

# THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

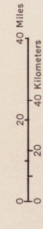


September 2007



**DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

- International boundary
- Provincia boundary
- National capital
- Provincia capital
- Railroad
- Road



# A WELCOME LETTER

*Bienvenidos!* The staff and Volunteers of Peace Corps/Dominican Republic welcome you to your new life in the Peace Corps in this beautiful country on this island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean! Congratulations on your selection and invitation to serve. You are now among the best America has chosen to represent our country and culture in the Dominican Republic.

You are about to embark on one of life's most transformative experiences—becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer. This is an opportunity for tremendous personal and professional growth, but, more importantly, it is an opportunity to make a contribution toward the development of the Dominican Republic. You will join the ranks of a highly professional and committed corps of Volunteers currently in-country, and more than 3,000 who have served in the Dominican Republic during the past 45 years. We expect you to continue to contribute to the “Culture of Excellence” that Peace Corps has in this country by committing yourself to working with Dominicans to improve their lives and opportunities in their communities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will work side-by-side with the Dominican people to find opportunities to implement sustainable development. This involves pairing with Dominican organizations, leaders, and community members to develop their capacity to make changes and improvements that they determine as key to their own development.

You are a development professional. You will be assigned to a specific project and expected to accomplish defined tasks with your Dominican counterparts. It will require hard work, professionalism, perseverance, maturity, flexibility, dedication, and creativity. If you have these qualities, and work hard

on your assignment and your cross-cultural interaction, you should have a marvelous experience, make numerous Dominican friends, and integrate yourself well in the society.

We have every confidence in your success and look forward to supporting you throughout your service.

Romeo Massey  
Country Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Map of the Dominican Republic**

**A Welcome Letter** 1

## **Peace Corps/Dominican Republic History and Programs** 7

History of the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic 7

History and Future of Peace Corps  
Programming in the Dominican Republic 8-11

## **Country Overview: Dominican Republic at a Glance** 13

History 13-14

Government 14-15

Economy 15-16

People and Culture 16-17

Environment 17

## **Resources for Further Information** 19

## **Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle** 27

Communications 27-30

Housing and Site Location 30-31

Living Allowance and Money Management 31-32

Food and Diet 32

Transportation 33

Geography and Climate 33-34

Social Activities 34-35

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior 35-36

Personal Safety 37

Rewards and Frustrations 37-39

<b>Peace Corps Training</b>	<b>41</b>
Overview of Pre-Service Training	41-42
<i>Technical Training</i>	42
<i>Language Training</i>	42-43
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	43
<i>Health Training</i>	44
<i>Safety Training</i>	44
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	44-45
<b>Your Health Care and Safety in the Dominican Republic</b>	<b>47</b>
Health Issues in the Dominican Republic	47-48
Helping You Stay Healthy	48
Maintaining Your Health	49-50
Women’s Health Information	50
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	51
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	52-53
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	54-60
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	54-55
<i>Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk</i>	55-56
<i>Support from Staff</i>	56-58
<i>What if You Become a Victim of a Violent Crime?</i>	58-60
Security Issues in the Dominican Republic	61-62
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	63
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in the Dominican Republic	64-65
<b>Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues</b>	<b>67</b>
Overview of Diversity in the Dominican Republic	68
What Might a Volunteer Face?	69
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	69-70
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	71-73
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	73-74
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	74-76

<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	76
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	77
<i>Possible Issues for Married Volunteers</i>	77-78

<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>81</b>
-----------------------------------	-----------

<b>Welcome Letters From Dominican Republic Volunteers</b>	<b>87</b>
---	-----------

<b>Packing List</b>	<b>93</b>
---------------------	-----------

<b>Pre-departure Checklist</b>	<b>101</b>
--------------------------------	------------

<b>Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters</b>	<b>105</b>
--	------------





# PEACE CORPS/DOMINICAN REPUBLIC HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



## **History of the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic**

Since 1962, more than 3,000 Volunteers have served in the Dominican Republic. These Volunteers have contributed to technical skills transfer and institutional capacity-building in a wide range of fields, including agriculture, urban and rural community development, forestry, conservation, environmental education, community health and child survival, nursing, small business development, fisheries, water and sanitation, teacher education, university education, youth development, and information technology.

Over the years, Peace Corps Volunteers have contributed significantly to the establishment and development of many of the country's leading nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and have worked hand-in-hand with the various administrations that have governed the Dominican Republic. In keeping with its commitment to peace and development, the Peace Corps remained in the Dominican Republic throughout its civil war in the 1960s. Likewise, the Peace Corps' commitment to service has been highlighted through the good work of Volunteers and their project partners in the recovery efforts following two of the most severe hurricanes (David in 1979 and George in 1998).

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in the Dominican Republic**

Peace Corps/Dominican Republic provides direct, community-based technical assistance. Volunteers work in marginalized sectors of the population to promote self-help strategies that respond to basic human needs and strengthen community efforts. Currently, the approximately 150 Volunteers in the Dominican Republic strive to increase local capacity for problem solving and to form links with grassroots, regional, and national organizations.

While Volunteers work primarily in community economic development, education, the environment, youth development, and health, the Peace Corps' program has evolved with the country's changing needs. Innovations include the development of an "information technology for education" project; a multi-sector approach to programming; and the incorporation of HIV/AIDS prevention, gender and development, and youth service-learning across all projects.

Peace Corps/Dominican Republic has seven projects within the sectors of education, environment, health, youth development and community economic development.

### ***Special Education***

In this project, Volunteers work in schools with children and the parents of children with special needs and learning disabilities. Volunteers create awareness among teachers and the communities about the needs of these students, promote awareness of the importance of an adequate education for all students, and train teachers in techniques to identify special-needs students and methodologies to provide them with a high-quality education.

### ***Information Technology for Education***

This project helps provide teacher training for the more than 600 computer centers established in public high schools around the country. Volunteers train teachers in the use of computers, focusing on how they can improve the quality of education in the classroom. Volunteers also create technology youth groups and help schools develop ways for the community to access information technology facilities.

### ***Environmental Awareness Education***

This project creates awareness among Dominicans for proper human interaction with the environment, such as appropriate waste disposal, preventing water contamination and deforestation, soil conservation, watershed protection, protecting marine resources, appropriate energy use, preserving air quality, noise and safety procedures, and demographic effects on the environment. To accomplish this, Volunteers help the Ministry of Education develop and implement education modules that train teachers how to incorporate environmental concepts into their curricula. They also provide training and technical support to community leaders to develop and implement projects that incorporate sound environmental practices and promote environmental protection.

### ***Healthy Families***

The Healthy Families project aims to reduce the risk of infant mortality in low-income families living in rural and marginal urban communities. Volunteers are assigned to the Ministry of Public Health or one of several private voluntary organizations. They help health supervisors improve and sustain basic health practices and services. The project focuses on the key causes of infant mortality: diarrhea,

respiratory infections, and malnutrition. Most Volunteers also help youth and health workers promote reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention among adolescents and young mothers.

### ***Environmental Sanitation***

Volunteers seek to reduce various endemic diseases by increasing access to potable water and improved waste disposal and sanitary facilities. Volunteers train community members to operate and maintain their water and sanitation systems and help private voluntary organizations improve their capacity to plan, implement, and evaluate environmental sanitation projects. Like the Healthy Families project, this project focuses on low-income families living in rural and marginal urban communities.

### ***Community Economic Development***

Volunteers take a broad approach to fostering economic development opportunities and community capacity-building among the neediest sectors of the population. They work with farmer associations and rural community groups to develop income-generating projects in agribusiness, organize integrated community development projects, and work with NGOs to provide business education to micro-entrepreneurs. Many Volunteers also provide business and leadership education to Dominican youth, using a curriculum similar to Junior Achievement's.

### ***Youth, Families, and Community Development***

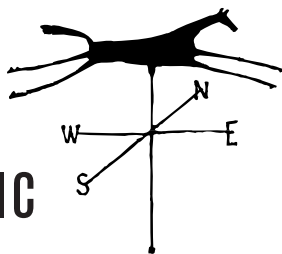
The youth, families, and community development project is the most recent addition to the Peace Corps/Dominican Republic program. It was initiated in 2002 to focus development activity directly toward youth and to support organizations that are working with youth development.

Volunteers collaborate with community-based organizations, nongovernmental and governmental organizations in urban, suburban and rural areas.

Key challenges faced by youth in the Dominican Republic include early sexual initiation and pregnancy, school desertion, HIV/AIDS infection, prostitution, and drug/alcohol use. These challenges are a result of family disintegration, unemployment, lack of conflict-resolution skills, and social exclusion. The youth project empowers youth by building their skills in making positive decisions that will affect their personal lives and communities. The youth program integrates five principles of positive youth development: engaging caring adults and positive role models; providing safe places and supervised activities; offering a healthy start through exercise and sex education; teaching marketable skills; and providing opportunities to serve through volunteering and engagement with the community.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE



## History

The island of Hispaniola, of which the Dominican Republic forms the eastern two-thirds and Haiti the western one-third, has been a center of great political struggles since the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the West Indies in 1492. The island was first colonized by the Spanish, and by the end of the 17th century, Spain had ceded to France all rights to the western portion of the island.

