijian. Some Volunteers of color may be mistaken for Pacific Islanders and thus be treated differently from Caucasians. Asian Americans, in particular, may encounter different treatment because of the many merchants and laborers of Asian origin working in provincial centers throughout Fiji.

Volunteer comments:

"As a current Volunteer in Fiji, being African American has allowed me to become accepted with minimal effort because of our likeness in features. But at the same time, the image portrayed by hip-hop has predetermined my description here in Fiji as the "N" word even in professional settings. Even though being called this has tested my will, I have learned to let go of the American meaning of the word and understand that Fijians are only looking for acceptance from me and my race."

"Coming to Fiji as an East Indian American and trying to integrate with the local community was somewhat of a double-edged sword. It was great, because on one side, having the same background as my local community, I was immediately accepted and welcomed into their homes. However, on the other side, they expected me to know everything they did about the Indian culture. It would get frustrating when people would judge me because I didn't know how to speak Hindi before I came to Fiji or if I didn't know when to celebrate a religious ceremony. After a year

and a half of service, I am glad to say that I am much more proficient in both of those areas! When it comes down to the overall experience, it's been amazing. I've learned so much about my own culture, and I've also shared my experience of what it's like growing up in America as an East Indian. I really do believe that after my service in Fiji, my community and I will have a much better understanding of where we were coming from and where we'll be going."

"I am an Asian-American woman of Korean descent living in Suva. I am commonly mistaken for being either Chinese or Japanese, as those races are more common here. Unfortunately, a large population of Chinese women are also prostitutes, and I am sometimes mistaken as one of these women also, regardless of how conservatively I am dressed. I occasionally get rude (sexual) comments from local men, but I have learned to ignore them. There are also instances when people will speak in mock Chinese or yell '*Konichiwa*' to me as I pass. I am frequently told that I am 'smart in speaking English' by both Fijian and Indo-Fijian locals, who are used to the broken English of Asian overseas volunteers and tourists. I sometimes explain that I am American and have spoken English for my entire life, but sometimes I just smile and nod. Asian men are seen as kung-fu experts and are sometimes asked to demonstrate their karate moves. Although it is difficult at times to be asked a lot of seemingly rude questions, it is important to be patient and understanding to their (usually) innocent queries, and prepare to do a lot of gentle explaining. Besides, I've had people ask me rude questions and say inappropriate things to me in certain areas of America as well. Fiji is a great place and most people, especially the children, are just being curious and showing their genuine interest in you. I have

not had that many negative experiences related to my race/ethnicity, so it is something that has not put a huge damper on my overall Peace Corps experience nor has it stopped me from enjoying my host country and its people."

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

If you are an older Volunteer, we welcome your experience and special skills. Like others, you should be prepared for the basic living conditions and will need to take special care of your health because of the lack of medical facilities in Fijian villages. Older Volunteers have also commented that their immediate role of "expert" because of their age is both a blessing and a curse. They are culturally considered leaders and have a difficult time facilitating discussions or soliciting information because the community assumes they "know all."

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Fiji is, in many respects, conservative by U.S. standards, and homosexual acts are against the law. Because of this, expatriates who are gay, lesbian, and bisexual have not been able to be open about their sexuality. It will probably be impossible to be open about your sexual orientation and maintain a positive working relationship with villagers. You may find a support system within the Volunteer group. In the larger urban areas like Suva, Nadi, and Lautoka, beliefs are a bit more progressive than other parts of Fiji and its homosexual population is more open. The Peace Corps staff is committed to maintaining a supportive atmosphere for all Volunteers and will address gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers' concerns in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Volunteer Comment:

"Being a GLBT Volunteer in Fiji is not entirely difficult, but very different than the climate in the U.S. In Fiji there are many homosexuals and transvestites, also called '*puftas*,' who are mostly seen in the major urban centers of Suva,

Nadi, and Lautoka, but like America, there are also GLBT Fijians and Indo-Fijians scattered throughout the villages and settlements. Though there seems to be many GLBT people in this small country, it is still a very taboo subject and careful discretion must be considered when disclosing your sexuality to your host community, counterparts, etc. Since I work for a religious-based organization, I have chosen to keep my sexuality private in order to be most effective in my work. I did inform Peace Corps/Fiji staff with my concerns of safety and security, and they were able to place me in an assignment that didn't put me in danger or make me feel uncomfortable. Overall, I am very happy with my time in Fiji."

