

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

B E N I N



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



August 2007



A WELCOME LETTER

You have probably already read in the literature that Peace Corps is a life-changing experience. It is really true that this experience will have a profound impact on your outlook and perspective for the rest of your life. Not only for you but the people you meet in Benin, and the people with whom you will be in contact with back home. It is a great challenge, and I congratulate you for making this bold and unconventional decision. The Peace Corps staff and I will do what we can to ensure that this is an overall positive experience for you.

Having said that, I remember hearing that life is 10 percent reality and 90 percent attitude (or something to that effect). Having a positive outlook, patience and a sense of humor are very important, especially as a Volunteer. You also need to learn to be your own source of support and best friend during times when you are first starting out in your village with fledgling language skills.

I remember when I was first plunked down in my village after being surrounded by my fellow Peace Corps trainees for three months. I will be honest—the first six months were not easy. I would give myself pep talks before getting out of bed, and congratulated myself after I got through the first two weeks (I'd tell myself that I'd finished 4 percent of my contract!), and after one month, two months, etc. But somewhere around the sixth month, I forgot to keep track, and then, after the 18th month, I thought that I was just getting started and how could I possibly leave in six months! I ended up extending for a third year!

Integrating yourself into the community where you are living will probably bring you the greatest satisfaction and the best memories of your Peace Corps experience. It is strongly

recommended that you learn the local language as much as possible. Even saying the local greeting as you pass somebody will make their face light up and be more receptive to you. This will be especially challenging for Volunteers who will teach English as a foreign language (TEFL). Even though it will be your job to make sure students are practicing their English, you will still need to make an effort to learn the language, but it is well worth it.

Welcome to Peace Corps/Benin! We look forward to meeting you soon!

Sheryl Cowan
Country Director
RPCV Lesotho 1991-94

NOTES

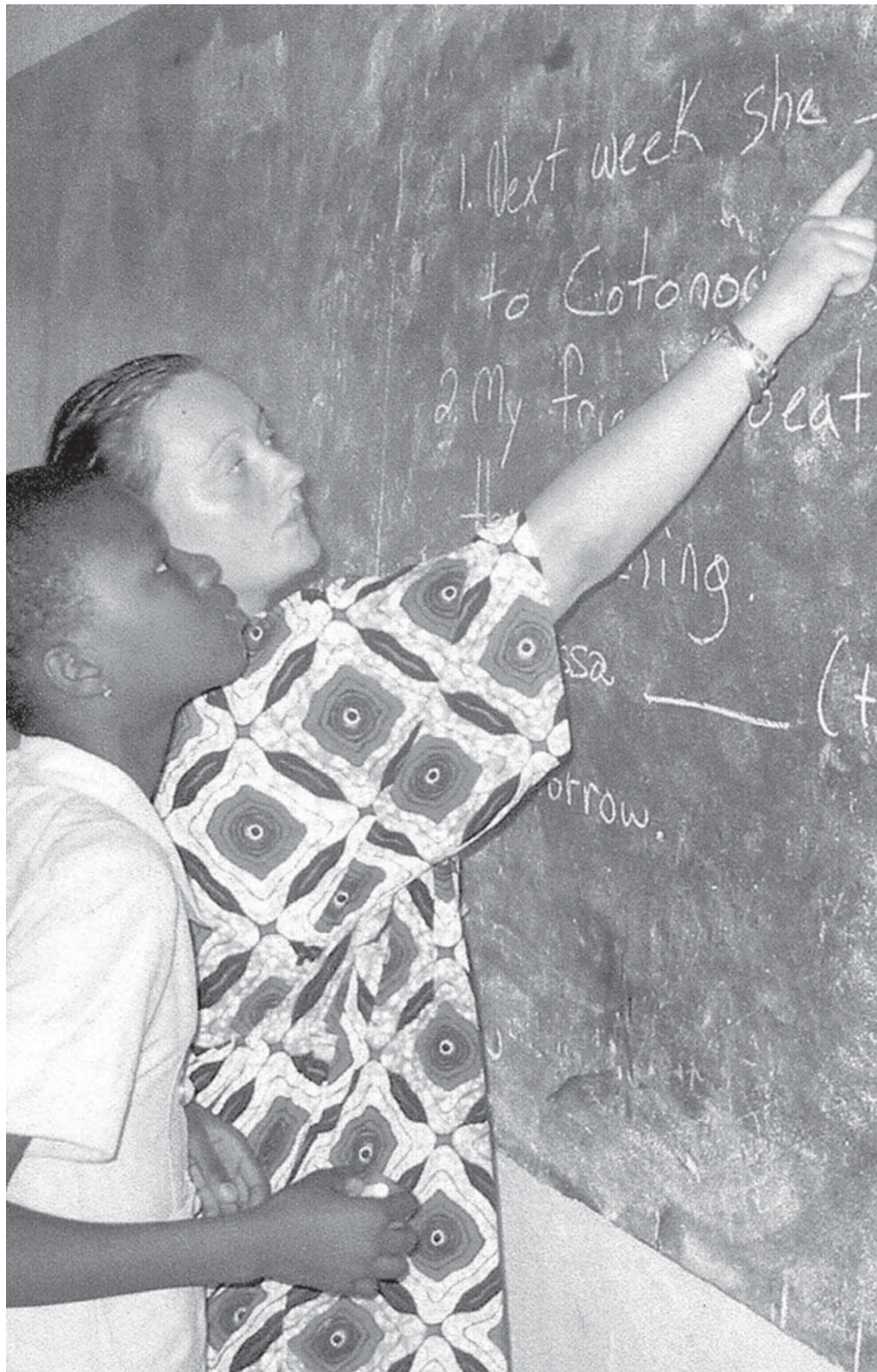


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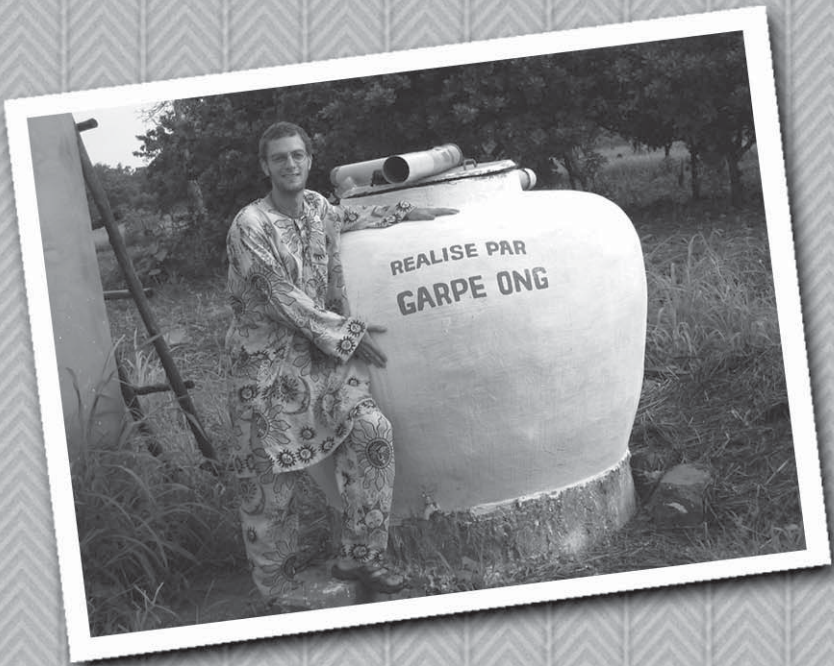
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PEACE CORPS/BENIN HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Benin

Since 1968, more than 1,500 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Benin. The initial program included projects in animal traction, small-farm grain storage, rice production, and secondary English education. From the late 1960s through the mid-1970s, the number of Volunteers in Benin remained at approximately 50. During the late 1970s, Peace Corps/Benin received fewer requests for assistance, and by 1980 only six Volunteers remained in-country. In 1981, the government of Benin (GOB) expressed renewed interest in having Volunteer assistance in implementing its new development plan, particularly in the areas of education, reforestation, and rural development. The Peace Corps responded by developing projects and recruiting Volunteers in those areas.