In 1804, Toussaint L'Overture, the leader of a slave uprising in the French colony, declared the island "one and indivisible" under the new Republic of Haiti. At that time, what is now the Dominican Republic was occupied by Haitian troops. The Haitians conquered the entire island in 1822 and held it until 1844. In that year, Juan Pablo Duarte, the hero of Dominican independence, and his forces, drove out the Haitians and established the Dominican Republic as an independent state.

Since independence, the country's political stability has been shaky. Economic difficulties, the threat of European intervention, and ongoing internal disorders led to a U.S. occupation in 1916 and the establishment of a military government. The occupation ended in 1924 with a democratically elected Dominican government. From 1930 until his assassination in 1961, Army commander Rafael Trujillo ruled the country under a repressive dictatorship. The country then underwent a number of military coups as well as an occupation by U.S. military forces from 1965

to 1966. During those years, several key political figures rose to power, including Joaquin Balaguer, leader of the Social Christian Reformist Party; and Juan Bosch, founder of the Dominican Liberation Party. In the more recent past, the country has experienced peaceful transitions of democratically elected governments. Hipolito Mejia was elected in 2000 for a four-year term. Former President Leonel Fernández won the 2004 election and was inaugurated in August 2004.

Although the Dominican Republic's relations with Haiti have been challenging, the two countries are intrinsically linked. A sizable number of Haitian migrants live in the Dominican Republic and many of them contribute to the Dominican economy.

The Dominican Republic has a close relationship with the United States despite the fact that America has occupied the country on two occasions. It is estimated that there are more than 1 million Dominicans living in the United States, the majority in New York City. An estimated 60,000 U.S. citizens live in the Dominican Republic.

## **Government**

The Dominican Republic is a representative democracy whose national powers are divided among independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president appoints the cabinet, executes laws passed by the legislative branch, and is commander in chief of the armed forces. The president and vice president run for office on the same ticket and are elected by direct vote for four-year terms. Legislative power is exercised by a bicameral National Congress, consisting of a Senate (30 members) and a Chamber of Deputies (149 members).



There are three major political parties: the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD), led by President Leonel Fernández; the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD); and the Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC).

## **Economy**

The Dominican Republic is a middle-income developing country. The economy is primarily dependent on services, especially tourism; remittances from the United States (which help support 30 percent of all Dominican families), construction, and agriculture. The service sector has overtaken agriculture as the leading employer of Dominicans, principally as a result of growth in tourism and free-trade zones. More than 1 million tourists visit the Dominican Republic each year, contributing close to \$1 billion (U.S.) to the economy.

The Dominican Republic's economic success of the 1990s has deteriorated significantly over the past few years, though it has begun to improve. Moreover, the costs of many basic goods (gas, food, utilities) have significantly increased. However, under President Fernández, the economic situation has stabilized and improved. Inflation stands at single-digit levels for 2006 and there is increasing economic growth. Additionally, the peso has been revalued and stabilized; the exchange rate is now approximately 32.50 pesos to \$1 (U.S.).

In spite of the significant rise in prices in 2003–2004, there was no corresponding increase in wages for the working population. An average agricultural day laborer still earns approximately 150 pesos per day (less than \$6 per day), and the unemployment rate is nearly 20 percent. The nation's \$7 billion foreign public debt represents nearly half of its GDP. Poverty incidence in the rural areas is three times higher than

in urban areas, and it reaches extreme levels on the Haitian border and in the *batey* communities (work camps on the edge of sugar plantations in the east and along the border of the Dominican Republic and Haiti).

Severe energy shortages, with average daily blackouts of up to 12 hours, and a 60 percent increase in gas prices have had a domino effect on prices of general consumer goods and transportation. Additionally, the lack of access to potable water, inadequate access to basic preventive health services, and low pay in the service sector make it difficult for Dominicans to advance.

## **People and Culture**

The Dominican population was 1 million in 1920; by 2007, it had grown to 9 million. The country has one of the highest population densities in the Western Hemisphere. The population is roughly 40 percent rural and 60 percent urban.

The Dominican people are a blend of Spanish, African, and indigenous Taino Indians. The Spanish arrived in 1492; by 1520 the indigenous population had been virtually eradicated by warfare, disease, and an unsuccessful attempt to enslave them to work in the country's fields and gold mines. As the indigenous population decreased, the labor shortage was filled by African slaves brought to Santo Domingo. The current population is largely mulatto. More recently, there has been a small influx of Japanese, Chinese, European Jews, Arabs, and other groups.

The Dominican culture reflects its Spanish, African, and indigenous Indian heritages. From the Spanish, Dominicans inherited their language, cuisine, Roman Catholicism, and the patriarchal family structure. From the African and indigenous

Indian cultures, they inherited their music (merengue), folklore, social activities, handicrafts, cuisine, and many of the names given to children. Spanish is the official language, although many indigenous words have been incorporated into Dominican Spanish. While Roman Catholicism is the predominant religion, Christian evangelical churches are becoming a more influential religious force in the country..

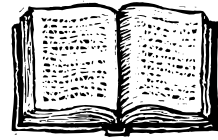
## **Environment**

The Dominican Republic has some of the most varied and beautiful terrain in the hemisphere, including mountain ranges, tropical beaches, forests, and desert (found primarily in the southwest). It boasts the highest mountain in the Caribbean, Pico Duarte, which is surrounded by extremely productive farmland in the Cibao region. Sugarcane and rolling landscapes highlight the south and east of the island.

There is growing concern about the Dominican Republic's rapid rate of environmental degradation in both rural and urban areas. About 60 percent of the country's original forest cover still existed in the early 1900s. By the end of the 1980s, that figure had plunged to approximately 12 percent as a result of slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, forest fires, and charcoal production. Degradation and silting in the Caribbean and Atlantic have also negatively affected the extremely rich coral reef environments found around the island.



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and the Dominican Republic and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it.

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own experiences, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

## **General Information About the Dominican Republic**

### **[www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations)**

Visit this site for general travel advice about almost any country in the world.

### **[www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn)**

The U.S. State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find the Dominican Republic and learn more about its social and political history.

**[www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm](http://www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm)**

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

**[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation3/menu/advanced.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation3/menu/advanced.asp)**

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

**[www.worldinformation.com](http://www.worldinformation.com)**

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

**[www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)**

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, composed of returned Volunteers. The site has 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.

**[www.fotdr.org](http://www.fotdr.org)**

This site is filled with information about Peace Corps/ Dominican Republic and is managed by the returned Peace Corps Volunteers of the Dominican Republic and their organization, Friends of the Dominican Republic.

## **Spanish-Learning Resources**

**[http://www.byki.com/free\\_lang\\_software.pl](http://www.byki.com/free_lang_software.pl)**

Free language learning software “Before You Know It” (BYKI) based on the flash-card system. The free version of the software contains 17 lists of words and phrases that include sample phrases for polite conversations, meeting and greeting, and food and beverages vocabulary.

**<http://www.miscositas.com/>**

Short stories, links and other exercises for learning Spanish, French, and English.

**<http://mld.ursinus.edu/~jarana/Ejercicios/>**

Spanish language exercises and materials for learners and teachers from Ursinus College.

## **Online Articles/Current News Sites About the Dominican Republic**

**[www.dr1.com](http://www.dr1.com)**

This site provides daily news summaries in English.

**[www.listin.com.do](http://www.listin.com.do)**

Online edition of *Listin Diario*, a Dominican newspaper (in Spanish).

**[www.hoy.com.do](http://www.hoy.com.do)**

Online edition of *Hoy*, a Dominican newspaper (in Spanish).

**[www.dominicanrepublic.com/](http://www.dominicanrepublic.com/)**

Official Internet portal to the Dominican Republic with information on history, culture and arts, economy, business, politics, news, etc. (in Spanish and English).

## **International Development Sites About the Dominican Republic**

**[www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/dominican\\_republic/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/dominican_republic/)**

The U.S. Agency for International Development's programs in the Dominican Republic

**<http://portal.onu.org.do/interfaz/main.asp?Ag=2>**

The United Nation's Development Programme's projects in the Dominican Republic (in Spanish)

**<http://www.worldbank.org>**

Website for the World Bank, which includes programs in the Dominican Republic.

## **Recommended Books**

1. Alvarez, Julia. *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1991.
2. Alvarez, Julia. *In the Time of the Butterflies*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1995.
3. Alvarez, Julia. *¡Yo!* Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1997.

These are three novels about Dominican history and the immigrant experience by a writer who moved to the United States as a girl when her parents fled the Trujillo regime.

4. Fischkin, Barbara. *Muddy Cup: A Dominican Family Comes of Age in a New America*. New York: Scribner, 1997.

A journalist follows the emigration of a Dominican family from the time they apply for visas through their move to New York.



