

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# A L B A N I A



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



July 2006



# A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on your invitation to become a Peace Corps Volunteer in Albania. Serving as a Volunteer will be one of the most challenging experiences of your life and will be as rewarding as you make it. Peace Corps arrived in Albania in March 2003 to reopen Peace Corps/Albania, and the first group of Volunteers arrived in September 2003 to begin training. Yours is still among the early groups of Volunteers that are helping to rebuild a quality Peace Corps program in a country struggling to throw off the legacy of an authoritarian and isolationist regime and to reconcile old and strong cultural traditions with modern Europe. Neither of those struggles is easy and you will be challenged by the consequences every day in Albania. If you come with an open mind, a warm heart, lots of patience and flexibility, and a good sense of humor, you will do well.

The Peace Corps assigns all Volunteers to locations outside of the capital city of Tirana. The country's greatest needs are in rural areas, and the Peace Corps works in towns and villages throughout most of the districts. Being placed outside of Tirana means that your ability to learn and use the Albanian language and adapt to local cultures and lifestyles will be critical to your success and satisfaction. You will have to make major adjustments in your lifestyle to be accepted and be effective in Albania as the social customs are quite conservative by American standards. Women, especially, must be very circumspect in their behavior; the adjustments and restrictions are very challenging.

Housing is scarce in Albania and your continual safety and security is paramount. To integrate these realities into a site that combines meaningful work opportunities and risk mitigation, you will live with an Albanian family throughout pre-service training (three months) and another Albanian family during four and one-half months at your assigned site. Peace Corps/Albania works to make site assignments on the basis of matching your skills and knowledge with the needs of a particular organization and community, not on the basis of your personal preferences, and you may be placed anywhere in the country.

To help assure your safety and security as well as a collaborative Peace Corps team effort, we all must inform the out of site contact at the Peace Corps office at post here, whenever we leave our sites. While you will have the opportunity to help Albanians stretch scarce resources to make differences in their lives, your own living and working situations may be very challenging. Your role as a good representative for the Peace Corps and the American people means that you will always be on duty in Albania.

Please think about all of these things carefully before you accept our invitation to Albania. You should be sure that being a Volunteer in a country of stark contrasts and tremendous challenges is right for you at this point in your life.

When you arrive in Albania, you will begin 12 weeks of intensive training in five areas: language, cross-cultural, community skills, technical, health, and safety and security. You will spend most of the training period as part of a small group of trainees who live in the same small town. Your group will get together with the other groups of trainees at a central site for one or two days a week. We believe that pre-service training provides a strong foundation for service and require your full participation in the program.

The entire Peace Corps/Albania team looks forward to working with you in further developing a high quality, safe and secure Peace Corps program in this historically rich part of the world. The Albanian people are eager to have you come and share this vision to build a better future with the three goals of Peace Corps that have stood the test of time for the past 45 years. Let's celebrate this legacy by renewing our commitment to the Peace Corps in promoting friendship, peace, progress and a brighter future for Albania and the global community.

Henry Weiss  
Country Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Map of Albania**

### **A Welcome Letter 1**

### **Peace Corps/Albania History and Programs 7**

History of the Peace Corps in Albania	7
History and Status of Peace Corps Programming in Albania	8-11

### **Country Overview: Albania at a Glance 13**

History	13-14
Government	15
Economy	15-16
People and Culture	16-17
Language	17
Environment	17-18

### **Resources for Further Information 21**

### **Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle 31**

Communications	31-33
Housing and Site Location	33-34
Living Allowance and Money Management	34-35
Food and Diet	35
Transportation	35-36
Geography and Climate	36
Social Activities	36-37
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior	38
Personal Safety	38-39
Rewards and Frustrations	39-40

<b>Peace Corps Training</b>	<b>43</b>
Overview of Pre-Service Training	43
<i>Technical Training</i>	43-44
<i>Language Training</i>	44-45
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	45
<i>Health Training</i>	45-46
<i>Safety Training</i>	46
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	46-47
<b>Your Health Care and Safety in Albania</b>	<b>49</b>
Health Issues in Albania	49
Helping You Stay Healthy	49-50
Maintaining Your Health	50-51
Women’s Health Information	51
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	52
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	53-54
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	55-60
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	55-56
<i>Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk</i>	56-57
<i>Support from Staff</i>	57-60
What If You Become a Victim of a Violent Crime?	60-61
Security Issues in Albania	62
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	62-63
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Albania	63-65
<b>Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues</b>	<b>67</b>
Overview of Diversity in Albania	68
What Might a Volunteer Face?	68
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	68-72
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	72-73
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	73-74
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	74-75
<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	75
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	75-76
<i>Possible Issues for Married Volunteers</i>	76-77

<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>79</b>
<b>Welcome Letters From Albania Volunteers</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Packing List</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Pre-departure Checklist</b>	<b>105</b>
<b>Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters</b>	<b>109</b>





# PEACE CORPS/ALBANIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



## **History of the Peace Corps in Albania**

Albania began the transition to a democratic, open-market nation later than the other Balkan states. Former Communist leader Enver Hoxha headed an isolationist and authoritarian regime from 1944 until his death in 1985, and it was not until March 1991 that Albania and the United States reestablished diplomatic relations (after a 35-year break). The Albanian government invited the Peace Corps into the country soon after, and the first group of 21 Volunteers arrived in June 1992 to begin teaching English at secondary schools and universities. The Peace Corps program was expanded with a small business development project, and 12 Volunteers working in this sector arrived in April 1993. The program was expanded again in 1995 with the addition of 15 Volunteers for an agroforestry project. A group of new Volunteers was scheduled to arrive in February 1997, but a breakdown in civil order and public safety precipitated by the collapse of fraudulent pyramid savings schemes led to the evacuation of all Peace Corps Volunteers and U.S. staff in March 1997 and the closure of the post. At the time of the evacuation, 73 Volunteers were serving in the three Peace Corps projects.

In March 2003, Peace Corps returned to Albania after a six-year absence. Thirty-two Volunteers arrived in the country in September 2003 to begin training for a community development project and another 29 arrived in March 2004 to begin training for English education and health education projects. Those first two groups established the three projects that are now operating. The largest group ever of 40 Volunteers arrived in March 2006.

## **History and Status of Peace Corps Programming in Albania**

During the Peace Corps' first five years in Albania (1992–1997), staff and Volunteers regularly assessed conditions to identify challenges and successes and made adjustments in the overall program to better meet Albania's needs.

The program was still in its formative stage when the post closed in 1997. The TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) project had added a teacher-training component, and Volunteers also developed materials, helped establish school and community libraries, and served as linguistic and cultural resources for teachers and students. In addition, Volunteers introduced their students to a variety of social and environmental issues and helped enhance their critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

The first small business Volunteers were assigned to regional business associations, where they provided assistance in business development, planning, and credit. The second group of small business Volunteers began working with branch offices of the Rural Commercial Bank to advise and train branch credit departments and support a World Bank restructuring effort. The project diversified again in 1995 when Volunteers were assigned to a savings bank, a business school, and a business association to help develop the institutional capability of organizations providing assistance to small businesses. In response to emerging needs of the fledgling Albanian economy, the project diversified once again to move into chambers of commerce, organizational development centers, and micro-credit institutions. Additionally, the project provided basic financial and business services and training to small-scale entrepreneurs and farmers and educated the public about market economies.

As part of the village-based agroforestry project, Volunteers helped initiate the first on-the-ground forestry development program. The project was a cooperative effort between the

Albanian government and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Volunteers worked with the General Directorate of Forestry staff to help Albanian farmers manage forest and grassland resources. Though the goal was to provide farm forestry extension services, many farmers saw the directorate staff as forestry police. When the post closed in 1997, the Peace Corps was reexamining the project's initial assumptions and making adjustments to focus more on the development of forestry communities.