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Christianity has been an integral part of indigenous Fijian culture since Christian missionaries first arrived in Fiji more than 100 years ago. Fiji's major Christian churches include Methodist, the Assemblies of God, Anglican, Apostolic, Church of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, and Catholic. Indo-Fijians are primarily Hindu with a small percentage of Muslims. Wherever you are assigned within Fiji, it is essential that you understand and respect the important place that religion holds in the lives of Fijians. Volunteers who show respect for local beliefs are more likely to be accepted into the homes and lives of the members of their new community.

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities:

Fijians in general are respectful toward people with disabilities. However, the challenge will be that there is very little infrastructure to accommodate special needs. As part of the medical screening process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of duty without

reasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, job sites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

Possible Issues for Married Volunteers

To serve effectively, couples must have established positive communication patterns with each other and have a solid foundation in their marriage to face the daily challenges that they may encounter while in service. Couples in Fiji may face gender role issues, as men traditionally have a more prominent role in communities and more access to social settings. However, married couples in Fiji do have a cultural place in society and may find integrating into communities easier than single Volunteers.

NOTES



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



How much luggage will I be allowed to bring to Fiji?

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds this allowance. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limitations and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limitations. The current authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds total with a maximum weight allowance of 50 pounds for any one bag. However, as airline regulations change frequently, we advise that you check with your airline prior to packing. We strongly encourage you to pack light and consider purchasing items you are not sure of when you arrive in Fiji.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. Please check the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website for a detailed list of permitted and prohibited items at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

Can I ship items to myself once I arrive?

Many Volunteers comment on how they wish they hadn't brought so much stuff as almost everything you'll need is readily available in Suva and the major cities. That said, there's nothing more exciting than receiving packages from home! Small packages from home sent via the U.S. mail tend to reach

Fiji within two to three weeks. We strongly discourage large shipments (i.e., via sea freight) and Peace Corps/Fiji does not have the staff resources to assist you with customs clearance.

Should I bring my SCUBA gear or have it sent to me?

Current Volunteers report that snorkeling equipment is much more useful and that SCUBA equipment is available for rent all over Fiji. SCUBA-certified environmental education and resource management Volunteers may be called on to do work-related diving. In these instances, our partner agencies supply appropriate diving equipment.

What is the electric current in Fiji?

220-240 volts, 50 hertz. Outlets take plugs with two or three flat pins (as in Australia). You will need a voltage converter if the device you are bringing is 110 volts. This applies to most U.S. appliances, although many computers and personal electronics operate on dual voltage (in this case, you will simply need the appropriate plug and these are readily available and reasonably priced in Suva and many of the larger towns).

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should be sufficient to cover your expenses. Volunteers traveling on vacation will find credit/debit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash.

When can I take vacation?

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. In order to assist you in your community integration, Volunteers are required to remain in their site for the first 30 days of their service.

When can my family and friends visit me?

Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and after the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended visitor stays greater than 14 days at your site are not encouraged and require permission from the country director. The Peace Corps cannot provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects. However, such insurance can be purchased before you leave. Ultimately, Volunteers are responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be given to you, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Additional information about insurance should be obtained by calling the company directly. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Peace Corps Volunteers in Fiji are prohibited from operating motor vehicles and therefore do not need to obtain an international driver's license. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses to mini-buses to trucks and a lot of walking. Your U.S. driver's license will be helpful for identification purposes and also if you intend to rent a car while on vacation in another country.