5. Ruck, Rob. *The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic*. University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

Traces baseball's roots in the Dominican Republic against a historical background of economic and political change.

6. Pons, Frank Moya. *The Dominican Republic: A National History*. New York: Hispaniola Books, 1994.
7. Wucker, Michele. *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1999.

### **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, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

### **Books on the Volunteer Experience**

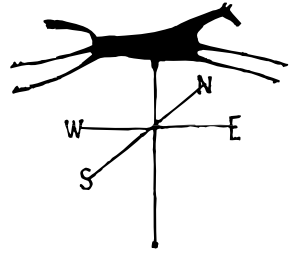
1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.

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).

## NOTES



# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## Communications

### *Mail*

Mail delivery between the United States and the Dominican Republic can be unreliable. Letters and packages sent by airmail take from 10 days to two weeks to arrive. Surface mail can take months.

Your address for **regular mail** service in the Dominican Republic while you are a Peace Corps trainee (PCT) will be:

“Your Name,” PCT  
Cuerpo de Paz  
Av Bolivar 451, Gazcue  
Apartado Postal 1412  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

*Please Note:* Do not send money, airline tickets, or other valuable items through the mail.

Should you need to have a package sent to the Dominican Republic, we recommend that the contents be limited to items that fit into **padded envelopes**. These are less likely to be lost, opened, or taxed.

Packages may also be shipped via a parcel delivery service. Federal Express and DHL have offices in Santo Domingo. If you want them to deliver a package to the Peace Corps office, you will have to provide the office street address (instead of the post office box address listed above) and phone number.

Your address for **expedited mail** service in the Dominican Republic while you are a Peace Corps trainee or Volunteer will be:

“Your Name,” PCT  
Cuerpo de Paz  
451 Avenida Bolivar  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
Telephone: 809.685.4102

*Please Note:* Federal Express and DHL will not deliver items larger than an envelope to the Peace Corps office, so **you may have to pay significant customs duties to retrieve larger items from customs**, and picking up the items may mean an entire day’s travel to the capital. In addition, packages sometimes disappear in transit.

Additionally, there is a tax levied on every package received by a trainee or Volunteer. Peace Corps does not cover these costs. All packages received in-country are charged RD (Dominican pesos) \$100 (currently about \$3 U.S.) to retrieve and then an additional RD \$100 per pound. So, for example, a 10-pound package would cost the Volunteer RD\$1,100 (USD\$34.00), a significant amount considering a Volunteer’s living allowance.

Private courier services, such as Mail Boxes Etc., provide mail-forwarding service from Miami; however, these companies are limited to major cities and receiving rates vary according to weight. While mail-forwarding services can be considered more reliable than standard surface or airmail, it can be quite costly.

During training, Peace Corps staff will deliver mail to you at least twice a week while you are in Santo Domingo; less often when you are outside of Santo Domingo. Once you move to your site, you will be responsible for sending your new mailing

address to friends and family. Some Volunteers find it more convenient to continue using the Santo Domingo address. In that case, mail received at the Peace Corps office will be put in your locker in the Volunteer lounge, and you will have to collect it periodically.

We encourage you to write to your family regularly, as family members may become worried when they do not hear from you.

### ***Telephone***

The Peace Corps office in the Dominican Republic can be reached by direct dialing from the United States. The number is 1.809.685.4102. The phone number for the after-hours duty officer is 1.809.723.9944. The fax number is 1.809.689.9330.

Long-distance telephone service is available in the Dominican Republic and is not expensive. However, you may or may not have access to a land-line or cellular phone signal at your site. Therefore, ALL Volunteers are issued cellular phones by Peace Corps/Dominican Republic. Cellphones enable staff to maintain contact with Volunteers and to send messages in an emergency. You will be issued these after being sworn in at the end of training. There is no charge for receiving calls or text messages on cellular phones, but **all personal calls are at the Volunteers' expense**. Phone card rates for calling internationally to the U.S., Canada, or Puerto Rico are typically the same as making a local call. Prepaid calling cards bought in the United States typically don't work. Volunteers may use call centers of the major telephone companies which have branches throughout the country.

### ***Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access***

If your sponsoring agency or project partner owns a computer, you may be able to arrange access for work-related or personal use. The resource center and computer room at the Peace Corps office in Santo Domingo has a limited number of

computers with Internet access for Volunteer use. However, if you want to receive personal e-mail, you will need to set up an account with a service such as Yahoo!, Hotmail or Google's Gmail. Internet access is also available at Internet cafés throughout the country. Peace Corps staff computers are not available for Volunteer use.

## **Housing and Site Location**

During pre-service training (PST), you will live with a Dominican host family near the Peace Corps training center on the outskirts of Santo Domingo. The families are selected by training staff. Houses typically have electricity and running water (when these systems are operating). Your host family will provide you with a private room, and you will eat your meals with the family.

You will also live with a host family during the first three months of your Volunteer service. These host families are identified by the community and/or the host country agency and are approved by Peace Corps staff prior to your arrival. Living with a Dominican family allows faster integration into the community, provides a safe environment while you are settling in, and gives you time to look for independent housing should you choose to do so. It is important to understand that Peace Corps cannot guarantee that Volunteers will find independent housing after the initial three-month period of living with a host family. Due to a general shortage of quality housing options in the small communities where Volunteers live and work, many Volunteers find that living with a host family for longer than three months is the norm. During service, you are expected to live in the same type of housing commonly found in your community. Housing varies widely, depending on whether you live in a city, a large or small town, or a *campo* (rural) village



Volunteers typically live in houses with tin roofs, walls of wood or cement block, and cement floors. Many communities have electricity, though some do not. Power outages are very common. The water supply is subject to the same inconsistencies. Many communities do not have water piped into houses. Rural families, for example, often have to walk to the nearest river or other water source for household water. Even if you live in a house with faucets, there is no guarantee that there will be water; it is common for water not to appear for days at a time. Volunteers placed in more urbanized areas will also face some of these same challenges.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

As a Volunteer, you will receive a monthly living allowance in the local currency (Dominican pesos; abbreviated as RD). The living allowance is meant to cover housing, utilities, household supplies, normal clothing replacement, food, transportation and moderate entertainment expenses, reading material, and other incidentals. It will enable you to live modestly, at the same level as your neighbors and colleagues. Peace Corps/Dominican Republic will open a bank account for you and provide you with an ATM card. You will need to budget appropriately to make the living allowance last a month.

Additionally, you will receive a monthly vacation allowance equivalent to \$24, paid in local currency at the same time as the living allowance. You will also receive a one-time settling-in allowance to purchase needed household furniture and equipment (e.g., a bed, a stove, kitchen items, and locks) and pay several months of advance rent if required.

Most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in the Dominican Republic with these allowances, so we strongly discourage you from supplementing the living allowance with

money from home. Still, many Volunteers bring money from home for out-of-country travel. Credit cards can be used in many establishments in major cities, and traveler's checks can be cashed for a small fee.

## **Food and Diet**

The Dominican diet consists primarily of rice, beans, *yuca* (cassava), plantains, sweet potatoes, potatoes, and other vegetables, along with eggs, chicken, pork, beef, and some fish. The national dish is *sancocho*, a rich vegetable-and-meat stew served on special occasions. A typical Dominican meal, called *la bandera*, is a mix of rice, red beans, and meat. Yuca may be boiled, prepared as fritters, or baked into rounds of crisp cracker bread called *casabe*. Most dishes are not spicy. Locally grown, seasonal fruits include bananas, mangoes, papayas, pineapples, guavas, and avocados. Dominicans generally eat small quantities of meat at meals. *Bacalau* (dried fish; usually cod) can be found in several areas, but fresh fish is generally available only along the coast. *Habichuelas con dulce*, a sweet desert made from beans, is popular at Easter.

Vegetarians will be able to maintain their diet at home, but they will be offered—and most likely expected to accept—traditional foods, including meat, when visiting Dominican families. You will have to be open and flexible about sharing in the Dominican diet when necessary.

During training, your host family will provide your meals. Once you are at your site, you can choose to eat with Dominicans or cook on your own. To supplement their diet, some Volunteers plant gardens at home.

## Transportation

Transportation is relatively easy in the Dominican Republic. Most urban travel is by bus and van, although *carro públicos* (a sort of shared taxi) are available as well. Intercity travel is by bus; rural travel runs the gamut from air-conditioned minibuses to crowded *carro públicos* to lots of walking. Although inexpensive, *carro públicos* are where most Volunteers experience pick-pocketing and robberies.

**Do not travel in them at night.**

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to drive vehicles or motorcycles in the Dominican Republic. Violation of this policy will result in termination of your Peace Corps service.

Most Volunteers rely on public transportation to get around. But Volunteers can request assistance from the Peace Corps in arranging alternative means of local transportation. Volunteers can apply for and receive limited funds from their Volunteer readjustment allowance to purchase a bicycle to use during their service in the Dominican Republic. The Peace Corps will also provide you with a helmet, which you must wear at all times while riding a bicycle. Failure to abide by this policy will also result in termination of your Peace Corps service.