Currently, about 100 Volunteers work under the direction of the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Promotion of Employment (small enterprise development Volunteers), the Ministry of Family, Social Protection, and Solidarity (rural community health Volunteers), the Ministry of Environment (environmental action Volunteers) and the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (TEFL Volunteers) to respond to the four national priorities:

- Increased development of small enterprise;
- Improved quality of health delivery for rural populations and HIV/AIDS education;
- Environmental awareness and protection; and
- Expanded secondary educational opportunities;

The education, health, and environmental sectors account for approximately 60 percent of the national budget; and 75 percent of Volunteers serving in Benin work in these sectors.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Benin

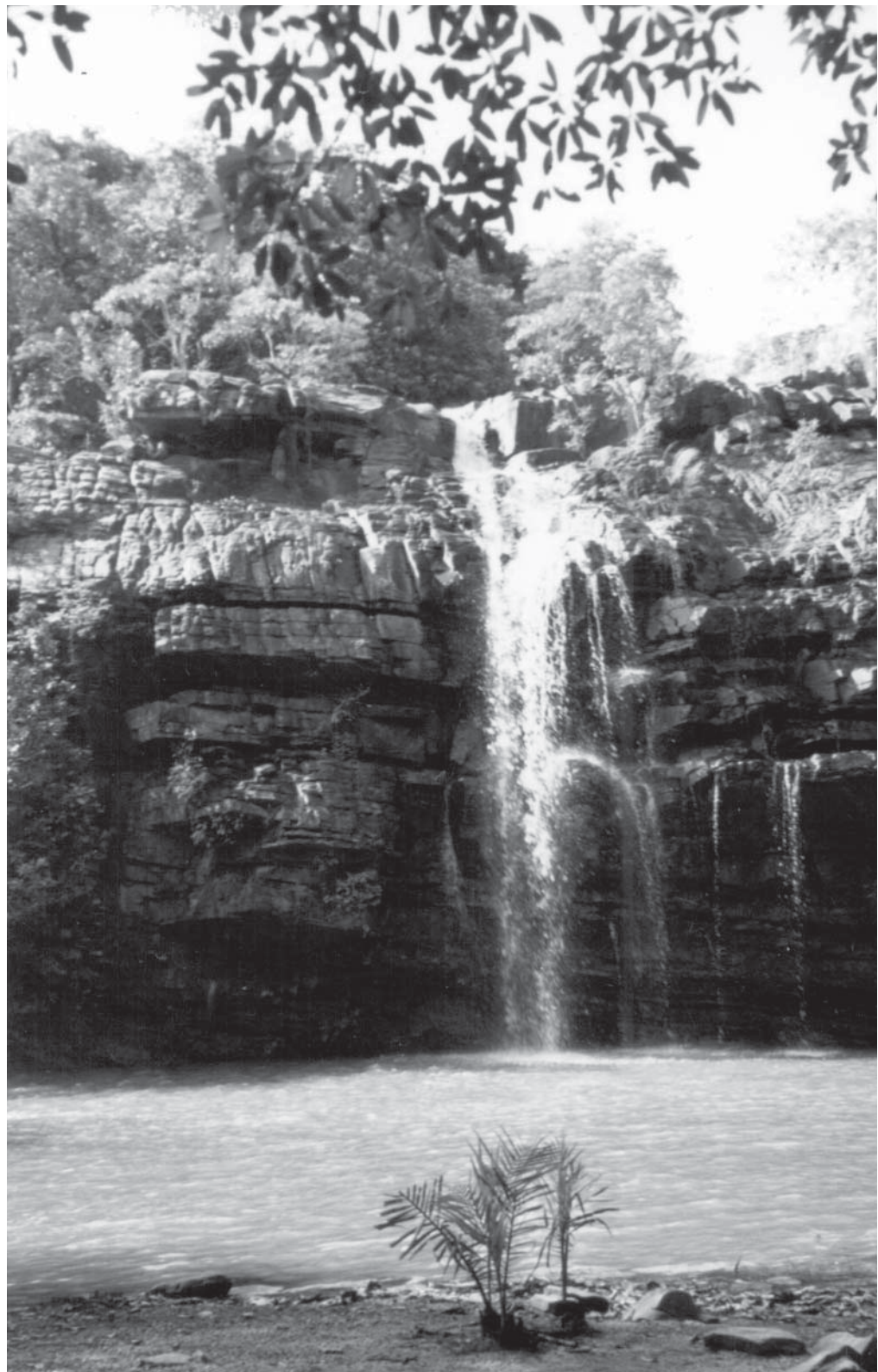
Small enterprise development Volunteers work with rural credit unions, small business owners, artisan groups, community cooperatives and municipal governments to strengthen management skills and to improve income generation. Volunteers in the education program teach English as a foreign language in secondary schools.

Volunteers in the rural community health project are assigned to government social centers where they work closely with host country counterparts to promote improved maternal and child healthcare. Environmental Volunteers assist communities with natural resource protection, training, and conservation activities.

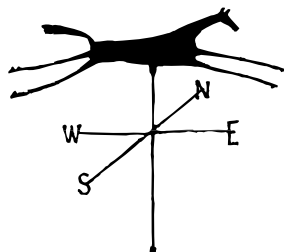
The Peace Corps/Benin program emphasizes full development of a “core training curriculum” for Volunteers to achieve gender and development sensitivity; cross-cultural (American and host country) skills; and safety, language, project design/management, and HIV/AIDS education competencies. In addition, staff seek more interactive engagement with host agencies through clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities, action planning to achieve sustainability, and a mutually agreed-upon exit strategy from each community/agency. As such, each community will only have access to the skills of a Volunteer for a maximum of six years (three rotations) to convey the urgency of capacity building and skills transfer. A recently prepared *Partners’ Manual* for each supervisor reinforces the mutual expectations of Peace Corps and the agencies to which Volunteers are assigned.

Additionally, Peace Corps/Benin continues to explore more fully innovative opportunities to support Volunteer assignments and secondary activities through partnerships with host country and international agencies.

The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty AIDS causes has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV/AIDS, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV-positive people and working with training staff, office staff, and host family members living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength so that you can continue to be of service to your community.



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: BENIN AT A GLANCE



History

In short, the history of Benin can be described as a succession of 12 kingdoms dating back from the early 1600s to approximately 1900. Following French and Portuguese rule, the territory was named the Colony of Dahomey and its Dependencies and was granted autonomy on June 22, 1894. Dahomey retained its autonomy until October 18, 1904, when it became part of French West Africa. On August 1, 1960, Dahomey became independent. This first independent government was ousted by a military coup on October 28, 1963. Dahomey experienced multiple coups between 1963 and 1972. The coup on October 26, 1972, marked the beginning of a 17-year Marxist-Leninist regime headed by Mathieu Kérékou who proclaimed Dahomey the People's Republic of Benin in 1975. In 1990, Benin embarked on the process of democratization, and the country has made concerted efforts to implement more liberal political, economic, and administrative reforms.

Government

Benin has experienced 16 years of sustained transition to democratic practices. The first municipal elections were held in December 2002; and elections heralding the transition to a mayoral system were successfully conducted in March 2003. The current government represents a cross-section of political parties and interest groups. In March 2006, Dr. Thomas Boni Yayi was elected president. He replaced Mathieu Kerekou, who had held the office at different times for a total of 27 years. This peaceful process was a shining light in African democratization.

Porto-Novo is the administrative capital and the seat of the National Assembly. The city of Cotonou is the economic capital and the seat of the presidency and most ministries.