What should I bring as gifts for Fiji friends and my host family?

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include: knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; sports T-shirts; or photos to give away.

Where will my site assignment be when I finish pre-service training and how isolated will I be?

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until the end of their pre-service training. This gives the Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites. Although some share housing, most Volunteers live on their own in small towns or in rural villages, usually within one hour's traveling distance from the nearest Volunteer. Some sites require significant travel time to and from Suva (usually by road on the main island or by boat elsewhere for routine travel); however, most sites are accessible by air for emergencies as well. Note that Volunteers may be required to live with a host family for the first few months at their site or all of their service based on site location and/or village resources.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services in Washington, D.C., provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, you should instruct your family to notify this office if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the office is 800.424.8580, extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574.

For nonemergency questions, your family can get information from the Pacific country desk staff at the Peace Corps headquarters by calling 800.424.8580.

Can I call home from Fiji?

You can place a collect call overseas 24-hours a day at the main telecommunications center in Suva. You can also pay for the overseas call yourself at a current rate or about \$3-\$4 per minute (Fijian). Many Volunteers use AT&T or Sprint prepaid phone cards (available only in the U.S.).

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will be expected to live at the level of the local people in your community, and most villagers cannot afford cellular phones. However, a few Volunteers bring a cellphone (GSM capable) for personal use from the U.S. as service is increasing in Fiji.

Will there be e-mail and Internet access?

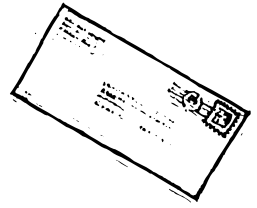
Internet access is available in urban areas and in public Internet cafés. However, in rural areas and in the bush, you will probably not have Internet access. Please plan on not having access during your first three months in-country.

Should I bring my computer and other electronics?

Whether or not to bring a computer is a personal decision. Some Volunteer sites may not have electricity, which will make it difficult to keep a computer charged. Additionally, electronic equipment may mark you as a target for theft, and you should carefully consider the possibility of losing your equipment and possibly putting yourself at personal risk. If you do decide to bring electronic equipment, you should also strongly consider purchasing insurance for your items.



WELCOME LETTERS FROM FIJI VOLUNTEERS



Bula!

I would like to extend a warm welcome from the “Friendly North”ern island of Vanua Levu! I can remember reading these welcome letters, and I really wanted to know what the Volunteers’ jobs and housing were like, so I’ll give a brief description of mine.

I am an environmental Volunteer who has been assigned to work with the Ministry of Fisheries working on the Qoliqoli Tabus (marine protected areas or MPAs) in the province of Macuata. My primary project consists of consulting with villages that are interested in starting an MPA, helping to organize workshops to train the villagers on reef survey techniques, and, of course, doing the reef surveys (which is definitely the best part of my job!). I live in a part of Fiji where there is only one resort in the province and the reef is nearly pristine and untouched from pollution. I feel so blessed to be able to work with people who truly want to protect their reef from over-fishing and future pollution, and keep it sustainable for their children’s futures. My housing is on a government station—about a two-and-one-half-hour bus ride from Labasa Town, where I do all my shopping. I have two dogs, one of which I adopted from a previous Volunteer, and another that I got when she was a puppy from a local village. They are the best security system I could have, not that I feel I need one, but in a country with no doorbells and where the door is always open, they always let me know if someone is coming near my house. The government station where I live is pretty rural; the nearest store (more like a tiny gas station-store), school, post office, and phone is about eight kilometers away. We don’t have electricity, but we do have a generator that turns on for two hours every night. However, I have come to

not depend on this electricity because it frequently breaks down and doesn't get repaired for about a week. I personally like the freedom of not having electricity and I enjoy the silence that it brings. I feel in touch with my surroundings and since I don't have the distraction of electronic "things," I can read more, enjoy the company of my community, write letters, and do all sorts of fun projects around my house.