## Climate

With an average temperature range of 65 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit, this Caribbean country is probably not as hot as you might think. It is difficult to define a rainy season, since showers can occur at any time during the year, depending on the area. However, the period of heaviest rainfall for most of the island is late April to early October, months that can be relatively hot and humid. The cooler season—from November

to February—is pleasant but still warm, with temperatures from 65 to 85 degrees Fahrenheit. You will need lightweight clothing suitable for hot weather and at least one heavier garment for traveling to cooler, mountainous areas such as the 10,000-foot Pico Duarte, the highest mountain in the Caribbean.

## **Social Activities**

Social activities in the Dominican Republic vary depending on where you are located. They include taking part in festivities such as Carnival, parties, and dances. Some Volunteers visit other Volunteers nearby on weekends for work-related or social occasions and will make an occasional trip to the capital. We encourage Volunteers to remain at their sites as much as possible to help accomplish the Peace Corps' goal of cultural exchange. Most regional capitals have cafés and restaurants, movie theaters, and other forms of entertainment.

Social life in the Dominican Republic often revolves around the family porch, where people talk while playing dominoes, a national pastime. Outdoor tables in front of homes, bars, and *colmados* (neighborhood markets) are surrounded by men who play for hours, especially on Sundays. Outdoor players are almost exclusively men, but everyone plays at home. Even young children become adept at the game. Baseball is the country's most popular sport. The competition is keen, and rarely does a day go by when children, youth, and even adults are not playing baseball with anything they can find to use as a bat and ball. Cockfighting is another national pastime, and the gambling stakes can be high.

Dominicans also love music and dancing. Merengue is the national dance, and many people, including small children, know the steps. The fast-paced, rhythmic music of merengue is traditionally performed with three instruments: *a tambora*

(a small drum), a *melodeon* (similar to an accordion), and a *guira* (a scraping percussion instrument). *Bachata* is another folk dance that has become as popular as merengue. Salsa and other styles of Latin American music are popular, as are North American pop and jazz. Discos exist even in rural communities.

What has kept merengue alive over the years is its place in the Dominican Republic's Carnival celebrations. All of the major cities celebrate Carnival with zeal, incorporating music and dance into the street parades and other festivities. In Santo Domingo, Carnival occurs twice a year. The first occurs during the traditional pre-Lenten holiday. The second one, much smaller, but just as festive, starts the day before August 16, which is the anniversary of the Dominican Republic's declaration of war against Spain in 1863.

Each July, Santo Domingo hosts a merengue festival along its main seaside strip, El Malecón. The street is closed off to make way for some of the country's most popular bands. Celebrations also take place at clubs, hotels, and even nighttime beach parties. Smaller merengue festivals take place in other towns.

### **Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior**

Dominicans take pride in their personal appearance. To gain the acceptance, respect, and confidence of rural, urban, and government-level workers, it is essential that you dress and conduct yourself professionally. Standards of dress for development professionals tend to be conservative and modest. Women are expected to wear casual pants or mid-length skirts for professional activities (excluding physical labor); men are expected to wear pants for professional activities other than sports and physical labor. Simply stated:

first impressions will be informed by the way you dress. Establishing yourself as a professional technical resource in your community is a part of the overall challenge of adjusting to a new language and culture. Dressing as a professional will ease this process for you. Inappropriate dress may send unintended messages or invitations to co-workers and/or others in your community.

Out of respect for Dominican culture, Volunteers are not allowed to display body piercings. This includes nose rings, tongue bolts, and navel rings. Men are not allowed to wear earrings or have long hair or ponytails. If you do not remove your body rings and cut your hair before you arrive in the Dominican Republic, you will be asked to do so before you move in with a host family during training. Adherence to this policy is an important test of your motivation and commitment to adapt to the new environment. If you have reservations about this policy and the degree of sacrifice and flexibility required to be a successful Volunteer, you should reevaluate your decision to accept the invitation to Peace Corps/Dominican Republic.

The Peace Corps expects you to comport yourself in a way that will foster respect in your community and reflect well on the Peace Corps and on citizens of the United States. Drinking and smoking in public is strongly discouraged as Volunteers are seen as role models, especially among local youth. You will receive an orientation on appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest and must be sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of your hosts. Behavior that jeopardizes the Peace Corps' mission in the Dominican Republic or your personal safety could lead to an administrative separation—a termination of your Peace Corps service. The Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook* has more information on the grounds for administrative separation.

## **Personal Safety**

More detailed 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 incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal security incidents. 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 the Dominican Republic. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being. This means being proactive in avoiding dangerous situations and reporting immediately to Peace Corps/Dominican Republic when there is an incident or emergency.

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

Although the potential for job satisfaction in the Dominican Republic is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. Because of financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support they promised. In addition, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these

reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

Volunteers usually are readily accepted by their host community and make lasting friendships. However, for many Volunteers, constantly being asked personal questions, the lack of privacy, being considered a rich foreigner, and the need to be aware of different social mores can be trying. As in most Latin American countries, women in the Dominican Republic do not have the freedoms to which North American women are accustomed. A female Volunteer's inability to adapt to this reality can make her less effective and possibly even affect her safety.

The Peace Corps is not for everyone. Creativity, initiative, flexibility, patience, and a high tolerance for ambiguity are necessary attributes in confronting the challenges associated with facilitating change in a cultural setting different from the United States. Your dedication, however, can have real and lasting results. When your service is over, you will have the deep satisfaction of having played a role in a grassroots development process that helped give Dominicans greater control of their future.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work, perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance from supervisors. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from, or without receiving feedback on, your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress most often comes after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of

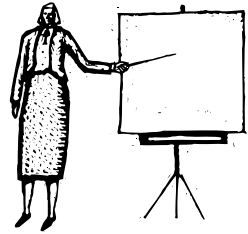


many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. The Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge as well as in moments of success. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave the Dominican Republic feeling that they have gained much more than they gave during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful Volunteer.



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

Training is an essential part of Peace Corps service. Our goal is to give you the skills and information necessary to live and work effectively in the Dominican Republic. In doing so, we build upon the experiences and expertise you bring to the Peace Corps. We anticipate that you will approach training with an open mind, a desire to learn, and a willingness to become involved. Trainees officially become Peace Corps Volunteers after successful completion of training.

You will participate in 10 weeks of intensive training in five major areas: technical job orientation, language (Spanish), cross-cultural adaptation, health, and safety training. You will live in a community near Santo Domingo with a Dominican family, sharing meals, conversations, and other everyday experiences. You will also visit secondary towns and rural areas to get accustomed to the realities of life in the Dominican Republic. Trainees are together for the first three and a half weeks of training. For five weeks, you will live in a smaller town for community-based training by project sector. Following the community-based portion of your training, you will travel to your future project site for an orientation visit and then return to the capital for a training wrap-up and to swear in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. (If you are serving with a spouse and you and your spouse are assigned to different programs, you will live apart for the community-based training portion of the program. Married couples are allowed to get together for one weekend during community-based training if they are in different project areas.)

Training helps you learn how to apply your strengths and knowledge to new situations, developing your skills as a facilitator in a variety of technical areas. It doesn't make you an expert. At the onset of training, the training staff will outline the goals you must achieve to become a Volunteer and the criteria that will be used to assess your progress. (A detailed breakdown of these criteria will be provided in-country.) Evaluation of your performance during training consists of a continual dialogue between you and the training staff.

### ***Technical Training***

Technical training prepares you to work in the Dominican Republic by building on the skills you already have and by helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Dominican experts, and current Volunteers conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in the Dominican Republic and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and meet with the Dominican agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you will need to undertake your project 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 are critical to your job performance,

they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is the heart of the training program, and you must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Experienced Spanish-language instructors teach formal classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people at the training center or in community-based settings.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so that you can practice and develop language skills further on your own. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your two years of service.

### ***Cross-Cultural Training***

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Dominican host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in the Dominican Republic. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

### ***Health Training***

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive healthcare and to take responsibility for your 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 that you might encounter while in the Dominican Republic. Nutrition, mental health, and strategies to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are also covered.

### ***Safety Training***

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

### **Additional Training During Volunteer Service**

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *In-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- *Midterm conference* (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): 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 their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these training sessions are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. 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 THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps' medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic maintains a clinic with two full-time medical officers, who take care of Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in the Dominican Republic at local, American-standard hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

## **Health Issues in the Dominican Republic**

Major health problems among Volunteers in the Dominican Republic are rare and are often the result of a Volunteer's not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems in the country are minor ones that are also found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, STIs, adjustment disorders, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in the Dominican Republic because certain environmental factors here raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illnesses and injuries.