Theoretically, Benin is now divided into 12 administrative Departments even though, in actual fact, there are six: Atacora (capital, Natitingou); Atlantique (capital, Cotonou); Borgou (capital, Parakou); Mono (capital, Lokossa); Ouémé (capital, Porto-Novo); and Zou (capital, Abomey).

Economy

With an annual gross national product (GNP) per capita of U.S. \$1,100 (est. 2005), Benin ranks among the poorer countries in the world. The economy of Benin remains dependent on subsistence agriculture, cotton production, and regional trade. Growth in real output averaged 5 percent in 2000–2003 but a rapid population rise has offset much of this growth. Inflation has subsided over the past several years. Commercial and transport activities, which make up a large part of GDP, are vulnerable to developments in Nigeria, particularly fuel shortages. Industry accounts for only a small percentage of GDP. The fishing and textile industries meet only local consumption needs. The weaknesses of the Benin economy are a top-heavy civil service, large-scale smuggling, lack of reliable energy sources and telecommunication infrastructure, a poor road network, and an acute absence of credit facilities.

People and Culture

The most recent census data for Benin put the population at approximately 7.8 million. The population growth rate estimated in 2006 is approximately 3.25 percent. At that rate, the population will double in about 21 years to more than 13 million inhabitants. The largest population centers are the

southern coastal region near the major port city of Cotonou, the capital city of Porto Novo, Parakou, and the “Royal City” of Abomey in the central Department of Zou. Other major towns are Natitingou, Ouidah, Allada, Grand Popo, Lokossa, Save, Savalou, Djougou, Malanville and Kandi.

Benin is composed of more than 40 ethnic groups. These ethnic groups can be divided into four main ethno-linguistic groups: Fon, Voltaic, Fulani and Yoruba, the latter accounting for more than half the population. While French is the official language, there are more than 50 indigenous languages spoken throughout Benin. Of these, the most prevalent are Fon, Dendi, Bariba, Yoruba, Nago, Fulani, and Mina.

Benin is the birthplace of *Vodun* (also known as voodoo), a Diaspora-wide religion that blends medicine, justice, art, dance, music, and ritual. *Vodun* is generally conceived as a way of life as much as a religion. Followers of *Vodun* often blend their practices with other religions, and offshoots throughout the world, such as Santeria, have developed. *Vodun* is celebrated on January 10, which is “Traditional Religion Day.”

Environment

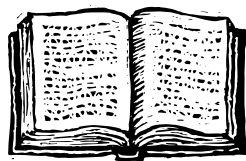
The Republic of Benin is located entirely within the inter-tropical zone between the equator and the Tropic of Cancer. Benin can be divided into five natural regions. There is coastal sandy area approximately two to five kilometers wide and bounded by lagoons. A plateau zone called *La terre de barre* is composed of iron clay cut with marshy dips. The Niger plains are vast, fertile, silica-clayey areas. A silica-clayey plateau with wooded savannah extends north of Abomey to the foothills of the Atakora hills in the northwest. The fifth region, the Atakora, has an elevation ranging from 500 meters to 800 meters, and constitutes the water reservoir for both Benin and Niger.

The forest thins out considerably in the center and gives way to grassland. Elsewhere, cultivated crops predominate, including the immense palm groves of lower Benin and the coconut plantations on the 124 kilometer-long coastline and along the lagoons.

NOTES



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



We offer a list of websites for you to search for additional information about the Peace Corps and Benin, or to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. It is difficult to track information as it is moved around on the Web, so please keep in mind that we try to make sure all these links are active and current, but we cannot guarantee it.

A note of caution: As you surf these sites, please also remember that you will find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to give opinions and advice based on their own experiences. The opinions expressed are neither those of the Peace Corps or the United States government. You may find opinions of people who were happy or unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. As you read these comments, we hope you will keep in mind that the Peace Corps is not for everyone, and no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Benin

www.countrywatch.com

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

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site to learn all you need to know about any country in the world from the viewpoint of *Lonely Planet* authors.

www.state.gov

This is part of the U.S. State Department website, which issues background notes about countries around the world. Find your country of service and learn more about the social and political history.

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

This site includes links to all the official sites for governments of countries around the world.

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

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

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

This United Nations site allows you to search for statistical information for member states.

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries worldwide.

www.benintourism.com

The Government of Benin's Ministry of Tourism and Peace Corps Volunteers serving in the small enterprise development program developed this site jointly. It is the official tourism website of Benin and is maintained by the Ministry.

<http://cotonou.usembassy.gov/>

U.S. embassy in Benin.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees:

<http://clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/peacecorps>

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

www.rpcv.org

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

Or skip straight to the Friends of Benin site <http://www.friends-of-benin.org/>.

www.peacecorpswriters.org

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts from countries around the world.

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Benin:

www.npr.org

Go to National Public Radio's website and type "Benin" into the search window. There are several audio and video links there containing cultural programs about Benin.

<http://allafrica.com/benin/>

Benin news articles

International Aid Organizational Sites About Benin:

www.worldbank.org/benin

Information on the World Bank's projects in Benin

<http://www.gouv.bj/>

Republic of Benin government website (French)

http://www.usaid.gov/locations/sub-saharan_africa/countries/benin/index.html

U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) work in Benin

www.ndi.org/worldwide/cewa/benin/benin.asp

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs

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

African Development Bank

<http://www.undp.org.bj/>

United Nations Development Programme in Benin (French):

French Language Websites

It is a good idea to practice French as much as possible before your departure. Local language instruction will be extremely important when you begin your training, and it can only begin when your French level is sufficiently advanced. These websites may be useful:

<http://www.jump-gate.com/languages/french/>

<http://www.languageguide.org/francais/>

<http://www.wordprof.com/>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/languages/french/index.shtml>

Recommended Books:

1. Ben-Amos, Paula. *Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth Century Benin*. Bloomington, Indiana.: Indiana University Press, 1999
2. French, Howard W. *Benin's Cultural Bounty*. Africa Report, 57. January/February, 1993

3. Kane, Hamidou. *Ambiguous Adventure*. 1969 This novel is set in Guinea but is recommended by in-country staff for its handling of West African cross-cultural issues and Muslim culture.

Check one of the popular online book stores and do a search for Benin. You will discover hundreds of entries. Search by genre (travel, art, Peace Corps authors, religion, development, politics, etc.) and read the reviews. You are sure to find a book that looks interesting to you and suits your interests!

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

Few countries in the world offer the level of service we consider normal in the U.S. If you come to Benin expecting U.S. standards for mail service, you will be in for some frustration. We do not want to sound discouraging, but when we are thousands of miles from our families and friends, communication becomes a very sensitive issue. We would prefer you be forewarned so as to decide what is important to you.

We strongly encourage you to write to your family regularly. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so please advise your parents, relatives, and friends that mail is sporadic and that they shouldn't worry if they don't receive your letters regularly. If a serious problem were to occur, Peace Corps/Benin would notify the Office of Special Services at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., and your family members would be contacted.

Similarly, in the event of an emergency at home, your family could contact the Peace Corps at 1.800.424.8580 and any messages would be transmitted to us to deliver to you.

Mail generally takes two weeks to one month to get from the U.S. to Cotonou. Some Volunteers rent post office boxes in their villages; others have mail sent to the office in Cotonou where they pick it up or it is periodically delivered to sites near the Volunteers. Airmail is received several times a week via France and Dakar. Surface mail arrives approximately once every five weeks. Some mail may simply not arrive

(fortunately this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen). Some letters may arrive with clipped edges because someone has tried to see the contents (again, this is rare, but it does happen). Ninety percent of all packages sent to Benin arrive (sometimes a few months late). Padded envelopes are a better bet than boxes because you don't have to pay duty. Don't ask people to send valuables to you. Items such as Walkman speakers, food, and clothing have usually arrived with no problem.