In April 2002, the Peace Corps conducted an assessment for reopening its program in Albania. The assessment team identified continuing needs for support in English education, small business development, community development, and natural resource management. In addition, the assessment team identified pressing needs in municipal development and health education.

Public confidence in politics and most public institutions is very low. Exceptions include a few communities whose mayors believe that pragmatism in addressing local issues should take precedence over political affiliation. In this way, local government and community development are focal points for the development of responsible civil society in the country.

The assessment team recommended that the Peace Corps return to Albania with a municipal development project to help improve the organizational and management capacities of municipal government staff and village leaders. The project would facilitate the development of collaborative activities with community organizations, businesses, and citizens groups, and provide assistance to all segments of a community in project design and management.

Albania also is in great need of support in public health and health education. Public services and the health infrastructure are in very poor condition, and doctors and nurses are cut off from new developments in medicine. Albania's infant mortality rate is the highest in Europe, and the country has had to tackle new problems for which it has little experience, including drug abuse and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). The assessment team identified opportunities for Volunteers to work with local clinics, schools, and community groups to provide education on maternal and child health, water and sanitation, drug awareness, and other local health issues. The team recommended that Volunteers help develop health education programs and materials and to deliver those programs primarily at the community level.

The Volunteers who arrived in September 2003 to initiate the municipal development project worked with local governments, business development organizations and civil society development organizations. The Peace Corps soon broadened the municipal development project into a community development project, and current Volunteers work with local governments and other organizations to strengthen the capacity of the various organizations to address such issues as tourism development, strategic planning, and communication among local governments and community members. Other Volunteers work to strengthen nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and businesses through training, technical assistance, and networking.

Volunteers currently serving in the English education project teach primarily in high schools in smaller towns throughout the country. They bring native-speaking ability into the classroom to enhance the language skills of both teachers and students. They peer teach with existing English teachers and, when appropriate, teach on their own. Volunteers also work

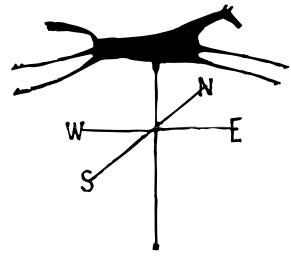
in their communities to identify and implement projects that address the needs and issues faced by youth and children. The group that arrived in March 2006 included the first English educators to be placed at the university level and at secondary schools of foreign languages since the Peace Corps reopened its program here in 2003.

The current health education project is linked to the Albanian health system at the district level (there are 36 districts in Albania) and at the rural health center level. With Albanian counterparts from throughout the community, Volunteers identify priority health education issues and then design and deliver campaigns and training to address those issues. Volunteers foster links with schools and formal and informal community groups to implement the campaigns and training, and identify other appropriate venues for promoting health education activities.

These three projects are still in their early development. Peace Corps/Albania will continue to refine project structures and Volunteer roles based partly on the experiences of current Volunteers and on linkages and interactions with project partners.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: ALBANIA AT A GLANCE



## History

Albanians are descendants of the ancient Illyrians, and their history can be traced back to the Bronze Age in about 2000 B.C. Their name comes from the Albanoi tribe of Illyrians, and their language has few similarities to the languages of neighboring countries. The history of Albania is one of occupation, including periods of administration or rule by Alexander the Great, the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire, and the Ottoman Empire—the latter beginning in the 14th century and continuing until 1912. The modern borders of Albania were drawn by the European powers during the First Balkan War in 1912, and excluded about half the former Albanian lands and 3 million Albanians. Albania had a brief period of independence from 1912 until 1939, after which it was occupied by the Italians. It was during this period that Ahmet Bey Zogu declared himself King Zog I.

During World War II, the Germans replaced the Italians and a resistance movement began in the south under the leadership of Enver Hoxha. Hoxha and his resistance fighters took over the country in the aftermath of the war and established a socialist republic. Foreigners were expelled and their assets nationalized, churches and mosques were closed, and agriculture and industry were collectivized. Hoxha was a doctrinaire Stalinist who broke away from Marshal Tito and Yugoslavia in 1948; from the Soviet Union in 1960, when Nikita Khrushchev abandoned Stalinism; and from China in 1978, when China established diplomatic relations with the United States.

All outside economic assistance ended in 1978. From that time until his death in 1985, Hoxha made Albania one of the most isolated and repressed countries in the world. At one point, Hoxha had 700,000 reinforced-concrete bunkers built throughout the country to defend against a multifront attack, each equal in cost to a two-bedroom apartment. Albania was the last country in Central and Eastern Europe to be caught up in the collapse of communism, introducing its first cautious reforms in 1990. Even after his death in 1985, Hoxha's successors in the Communist Party continued to govern the country until elections in March 1992.

The period from an election victory by the opposition Democratic Party in 1992 to the current day has been challenging and often tumultuous. The Democratic Party's Sali Berisha governed the country from April 1992 until mid-July 1997, when the Socialist Party's Fatos Nano formed a new government. Manic investment in a number of pyramid schemes marked the period from February 1996 to February 1997. When the pyramid schemes began to fail in late 1996, demonstrations erupted and soon turned violent.

With increasing concerns about safety and security, the Peace Corps evacuated its 73 Volunteers in March 1997 and closed the post shortly thereafter. With the help of Greek and Italian peacekeeping forces, the government reestablished order and eventually led a successful effort to pass a new constitution in 1998. During the spring and summer of 1999, Albania sheltered more than 450,000 Kosovar Albanians who had fled Kosovo to avoid the actions of the Milosevic regime and the dangers of the NATO action against it.

Local elections in October 2000 and October 2003 and parliamentary elections in June 2001 and July 2005 were conducted in a peaceful atmosphere and were judged to represent some progress toward meeting democratic standards.



## **Government**

Under the 1998 constitution, Albania became a republic with a multiparty parliament, the unicameral Kuvendi Popullorë. The parliament has 140 members; 100 are elected by majority voting and 40 by proportional results. The Kuvendi Popullorë elects the president, a largely ceremonial office with limited executive powers. The majority party in the national elections chooses the prime minister. There is universal suffrage for citizens 18 and older. The first local governments in Albania were formed in 1992. Though they had political autonomy, these local governments did not have substantial administrative and fiscal authority. Though a 2000 law on decentralization transferred many responsibilities from national government to local governments, implementation of the law is slow.

## **Economy**

Recent efforts to stabilize the Albanian economy are showing some success at the macroeconomic level. The gross domestic product (GDP) began increasing in 1998, and inflation and the budget deficit showed little increase after 1999. The local currency, the lek, has stabilized. Foreign aid provides the largest share of financing for public investment, but continued deep and pervasive corruption retards direct foreign as well as domestic investment. Approximately 50 percent of Albania's GDP and employment derives from agriculture, but limited access to key supplies and limited links to other economic sectors preclude a productive agriculture sector. Urban migration continues to accelerate, particularly among the young.

While economic growth is visible in some areas, it has not had a substantial impact on the life of most Albanians. Albanian families, particularly in smaller towns and villages, remain

poor, with low incomes and inadequate living space. Funds from Albanians working abroad to their families are the main source of income at the local level. Unemployment remains high because of a lack of large-scale investments, a shortage of skilled labor, a large informal market, a lack of coordinated state policies on employment, inefficient market institutions, and a low level of credit.

## **People and Culture**

The population of Albania is estimated at 3.5 million, with as many as 800,000 living in Tirana, the capital. There are only a few cities with populations greater than 75,000, and most people continue to live in small towns and rural villages. The population for the most part is ethnically homogenous. Southern Albania has a small ethnic Greek minority. Other small ethnic groups include Macedonians, Romany, Montenegrins, and Vlachs. More than 2 million ethnic Albanians live in Kosovo and the western portion of Macedonia.