The most common major health problems are dengue fever, malaria, amoebic dysentery, and HIV/AIDS. Because malaria is endemic in the Dominican Republic, taking anti-malarial pills is required. You will receive vaccinations against hepatitis A,

hepatitis B, meningococcal meningitis, rabies, typhoid, MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), the flu, and TD (tetanus and diphtheria). If you have already received any of these vaccinations, please bring written documentation of the dates they were administered.

Amoebic dysentery can be avoided by thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables and either boiling drinking water or using the water purification tablets provided in your Peace Corps-issued 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 the Dominican Republic, you will receive a medical handbook. During training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, 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 as they may not be available here and it may take several weeks for shipments to arrive.

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

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury.

The most important step in preventing malaria and dengue is to avoid being bitten by mosquitoes. The best ways to avoid insect bites are to sleep under a mosquito net, wear long sleeves and pants whenever possible, use insect repellent, and keep screens on your windows and doors. The mosquitoes that transmit malaria bite primarily between dusk and dawn; the mosquitoes that transmit dengue are day feeders. The Peace Corps requires all Volunteers serving in the Dominican Republic to take the anti-malarial drug Aralen (chloroquine). Aralen, however, can exacerbate dermatological conditions such as psoriasis. If you have a history of psoriasis, contact the medical office in Washington, D.C., before you leave for staging. You may be able to take an alternative anti-malarial medication.

Rabies is endemic throughout the region. You will receive a series of three vaccinations to protect you against rabies once you arrive in the Dominican Republic. If you are bitten by any animal, inform your medical officer immediately so appropriate action may be taken.

Many diseases that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water preparation is followed. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, parasitic infections and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in the Dominican Republic during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the only way to prevent the transmission of HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be

sexually active. To lessen these risks, 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/AIDS or other STIs. The Dominican Republic has a high infection rate of STIs and HIV/AIDS. You will receive more information from your medical officer about this important issue.

Sexually active Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent an unplanned pregnancy. Oral contraceptives and condoms are available in the health unit.

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

## **Women's Health Information**

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but 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.

There are many feminine hygiene products available on the local market; therefore, Peace Corps/Dominican Republic will not provide these products. If you prefer a specific product, you should bring a supply with you.

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

### ***Medical Kit Contents***

Ace bandages  
Adhesive tape  
*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*  
Antacid tablets  
Antibiotic ointment  
Antifungal cream  
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner  
Band-Aids  
Butterfly closures  
Calamine lotion  
Cepacol lozenges  
Condoms  
Dental floss  
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)  
Eyedrops  
Insect repellent  
Iodine tablets (for water purification)  
Lip balm  
Oral rehydration salts  
Oral thermometer  
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)  
Scissors  
Sterile gauze pads  
Sunscreen  
Tweezers

## **Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist**

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since 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 Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends the required reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it with you. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment once you arrive in-country. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to arrival.

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, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several weeks—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription medications.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. Peace Corps will replace one pair of glasses during your two-year term of service. We discourage you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. 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 Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are 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 health care 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 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 85 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2006 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 2006, 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).
- 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 11:00 p.m.
- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 73 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 48 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Fourteen (14) percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers. Twenty-six (26) percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by 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 the Dominican Republic as compared to all other Inter-America and Pacific (IAP) region programs as a whole from 2002 to 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

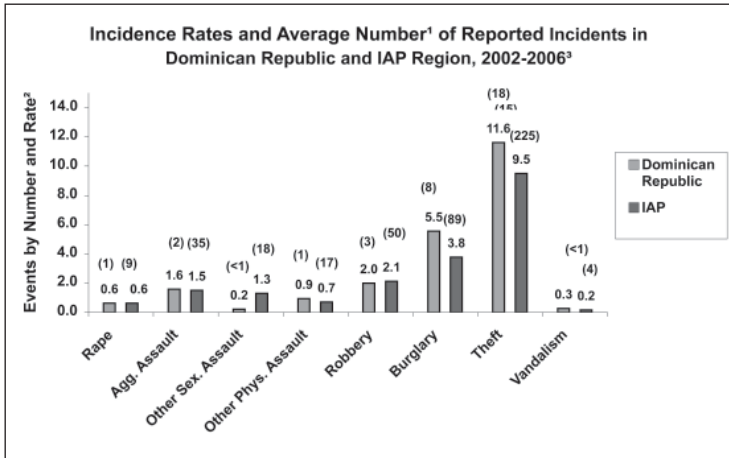
months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way to compare crime data across countries. An “incident” is a specific offense, per Peace Corps’ classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.

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); other physical assault (attacking without a weapon with minor injuries); other 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



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

<sup>2</sup>Incident 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.

<sup>3</sup>Data collection for Dominican Republic began as of 2002; due to the small number of V/T years, incidence rates should be interpreted with caution. Sexual Assaults are termed Other Sexual Assault and Other Physical Assault per CIRF definitions as of the year 2006. Prior to CIRF and prior to 2006, Sexual Assaults were termed Minor Sexual Assault Assault and Minor Physical Assault per ANSS definitions.

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 07/16/07.

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 or the safety and security coordinator. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect. Country directors, medical officers, and safety and security coordinator 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](mailto:violentcrimeline@peacecorps.gov).

## Security Issues in the Dominican Republic

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 with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in the Dominican Republic. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking 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 in large towns, for instance, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. The following are safety concerns in the Dominican Republic of which you should be aware:

**Motor vehicle accidents.** These are the single greatest risk to your safety in the Dominican Republic. You should wear seatbelts whenever available and avoid riding in overcrowded public buses or vans. Volunteers are not allowed to drive motorized vehicles and are prohibited from traveling long distances in cars or buses at night. When you travel for official business, the Peace Corps will reimburse your expenses for bus or airline tickets.

**Robbery/burglary.** Some Volunteers' homes have been robbed in the past, so you need to exercise the same precautions that you would in the United States. The Peace Corps will provide information on proper home safety during training and requires landlords to install deadbolt locks on all Volunteer housing. In addition, many Americans and Dominicans have been the victims of muggings, especially in Santo Domingo. A common strategy of muggers is for a man to walk up behind a person and grab his or her cellphone, bag, or purse, making a getaway on a motorcycle driven by a partner. It is therefore important to travel on well-lit streets at night with other people around you.

**Border conflicts.** Dominicans and Haitians have had border conflicts in the past. At times, the disputes have resulted in gunfire and the involvement of the military. For safety reasons, travel to Haiti is currently prohibited.

**Harassment.** Volunteers have reported varying levels of harassment, such as sexual comments and being called derogatory names, though this rarely happens at Volunteers' sites, where they are known. Strategies for dealing and coping with harassment will be discussed during pre-service training.

**Alcohol abuse.** The Dominican Republic has a higher rate of alcoholism than the United States. Volunteers have reported being approached by drunken men asking for money and alcohol. It is best to avoid frequenting bars, particularly at night. Alcohol use impairs judgment and must be consumed responsibly. The Peace Corps does not tolerate public drunkenness by Volunteers, which can lead to termination of their service.

**Sexual assault.** Volunteers have been targets of sexual assault in the Dominican Republic. Alcohol consumption and cross-cultural differences in gender relations often are associated with sexual assaults. In addition, the assailant often is an acquaintance of the Volunteer. Volunteers who take seriously the training provided by the Peace Corps regarding sexual assaults will minimize their risk. Volunteers are urged to report all assaults and threats of assault to the Peace Corps medical officer so that staff can respond with appropriate support. (Note that sex outside of marriage is not looked upon favorably in the Dominican Republic and that promiscuous behavior on your part may jeopardize your safety and/or your ability to develop mutually respectful relationships in your community and your job.)



## **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to the Dominican Republic, do what you would do if you moved to a large city in the United States: Be cautious, check things out, ask 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 the Dominican Republic may require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers than at their sites, where “family,” friends, and colleagues look out for them. 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. Keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, 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, and do not carry cellphones in visible places, as they are common targets of robbers. Always walk with a companion at night.

## **Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in the Dominican Republic**

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 reporting and responding to safety and security incidents. The Dominican Republic's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Dominican Republic office will keep Volunteers informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, Volunteers will be contacted through the emergency communication network.

**Volunteer training** will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in the Dominican Republic. This training 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. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and work sites. Site selection 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 Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Dominican Republic's detailed **emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, 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 the Dominican Republic will gather at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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



# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



In fulfilling the Peace Corps' mandate to share the face of America with our host countries, we are 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, it poses challenges. In the Dominican Republic, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in the Dominican Republic.