Number your letters, and advise your family and friends to number their letters as well and to write "Air Mail" and "Par Avion" on their envelopes. Your address during training will be:

"Your Name", PCT
Corps de la Paix Americain
01 B.P. 971
Cotonou, Benin
Afrique de l'Ouest (West Africa)

Once you have been sworn-in as a Volunteer and are at your post, you will have your mail sent directly to your new address there. However, many Volunteers continue to receive packages in Cotonou since in-country delivery of mail is usually unpredictable.

Telephones

Generally, regular and long-distance communication via telephone is available but expensive. If you are calling from outside the capital city, it may take longer to get a line. You can generally arrange for your family to call you in Benin, depending on your location in-country. You can tell your family how to call once you learn where you will be posted. Remember that there is a six-hour time difference (five hours during Daylight Savings) between Benin and the East Coast of the U.S.

Cellphone coverage is more and more prevalent throughout Benin. Many Volunteers buy cellphones once they arrive, which facilitates contact with family and friends back home as well as Peace Corps staff in-country. The Peace Corps does not supply cellphones to Volunteers.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

If your sponsoring agency or counterpart owns a computer, you might be able to arrange access for work or personal use. The resource center in the Peace Corps office and the three workstations located in Parakou, Natitingou, and Kandi all have computers for work-related use. However, Internet access is currently not available at all of these workstations, nor is it available in rural areas where the most Volunteers are placed. In most cities, Volunteers have been able to access e-mail at private businesses or at Internet cafes; access to the Internet averages about \$1 per hour, though the connection and speed are best in major cities and much slower in rural areas. Please let your family and friends know that it may be one or two months between times when you can check your e-mail. E-mail should not be considered by family and friends your main avenue of communication.

Housing and Site Location

Peace Corps staff, in collaboration with the ministry for which you will work, will decide your post according to the needs of the country. This happens after Peace Corps staff reviews all sites for appropriateness, safety, and security and takes time to get to know each trainee during pre-service training. You may not know where you'll be assigned until the last few weeks of your training program.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer in Benin, you will receive four types of allowances: living allowance, settling-in allowance, vacation allowance, and, when needed, travel allowances.

Your living allowance is meant to cover your basic expenses; i.e., food, utilities, household supplies, clothing, recreation and entertainment, transportation, reading materials, and other incidentals. The allowance is reviewed at least once a year through a market survey to ensure that it is adequate. Currently, the living allowance in Benin is paid in local currency and is equivalent to approximately \$180 a month. It is directly deposited quarterly into your bank account.

Additionally, you'll receive a one-time settling-in allowance (roughly the equivalent of \$150, and paid in local currency) to buy basic household items when you move to your site.

You earn your vacation allowance at the rate of \$24 per month and it is added to your living allowance each quarter.

If you are requested by the Peace Corps to travel, you will be given funds for transportation and meals. This amount is based on the costs of transportation and lodging.

Most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in Benin with these four allowances, although many Volunteers bring money (in U.S. currency; cash or traveler's checks) for out-of-country travel. You are strongly discouraged from supplementing your income with money brought from home. The living allowance is adequate, and Volunteers should be living at the same economic level of their neighbors and colleagues.

Credit cards can be used at a few hotels in the capital. Traveler's checks can be cashed for a fee. You will not find many retail places that accept credit cards or traveler's checks.

Food and Diet

Practically all foods are available at local markets in regional centers and in Cotonou. In some regional centers, there is a sufficient variety of meats, and local green vegetables are in abundant supply and variety when in season. Most tropical fruits can be found year-round. Fresh milk is not available, but powdered milk can generally be found throughout the country. In some villages, fruits and vegetables are rare, and Volunteers must travel to larger towns to obtain them. There are several supermarkets in Cotonou that cater to European and American tastes. Almost everything is available, but items are typically imported and therefore expensive. Basic foodstuffs available in almost all markets include beans, corn, rice, tomatoes, yams, hot peppers, garlic, onions, and spices.

Transportation

Volunteers are not allowed to own or drive cars. Instead, you will be issued a bicycle and a bicycle helmet. All Volunteers must be prepared to ride on *zemi-jahns* (a motor scooter operated by a taxi driver), which is a principal source of transportation throughout Benin. You *must* wear a Peace Corps-provided motorcycle helmet when riding one of these, and you must wear the bicycle helmet when riding your bike. Violation of this policy will result in administrative separation. There are precious few vehicle taxis, and they are expensive and located only in Cotonou.

Most Volunteers travel throughout the country in “bush taxis,” which are generally in less-than-optimum condition and unregulated for safety standards. There are frequent road traffic accidents due to fast driving and poor road conditions.

We strongly urge that you pay careful attention during the training sessions on selecting public transportation and ask other Volunteers to assist in identifying safe drivers. You should avoid traveling at night whenever possible and use the bus lines when feasible.

Geography and Climate

Benin has a hot and humid climate in the south. There are four distinct seasons in most of the country: a long rainy season from April to July; a short dry season from August to September; a short rainy season from October to November; and a long dry season from December to March.

In contrast, the north has two seasons: a dry season from November to the beginning of May and a rainy season from May to October. The north is also marked by extreme daily temperature fluctuations, especially during the Harmattan (a dry sand-carrying wind from the desert during the dry season months of November, December, and January).

Social Activities

Social activities will vary depending on your interests and where you are located. They may include taking part in various festivities, parties, storytelling, and local dances. We encourage all Volunteers to remain at their sites and to discover the region to accomplish the second Peace Corps goal of cultural exchange.

A few larger towns may have more entertainment venues and an assortment of *buvettes* (bars) with live music and dancing, but for the most part it will be incumbent upon you to entertain yourself. The most successful Volunteers are those who make friends in their village and organize their lives around activities that take place there. There are many

religious and traditional ceremonies during the year that provide opportunities for you to participate and immerse yourself in the cultural life of your village or town. Much of life revolves around food and Volunteers are often invited to other people's homes to relax and enjoy a meal and conversation.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Your social and public behavior as a Volunteer is of critical importance to you and the Peace Corps. Volunteers have social responsibilities that are more complex than those of private citizens. The Volunteer is often the most identifiable (and frequently the only) American in the community; hence, in addition to the responsibility for personal conduct that resides with every individual, Volunteers have a responsibility to conduct themselves in a manner reflecting credit on the Peace Corps and on the United States. Your hosts will inevitably see you as an example of American culture and customs. You will receive an orientation to appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during your training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest, and thus you should be sensitive to the culture and customs of your hosts and other Americans who may have a culture different than your own.

Being neat and cleanly dressed is a sign of respect and pride. Trousers (for men, and women in some regions), blouses/shirts, skirts (below the knee) and dresses are appropriate wear for work. Particularly in the Muslim north, dress is very conservative. If dress is inappropriate—shorts, halter tops, short skirts, form-fitting or low-cut blouses, dirty or torn clothing—you will not be readily accepted in your job. Moreover, for women, inappropriate dress and behavior will attract unwanted attention. Beninese may not directly comment on your dress, but they most likely will think that you either don't know what is culturally acceptable or that

you don't care and are disrespectful. Beginning in pre-service training, staff will require you to appear appropriately dressed and will ask you to leave the training site if you are not dressed properly.

Personal Safety

More information about the Peace Corps approach to safety is outlined in the Health Care and Safety chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well off are some of the factors that can put you at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. **We ask that you inform the country director of harassment of any kind on the job, as there is a zero-tolerance policy.**

Harassment in public (e.g., being called *yovo* [foreigner] by children or adults on the street) is an issue that you will encounter. Staff and peer support Volunteers will help you develop strategies to cope. Your success and effectiveness in doing so will depend largely on your personality. Perhaps for the first time in your life, you will learn what it means to be “different” or a member of the “minority.” If you are uncomfortable with being perceived as different all the time, Peace Corps service is not for you.

Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal safety problems. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help Volunteers reduce their risks and enhance their safety and security. At the same time,

Volunteers are expected to take responsibility for their safety and well-being by exercising common sense and by following the policies and procedures developed from the experience of staff and Volunteers who have come before you.