From 1967 to 1990, Albania banned all religious practices and was the only officially atheist state in the world. Traditionally, Albania has been about 70 percent Muslim, 20 percent Albanian Orthodox (predominantly in the south), and 10 percent Catholic (predominantly in the north), although the labels are more cultural than religious.

Albania has preserved many of its cultural traditions and customs. Traditional dress is regularly seen in many rural areas, especially among the older generation. Younger Albanians have adopted Western fashions for the most part. Indigenous Albanian music in the north runs to heroic epics and ballads on the themes of honor and vengeance.

Polyphony is a southern Albanian tradition that dates from Illyrian times. Rural Albania is socially conservative and women live under many restrictions.

In Albania, the family has a significance not often seen in Western cultures. It includes grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Families, usually led by a patriarch, rely on the active participation of all members to help supply basic commodities and foodstuffs. Albanians identify with and support their families, first and foremost.

## **Language**

An Indo-European language, Albanian probably derives from ancient Illyrian and Dacian. It has been written in the Latin alphabet since 1909, but has 36 letters. There are two traditional dialects—Tosk in the south and Gheg in the north. The language was standardized in a series of linguistic conferences in the 1970s. Albanian is a phonetic language in which each letter has a specific sound that does not change in context. Inflections (i.e., changes in form) play an indispensable role in the grammar.

## **Environment**

Albania has a narrow coastal plain and a mostly mountainous interior that is about 36 percent forested. The country generally has hot, dry summers and cool, wet winters, with some variation resulting from its broken mountain relief. Summers along the coast are moderated by sea breezes. About 40 percent of the rain falls during the winter months, when the higher elevations are very cold with deep snow. A few large lakes stretch along the country's borders with Montenegro in the north and Macedonia and Greece in the southeast. The Ionian coast from Vlore to Saranda offers

some of the most beautiful scenery in the country. Albania has six national forests, 24 nature reserves, and 2,000 natural monuments, which receive protection mainly on paper. All parks are under threat from human activities such as hunting and woodcutting. Nearly all raw sewage flows into rivers untreated and there is very poor management of solid wastes, so environmental pollution is a major concern.

## NOTES



ITALIA  
ALBANIA

W la  
PACE

FRONTE ALLA PACE  
TE UN ANIMO TI SVEGLIATI SOLO  
IN UN MONDO SENZA MAI E SENZA COLORI  
COSA PROVVERAI?  
TRISTEZZA TANTA TRISTEZZA  
SE UNA SERA TI ADDORMENTI  
CON QUALCUNO CHE VEGLIA IL TUO SONNO  
E TI SVEGLIANO CON QUEL QUALCUN  
MIGRA ACCANTO, COSA PROVVERAI?  
E SE OGGI QUALCUN DI NOI PROVVISORIO  
ESSERE QUEL QUALCUN CHE VEGLIA  
SUI TUOI AMICI ALBANESI ALTERN  
TE E MENTRE CANTANO "IL POETE LETTER  
PACE

LOVE  
PACE

PACE

REI  
PACE

IL REGNO DI...  
IT...  
PENSA

COSE  
PACE

PACE

PACE

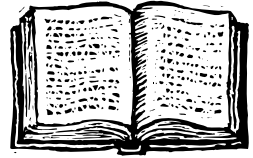
PACE

PACE

PACE

PACE

# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Albania and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees.

A note of caution: As you surf these sites, be aware that you will find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to give opinions and advice based on their own experiences. The opinions expressed are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government. You may find opinions of people who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. As you read these comments, we hope you will 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 Albania**

**<http://www.answers.com/Albania>**

This site has a map and general information about Albania and its history.

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

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Tirana to how to convert from the dollar to the lek. Just click on Albania and go from there.

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

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

**[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)**

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

**<http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/al.html>**

Provides general and statistical information on Albania.

**[www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm](http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm)**

This site includes links to all the official sites for governments worldwide.

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

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

**[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp)**

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

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

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information for 228 countries.

**Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

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

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



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

This site is known as the Returned Peace Corps Volunteer Web Ring. Browse the Web ring and see what former Volunteers are saying about their service.

**[www.peacecorpswriters.org](http://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 of their Peace Corps service.

**<http://peacecorpsonline.org/>**

This site is billed an independent news forum serving returned Volunteers. It has links to Albania returned Volunteer groups.

**Current News Sites/Online Articles About Albania**

**<http://www.president.al>**

Albanian government site about the President of Albania in both English and Albanian (Shqip)

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

News about different countries in the Balkan region, including Albania. In Albanian.

**[www.onlinenewspapers.com/albania.htm](http://www.onlinenewspapers.com/albania.htm)**

Provides links to online newspapers covering Albania

**<http://www.oneworld.net/section/indepth>**

Provides links to news about Albania

**[www.einnews.com/albania](http://www.einnews.com/albania)**

Geopolitical news service covering over 263 countries; includes online news feed about Albania.

**<http://reenic.utexas.edu/reenic/countries/albania.html>**

Site of the Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies at the University of Texas-Austin. Lots of information about Albania and links.

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

Contains information on Albanian culture, art, current events, news, history, trading, and food. Includes an extensive photo album with pictures from all over Albania. Site is in Albanian.

### **International Development Sites About Albania**

**[www.usaid.gov/regions/europe\\_eurasia/countries/al/index.html](http://www.usaid.gov/regions/europe_eurasia/countries/al/index.html)**

Information about the work of the U.S. Agency for International Development in Albania.

**[www.undp.org.al](http://www.undp.org.al)**

The United Nations Development Programme in Albania

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

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

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

Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe

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

The Open Society Institute is a private operating and grantmaking foundation that serves as the hub of the Soros foundations network, a group of autonomous foundations and organizations in more than 50 countries.

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

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

**www.iom.int**

International Organization for Migration

**www.worldbank.org**

World Bank

### **Information and Travel:**

**<http://www.albanian.com/information/countries/albania/index.html>**

Contains information about Albania and useful links.

**<http://www.escapeartist.com/albania/albania.html>**

Contains useful travel information and links to other sites, both in and out of Albania.

**<http://www.tripadvisor.com/Tourism-g294445-Alba>**

Primarily for travelers, but some interesting information in the “Albanian Forums” section.

### **Albanian Language:**

**[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanian\\_language](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albanian_language)**

Contains information about the language, including its history and alphabet. The proverbs section is particularly interesting.

**<http://travlang.com/languages/>**

Site has words you can listen to and practice pronunciation prior to training.

**[www.shqiperia.com/fjalori.php](http://www.shqiperia.com/fjalori.php)**

Online Dictionary (Albanian-English and English–Albanian)

**<http://www.pimsleurapproach.com/learn-albanian.asp>**

Pimsleur language tapes for sale (may be cheaper at other venues (e.g., eBay)

## Recommended Books

1. Biberaj, Elez. *Albania in Transition: the Rocky Road to Democracy*. (Nations of the World Series). Boulder: Westview Press, 1998 (hardback), 1999 (paperback).
2. Biberaj, Elez. *Albania: A Socialist Maverick*. Boulder: Westview Press, 1990.
3. Carver, Robert. *The Accursed Mountains: Journeys in Albania*. London: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd., 2000 (paperback).
4. Durham, Edith. *High Albania: A Victorian Traveller's Balkan Odyssey*. London: Phoenix Press, 2000 (paperback).
5. Fonseca, Isabel. *Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996 (paperback).
6. Glenny, Misha. *The Balkans: Nationalism, War and the Great Powers, 1804-1999*. New York: Penguin, 2000 (paperback).
7. Jones, Lloyd. *Biografi: An Albanian Quest*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1994.
8. Kadare, Ismail. *Albanian Spring*. London: Saqi Books, 2001 (paperback).
9. Kaplan, Robert. *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History*. New York: Picador Press, 2005 (paperback).
10. Karklins, Rasma. *The System Made Me Do It: Corruption in Post-Communist Societies*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2005.
11. Olsen, Neil and Rhodri Jones. *Albania* (Oxfam Country Profile Series). London: Oxfam Publishing, 2000 (paperback).