Living on an island is wonderful, once you get over being in the "American pace." Everything happens more slowly here, and once you get in tune with the island rhythm, life is utterly amazing. Things ebb and flow to their own current and you start to become more aware of your surroundings and open your eyes to more and more of the small things in life. As far as packing advice, I only have two pieces: If you are staring at your mask and snorkel and don't know whether to bring them? Bring them! You never know when you'll get the chance to just jump in the water and go snorkeling, fishing, or help out with reef surveys. And for the ladies, my biggest regret on packing is that I didn't bring a good pair of comfortable shorts to sleep in (like a pair of boxers), and that I could wear under my *sulu* (a Fijian sarong) because they aren't easy to find here in Fiji.

Happy Packing and Happy Travels to Fiji!

—Katie Moses

.....
Greetings!

I realize that there are as many different reasons for joining the Peace Corps as there are Volunteers. Everyone brings his or her own unique experiences to the organization and, in turn, to his or her host country. Still, I was one of "those" Volunteers who had friends who joined the Peace Corps and was inspired by their stories as Volunteers.

I received warnings and advice about every imaginable frustration. My friend Chris, who served in Mauritania, told me never to count on local transport being as timely as I would like. Amy did two tours in Botswana and she warned me that

Peace Corps as an organization could feel like Big Brother at times, only less efficient. Paul (he'd been in Colombia in the 1970s) shared his experience of feeling frustrated by the rate of progress, having trouble accomplishing anything tangible. Aly, who served in West Africa, warned me about medical issues, loss of control with food and my body. Melissa (serving in Vanuatu) said the dresses I'd have to wear were hideous, that other Volunteers would get under my skin, and that I'd feel confusedly trapped and isolated and sometimes just want to scream.

But I still wanted to join. When I looked at all my current and returned Volunteer friends and mentors, I saw in their experiences and in who they had become something that I wanted to see in myself. They are compassionate, knowledgeable, capable, patient people who had great stories and to whom you would go if you had a problem or a great idea.

When my invitation arrived, there wasn't a doubt in my mind. When I left home to fly to staging that May morning, I had no doubt. When I met my fellow trainees, still no doubt. When we arrived in Fiji and even through the emotional rollercoaster that was training, still I never doubted I could handle any challenge thrown my way. The Dokidoki pop music, no big deal; the church every Sunday and prayer before each meal, doable; the grog, well, I almost came to like it. After all, I'd been very well-prepared, mentally, for all of this. This was what I'd asked for. I grinned all through swearing-in and could scarcely wait to arrive at my site in a rural coastal village on the northern coast of Viti Levu.

And then I arrived. For a few weeks, I stayed with my counterpart while screens were being put on the windows of my house. As it turns out, his family and most of the village were an evangelist Christian religion different than those in my host village.

Every morning at 4 a.m. and every evening at 7 p.m., the family sings songs, prays, and gives personal testimonies of thanks. On Sundays, it isn't one mandatory church service to sit through, but two, back to back, starting at 10 a.m., and going until 6 p.m.; everyone attends both. They don't drink

grog or other alcohol or smoke; and they don't sing, listen to, or dance to any music that isn't Christian. I didn't know all this on the first night of my arrival in the village. I accepted the prayer going on around me and was dumbstruck when I was asked to contribute a Bible verse.

I grew up as a Unitarian Universalist, but I majored in religious studies in college and came here with an open mind. I wanted to be a part of this community desperately. I wanted them to like me. I wanted my two years to be good ones. In America, your religion is personal. Here, it may be the first question asked about you. *Lotulotu* (acts of singing songs, prayers, and giving thanks) began, and I was asked to add my prayer. This I did.

As the weeks went by, however, I grew to regret the commitment I'd tacitly made to this new community—particularly when I found myself next to a woman one Sunday who spontaneously burst into tongues. I had written my thesis on the phenomena. I'd even visited churches to observe it as field work. Yet watching this woman speaking in tongues completely freaked me out. No amount of warning could have prepared me for this experience. I went home and cried into my pillow that day.