These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Benin.

Rewards and Frustrations

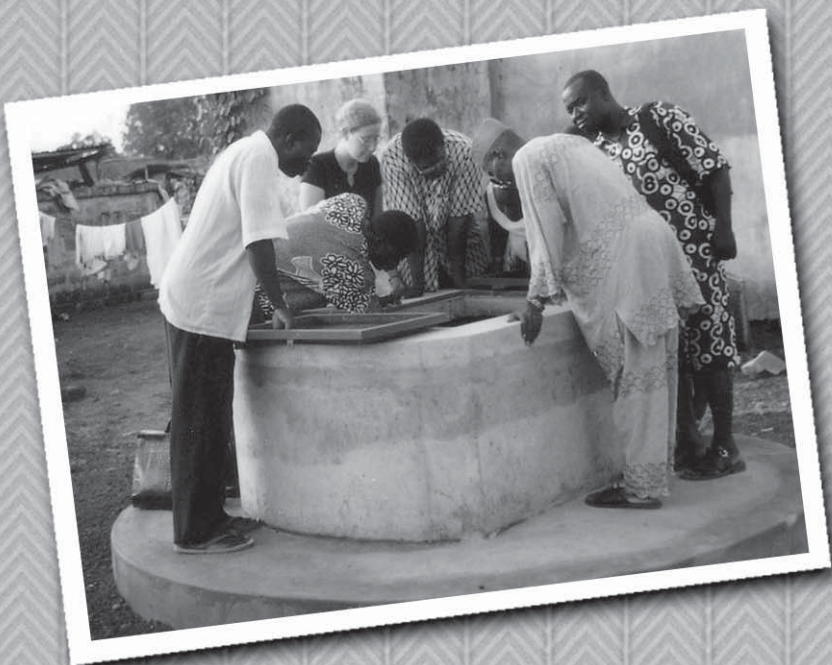
Although the potential for job satisfaction is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. For example, the pace of work and life is slower in Benin than most Americans are accustomed to; and, people change practices and traditions that are centuries old only when it is sensible to them and profitable. Also, due to financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support promised. For these, and other similar reasons, the Peace Corps experience is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys that occur while you adapt to a new culture and environment.

To counterbalance some of these frustrations, Peace Corps/Benin has worked to create formal collaborative and supportive systems and work environments. You will find yourself in work situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your counterparts with little guidance from supervisors. You may work for months without seeing any visible impact and without receiving feedback on your work.

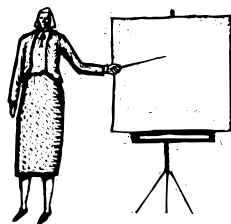
Development is a slow ongoing process. Positive progress is often seen only after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To approach and overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Beninese are a hospitable, friendly, and warm people. 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 Benin 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.

NOTES



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

The Peace Corps employs a community-based model during pre-service training. Community-based training is best described as discovery-oriented and self-directed. It is based on adult learning methods that emphasize individual responsibility for developing the competencies to function independently as a Volunteer. Training takes place in a village or town, where you will encounter the day-to-day realities of Volunteer life. You will live with a family, take care of your own needs, and work either independently or in small groups to accomplish tasks that build your skill levels. Each “learning group” will be assisted by a Beninese facilitator who will help you learn the necessary language skills to accomplish your living and work tasks. You will be assigned to a learning group based on your French language competency level and project assignment.

Training will be stressful at times as you try to learn new skills in a different and often confusing environment. Our highly experienced training staff is here to help you help yourself learn the skills necessary to become an effective Volunteer.

Your progress will be evaluated by the staff and country director throughout training to determine if you meet the qualifications to serve as a Volunteer. You cannot be sworn-in to Peace Corps service until you have clearly demonstrated the attributes and skills necessary to meet the needs of your assignment. You can monitor and demonstrate your own progress through self-evaluation, consistent feedback from staff and facilitators, and participation in daily activities.

Your success in this learning period—and your success as a Volunteer—depend on your maturity, self-discipline and motivation. Success requires full participation and some measure of sacrifice in terms of time and personal comfort. But investment of effort during this time will be well worth the rewards of satisfaction and well-being you will experience as a Volunteer.

The town or village where you will live during training is referred to as a “learning site.” Each learning site is different and has been selected by Peace Corps staff and current Volunteers because of the range of resources available to facilitate preparation for your work. The local authorities and families of these posts are aware of your mission and eagerly await your arrival. Each host family has been carefully selected to ensure that you will be warmly received and have a safe, productive environment for this important preparatory period. You will have your own private room, which will be equipped with a bed, mosquito net, table and chair, gas-burning camp stove, water filter, and a small footlocker to store your valuables. The Peace Corps and our partners have explained to the families that each member has an important role to play in the development of their country by helping you prepare for your work.

Families are asked to include you in the routine and the special activities of the household (cooking, going to the fields, shopping at the market, and visiting family members and friends) and special ceremonies (weddings, funerals, and baptisms). You will find Beninese family hospitality generally gracious and warm. Your family will do their best to make sure you are comfortable, and will probably be doing many extra things that they normally don't do for themselves. They look forward to learning more about you, your family and friends, your culture, and life in the United States. You should also seize the opportunity to learn about them and their culture. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting bonds with their host families.

The families have been encouraged to prepare nutritious and varied meals, but they are limited by food availability and their own cooking habits. They are aware that some trainees may be vegetarians. They will cook Beninese food and are not required to prepare American food. If you must have American cuisine, the Peace Corps is not for you.

You should be aware that personal privacy is not a strong cultural concept; on the contrary, many Beninese feel that something must be wrong if you are off alone, and will make an extra effort to keep you company. To help families understand that you will be spending some time alone, they have been told that you will need private time to study.

Because the host families are making a commitment and effort, you are expected to make an equal commitment to them. You will be expected to eat all of your meals with the family, and accept what is offered. You can get involved with the cooking and demonstrate some of your favorite dishes using locally available foods. You will be expected to respect the norms of your households (e.g., hours, manners, and customs). You should integrate yourself into daily activities to learn the daily living skills you will need as a Volunteer. The time you spend with family members will not only show respect and interest, but will help improve your language, cross-cultural, and living skills, as well as increase your understanding of the community social structure. Don't hesitate to ask your host family about anything and everything that you don't understand; they are eager to help you learn. You should politely express your needs regarding privacy and diet rather than try to hide your feelings and end up frustrated. The families are very motivated to making this experience positive. Your learning group facilitator will always be available to give you advice, background, and guidance on how to address any problem.

Typically, the weekly schedule will consist of both formal and nonformal language classes conducted by your facilitator. The scheduling, location, and learning methodology will be decided jointly by each learning group and facilitator. The language classes and exercises will focus on helping you develop the competencies to communicate in French and to conduct assigned learning tasks.

Technical learning will be facilitated through formal seminars conducted at or near your learning sites and through the assignment of weekly tasks that you will undertake in your community using local resources. Technical tasks will require you to use language and cross-cultural skills, and they will become progressively more demanding as your capabilities increase.

Once a week, during the first half of your learning, you will participate in larger formal sessions on health and cross-culture. At these sessions, you will also be assigned self-directed tasks to undertake at your posts to prepare for upcoming sessions.

Additional Trainings during Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system which provides trainees and Volunteers with continuous opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During your service, there are usually three training events:

- *Early Service Conference:* Allows staff to touch base with new Volunteers after their first three months at site.
- *In-Service Training:* Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for four to six months.

- *Close-of-Service Conference*: Prepares Volunteers for post-Peace Corps service and to review Volunteers' respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that events are integrated, interrelated, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by staff and Volunteers.