12. Pettifer, James. *Blue Guide: Albania and Kosovo*. New York: A. & C. Black, Ltd., 2001 (paperback).
13. Schwandner-Sievers, Stephanie and Bernd Jurgen Fischer. *Albanian Identities: Myth and History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002 (paperback).
14. Vickers, Miranda. *The Albanians: A Modern History* (revised edition). London: I. B. Tauris, 2001 (paperback).
15. Vickers, Miranda, and James Pettifer. *Albania: From Anarchy to Balkan Identity*. New York: New York University Press, 2000 (paperback).
16. West, Rebecca. *Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey through Yugoslavia*. New York: Penguin Books, 1995 (paperback).
17. Wilkes, John. *The Illyrians* (Peoples of Europe Series). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1995 (paperback).

### **Books About the History of the Peace Corps**

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

## Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, CA: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, WA: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, NY: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, NY: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine (ed.) *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, CA: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

## NOTES





# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Albania, you will have to adapt to conditions that may be dramatically different than you have ever experienced and modify lifestyle practices that you now take for granted. Even the most basic practices—talking, eating, using the bathroom, and sleeping—may take significantly different forms in the Albanian context. You will need to learn to live on far less money than you are now used to, give up most of your privacy, and adapt to different ways of socializing. You may not be able to go out of your house much after dark or have an opportunity for dating within your community. Women will have many more restrictions than men. You will come to Albania to assist people in their efforts to improve their lives, which will be difficult. It will be up to you to adjust to Albanian lifestyle and work practices—Albania is what it is and it won't adjust to you. If you successfully adapt and integrate, you will in return be rewarded with a deep understanding of a new culture, the establishment of new and potentially lifelong relationships, and a profound sense of humanity.

## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

International mail to and from Albania is somewhat slow and unreliable, but generally works. Both letters and packages are sometimes opened in transit and valuable items taken. Packages are usually held by post office officials until you pay a customs fee. Letters from the United States usually take two to three weeks to arrive, while packages can take up to two

months. Despite these issues, it is important to keep in touch with family and friends and share your experiences.

Before you leave for Albania, the Peace Corps will send you a mailing address that you can use for letter mail during your first three months in the country—the period of pre-service training. Once you have been sworn in as a Volunteer and move to your site, you will have your own address for mail.

### ***Telephones***

Local telephone service is generally poor, and the installation of new phones and repairs can be extremely slow. Telephone lines sometimes disconnect in mid-conversation. Although it is expensive and often time-consuming to place international calls, direct dialing is available in many sites. Many communities in Albania have just a few phones that are shared by all residents. Cellular phone service is becoming more widely available, and most of the country is now covered by various providers. Many Albanians make sacrifices in order to have cellular phones, which are rather expensive. Calls from family and friends to a cellular phone in Albania may be the best way for you to keep in contact. Albania uses the standard European GSM cellular system, so most U.S. cellular phones will not work in the country.

As part of Peace Corps Albania's overall safety and security program, Peace Corps gives each trainee a cellular phone within a few days of arriving in the country, as well as a monthly allowance for phone time for emergency calls for health or safety and security. Trainees keep the phones after they become Volunteers and use them throughout their service. These phones can receive international calls at no charge to the trainee or Volunteer. You will need to keep your cellphone charged, on, and with you.

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

It is unlikely that you will have access to a computer and highly unlikely that you will have access to the Internet at your assigned organization. If you already own a laptop, we advise you to bring it for personal and professional use and to insure it. Volunteers also find that a USB flash drive is a very useful tool for managing e-mail and sharing documents. The Peace Corps does not provide computer support (software, hardware, Internet access, repairs), nor will it replace damaged or stolen computers. Insurance is readily available, and the Peace Corps will provide you with an application for such insurance before you leave for Albania. Internet access in Albania is reaching more towns all the time, and Internet cafes are springing up in unexpected places. But you may have to walk across town or ride a bus for an hour or more to find an Internet cafe where you can read and send e-mail messages. You won't have the access to the Internet that you may be used to and Internet use can be expensive, so you will have to adjust.

## **Housing and Site Location**

Before you complete pre-service training, you will be assigned to a site in Albania where a workable match can be made between your skills and knowledge and the needs of a local organization and the community. Sites may be located anywhere in Albania outside of Tirana, and many are in smaller towns in the more rural areas, which are the areas of greatest need. The Peace Corps is striving to serve more of the northern areas of Albania. Due to the potential isolation in winter, the agency will consider assigning married couples or multiple Volunteers from different projects to these northern towns and villages. Housing can be scarce in Albania, especially in rural areas, and you may need to live with an Albanian family for your entire time in the country.

You will live with a host family during pre-service training and then with another family for the first few months at your assigned site to help you become integrated into your community. The Peace Corps will assign you to a training family, and your assigned organization will help find you a host family at your site that meets Peace Corps standards. The Peace Corps visits every host family to make sure that it understands its role and can meet your basic needs. After you have been at your assigned site for the required host family period and are well integrated into the community, you may search for independent housing if you wish, if it is available in your site. Independent housing must meet Peace Corps safety and security criteria as well as cost limitations. A Peace Corps staff member must check and approve any new housing situation before you move.

### **Living Allowance and Money Management**

The Peace Corps will provide you with a monthly living allowance in Albanian lek, the local currency. The living allowance amount is based on reviews of local living costs, as well as surveys of Volunteers already in the country. It is to be used to pay your host family for room and board, for recreation and entertainment, for a very limited amount of replacement clothing, for local transportation, and for reading materials and other incidentals. The Peace Corps expects you to live within the modest standards that most Albanians do.

In some cases, you will find that your living allowance is less than the income on which your Albanian colleagues live. Many in Albania receive money from family members living and working abroad, helping them to afford extra luxuries. It can be challenging to explain to colleagues that you are a Volunteer and are in the country to serve while living on limited means, but this is part of the essence of the Volunteer experience. We discourage you from using personal money

to supplement your living allowance. Albania is mainly a cash economy; there are no personal checking accounts and limited use of credit cards and traveler's checks. There are an increasing number of ATM machines in the country that enable access to certain accounts in U.S. banks. It is advisable to bring some cash in Euros or dollars for vacation travel. Traveler's checks and credit cards are also an option for vacation travel outside of Albania.

## **Food and Diet**

The availability of some vegetables and fruits in Albania is seasonal, but prices for locally grown produce are low. Imported produce is usually available year round at higher prices. Local produce in summer is wonderful in Albania. Salt, sugar, rice, flour, eggs, cooking oil, pasta, long-life milk, and other basic items are readily available and are of good quality. Fresh meat presents a problem, as inspections and refrigeration are minimal. Your host families during pre-service training and your first few months at site will help you find local foods in every season. In winter in some areas, only potatoes, cabbages, leeks, onions, oranges, carrots, apples, bananas, and rice or pasta may be readily available. Vegetarians will have to be flexible, as many Albanian families will not know what it means to be a vegetarian and will want to serve you meat as an honored guest. Albanians do not use many spices in their cooking, so you may want to bring a supply of your favorite spices and some recipes that you can use with your host families.