Outside of the Dominican Republic's capital and tourist centers, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of the Dominican Republic are known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present. In

particular, there are still subtle to overt forms of racial discrimination that are seen on a regular basis toward darker-skinned persons due to the historical tensions between Dominicans and Haitians.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in the Dominican Republic, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions 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 limitations. 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 the Dominican Republic**

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

## **What Might a Volunteer Face?**

### ***Possible Issues for Female Volunteers***

Female Volunteers should know that Dominican society has elements of *machismo*. Men often hiss and make comments to women walking by, and women must learn to deal with this by completely ignoring men who behave in this way. Most female Volunteers never fully accept this sexual harassment, but, rather, develop a tolerance within which they are able to function effectively. Dating for American women in the Dominican Republic is also a sensitive subject. The Dominican culture follows its own guidelines regarding male-female relationships; for example, female Volunteers who live alone should not invite males into their home unless they have intentions of beginning a serious relationship with the man.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Being a woman in the Dominican Republic is sometimes frustrating. This is a patriarchal society that treats women much like America did pre-1960s. It helps that three Peace Corps women have successfully served before me in my community, and the elders recognize the contributions that we, as women, are making. It’s also an inspiration to see the women of the community empowered by the women’s leadership conference several Volunteers co-sponsored last year. Change here is slow, but I definitely see the society evolving. It’s sometimes difficult to put my American attitude of gender equality aside, but I keep reminding myself that I am here to share their culture as much as I am here to share mine with them.”

“My experience in the Dominican Republic has both tamed and fueled the feminist in me. I realized when I first got to my site that I wasn’t going to be productive by starting the

‘foreigner’s feminist movement’ in the Dominican Republic. Since alcoholism among men here is high, women in the Dominican Republic seem to carry the larger burden, but you’ll never hear them complaining. I like working at the grassroots level, sponsoring workshops for women in coordination with our Women in Development committee. We are working with the younger generation, raising young women’s self-esteem and trying to change their perceptions of women’s importance in the community.”

“Not only am I a woman in the Dominican Republic, I am a young, single, childless, and extremely independent woman. These are traits rarely seen in Dominican women and often misunderstood by Dominican men. However, these traits also allow me to express my individualism and self-pride. Yes, I experience unwanted attention from men and, in extreme cases, a few annoying admirers. But these situations allow me to face sexism and disrespect head-on by educating the violators about why women should be looked upon as equals to their male counterparts. Or sometimes I hiss back and make comments, and they shut up. It also helps that I’m from America and I’ve faced similar challenges there. Therefore, being a feminist (but not to the extreme) in the D.R. attracts respect from both men and women. I also get the opportunity to educate and help young girls build confidence in themselves. I suggest that women Volunteers exude confidence and their ability to perform as integral parts of society. And if it gets too frustrating, you have a support team of 60+ American women (Peace Corps staff and fellow Volunteers) to tell you why you are strong and phenomenal!”



### ***Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color***

In rural sites and even in some cities, Volunteers are usually the only foreign resident and receive extra attention, especially because of their racial or ethnic background.

Volunteers in certain areas of the country are more prone to racial discrimination than others. Most Volunteers of color say that despite initial confusion regarding their nationality and discrimination, they are well-received in their communities.

African-American Volunteers may face some unique challenges. They are sometimes mistaken for Dominicans or Haitians. If seen as Dominican, this can lead to an expectation of Spanish fluency; if seen as Haitian, it can result in poor treatment by Dominicans. African-American Volunteers should be prepared to face mild cases of discrimination and racism. However, Volunteers should remain open-minded and calm. Many of these situations are due to lack of education and the history of the Dominican Republic. On the other hand, misidentification with black ethnic groups other than Haitians, such as members of the English-speaking Eastern Caribbean population, may lead to faster acceptance. Female African-American Volunteers should also be prepared to face issues concerning their hair. The straightness of a woman's hair is considered an important quality by many. Though natural hairstyles are accepted, they are not as highly regarded as straight hair. Relaxers, usually manufactured locally, are available for Volunteers who wish to use them. U.S. brand name hair products may be available but they may be more expensive.

Hispanic American Volunteers may be surprised to find that some Dominicans are unaware that not all Hispanic Americans are of Mexican origin. Because there is a small population of Dominicans of South Asian descent, some Asian-American Volunteers have been misidentified as Dominicans, especially in urban areas.

## Volunteer Comments

“I am one of the African-American Volunteers in the Dominican Republic. There are stares and giggles, which is quite disconcerting. Many people believe you are from Africa. Most people have been very nice and have opened up their homes to me. Many people believe that there are no races of people other than Caucasians living in the United States. I really believe my presence is an educational experience for the community. I would do it again. People here are very hospitable; they want to meet and get to know you. I am having a great time at my site. The community really wants to know what America is like.”

“Pride, self-love, confidence...Just some of the things that get me through a normal day in the Dominican Republic. Similar to every country in the world (including the United States), racism exists in the D.R., whether it's between the D.R.'s neighbors (Haitians), visitors (tourist of color), or themselves. Prejudice and discrimination is a disease that attacks the communities. I've made it a part of my mission as a African-American Volunteer to bring awareness to fellow Volunteers and the Dominican community, as well as to support other diverse Volunteers with their struggles against racism. I've begun to praise the color of skin, appreciate the history of my people, educate the Dominicans of my community, acknowledge the differences in society, and love myself even more. As Volunteers, we take on a task to shed all that is familiar and comfortable and experience what is different and disturbing. For me, some days are more challenging than others, but every day counts. So, every day I wake-up thankful for the color of my skin, the texture of my hair, and my commitment to fighting the cause another day.”

“Being a Mexican-American Volunteer in the north of the Dominican Republic has been a positive experience. People have been very welcoming and interested in my family’s traditions. At first, they figured they knew everything about my heritage because most are quite familiar with the images of Mexico and Mexicans presented on the dubbed Mexican soaps that are all the rage here. Sometimes when I tell people I’m Mexican-American, I get an excited reaction: ‘Oh! Like Veronica Castro!’ I brought postcards and pictures of Mexico, which have been a hit.”

“I wouldn’t say I have had problems as an Asian-American Volunteer. A few people are surprised when they discover I’m American and have said, for example, ‘You don’t look American.’ For the most part, though, being Asian has been more of a positive than a negative. There are many places where I can go where I won’t and don’t stand out.”

### ***Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers***

Approximately 5 percent of Volunteers in the Dominican Republic are seniors. The vast majority of other people in the Peace Corps community are in their 20s. Service in the Dominican Republic can present significant social and logistical issues for older Volunteers. Dealing with family emergencies, maintaining lifelong friendships, and arranging power of attorney for financial matters may be more problematic for these Volunteers than for younger ones. Still, older Volunteers find Dominicans, the Peace Corps staff, and fellow Volunteers to be very welcoming.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“I love it! In fact, when I went home for a vacation, I was suddenly confronted with age discrimination. Here in the

Dominican Republic, I was constantly treated with respect. I was never hassled by men on the streets, almost always given a seat on the bus, and given an inordinate amount of respect by younger people. The Volunteers were great, and although I am over 60, one of my best friends is 22. Oh, and my health has never been better. Walking everywhere brought my cholesterol levels down to below average, my body is almost in shape (I lost about 40 pounds), and I feel 20 years younger than I did when I joined the Peace Corps.”

“I have not experienced negative issues at my site from either Volunteers or work associates. I feel I have been accepted on all levels and included in local and Volunteer activities and socializing. Training was a little uncomfortable. I felt generational differences at the time, but it may have been largely the tension of attending concentrated training in a sizable group such as ours. Personal support from the Volunteers at my site is always available and very warmly and sincerely offered.”

### ***Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers***

Homosexual or bisexual Volunteers are not able to express their sexual orientation as openly as they may have in the United States because of cultural differences and machismo in the Dominican Republic. Because of prejudice against homosexuals in Dominican society, it is wise to know your community and co-workers well before disclosing your sexual orientation.

While there are certainly homosexuals in the Dominican Republic, they do not have the level of acceptance found in much of the United States. Although some Dominicans consider homosexuality immoral, their view of homosexuality among foreigners may be quite different from their view of homosexuality among nationals. Styles of hair and clothes

and earrings on men may be considered inappropriate by Dominicans.

Most Dominican homosexuals probably have migrated to larger cities, but many Peace Corps Volunteers are posted in small communities. Relationships with homosexual or bisexual host country nationals can happen, but as with other cross-cultural relationships, they may not be easy.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Know that you may face additional challenges as a gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteer. But we have to remember that making sacrifices is part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. I can say that having to ‘go back into the closet’ in my community has been one of the biggest challenges of my service thus far. The best advice I can give to gay Volunteers coming to the Dominican Republic is to find support within the Peace Corps/Dominican Republic community right away. I’ve found that most of the administrative, training, and health staff, as well as other Volunteers, have been very supportive. Remember that you don’t have to completely hide your identity, but it’s going to take some time and may be challenging to find healthy and socially acceptable ways to express it. Be patient with yourself and Dominican culture.”

“Living a white lie is, unfortunately, a part of everyday life. In the beginning, this idea of not completely sharing my life with host country nationals appeared to be something I could tolerate. However, as time passed, I wanted to build close friendships and to share my life with people on a more personal level. To avoid rejection and social problems in my town, I have chosen to keep my lifestyle to myself. For such reasons and to put a stop to the constant questions about

my love life (everyone wants to know why someone in his mid-20s has not married yet), saying that a close Volunteer friend of mine is really my girlfriend put a stop to the uncomfortable questions.”