It is strange and isolating to be surrounded by strangers. Although they are strangers you are starting to like and want to know better, they are still strangers for whom religion is such a central part of their lives. I was more than willing to “fake” liking *Dokidoki* (religious ceremony), to sit through low-participation services in my training village, and even enjoyed drinking grog, singing Fijian songs, and dancing the *meke*. These are the “fun” aspects of a new culture. I thought there was nothing I was unprepared for, but wouldn't you know it, I was wrong.

I can't say I have any great advice for you when you come to Fiji. Your village may be different. You may live in a city and never be asked to attend any religious service. What I will tell you is that it's gotten much better. My village knows now that their religion is not my own. I attend two services each Sunday, but mostly I read the Bible or write in my journal during this time, occasionally getting up to sing and sway

to the music. They've come to like me for who I am. They appreciate that I show respect and a healthy interest in their religion and their way of life.

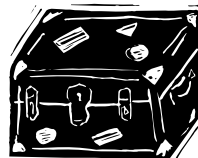
People know I cannot really be like them, but they love that I have tried to do what they do. It continues to be an emotional and very rewarding experience of contribution and self discovery.

The hardest job you'll ever love, right?

—Molly Powers



PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers who currently serve in Fiji and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You can always have things sent to you later. You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight restriction on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Fiji.

General Clothing

Avoid bringing clothing that requires dry cleaning. Also suede gets ruined here due to the high humidity.

For Women:

- Long dresses with sleeves. These should be loose and well below the knees (ankle length is best). Latest casual fashions are fine. One or two “nicer” dresses are good to have for swearing-in ceremonies and other important occasions, such as weddings and attending church services.
- Black dress and/or skirt. In the unfortunate event that there is a funeral in your community, you will need to have a properly conservative long black skirt or dress.
- Long, loose skirts. These should be below the knees and full enough for you to be able to sit on the floor with your legs to the side and your knees covered.
- Tops and shirts. At least one or two long-sleeved tops to wear when you’ve had enough sun. Also, plenty of loose-fitting, comfortable, short-sleeved cotton shirts. Tight-fitting and/or low-cut shirts or sleeveless tank tops are

not appropriate. Loose tailored T-shirts are fine (check Eddie Bauer, Lands End, L.L. Bean, etc.). You may also want to consider one or two sleeveless tops for when you are traveling (on vacation/at resorts).

- Blouses. Depending upon your site and your assignment, you may find yourself dressing more formally/professionally than you are used to at home. Bring a few nice, lightweight tailored blouses. Short sleeves are best for the hotter weather.
- Jacket and sweatshirt. It does (occasionally) get cool here, so bring something that is sturdy and cotton. Long-sleeved T-shirts work well, too. You will not need anything like fleece unless you are planning to travel to a colder area during your stay.
- Undergarments. There is only one kind to consider: cotton. Bring as many as you will need for your full two years as they are very expensive to replace here and they tend to wear out with repeated scrubbing. You may need to wear a slip with your lightweight dresses and skirts. On hot days, cotton slips will be more comfortable than nylon. Some Volunteers wear non-see-through medium-weight cotton skirts to avoid the double layers that slips produce. Leave your panty-hose and stockings at home as women do not wear them here (they are too hot in this climate).
- Jeans and long pants. Usually they will not be appropriate to wear at your site and in general are just too heavy to wear in the heat anyway. Pants and jeans are acceptable for home wear and some urban activities, but almost never in a village or settlement. Bring a couple along for travel and/or visits to Suva. Lightweight cottons and capris-type pants are most appropriate.
- Shorts. One or two pair(s) of long, knee-length shorts are advisable. Though they cannot be worn in the villages in public, they can be worn at the beach or for playing sports. Some women also wear shorts under

their *sulus*, so consider a pair or two for this purpose. Nylon running shorts or tight biking shorts are not acceptable. For exercising outdoors, longer running shorts or capris-length shorts are acceptable.