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN BENIN



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer and trainee. Medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative approach to disease. The medical unit in Cotonou is staffed by two full-time doctors, one receptionist, and two laboratory technologists. Limited laboratory testing and radiographic studies are also available at local facilities. If a Volunteer becomes seriously ill, the Volunteer will be transported to either a regionally approved facility or to another country as determined by the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C.

Health Issues in Benin

The most common minor health problems here are similar to those found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, constipation, skin infections, sinus infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), adjustment disorders, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These common problems may be somewhat more frequent or compounded by life in Benin due to a host of environmental factors here that raise the risk and/or exacerbate the severity of illness and injuries.

Major health problems among Peace Corps Volunteers in Benin are rare and often the result of a Volunteer not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The major health concerns here are malaria, amoebic dysentery, hepatitis, and HIV/AIDS.

Because malaria is endemic in Benin, anti-malarial pills are required. You will also be vaccinated against yellow fever; hepatitis B and A; meningitis A and C; tetanus/diphtheria; typhoid; polio; mumps, measles, and rubella; and rabies.

Amoebic dysentery can be avoided by thoroughly washing and drying fruits and vegetables and by only drinking boiled and filtered water. You will receive a thorough orientation to food and water preparation during your pre-service training.

Women's Health Information

Pregnancy is a health condition that is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions requiring medical attention, but may also affect your continued ability to serve as a Volunteer. 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 can be met. The majority of Volunteers who become pregnant are medically separated.

Feminine hygiene products are available in Cotonou, but can be expensive.

Peace Corps/Benin stocks four types of birth control pills: Ortho Tri-cyclen, Yasmin/Jasmin, Lo/Ovral, and Alesse. If you use a different brand, please work with your doctor and change to one of these before you depart.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer provides Volunteers with a medical 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

Your medical kit may contain the following items depending on availability:

- Ace bandage
- Adhesive tape
- American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*
- Antacid tablets
- Antibiotic ointment
- Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner
- Band-Aids
- Butterfly closures
- Calamine lotion
- Cepacol lozenges
- Condoms
- Dental floss
- Diphenhydramine HCL 25mg
- Insect repellent stick
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Lip balm
- Oral rehydration salts and Gatorade
- Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
- Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg
- Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)
- Scissors
- Sterile gauze pads
- Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)
- Tinactic (antifungal cream)
- Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since the time you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the

Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

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

If you wish to avoid duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and take it to your pre-departure orientation (staging). If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, we cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Benin. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

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

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

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

If you are eligible for Medicare, over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure.

The Peace Corps will provide all necessary healthcare from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service healthcare benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age and/or preexisting conditions might prevent you from reenrolling in your current plan when you return home.

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents

of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems. In addition, more than 84 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2004 Peace Corps Volunteer Survey say they would join the Peace Corps again.

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

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

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

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

- [Location](#): Most crimes occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). Specifically, 43 percent of assaults took place when Volunteers were away from their sites.
- [Time of day](#): Assaults usually took place on the weekend during the evening between 5:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.—with most assaults occurring around 1:00 a.m.

- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 82 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 55 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Forty percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.

Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

- Live with a local family or on a family compound
- Put strong locks on doors and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk
- Leave irreplaceable objects at home in the U.S.
- Follow Peace Corps guidelines on maintaining home security

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

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

Support from Staff

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

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

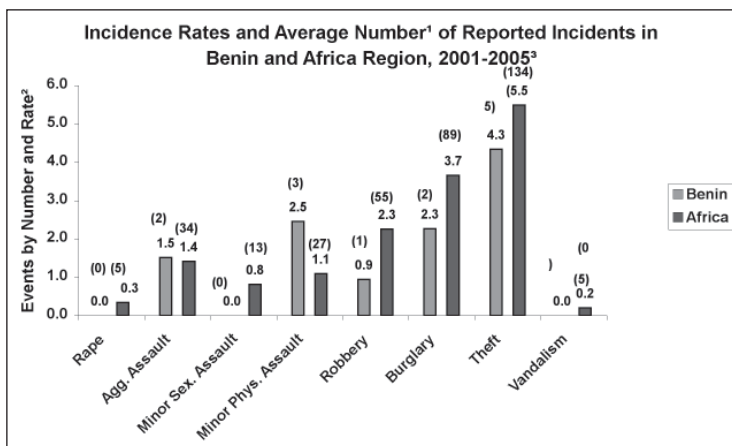
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents

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

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Benin as compared to all other Africa region programs as a whole, from 2001–2005. 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



¹The average numbers of incidents are in parenthesis and equal the average reported assaults for each year between 2001–2005.

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

³Data collection for Benin began as of 2001

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS) and Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS); the information is accurate as of 12/13/06.

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

When anticipating Peace Corps Volunteer service, you should review all of the safety and security information provided to you, including the strategies to reduce risk. Throughout your training and Volunteer service, you will be expected to

successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

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

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

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust and second, contact the country director or the Peace Corps medical officer. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation

of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect. Country directors and medical officers are required to report all violent crimes to the Inspector General and the RSO. This information is protected from unauthorized further disclosure by the Privacy Act. Reporting the crime also helps prevent your further victimization and protects your fellow Volunteers.

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

Security Issues in Benin

As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Benin. When it comes to your safety and security, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking advance precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities, but it does occur. Tourist attractions, especially in large towns, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. Normal precautions usually reduce most risks.

Because you are a foreigner and probably considered “rich,” your new home may be more prone to break-ins than those of your neighbors. Fortunately violent crime is not a severe problem. Benin is considered safe, although Cotonou has seen a marked increase in theft and harassment of Volunteers. The Peace Corps recommends that you do not go out alone at night, especially in larger towns. It is also preferable to travel in groups.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

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

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and their sites, but receive far more negative attention in highly populated centers where they are anonymous than in smaller towns where “family,” friends, and colleagues will 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 don't respond to such negative and unwanted attention. Keep your money out of sight; do not keep it in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. Use an undergarment money pouch, such as the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat.

Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer

Safety Support in Benin

The Peace Corps approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your two-year service and includes the following: information sharing; Volunteer training; site

selection criteria; a detailed emergency action plan; and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. The Benin in-country safety program is outlined below.

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

Volunteer training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Benin. 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 your two-year 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. Peace Corps staff work closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for your arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting Volunteers. Each site is inspected before your arrival to ensure viable work placements as well as appropriate, safe, and secure housing. Site selection criteria is based in part on relevant site history; safety and security conditions, and other support needs within the resources limits of host communities and Peace Corps.

You will also learn about the Peace Corps/Benin *detailed* **emergency action plan** (EAP), which is a guide for reducing your exposure in the event of situations that pose a security risk. You play a crucial role in the success of the EAP. First,

when you arrive at your site, you must complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. You must also update your site locator form as often as necessary (e.g. when a new phone is installed in your village, your supervisor gets a cell phone, etc.). If there is a security threat, Volunteers in Benin will gather at predetermined locations until the situation resolves itself or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order 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 or Duty Officer. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner. In addition to responding to the needs of the Volunteer, the Peace Corps collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to 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 ensure that our cultural and ethnic diversity is reflected in the Volunteer corps. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race, and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other, despite our many differences.

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

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

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

What Might A Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Benin has a traditional, patriarchal culture. However, at the community level, Beninese are learning to accept women who take professional roles or who live independently of their families. Current Volunteers advise that service is more difficult for female Volunteers due to verbal sexual harassment and the misconceptions that exist concerning male-female relationships. It is important to note that the same challenges exist for Beninese women, particularly in the schools. Peace Corps/Benin has a **zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment on the job**. Should you encounter harassment on the job, you should inform the country director immediately.

Female Volunteers may find that living alone raises questions about their marital status. Some find that saying that they are married helps limit sexual harassment. Others have felt that they have to work harder than male Volunteers to gain the respect of host country colleagues in the workplace.