## **Transportation**

Travel in Albania is an adventure, often a very slow one. Buses may be crowded and unreliable, and roads in poor condition are made more dangerous by the chaotic mix of vehicular,

pedestrian, and animal traffic. Train service is limited to a few areas and is very poor. Most travel is by mini-buses, but some private cars and vans operate as taxi services among towns and villages. There were virtually no private cars in Albania prior to 1992, and Albanian drivers are learning as they go. You will have to take delays and detours into account when planning your trips and travel with a trusted companion when possible to help ensure your safety. The difficulties of travel are a good incentive for staying at your site and becoming part of the local community. Traffic accidents are one of the highest probable risks here. To mitigate that risk, Peace Corps/Albania has a transportation policy that you will need to learn and follow.

## **Geography and Climate**

Albania is located on the Balkan Peninsula in southeastern Europe, across the Adriatic and Ionian seas from Italy. It is bordered by Montenegro and Kosovo to the north, Macedonia to the east, and Greece to the southeast and south. It is a small, mountainous country with a narrow coastal plain. The climate is Mediterranean in much of the country, with four distinct seasons, though the rugged and broken mountains help to create microclimates. Summers tend to be quite hot and dry; and winters, very damp and cold in all parts of the country, including coastal areas. Winters can be very severe in the higher elevations, with snow on the ground throughout the winter. Layering your clothing is the best way to deal with the variable weather.

## **Social Activities**

In the summer, the major source of entertainment in most towns is a daily promenade of the men up and down the main street where they socialize with friends and acquaintances.

Women may join the promenade during the daylight hours, but disappear inside at dusk. In winter, entertainment comes primarily from visiting the homes of friends and acquaintances. Most other social activities revolve around the family. The first modern movie theaters did not appear in Tirana until late 1999. And while Tirana has several interesting museums, many provincial museums were damaged during the civil unrest in 1997. There are interesting historical and archaeological sites throughout the country, however. You will depend on your Albanian family and friends and your own creativity for most of your social activities.

Public socialization between the sexes is uncommon in Albania outside of Tirana and a few of the larger cities. When men and women are seen socializing together, the assumption is that they are married, engaged, or part of the same family. Male Volunteers will be freer to socialize in pubs and cafes than female Volunteers, particularly after dark. In many smaller towns, female Volunteers may patronize cafes only during the day or only with women friends. Female Volunteers who smoke or consume alcohol in public may be compromising their reputations and those of their host families, as well as their own safety.

All Volunteers should expect that opportunities for dating are limited, and that any dating that they do will be publicly scrutinized. All actions of individuals—Albanians and Volunteers alike—reflect on that individual's family. Just as Volunteers are embraced and protected by host families as family members, their actions and public behaviors are also considered to reflect on the honor and respect of the family, as would those of any family member. Volunteers must accept and conform to this reality to successfully integrate into the local culture.

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

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity and acting as a professional, all at the same time. It is not an easy thing to do. You will be working in a professional capacity and will be expected to dress and behave accordingly. Stylish business casual is acceptable in most situations. Albanian fashion is influenced by Italian television programming and Spanish soap operas, and looking good matters. Albanians dress in their fashionable best in public even if the clothes are worn. A foreigner who wears ragged or unkempt clothing is likely to be considered an affront. Although you must dress professionally for work, there are times when you can wear shorts and T-shirts or casual clothing at your host family's home.

## **Personal Safety**

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Health Care and Safety chapter, but it is an important issue that cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk.

Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment in Albania. Petty thefts and burglaries do happen, and incidents of physical and sexual harassment also occur, but Peace Corps Albania has experienced relatively few serious personal security incidents since the post reopened



in 2003. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Albania. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your own safety and well-being. For example, one of your responsibilities will be to inform Peace Corps whenever you leave your assigned site.

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

The Peace Corps experience is sometimes described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys that occur as you adapt to a new culture and environment. The potential for being productive and satisfied with your service is high, but so is the probability of being frustrated. Your organization may not always provide the support you want, or it may not be sure about what it wants you to do. Living with a family in close quarters may be quite challenging. The pace of life and work may be different from what you expect, and many people will be hesitant about changing age-old practices. You will not be able to leave your site without informing Peace Corps in advance.

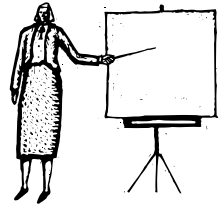
In addition, you will have a high degree of responsibility and independence—perhaps more than in any other job you have had. You will be in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your colleagues with little support or guidance from supervisors. You may work for lengthy periods without seeing any visible impact and without receiving any supportive feedback. Development is a slow process, and you must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

You will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness to approach and overcome these difficulties. Albanians are a hospitable, friendly, and warm people, and Peace Corps staff members, your Albanian family, your co-workers, members of your community, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge as well as moments of success. The peaks are well worth the difficult valleys and you are likely to leave Albania feeling that you have gained much more than you gave during your service. If you make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful and satisfied Volunteer. You will also have contributed to the overall mission of the Peace Corps to promote world peace and friendship.

## NOTES



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## **Overview of Pre-Service Training**

You will participate in an intensive 12-week training program that will begin immediately upon your arrival in Albania. The weekly schedule is Monday through Friday with most Saturday mornings for language training and special events. You and a few other trainees will live with host families in a small town or village. You will participate in many of the training activities with that small group. One or two days each week, you will travel to a central site where you will participate in training activities with the entire group of new trainees. Pre-service training focuses on learning the Albanian language, cross-cultural, community skills development, technical skills development, safety and security, and health. The training period is a time for you to reexamine your commitment to being a Volunteer in Albania. It also gives Peace Corps/Albania the opportunity to get to know you and be assured that your skills and attitudes are a good match for the program here. Throughout the training period, you and Peace Corps staff will measure your progress in meeting the training objectives.

## ***Technical Training***

Technical training will prepare you to work in Albania by building on the skills you already have and by helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. Peace Corps staff members and Albanian experts conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training includes sessions on the environment, economics, and politics in Albania with emphasis on the status and activities of the sector that you will work in. The training will help you identify strategies to understand and work within existing frameworks. You will review your technical sector's goals and meet with the Albanian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will also meet with other Albanian and international organizations that support the activities of the particular sector. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

### ***Language Training***

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are the key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Language training is the heart of the training program, and you must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Albanian language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people. The Albanian language is also incorporated into the other components of training.

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

It is a good idea to start studying Albanian as soon as you accept the invitation to come to Albania. Unfortunately, there are not many commercially available materials for learning the language. One useful resource that is widely available is Pimsleur International's audiotape series for self-instruction in Albanian. Please don't worry if you lack the resources for these materials. We will also send you a CD-ROM with Albanian language learning materials four to six weeks prior to your departure.

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

Community skills training provides information and methods for integrating into the Albanian culture, and the skills and tools that will help you understand your community more deeply.

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with an Albanian host family. This experience will ease your transition to life at your site. Host families have gone through an orientation by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Albania. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

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

### ***Health Training***

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and health information. You will be expected to practice preventive healthcare and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies.

Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Albania. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and avoiding HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

### ***Safety Training***

During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service. You will learn how to assess basic risks and hazards and to identify and manage the risks you may encounter. There will be tests of the Emergency Action Plan (EAP) and your compliance is required in order to complete training. You will learn that safety and security are team efforts and if you do not work and live safely, you can put other members of the team at risk. As one Volunteer said, “safety is a team sport in Albania and never takes a vacation.”

### **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their language, community, and technical skills. Peace Corps/Albania provides two types of training events:

- *In-service training*: Provides opportunities for Volunteers to upgrade their language, community, technical, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment



to serve. You may participate in several in-service training events during your two years of service.

- *Close of service conference*: Provides an opportunity to review Volunteers' respective projects and personal experiences and prepares them for the future after Peace Corps service.