For Men:

- Slacks and long pants. Permanent press cotton-poly blends are a good bet and always acceptable in professional situations and at your site. Medium-weight, drab colors will last and hide stains and can usually go a bit longer between washings. Blue jeans are not acceptable in professional situations and are usually too heavy to wear anyway, but are fine to wear around the house and in some urban activities.
- Shirts. Permanent press, collared, button-down cotton shirts are suggested for work. Long sleeves rolled up for comfort are perfectly acceptable, but short sleeves are cooler and more commonly worn. Golf shirts are fine to wear to work. T-shirts and rugby shirts are for recreation only. One or two dressier shirts are needed for special occasions or church.
- Shorts. These are usually worn only in casual, non-job-related activities and in some rural-based assignments (e.g., fisheries). Cut-offs and gym shorts are for recreation only. Otherwise, stick to packing permanent press, medium-weight, drab-colored cotton shorts that come just to or below mid-thigh.
- Jacket, sweater, sweatshirt. It's not always warm in the tropics, so you will find it handy to have an extra layer to wear. Washable cotton is suggested. It is not necessary to bring a sports jacket, but there are events when it will be nice to have one (swearing-in ceremonies, local celebrations, etc.). A tie with a short-sleeved dress shirt is also acceptable without a jacket for dressier occasions.

- Undergarments. Bring a good number of cotton briefs. Underclothes are very expensive in Fiji and wear out quickly due to hand-scrubbing and humidity. Cotton boxer shorts are not available here.
- Swimsuits. Local men just wear their walking shorts for swimming. Trunk styles are more acceptable than bikini Speedo styles.
- Neckties. One will come in handy for special occasions and for church. Most men do not wear ties to work as they are too hot.
- Socks. Cotton socks are expensive and hard to find here; however, you probably won't need more than a few pair.

All Volunteers

Shoes and Accessories

- Athletic shoes. Fiji offers many different sporting activities, especially walking. If you plan to do a lot of running, hiking, or playing squash, bring the appropriate shoes for it. Brand-name shoes are often available, but expensive and styles are limited. Be aware that expensive athletic shoes are among the items most often stolen from Volunteers. Leather hiking shoes are usually too hot and mold before you get much use out of them.
- Sandals/walking shoes. A good sturdy, waterproof style (like Teva or Chaco) that can be worn both in the water and out are a good investment; you will find yourself living in them. You may also want to bring along a “nice” pair of sandals for more formal occasions (swearing-in, celebrations, etc.). Plastic flip-flops are widely available here and are great for showers. You will probably not need dress shoes, heels, rain boots or the like.
- Sunglasses. The sun in the tropics is very strong, so be kind to your eyes. If you wear prescription glasses, you may want to invest in a pair of prescription sunglasses.

Cheap, non-polarized sunglasses are available in urban areas; duty-free shops carry quality brands, but be ready to pay a premium for them.

- Hats. Hats are taboo in the villages, but there will be plenty of times when you are away from the village when you will be glad for some protection from the sun. A collapsible, washable type that is easily packed is best. Note: never wear a hat inside a building or house.
- Waterproof windbreaker. A lightweight, waterproof jacket is a good thing to have. Make sure it isn't too heavy and that it's breathable. You will not need a full raincoat, as a cool, afternoon shower will be a welcome change from the heat! Plastic raincoats tend to be cumbersome and very hot in this weather.
- Umbrella. It rains a lot here! Inexpensive folding umbrellas are available, but tend to be poorly made. Consider bringing one from home (Eddie Bauer makes a great travel umbrella that is well-made and very small). Better quality, full-size umbrellas are available everywhere.
- Waterproof watch. Even if you don't get the watch wet, if it isn't waterproof, it will rust from the humidity. Watches can be purchased here at reasonable costs.
- Personal hygiene and toiletry items. Just about anything you need can be purchased here; however, imported items often cost roughly the same as they would in the U.S. If you have a favorite brand or product, you might consider bringing a supply with you. If you are on any special medication, bring a three-month supply with you as it may take that long for a replacement to be ordered from the U.S. Anyone with glasses, hearing aid, etc. should bring at least one replacement. In most cases, the Peace Corps will not replace lost or damaged contact lenses nor more than one pair of eyeglasses.