Females may encounter unwanted attention in public. While we cannot control this, we can help you develop strategies for coping. Do not hesitate to insist on learning strategies during your pre-service training. Some female Volunteers have found they need to keep a low social profile and practice discretion in public (e.g., not smoking in public or drinking in bars) to avoid developing an undesirable reputation in their community.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

In rural sites or villages, Volunteers are usually the only foreign resident and will receive extra attention regardless of their racial or ethnic background. Volunteers of color will encounter a wide range of cross-cultural issues in Benin.

Most Beninese are used to seeing African Americans. Furthermore, because of the country's historical role and involvement in slavery, some Beninese feel some affinity with African Americans and will often joke with them or believe that they come from Benin or another African country. Beninese will sometimes assume that you speak a local language because of your skin color. Depending on your personality, you may interpret this assumption as welcome or you may find it distressing. Remember, you will not be able to readily identify the ethnicity of a Beninese by his or her language. Similarly, you should not expect that a Beninese will know that you are American, even though you are a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Like African Americans, Asian-American Volunteers have expressed frustration and disappointment at being asked their nationality. When they answer "Asian-American," some Beninese react with surprise or disbelief, saying they didn't know there were people of Asian descent in America. In Benin, there are Chinese, Indian, and Lebanese communities and Volunteers of Asian heritage may be confused with

merchant classes in the eyes of some Beninese, especially in urban areas. Some Asian-American Volunteers have found that some Beninese will call them “Chinese” no matter their origins. They may be teased by children and asked if they know kung fu or karate.

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Respect comes with age in Benin. Younger Volunteers might have to work harder than older Volunteers to be accepted as professionals by their Beninese colleagues. Older Volunteers might find that almost too much is expected of them because of their age.

Within the Peace Corps community, older Volunteers may sometimes feel isolated, because most Volunteers in Benin are in their 20s. Older Volunteers may have difficulty finding emotional support among their fellow Volunteers. They may find that younger Volunteers expect older ones to “mother” them. (Some seniors find this a very enjoyable part of their experience, but others choose not to fill this role.)

Older Volunteers who are used to living independent lives may at first feel frustrated by the fact that younger Beninese want to do things for them. However, many seniors come to accept this as a sign of respect and enjoy the role of providing wisdom rather than physical assistance.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Benin’s sexual mores are conservative and you are expected to respect them. Many people in Benin still believe that gay and lesbian relationships are wrong, and that such relationships do not exist in their country. Although you may see signs of physical intimacy among men and women in Benin, this is not necessarily a sign of a gay or lesbian relationship. Engaging in homosexual sex is against the law in Benin. Some gay and lesbian Volunteers in Benin report that they are not able to

be open about their sexual orientation. In the past, gay and lesbian Volunteers have formed their own support group. You may find more helpful information at www.geocities.com/~lgbprcv/, a website affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association that provides specific information on serving in the Peace Corps as a gay or lesbian Volunteer.

Possible Religious Issues in Benin

Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community church. In some circles, there will be a tendency to think that all Americans are Protestants. 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 religious practice is not your choice. Most Volunteers facing these issues have found effective ways to cope with these additional challenges and have come to feel quite at home in Benin.

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

As part of the clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determines if disabled candidates can be selected if they are physically and emotionally capable of performing a full tour of Volunteer service in Benin without harm to themselves or interruption of their service. The Peace Corps/Benin staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for training, housing, job sites and other aspects of their service.

That being said, a disabled Volunteer in Benin will face a special set of challenges. In Benin, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. Benin has virtually no physical infrastructure to accommodate people with disabilities.

Many of the beggars in Benin are disabled people who have no skills. Some organizations provide training for the

disabled, but it is usually limited to arts and crafts. Disabled Volunteers would thus face challenges in overcoming negative stereotypes and difficult physical conditions. However, they also have an opportunity to be inspirational role models for disabled Beninese and to encourage changes in attitude and infrastructure in their communities.

NOTES



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds this allowance. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limitations, and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limitations. The authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds total with a maximum weight allowance of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (short-wave 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; and airport personnel will confiscate them. 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 Benin?

The electric current in Benin is 220 volts. There are surges and cuts, which can put a strain on voltage converters and appliances. The Peace Corps does not provide transformers.

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, and these funds 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 for travel purposes. If you choose to bring extra money, plan on bringing the amount that suits your own personal travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Volunteers accrue two days of vacation leave per month of service. Leave cannot be taken during the first three months of service or the last three months before your close of service, except in conjunction with authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after 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 is not encouraged and may require permission from the country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Note that holidays celebrated by the host country do not count as vacation days and Volunteers are not excused from work on U.S. holidays.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects. However, such insurance can be purchased before you leave. Ultimately, you are responsible for the safekeeping of your personal belongings. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided to you and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not bring valuables with them to Benin or have them sent overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Benin do not need to get an international driver's license. Operation of privately owned vehicles is prohibited. Most urban travel is by moped taxis or bush taxi. Rural travel ranges from bush taxis to buses to mini-buses to trucks to lots of walking.

What should I bring as gifts for Benin 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 wrapped in plastic that won't melt or spoil; pens and pencils; or photos to give away. (See packing list prepared by Volunteers.)

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

Peace Corps trainees are not officially assigned to individual sites until after they have successfully completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess your technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with ministry counterparts. You will 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 might ideally like to be. Most Volunteers will live in small towns or in rural villages. Some sites are in larger cities as well.

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,

you should 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. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580, ext. 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer may be reached at 202.638.2574. For non-emergency questions, your family may contact the Benin desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 1.800.424.8580.

Can I call home from Benin?

The international phone service to and from Benin is generally good. The OPT (the government-owned telephone and postal service) has offices in most cities. However, international calls are very expensive.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

No, it is better to purchase one here. Differences in technology make many U.S. cellular phones incompatible with service in Benin. There are four main cellular phone service providers in Benin, but service is not available everywhere.

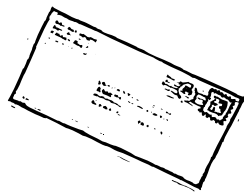
Will there be e-mail and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?

More and more businesses and individuals in the capital and the major cities have Internet access and there are more and more Internet cafés in Benin. Because of weaker telephone and electrical infrastructure in outlying areas, Volunteers in rural sites are limited to writing and receiving e-mail on occasional visits to regional capitals. If you bring a computer, be advised that you may not have electricity in your town or village and that power surges are common (so bring a good surge protector). You should also obtain personal insurance coverage for your computer because the Peace Corps does not provide insurance for personal items.

NOTES



WELCOME LETTERS FROM BENIN VOLUNTEERS



Working as a business Volunteer in Benin has been the most meaningful position I have ever held. It has also been the most discouraging, inspirational, frustrating, rewarding, and humbling position I have ever held. Since I've been in Benin, I've been overwhelmed with both feelings of definitive validation and extreme hopelessness. Realizing that you helped someone grasp a business principle that could help improve their enterprise, and ultimately improve their standard of living, is extremely rewarding and inspirational. These realizations are what help you through the frustration and discouragement encountered at times when you miss your loved ones or feel that there are too many problems for you to ever be able to make a significant contribution to the community you are serving. It's humbling to see what we take for granted and the challenges faced by people in different parts of the world. My laptop was the best thing I brought with me and has made both communicating with people back home and my work much easier. Although it's not necessary, I highly recommend bringing one if you have the means to do so.

—Amanda Dorion

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I have been challenged not so much by the inconveniences of no plumbing or electricity, but rather by the psychological hurdles of living in a place where I am different and where I don't have the safety nets of my friends and family from home to support me. I am dealing with the frustrations of having a job that is not structured in a nine-to-five or even week-to-week basis. In the process, I am growing stronger as an individual in this one year than during my entire undergraduate experience. And I know that although I hope

that the seeds I have sown, both literally and figuratively, bear fruit here, that I will be most useful not during my service, but as a cultural resource upon my return to the United States.”