Training events are integrated and inter-related, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



# YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN ALBANIA



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

## **Health Issues in Albania**

Good health results from good health maintenance. Major health problems among Volunteers in Albania are rare and often the result of Volunteers not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. Health problems in Albania are similar to those that exist in the United States, that is, colds, flu, diarrhea, skin infections, headaches, minor injuries, dental problems, STDs, adjustment problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Albania because of exposure to unfamiliar stresses.

## **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Albania, you will receive a medical

handbook. During pre-service training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your initial supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as we will not order these items during pre-service training. Please bring at least a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use since they may not be available in Albania and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physical exams at mid-service and at the close of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Albania will consult with the Office of Medical Services at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C. If your condition cannot be treated in Albania, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The old adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States.

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Albania during pre-service training.

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other STDs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, you should use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STDs. You will receive more information about this important issue throughout your training and service.

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

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

## **Women's Health Information**

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention, but also has programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if a pregnant Volunteer remains in Albania. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Albania, it is unlikely that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy could be met.

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

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

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

Adhesive tape

*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*

Antacid tablets

Antibiotic ointment

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner

Band-Aids

Butterfly closures

Throat lozenges

Condoms

Dental floss

Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg

Insect repellent stick

Water purification tablets

Lip balm

Oral rehydration salts

Oral thermometer

Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg

Cough lozenges

Scissors

Sterile gauze pads

Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops

Antifungal cream

Tweezers

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

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

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

If you don't want duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it with you to Albania. Costs for any immunizations received prior to Peace Corps service cannot be reimbursed. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment shortly after you arrive in Albania.

Bring at least 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 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 non-prescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

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

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

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



## **Safety and Security—Our Partnership**

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

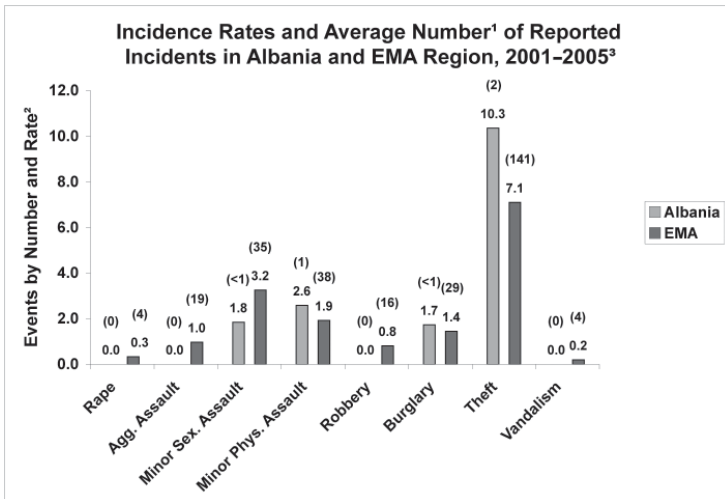
the world that have Peace Corps programs. The safety and security officers conduct security assessments; review safety trainings; train trainers and managers; train Volunteer safety wardens, local guards, and staff; develop security incident response procedures; and provide crisis management support.

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 provide 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 Albania as compared to all other Europe, Mediterranean and Asia (EMA) region programs as a whole, from 2000–2004. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

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

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way to compare crime data across countries. An “incident” is a specific offense, per Peace Corps’ classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.



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

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

<sup>3</sup>Data collection for Albania began as of 2003; due to the small number of V/T years, incidence rates should be interpreted with caution.

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS) and Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS); the information is accurate as of 04/4/06.

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; 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 [violentcrimehotline@peacecorps.gov](mailto:violentcrimehotline@peacecorps.gov).

## **Security Issues in Albania**

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you must be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime exists in Albania. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the larger cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Buses and bus stations in larger towns are favorite work sites for pickpockets. Using your cellphone in public can also put you at risk to be pickpocketed. Fortunately, violent crime is relatively rare. The most frequent threats to your security will be harassment and pick pocketing, especially during travel. If you follow a few simple guidelines, you will reduce most risks.

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

You must be prepared to take primary responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your living arrangement is secure, and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Albania, do what you would do if you moved to an unknown city in the United States. Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the Albanian language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps' policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Albania will require you to accept



many restrictions on your current lifestyle. One example is that you will have to inform Peace Corps in advance each time before leaving your site.

Volunteers always attract a lot of attention, but usually receive far more negative attention in larger towns, where they are anonymous, than in smaller towns, where family, friends, and colleagues look out for them. While gestures and exclamations from strangers may be fairly common on the street, these behaviors can be reduced if you dress appropriately, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention.

Carry valuables close to your body or under your clothing. Undergarment money pouches, the kind that hang around your neck and stay hidden, work well. Do not keep money or valuables in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. Keep track of your belongings at all times. Be wary of overly friendly strangers, particularly near bus stations. Avoid places that make you uncomfortable and make inquiries before you wander off alone. Women need to take extra precautions; it is not advisable for them to walk alone after dark. Finally, be very careful in drinking alcohol. The most common factors in injuries and security incidents involving Volunteers worldwide are alcohol consumption and being out late at night.

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

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during training and your two-years of service. The plan encompasses information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents.

Peace Corps/Albania will keep you apprised of any issues that may impact your safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided by the country director, safety and security coordinator, and medical officer through telephone and mail contacts. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, Volunteers will be contacted through the emergency communication network.

**Volunteer training** includes sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Albania. This training will help you 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, community skills, health, and other components of training.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for you before you arrive. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for your arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting you. Each site is inspected before your arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and work sites. Site selection is based in part on any relevant site history; access to medical, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; suitable living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Albania's detailed **emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, Volunteers in Albania will gather at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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



# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Albania, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Albania.

Outside of Albania's capital and a few larger regional towns, residents of smaller towns and rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. Albanians are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community where you live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

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

## **Overview of Diversity in Albania**

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

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

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

Gender stereotypes are much more evident and accepted in Albania than in the United States. By tradition, women are expected to cook and to look after the needs of their husbands and children even if they work outside the home.

Albanian women lead much more restrictive lives than American women do. Women do not go out alone at night, and jogging or walking alone for exercise is uncommon. Outside of downtown Tirana and in the larger city centers, women almost never smoke or drink alcohol in public. Young women are sometimes verbally harassed by groups of men in the streets, and looking foreign or walking alone on the street will heighten the likelihood that harassment will occur. Your adjustment to Albanian customs will be difficult and frustrating at times, but you must modify your behavior to avoid compromising yourself and your host family.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Albania is a small country, with only about 3 million people. Expect to live in a fishbowl for the next two years, especially if you’re assigned to a small town or village. People will know your business even if you don’t even know them. Building good relationships within your community is key during your first few months at your site. Your community can either help and protect you or shun and ‘gossip’ about you. If you’re a woman, don’t expect to stay out late and hang out at coffee shops and bars like the men do. Unless you’re in bigger towns, women usually stay at home. In the villages, you’ll find yourself the only woman having a cup of coffee. Sometimes, locals even frown upon you drinking alcohol or playing billiards, especially in small villages in northern Albania. Playing billiards and going out for coffee seem to be the main activity after work in Albania. If you go to a soccer game, be prepared to be the only woman there.”

—Anna Gutierrez

“Where do I begin? It’s safe in Albania, but keep an eye out. Live with a good level of caution. Caution allows you to think through a plan, but fear will paralyze you. I felt safe and trusted my host family, but had experiences on the *furgon* (mini-buses) and on the buses with men who were unsavory. You will have to learn to handle yourself—stuff happens. Know your boundaries, use your voice, keep your cool. If the Albanian language deserts you in a moment of shock, shout in English. Your strong voice will let people know you are none-too-pleased. Albanian men don’t expect a woman to get angry or defend herself, so you’ll have the element of surprise on your side. Do report such incidents to the authorities at the Peace Corps. They keep tabs on such things. I had three inoculations, I like to call them, and then never again. Many Albanians haven’t had enough experiences with foreigners to know how to treat them. I had one experience with a man in a business suit, so it can happen with anyone. But avoid judging people—the men I worked with, the county judge, the mayor of my village, schoolteachers, and my host family and extended family were all trustworthy. Take it easy at first, get to know people, let life come to you, and don’t try to make it all happen at once. And to you male Volunteers, please keep an eye out for women’s safety—companions help. Ladies, let the men be a buffer at times. It works to keep the bother to a minimum. Group support kept us all safe.”