Kitchen and Home

- Clock. Bring a small one with an alarm, either wind-up or battery-powered.
- Good, sharp kitchen knife. Needs no explanation and will make your hours in the kitchen much fewer and less painful! Remember to pack this in your luggage and not in your carry-on bag.
- Battery-operated (or solar-powered) tape recorder, radio cassette/CD player and/or shortwave radio. Also bring along some of your favorite music as pre-recorded tapes and CDs are very expensive here.
- Portable tool kit. Screwdriver, pliers, etc. can be bought here, but you may want to bring a small portable kit anyway.
- Towels. Two towels and face cloths. Lightweight towels dry faster in the humidity.
- Flashlight. Also known as a “torch” here in Fiji, these come in very handy. Consider a waterproof flashlight. Mini-Mag-lights are great, too.
- Pocket knife or all-purpose tool. A Swiss Army knife or Leatherman is something you will find yourself using daily.
- Duct Tape. A roll or two will come in handy throughout your two years.
- Luggage locks. A few small locks for your bags when they are in storage. Note: Most airlines are discouraging their use in flight, so you may want to just pack them in your suitcase rather than actually using them on your trip over.
- Plastic drip coffeemaker. Bring it if you really love coffee. The non-electrical kind that fits on top of a glass decanter or the type that you can brew an individual cup is best. Instant coffee is available all over Fiji and drip coffee can be found in Suva, if you're willing to pay the price.

- Silica gel. This is to protect your electronics (camera, etc.) from moisture damage. It also comes in handy with leather items, tapes, shoes, your medical kit, etc. You can get packets at your local craft store (used to dry flowers), at some discount chains (Target), some home stores and on the Internet. The kind that you can bake and re-use is best.
- Basic cookbook. The Joy of Cooking comes in a compact paperback version and is very useful.
- Vegetable steamer. Non-electric, basket kind that fits inside a pot.
- Zip-loc bags. These have so many uses! They keep the bugs out of your food; they can be used to store items (with a little silica packet to capture the moisture), for travel, wet clothing, cosmetics, etc.

Miscellaneous and Personal Items

Bring along small, but replaceable, parts of your life you don't want to live without for the next two years. Make sure they are light enough to carry, sturdy enough to last and dispensable enough so that losing them wouldn't be serious problem. Here are some suggestions:

- Checks. It's a good idea to keep a checking account at home so that you can write checks for things like tax returns, magazine subscriptions, graduate school applications, etc.
- Camera supplies. Film is available, but lens tissue, cleaning fluid, etc. are very expensive. There is also a one-day developing service, but expensive as you might expect.
- Paperback books. Very expensive in Fiji. Peace Corps is developing a limited lending library and there is a public library in Suva. Books can be shipped surface mail or "M-bag" (ask the post office for information), but will take several months to arrive.