—Katherine Haynes

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As I prepared to leave my college campus of cellphones and wireless Internet for a rural village in Benin, I confided in one of my professors that I feared being “out of the loop.” He told me that on the contrary, I’d be in the middle of the loop. He was right. Living on a level closer to that of the majority of people in the world, witnessing how much their livelihood depends on the land and the rain, and seeing and understanding the problems that world leaders apparently battle, has me quite “in the loop.”

—Leonore Adams

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Peace Corps/Benin has provided me the opportunity to grow in ways I never imagined. I now speak a second language; I can present behavior-changing lessons on topics such as AIDS, malnutrition, and personal health/hygiene; and I am culturally integrated into my Beninese community. The Peace Corps has given me the tools and resources needed in order to be a successful Volunteer and an active member in my village. Also, any problem or negative situation I have had to face in my service, the Peace Corps in-country staff has supported me and helped me resolve the problem right away.

—Anne Wenstrom

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The teaching project in Benin is one with few visible results. We are not constructing wells or weighing babies. This can make teaching in Benin frustrating because sometimes you aren’t sure if you are making a difference. But we are. The foundation for development is education, and the language of

business in West Africa is English. Therefore, our project is very important. In my school, if I was not there, my students would not have an English teacher. I remind myself of this when the going gets tough. The key to motivation is taking every small triumph and savoring it. Something as simple as a challenged student grasping a concept in class is cause for celebration. This is where you can find your rewards. And the people you will meet here, both fellow Americans and Beninese, are the greatest gift of all.

—Erin Crylser



PACKING LISTS



These lists have been compiled by Volunteers serving in Benin and are based on their experiences. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You can always have things sent to you later. You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight restriction on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Benin. Clothing can very easily be tailor-made from local fabrics. Second-hand clothing is also very popular across Benin and is available in many markets. It is not necessary to bring a large amount of clothing. Nice-quality shoes and sandals can also be made in-country.

Luggage should be durable, lightweight, and easy to carry as you will be responsible for transporting it in-country. Duffel bags and backpacks without frames work well. A good backpack is priceless because you will likely travel in-country regularly. Almost all the basic items you need can be found here; however, they may not be good quality or they may be expensive. So, if you are particular about something, bring lots!

Necessities

- Two sturdy water bottles (e.g., Nalgene) or camelback
- Nickel metal hydride rechargeable batteries (the longest lasting)
- Battery charger—solar powered or plug in

- Two pair prescription eyeglasses, consider prescription sunglasses as well
- A nice dressy outfit for first week dinner with officials and for going out
- Flashlight or headlamp with batteries and replacement bulb
- Two bathing suits (no bikinis for women)
- Sunglasses (two pair)
- English dictionary
- Nice comfortable shoes (nice sandals, Tevas, Chacos)
- One pair of dress shoes
- Professional clothing in breathable fabrics (two outfits minimum for TEFL Volunteers)
- Plenty and durable cotton T-shirts (many Volunteers prefer darker colors)
- Pants (of lightweight material)
- Blouses/button-down shirts
- Linen/cotton clothing (you can find linen and cotton here and get clothing made; dresses/skirts must be at least knee-length)
- Hats/scarf/bandannas
- Good sturdy bras (bring lots because hand washing wears them out)
- Good underwear (bring a two-year supply; hand washing wears them out)
- Good pair of tennis shoes
- Sweater, sweatshirt, or long-sleeve shirt
- Workout clothes (if you work out)
- Pictures from home
- USB flash drive (important for storing documents as diskettes fail quickly from dust/humidity and Volunteer computers don't burn CDs)
- Camera and film (lots!)

- Short-wave radio or World Space Radio
- Duct tape
- Medium book bag (for three- to four-day trips)
- Hairbrush or comb
- Three-month supply of prescription drugs
- Watch
- Portable alarm clock
- Leatherman or Swiss army knife (remember to pack in your suitcase as checked luggage)
- Towel (travel/camping ones work well because they dry quickly)

Specifically for Women

- Northern Benin is Muslim. Your shoulders and knees need to be covered, so pack accordingly.
- In the south and in some northern cities things are more liberal, so you can bring tank tops (not spaghetti straps).
- Linen pants are great!

Not necessary but useful for some Volunteers

- Wall calendar
- One set of sheets (in-country sheets are very low quality)
- Language materials (French)
- Adaptor (if bringing electrical appliances)
- CDs (bring lots—you will be listening to them for two years)
- CD player (portable with speakers or small battery-operated one)
- Tupperware
- Plastic storage bags (e.g., Ziploc)

- Raincoat/poncho
- Yoga mat or Therm-a-Rest (for when you or a friend needs to sleep on the floor)
- Money belt
- U.S. stamps (can easily be sent to you by mail)
- Beauty products/ pampering things for de-stressing (if you use them)
- Money (in large denominations, \$50, \$100, traveler's checks, euros)
- Your favorite pillow (ones here are not the greatest) or travel pillow
- Spices/spice packets
- Catalogue of clothing (to show to tailor to get copies made)
- Good pens (if they are important to you)
- Good flashlight

TEFL-Specific Suggestions

- Art supplies (markers, crayons, paints, construction paper, rubber cement, etc.)
- Children's books
- World map/map of Africa (can get free from AAA if member)
- Calculator
- Stapler
- Appointment book
- Books on CD (there are computers at work stations and in some schools; they are smaller than books, easy to pack, and can be useful (e.g., encyclopedias, journals, etc.))
- Stickers (can be easily sent here, too)
- Blank cassettes (for making listening comprehensions)

Gift Ideas for Host Families

(not necessary, can be bought here, too)

- Coloring books
- Dollar store stuff (tacky is good here!)
- Candy
- Pocket knives
- T-shirts
- Flashlights
- Karate/action movies on VCD (not regular DVD!)
- UNO
- Tape player/recorder

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

Almost every type of toiletry is available here, but some are quite expensive (such as shampoo, deodorant, hair conditioner, facial creams, and toners). If you prefer a certain brand name, stock up, but otherwise bring a three-month supply for the duration of training.

- Tea tree oil (a useful antiseptic and anti-fungal agent)
- Liquid hand sanitizer and hand wipes
- Oil-free sunscreen (for the face)
- Baby powder or talc
- Medical supplies if special medicine is taken or a preference on certain brands
- Two good-quality towels
- Aloe-Vera
- Tampons (three-month supply; can buy generic brands here)
- Good hair conditioner
- Hair ties

- Nail clippers, nail file
- Contact lenses and enough solution for two years (Peace Corps does not recommend wearing contacts due to dusty conditions and does not provide solution)
- Deodorant (note that deodorant salt crystals work well and could last your whole service; they're small, too!)
- Shampoo and conditioner
- Q-tips
- Basic make-up
- Facial soap

Kitchen

- Basic cookbook and favorite recipes
- Packaged mixes (sauces, salad dressings, soups, Kool-Aid, etc.)
- Most spices are available, but are expensive, so stock up if you like to cook (e.g., cinnamon, Italian spices, allspice, chili powder, curry)
- Freeze-dried foods
- Low-cal sweetener
- Boxed macaroni and cheese
- French press (if you like coffee)
- Good-quality can opener
- Good-quality potato peeler
- Good-quality garlic press
- Measuring cups and spoons
- Good-quality Teflon frying pan
- Good-quality knife
- Pepper grinder
- Any other small kitchen supplies that you like to use

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 (telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470; after-hours duty officer: 202.638.2574).
- ☐ 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. (Peace Corps/Benin stocks four types

of birth control pills: Ortho Tri-cyclen, Yasmin/Jasmin, Lo/Ovral, and Alesse. If you use a different brand, please work with your doctor and change to one of these before you depart.)

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 healthcare 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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Africa Region	Ext. 1850	202.692.1850
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: benin@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2320	202.692.2320
	Desk Assistant E-mail: benin@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2319	202.692.2319

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

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