—Brynne Sissom

“I was a Volunteer in Korca, teaching English at the foreign language school. As a female, I had to tolerate daily harassment by men, including remarks, facial gestures, and being pinched, grabbed, and followed, among other things. Being young, single, and American can bring more



harassment. The harassment was so relentless that, had I not met my future husband, I might have left.

I don't want to discourage anyone from going to Albania. Although many men on the streets harassed me, I did meet some amazing men as well. I am still in contact with my host family and my students, and although I am no longer married, my husband was an Albanian. My advice to a female going to Albania is to develop a strong relationship with your host family. It will serve as protection in the community. Also keep in mind the amazing power of elderly women in Albania. Most of the men who behaved horribly were terribly afraid of, and respectful to, their own mothers.”

—Melanie Bekiri

“Living as a woman in Albania was probably one of the biggest adjustments I had to make. I had to stop thinking, “Hey, I'm an American woman, and I have the right to [fill in the blank] without [fill in the blank] happening to me wherever I go!” Number one, you aren't in the U.S. anymore, and the old rules no longer apply. That means that you have to make sacrifices, ask for help even when you don't think you need it (or want it), and take responsibility for your own safety. It means learning the culture, knowing what's acceptable, and being very careful about when to make exceptions. Some of the latter 'fill in the blanks' might include being grabbed on a bus, being followed down the street, or having men yell nasty things at you or, worse, whisper them while making sounds with their mouths. You learn to ignore all these things, to never make eye contact with strangers on the street, to not talk to men you don't know, to always get an escort after dark, when to be friendly and when your smile could be misconstrued as an invitation,

how to make friends, and even, possibly, date and become romantically involved. Some American Volunteers, both men and women, have become romantically involved with, and later even married Albanians.”

—Melanie Wilson

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

There are very few people of color in Albania, and many Albanians have never met anyone of color. Some older Albanians may have met Chinese technicians and workers in the 1960s and 1970s, when Albania was aligned with China. They may have unpleasant memories from that period. Although there are currently foreigners from a variety of countries and races in Tirana, there are very few people of color in the smaller towns and rural communities. Many Albanians will not know what to make of a person of color who calls herself/himself an American. If you are of African, Hispanic, or Asian descent, you will probably be the only such person in your community and might be the only such person within the group of Volunteers in Albania. There may be no role models for you among the Peace Corps staff.

You may encounter varying degrees of harassment in your day-to-day life because of ignorance, stereotyped cultural perceptions, or Albania’s historical involvement with certain countries. You may be evaluated as less professionally competent than a white Volunteer. You may be stared at, pointed to, and commented on. You may hear comments that would be considered completely inappropriate in the United States. Children and teenage boys can be particularly insensitive and hurl comments or even rocks. In those situations, your greatest support will be your host family and local counterparts—people with whom you have established strong relationships—who consider you a friend. They will introduce you to others in the community and intervene

with children and others who may bother you. You will have to learn to live with a constant level of attention that you've never had to face before. It can be very difficult.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“If you're Asian American or even look Asian, expect to have kids and young men holler and taunt you. They'll call you *Xhinese* or *Haponese* (Chinese or Japanese) to your face. There's really nothing you can do about it except try to ignore it. Older folks and women tend to be a little bit discreet and will just persistently ask you your origin until you tell them. They won't believe you're from America and will start asking you questions about your country of heritage even if you've never been there.”

—Anna Gutierrez

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

Respect comes with age in Albania. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. There are situations that senior Volunteers will find challenging, however. Younger counterparts at your assigned organization may feel that the Peace Corps let them down by not assigning them a younger and presumably more energetic, eager Volunteer. It may take some time for them to see that age has nothing to do with energy or eagerness. Older people in Albania generally are less active than older people in the United States, and your Albanian friends may assume that you would rather stay home than socialize. You may also feel isolated within the Peace Corps community because the majority of other Volunteers are likely to be in their 20s.

## **Volunteer Comment**

“I went in at 75 years old! Perfect health. So aside from being a little slow in running across the square in the insane traffic, I made out pretty well. And my colleagues were great to me. My host family was wonderful—welcoming, eager to exchange cultures, and so kind! I found learning *Shqip* (Albanian language) a challenge, although the teachers were fine. But one learned to speak in the environment—while shopping, teaching, and socializing. My students (16- and 17-year-old foreign language students in Shkoder) delighted me, spoke pretty good English, and loved me as an American who was truly interested in their world and problems. Being a Volunteer in Albania will be one of the greatest experiences of your life, whether you get pneumonia three times, as I did, are 75 years old, or can’t run as fast as everyone else. You will learn so much, you can give a lot, and life will never look quite the same afterward!”

—Phyllis Jones Twichell

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

Albania has a homophobic culture, and many Albanians view homosexuality as immoral. If there is a gay and lesbian community in Albania, it is deeply underground. Being sensible and extremely cautious about revealing one’s sexual orientation in one’s home, workplace, and community is advisable. Dress and mannerisms considered acceptable in the United States, such as particular hairstyles or earrings on men, may be viewed with suspicion or disdain in your community. You may serve for two years without meeting another homosexual or bisexual Volunteer or Albanian, and there may be little emotional support for your sexual orientation among your Albanian friends.

## **Volunteer Comment**

“It is a very difficult situation. Homosexuality is totally taboo in Albania, and an openly gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteer could have a lot of trouble. This could be an issue even in Tirana.”

—Jerry McQuade

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

Albanians' religion generally varies by location. Some areas of the country have more Muslims, some have more Albanian Orthodox people, and some have more Roman Catholics. Though Albania is sometimes characterized as 70 percent Muslim, this refers more to heritage than to religious beliefs and practices. Most Albanians identify with one of the three religions because of family history, but tend to be non-practicing members. All religions are fairly well tolerated in Albania, and practicing your religion is not likely to be an issue. The Peace Corps forbids Volunteers from proselytizing or participating in other religious activities that could impair their effectiveness as Volunteers.

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

As a disabled Volunteer in Albania, you will face a special set of challenges. People with disabilities are often kept out of public view in Albania, and there is very little infrastructure to accommodate those with disabilities. There are no ramps in public places, and roads and sidewalks are uneven or otherwise in poor condition. Traffic throughout the country is chaotic. Nevertheless, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable of performing a full tour of Volunteer service in Albania without unreasonable risk to yourself or interruption of your service. Peace Corps/Albania will work with disabled

Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations in training, housing, and job sites to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

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

Married couples in different sectors may be required to live separately during their pre-service training. If you do live separately, it will be a matter of logistical necessity based on the design of the training program. It is not intended to unfairly burden married couples. Reasonable efforts will be made to accommodate proximity and visitation concerns. All married couples will live together following pre-service training, when they move to their permanent sites as Volunteers.