“There is a small gay community in the capital. Their lifestyle is very secretive and they keep to themselves. I’ve decided to not associate with these people to avoid raising suspicion. Everyone seems to know one another, and gossip travels quickly.”

### ***Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers***

Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community church. Volunteers not in the practice of attending church may be challenged to explain their reluctance, but it is possible to politely decline if the church or religion is not one of your choice. Most Volunteers find effective ways to cope with this and feel quite at home in the Dominican Republic.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“I’ve never really been too religious in my life, and certainly never tried to persuade someone to be a certain way. So it was a little strange for me when I arrived at my site and had many of my neighbors asking what religion I was, whether I went to church on Sundays, and how well I knew the Bible. My first few weeks, I didn’t attend church on Sundays—unlike just about everyone in town—and felt like a pariah. The services would last for hours. I developed a strategy of going for about the first hour or so, showing my face, and then splitting. Even though I felt a little odd doing this, I found that my community opened up more to me and to the projects I had developed. I wouldn’t recommend what I did to everyone, but my compromise seemed to help me.”

### ***Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities***

As a disabled Volunteer in the Dominican Republic, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In the Dominican Republic, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. What is more, there is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

As part of the medical clearance 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 Volunteer service in the Dominican Republic without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps/ Dominican Republic staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations in training, housing, job sites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

### ***Possible Issues for Married Volunteers***

Being a married couple in the Peace Corps has its advantages and its challenges. It helps to have someone by your side to share your experience with, but there are also cultural expectations that can cause stress in a marriage. It is important to remember that you are in a foreign country with new rules and you need to be open-minded about cultural differences. A couple may have to take on some new roles.

A married man may be encouraged by Dominicans to be the more dominant member in the relationship, be encouraged to make decisions independently of his spouse, or be ridiculed when he performs domestic tasks. A married woman may find herself in a less independent role than she is accustomed to or may be expected to perform “traditional” domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning. She may also experience a more

limited social life in the community than single Volunteers (since it may be assumed that she will be busy taking care of her husband). Competition between a couple may become a difficulty, especially if one spouse learns faster than the other (e.g., language skills, job skills). There also may be differences in job satisfaction and/or different needs between spouses. Younger Volunteers may look to couples for advice and support. Married couples also are likely to be treated with more respect because the community sees marriage as a responsibility. They may be asked when they will have children.



## NOTES



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to the Dominican Republic?**

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined linear 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 of 50 pounds for any one bag.

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. This is an important safety precaution. 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>.

## **What is the electric current in the Dominican Republic?**

It is 110 volts, 60 cycles (similar to that in the United States). Many Volunteers do not have electricity in their houses or have it for only a few hours a day.

## **How much money should I bring?**

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their

expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

**When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

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. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after you have completed pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to 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; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase such insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. 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 services are not available.

**Do I need an international driver's license?**

Volunteers in the Dominican Republic do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or

taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks and lots of walking.

**What should I bring as gifts for Dominican 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; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or baseball cards or photos to give away.

**Where will my site assignment be when I finish training and how isolated will I be?**

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require an 8- to 10-hour drive from the capital. There is at least one Volunteer based in each of the regional capitals and about five to eight Volunteers in the capital city.

**How can my family contact me in an emergency?**

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services

immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The 24-hour number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580, extension 1470. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

**Can I call home from the Dominican Republic?**

Yes, you can call the United States easily from the Dominican Republic. Many businesses sell calling cards that work with any phone.

**Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

You do not need to bring a cellular telephone with you; Peace Corps/Dominican Republic issues a cellphone to each Volunteer to ensure efficient communication with staff. Your phone can also be used to call internationally or locally by using a calling card, however not all areas of the country currently have cellphone service

**Will there be e-mail and Internet access?**

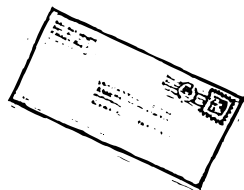
Many communities have computer centers or Internet cafés that provide e-mail and Internet access, and the resource center at the Peace Corps/Dominican Republic office has computers for Volunteer use. It is a good idea to set up a Hotmail or Yahoo! account before you leave the United States so you have an e-mail address family and friends can use to contact you in the Dominican Republic.

## NOTES





# WELCOME LETTERS FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC VOLUNTEERS



*Bienvenidos a la República Dominicana.* You are moments away from embarking on a once-in-a-lifetime experience. I am a Healthy Families Volunteer in a *campo* outside of Santiago. As a part of my project, I work with youth promoting HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention and women with nutrition and reproductive health promotion. Additional projects include a gravity-powered aqueduct, a birth certificate declaration campaign as well as summer camps. Aside from my title as Volunteer/*profesora*, my community regards me as a daughter, sister, aunt, niece, godmother, neighbor, and friend among other titles. The best thing that happened to me (and that I hope will happen to you) was embracing the culture and the people that occupy this island. Only then will you truly attain all that your time here has to offer.

The next two years (*por lo menos*) of your life will be filled with emotional highs and lows, hopeful more of the former than the latter. The best advice I can give you is to take experiences and people as they come. It is very easy to compare and contrast your life in the Dominican Republic with that of your life in the United States...DON'T DO IT!!! You are not in the States and what works here may not there and vice versa. *Cojéelo Suave* or take it easy and keep an open mind; you'll be amazed at what you learn and who you meet. Throw caution, although NOT ALL, to the wind and try new things in the name of "cultural immersion." You'll find that you like most things and the things you don't you can excuse yourself from in the future with the excuse that you have already tried it; nine times out of 10 you will have a great story to tell friends and family back home.

*Cuidese y que disfrute todo* (Take care and enjoy everything)

—Marita Lamb

.....

I found the transition from self-employment and teaching in the United States to Peace Corps/Dominican Republic to be quite smooth. I divested myself of most of my material possessions and financial obligations (my home, vehicles, debts) and followed the urge to gain new and different experience. I do not regret my decision at all. It has been good for me emotionally, intellectually, and physically. I do not feel that I have severed relationships at home, either. In part, I am pursuing Peace Corps as a new beginning, a sort of professional development activity focused upon my desire to become proficient in Spanish. I believe that my experience here will make me more marketable should I decide to apply for public school teaching positions or social service work when I return home.

I have been welcomed as a peer by my group. Most of them are in their 20s and I enjoy their company immensely. To look out from this 58-year-old frame and to be surrounded by exuberant and intelligent young people makes me feel younger than my years. I have tried not to play the part of the old know-it-all, following the lead of the young people most of the time. As a result, they include me in their activities and share their thoughts and concerns with me. Sometimes, believe it or not, they even solicit my opinion or advice. This is my second tour in the Peace Corps, and I know that I am establishing life-long friendships just as I did 35 years ago in Afghanistan.

The transition to Dominican culture is not without a bump in the road now and then. Caribbean Spanish can be puzzling; this is a bustling and often noisy society; and newcomers discover differences between the American and the Dominican work ethics. However, becoming accustomed to these things is a part of the learning experience. There are many wonderful Dominicans who sincerely want to help

and befriend Americans and to learn from us. They are also capable of teaching us more than a little about life, family, and friendship.

—Ed Crawford

.....

*Saludos!*

You probably joined the Peace Corps because you want to help change the world. Ironically, you are about to embark on an adventure that will change you forever. You have the opportunity to make an immeasurable impact on the lives of the community members where you will live and work. They will remember you and how you helped them for years to come. However, also be prepared to receive as much as you give. People will be unbelievably generous with the little that they have. Your experiences will shape you in ways that you never expected. Never again will you take for granted dependable electricity, mail delivery, or educational opportunities. It may even surprise you that after awhile, you are content without many things you considered necessities. You will begin to understand the Peace Corps slogan, “The toughest job you’ll ever love.”

—Erica Giljohann

.....

*¡Bienvenidas y bienvenidos!*

Congratulations. You’re headed to the Dominican Republic. This is a fantastic place to live and work. Surely you can inspire some healthy envy amongst your friends by telling them that you’re off to live in the Dominican Republic for two years. Perhaps you can convince them to come and visit, to take the edge off their envy.

I know I had no idea what to expect, essentially, before I began life in Peace Corps over a year ago. I had profound doubts about joining Peace Corps. You may also. But before you start your two years of service, you will spend three intense months with a group of extraordinary people learning Dominican Spanish (what’s a *kakata*?), Dominican history,

and technical skills to serve you in your work. You'll have a group of close friends to help you negotiate the cultural minefield or to laugh with you at your absurd mistakes (or better, their absurd mistakes).

Then, suddenly, your three months of training are up and they toss you into your community. You're on your own. And if there is just one piece of advice I have, it is this: Life as a Volunteer is what you make it. You are often hours and hours from your superiors. Many people in your community have a vague idea of just who you are and what you are capable of. Stick to what you're good at and what you really like doing. You can find ways to meet project goals in innovative ways, without following a "template" for what a Volunteer is supposed to do. Not a single project is just like another one, they are all unique.