- Day pack/backpack. Waterproof is best. You will use it often.
- Games, Cards, UNO, Scrabble, Frisbees, etc.
- Sturdy luggage/travel bags. Waterproof and collapsible. Hard luggage tends to be cumbersome here as you will not have much room for storage. Collapsible cloth bags or backpacks tend to be more durable than leather goods, which can mold quickly. Once you are in Fiji, you will be asked to travel during training for extended periods of time with only your necessities in one suitcase, so bring one average-sized lightweight piece of luggage so that you can travel light when necessary. You might consider a few waterproof bags—also known as sea bags—for when you travel by boat.
- Inflatable globe or lightweight atlas. Great for explaining where you come from to local children.
- Musical instrument(s) (if you play any).
- Photos of home. Photos of winter/snow scenes will be especially fascinating.
- Simple song book of American songs.
- American pocket dictionary (British versions available here).
- Backpacker's sleeping bag. You will not need a full-size sleeping bag, but a "dream sack," cotton "mummy" sleeping bag liner or other lightweight travel sheet will come in handy.
- Surface mail subscriptions of your favorite magazines. Takes about six to eight weeks to arrive.
- Cheap baseball logo hats for gifts.
- U.S. symbols (such as pins, flags, etc.) for gifts. Bottle openers, nail clippers, bumper stickers, ashtrays, ballpoint pens, etc.
- Comic books, cheap wind-up toys, posters, magazines, logo T-shirts for gifts.

- Water sport equipment. If you plan on SCUBA diving or snorkeling during your downtime you might consider bringing some gear—especially light-gauge wetsuits or dive skins to protect you from water lice. Snorkeling equipment might also be very handy for environmental education Volunteers. We do not recommend that you bring a SCUBA tank, regulator or buoyancy compensating device, as they can be rented and/or supplied by our partners for professional use.
- U.S. postage stamps. A good idea for sending mail home with staff or other Volunteers who are going to the States.



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone and the list is not all inclusive of everything you should make arrangements for.

Family

- Notify family that they should call Peace Corps' Office of Special Services any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470; 24-hour duty officer 202.638.2574.
- Establish a power of attorney to handle your legal and financial issues.
- Give Peace Corps' "*On the Home Front*" booklet to family and friends.

Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire 3 months after you finish your service, so if you plan on traveling longer after Peace Corps, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

- Complete dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to take a six-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are presently taking.

Health Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. Many times if there is a lapse in supplemental health coverage it is difficult and expensive to be reinstated for insurance. This is especially true when insurance companies know you have predictable expenses and are in an upper-age bracket. For additional information or specific questions, contact your insurance company and/or the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services in Washington.)
- Purchase short-term travelers or health insurance to cover you while traveling to and during pre-service events. (Note: The Peace Corps will cover your immediate service-related injuries while you are in the U.S., but any further complications from injuries acquired while in the U.S. are not covered. However, non service-related injuries (such as jogging injuries) are not covered, even in stateside training or Staging. For older Americans on Medicare, your coverage is usually limited to hospitalization and related charges only.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage.

Personal Papers

- Bring a copy of your certificate of marriage or divorce.

Voting

- Register to vote in the state of your home of record. (Many state universities consider voting and payment of state taxes as evidence of residence in that state.)
- Obtain a voter registration card and take it with you overseas.
- Arrange to have an absentee ballot forwarded to you overseas.

Personal Effects

- Purchase personal articles insurance for the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the U.S.

Financial Management

- Obtain student loan deferment forms from lender or loan service.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, ext. 1770.
- Place all important papers, mortgages, deeds, documents, stocks, and bonds in a safe deposit box, with attorney or with caretaker.



CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



Please use the following list of numbers to help you contact the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters with various questions. You may use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the Peace Corps toll-free number and extensions with your family in the event of an emergency during your service overseas.

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number: 800.424.8580, Press 2, then
Ext. # (see below)

Peace Corps' Mailing Address: Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Headquarters
1111 20th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20526

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Inter-America and Pacific	Ext. 1872	202.692.1872
Programming or Country Information	Leah Tafara-Maddox Desk Officer E-mail: fiji@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2522	202.692.2522
	Robert Reese Desk Assistant E-mail: fiji@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2502	202.692.2502

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.818.8772
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 9-5 EST 202.638.2574 (24-hour answering service)

PEACE CORPS

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters

1111 20th Street NW · Washington, DC 20526 · www.peacecorps.gov · 1-800-424-8580