What can I tell you about my experience now? I am a basic and special education Volunteer in the central Cibao valley. I split my time between helping the elementary school develop effective literacy programs and helping my community establish a new school for kids with special needs. I aim to connect the community to existing resources. Specific technical skills are less valuable than persistence, thinking creatively, and trying to apply what works well in other places. The less I do and the more folks in town do the better—from my perspective.

In my down time, I do my best to improve my bachata and merengue dancing. I must report, shamefully, that I just don't have the ingrained rhythm that Dominicans do. When I need to retreat from life as a town spectacle, I dig around in my backyard, amongst the coconut, grapefruit, mandarins, noni, guava, marañon and crabapples (all in a fairly small yard). And, of course, there's always a gorgeous white sand Caribbean beach less than an hour down the road to keep my friends back home jealous.

—Neal Riemer

*Felicidades!*

You don't know it yet, but you're about to embark on one of the most exciting, crazy, backward adventures of your life. One that will open your eyes, change your perspective, and make you question everything you ever thought to be true. The thrill of entering into a new country and a new culture and the challenge of speaking a new language make the dull moments seem exciting and the exciting moments—well you can only imagine!

I'm a youth, families, and community development Volunteer. I have been living in a rural village in the southwest part of the Dominican Republic for about a year and a half. I've worked on projects ranging from building a youth center to teaching sex-education to getting birth certificates to reforestation projects. That's what's so great about the Peace Corps. It's a flexible job that lets you step outside of the box. You can design your projects to meet your community's needs as well as to stimulate your own interests.

I can't say the journey has been all downhill. Some weeks seem like a steep uphill climb with no end in sight. The road is often long and bumpy, rarely straight, and few signs marking the way. But not knowing what's around the corner makes it exciting and challenging and makes each success that much sweeter.

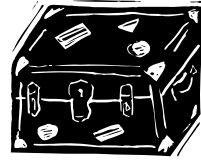
I've learned how to carry water on my head, play dominos by candlelight, cook exotic dishes (rice and beans...what's more exotic than that?), drink *cafecito* like a pro, and dance bachata until dawn. You can't learn that in the States. And there is no emotional high greater than knowing you've improved someone's life, and where better to do it than the beautiful Caribbean island of the Dominican Republic.

*Bienvenidos!*

—Jennifer Bires



# PACKING LIST



One thing to keep in mind as you read through this rather long list of suggestions and recommendations for past Volunteers is that you can get just about everything you may need here in the Dominican Republic. There is no perfect list! Use the following as an informal guide to create your own. Only you know what is important to you. Remember you have one important limitation—the weight of your bags at the airport check-in.

You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally, considering your job assignment. This is not a camping trip; If you didn't go camping much in the States, you probably won't go very often here. "Street clothes" for work and relaxation in the States will suit you well here.

## **General Clothing**

A former Volunteer in the Dominican Republic told this story to describe the dress code in the D.R.: "A community member walked out of his house with a tie on. I was a bit shocked and asked what the big occasion was. He said, "Someone is coming to my office today that deserves a tie." This is the essence of dressing in the D.R. People here dress to show their respect for others.

Dominicans who work in the field usually wear a button-down short-sleeved shirt, khakis, shoes and a hat. Volunteers in health, education, youth, and small business projects who work in offices or schools will find that their co-workers often are casual-professional in their dress. In general, men

wear khakis and short-sleeved sports shirts or Dominican *chacabanas* (also called *guayaberas*), and women wear skirts or pants with nice tops. Worn, torn, patched, tight, overly baggy, or very low-cut clothes are not appropriate for Volunteers. Nor is military-style clothing (e.g., camouflage or olive-green Army surplus items). Shorts and flip-flops are not appropriate to wear either to work or when visiting the Peace Corps office in Santo Domingo. Following are suggested items for both men and women.

- At least five T-shirts
- At least two casual shirts or polo-type shirts (or sleeveless shirts for women)
- One or two sweaters, sweatshirts, or windbreakers/rain jacket
- At least two button-down shirts
- Appropriate mix of athletic and dress socks (two-week supply)
- Two-week supply of underwear (cotton is highly recommended)
- Two or three swimsuits
- Cap or hat
- Belts

### ***For Men***

- Three to five pairs of pants for work (e.g., cotton, khaki)
- One to three pairs of more casual pants (e.g., jeans)
- Three or four pairs of shorts
- One or two ties (for special occasions—you will need one for your swearing-in ceremony)

### ***For Women***

- Three pairs of work pants (e.g., cotton, or khaki)
- Two to four pairs of casual pants (e.g., jeans, capris, etc.)



- One or two pairs of shorts for jogging or sports
- Two or three casual skirts or casual dresses (knee length is recommended) and one dressy outfit

## **Shoes**

- One pair of sturdy walking or hiking shoes (some Volunteers suggest Vibram soles)
- One pair of running or athletic shoes
- One pair of dress shoes (or nicer sandals for women)
- One pair of sturdy sandals such as Chacos or Texas
- Flip-flops for showering or beach (these are not appropriate to wear anywhere else)

## **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

As we mentioned above, you can buy almost anything that is available in the United States in the way of clothing and toiletries in the Dominican Republic. However, if you have any favorite brands of toiletries or cosmetics, you may want to bring a supply, as most imported items are considerably more expensive here than in the United States.

- Start-up supply of shampoo, deodorant, etc.
- Several months' supply of tampons
- One bath towel and one quick-dry towel
- Extra sun block with high SPF

## **Kitchen**

You can easily buy most kitchen supplies (e.g., dishes, pots, glasses, and utensils) locally. There are a few items you might consider bringing:

- Ziploc bags (gallon sized, freezer-style is best)

- Tupperware or Gladware for food storage (to keep out dust, bugs, etc.)
- Good can opener
- Favorite spices (many are available locally, but are expensive)
- Favorite cookbook or recipes
- Good peeler
- Measuring cups/spoons

## **Electronics and entertainment**

Many Dominicans in the areas where you will be living do not have and cannot afford expensive electronics like iPods and computers. If you are considering bringing items on this list you should consider personal articles insurance as these high-priced electronics are at a higher risk of theft and/or loss. A good battery source is also recommended since most towns, including the neighborhoods of Santo Domingo, experience frequent and prolonged power outages.

- iPod, CD player, or other music player and portable speakers
- Digital camera
- Rechargeable batteries and charger
- Shortwave radio
- A USB flash drive (for document storage; 256 to 512 is recommended)
- Laptop computer or a PDA (Note: Many Volunteers have found laptops handy for their work. If you choose to bring one, consider bringing an older used one rather than a new computer. The computer should have wireless capability.)
- Surge protector for electrical appliances

### **Miscellaneous (these are really up to each individual)**

- Two good-quality water bottles (e.g., Nalgene)
- Sturdy backpack or duffel bag for three- to four- day trips
- Day pack or small backpack
- Money belt
- Full-size cotton sheets with pillowcases
- Inexpensive, water-resistant or waterproof watch
- Small travel alarm clock (and extra batteries)
- Two pairs of sunglasses
- Umbrella
- Multiple-utility pocketknife (e.g., Leatherman)
- Light, stuffable (preferably waterproof) sleeping bag
- Sleeping pad (e.g., Therm-a-rest)
- L.E.D. headlamp or flashlight
- A few U.S. dollars to show as souvenirs of the United States
- Sewing kit
- Good scissors
- Markers, crayons, or other art supplies
- Start-up supply of stationery and pens
- World map (preferably in Spanish)
- Photos of family and friends
- Inexpensive jewelry
- Musical instrument
- Backgammon, cards, or interesting game, puzzle, or brainteaser
- Yoga mat (if you do yoga)

- Books (Peace Corps/Dominican Republic has a large selection of paperbacks accumulated over the years. Otherwise, English-language books generally are not available. The Peace Corps' technical reference library is also quite good. If there are materials you think could be essential to your job, bring them with you.)

### **Items You Do Not Need to Bring**

The following items are either available in-country or provided by the Peace Corps:

- Large supply of razors, soap, shampoo, conditioner, standard healthcare products, condoms, etc.
- Camping stove or kerosene burner
- Iron
- Mosquito nets and repellent
- Large Spanish-English dictionary or the *501 Spanish Verbs* book, (you get these in training)

## NOTES



# PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



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

## Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

## Passport/Travel

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

## Medical/Health

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

## **Insurance**

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

## **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 property insurance to extend from the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.



## **Financial Management**

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



# CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



The following list of numbers will 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 so they have them 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 Corps Headquarters  
1111 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/ Local Number</b>
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Inter-America and the Pacific Region	Ext. 1835	202.692.1835
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: dominicanrepublic@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2517	202.692.2517
	Desk Assistant E-mail: dominicanrepublic@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2509	202.692.2509

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/ Local Number</b>
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 (24 hours)

# PEACE CORPS

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters

1111 20th Street NW · Washington, DC 20526 · [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov) · 1-800-424-8580