Married couples may face challenges stemming from traditional Albanian gender roles. A married female Volunteer may find herself the object of gossip among older Albanian women, who may wonder whether she is taking proper care of her husband, can cook and preserve enough vegetables for the winter, or spends too much time with other men. While the wife may be expected to do all the domestic chores, the husband may be expected to assume an overtly dominant role in the household. In addition, the independence exercised by each member of an American couple may be perceived as immoral behavior. Still, married couples are serving effectively in Albania without having to make unreasonable compromises.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Being a married Volunteer is a great advantage. As you adapt to the different culture, it is a great comfort to have your partner there to share successes as well as fears and frustrations. It is such a relief to have someone around to speak with in English. But perhaps more importantly, you

gain a lot of respect in Albanian society by being married. You are taken more seriously. Children in Albania are spoiled rotten. They are pampered, given complete freedom, rarely reprimanded, but also rarely listened to. Like it or not, until you are married, you are considered a child. Even the words in Albanian are boy and girl before marriage and man and woman after marriage. Those words tell the whole story of the attitude. The best advice I can give to younger Volunteers is to act older than your age and show a lot of respect to gain respect.”

—Judy Green

“As a married person, I feel extraordinarily fortunate to be here with my wife for so many reasons. We will share this experience for the rest of our lives. We support one another when we need it. We act as a sounding board for one another, and on and on. If you are considering serving together, I heartily recommend it.

If you are married, there may be an adjustment period regarding how much time you spend together. My wife and I spend much more time together in Albania than we did in the U.S. In fact here, I think we are generally seen as a unit, not so much as individuals. While that has been great, we have had to figure out ways to create space and alone time for ourselves. One more benefit as a married person: Albanians respect your privacy! You may hear complaints from single Volunteers that they have a hard time convincing Albanians that they like to be alone sometimes. We don't have to worry about that. If we are in our room, we are left alone.”

—Ted Feeny





# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Albania?**

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 limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. 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 100 pounds total with a maximum weight allowance of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as fireworks, lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

## **What is the electric current in Albania?**

The electric current is 220 volts, 50 hertz. Electrical outlets use round, two-pronged plugs that are standard in Europe, so most American appliances (e.g., hair dryers and CD players) will require transformers and plug adapters. It is best to buy these before leaving the United States. However, European-made electronics are becoming more widely available in Albania at somewhat reasonable prices, so if you do not already own an American item, you may want to wait until you get to Albania and buy one that does not need a transformer or plug adapter. Check out the website of Walkabout Travel Gear ([www.walkabouttravelgear.com](http://www.walkabouttravelgear.com)) for helpful products (converter plugs, small surge protectors, etc.) and tips on dealing with differences in electric current. Electricity can be very unreliable and of poor quality. Some areas of Albania experienced power outages for up to 18 hours per day during the winter of 2005–2006.

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

Volunteers are expected to live at the same modest level as the people in their communities. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which covers their expenses. Often Volunteers bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash for such travel, but they cannot be used in most of Albania. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

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

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. When you travel outside of Albania, weekends away are counted as leave days. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after you complete your first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended visits at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps cannot provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

### **Will my belongings be covered by insurance?**

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, the Peace Corps will provide you with insurance application forms, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available. Don't bring something you aren't willing to lose.

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

Volunteers in Albania do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating motorized vehicles of any kind. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking.

### **What should I bring as gifts for Albanian friends and my host family?**

This is not a requirement; a token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

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

Peace Corps trainees are assigned to individual sites about one-third of the way through pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's language and technical skills prior to assigning sites. The most important factor in assigning sites is making a workable match between your skills and knowledge and the needs of the community. This takes precedence over all other considerations. If feasible, you may be able to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, many factors influence site assignment and the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placing you where you would most like to be. Current Volunteers live in cities, small towns, or rural villages in all parts of Albania, including coastal areas and in the mountainous interior. Most Volunteers are within a two-hour bus ride of another Volunteer. Some sites are an eight-hour mini-bus drive from Tirana. You should be prepared to live in any of these settings.

### **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, extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580, then extension 2421.

### **Can I call home from Albania?**

Yes, but you will need to pay for all personal calls from your living allowance, and their cost can be substantial. All Volunteers have access to a phone in their communities, but it may be in a post office some distance away. Some host families may have a phone in their home that you may use to make local calls and receive local or international calls. Telephone service in Albania is generally poor, and it is best not to expect to make calls easily. Cellular service is one bright spot as prices drop and coverage increases. Volunteers receive a cellphone during training that can be used to call home if they wish to pay the fees. While the Peace Corps provides funds for phone time each month for safety and security purposes, it will not be enough to call home. You can receive calls on your cellphone at no charge, however.

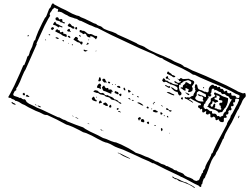
### **Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

Not unless it is a European GSM (global system mobile) phone that accepts SIM (subscriber identity module) cards. Though the most common U.S. cellphones will not work in Albania, there are GSM/SIM card phones in the U.S. that will (usually called tri-bands).

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

Internet and e-mail access is becoming more available in larger towns but remains relatively rare in rural villages. Although new Internet cafes are opening all the time, you may have to travel quite a distance to find one in your region. If you already have a laptop and do not bring it with you, you will probably wish you had. It is unlikely that you can set up a connection to the Internet, but you could use a laptop for personal and professional word processing. If you do bring a computer, you are responsible for insuring and maintaining it. Powering your laptop may be challenge. Most communities have electricity only on a schedule and power outages are common throughout the country.





# WELCOME LETTERS FROM ALBANIA VOLUNTEERS

The letters included here should give you a sense of both the challenges and the rewards of serving in Albania. Keep in mind that serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer is a unique, individual experience and that what someone else thought or experienced may not be at all relevant to your experience.

.....

As a female Volunteer in my 40s, I find everyday life in my small city easy and enjoyable. I love going to the *pazar* (market) on Sundays to see what's fresh and watch people sell their produce, cheeses, and meats. People here in the northeast are easygoing, polite and are eager to converse with any foreigner. They stare but I have to remember that all foreigners are a novelty to them and they are simply curious about us. Some things are different, and as a single woman you can expect to have to limit some of the activities you take for granted in the U.S. For example, most people do not exercise for enjoyment; if they do, it is not done in a public place for all to see (this assumes you are not playing on a football or volleyball team). But football stadiums are located in many towns and jogging or doing exercises there is normal and acceptable.

As far as fashion goes, anything goes! Smart business clothes will always work. Long skirts are not necessary. I shortened one of mine and plan to give the other one away. Fashions are changing quickly here and with all the used clothing stores around, you can find anything from almost any era.

People are part of families in Albania. Even if a woman is single, she has to go home to her parents and siblings to help out. She is generally not available as a friend after work hours unless you visit her at her house. This makes for much alone

time—which can be okay, but sometimes lonely. One way to remedy the situation is to be outgoing by accepting invitations to others' homes or sitting around in the park with women and their children. They all are curious about you anyway.

My city is far enough away from the super highway to discourage constant travel, but when I have traveled, I have always felt secure about my personal safety regarding men. The safety of the trip itself is a whole other matter (road conditions, speed, other drivers). There have been a number of purse and wallet thefts on public transportation—mostly in the Tiranë area, I assume.

All in all, life in Albania for Volunteers is a good one. It can be full of surprises one day and very predictable the next. I have been here a year and feel I have so much more to learn about the people and how I can be effective among them. There is so much more I could do to integrate—it's a matter of comfort level.

—Brenda Wolsey

.....

Congratulations on your invitation to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in the little-known, but exciting country of Albania! It will be a choice you will not regret. I encourage you to find out as much as you can about the country now. Even though there isn't much information out there, it can be found. Gathering information beforehand will help you make the decision about coming to Albania. It isn't for everybody. It will also be beneficial to know as much as you can before you get here, even though you will learn a lot during training.

Pack only what is important to you and what you absolutely need, and then if you have room, pack the extras. If not, you can always have them mailed to you later on. You can find almost everything you will need in Albania if you look hard enough.

Some of the things you will need in Albania are not material things but mental traits. You will definitely need to learn to be patient, even more so than you already think you are. Things do move slowly and Albanians won't be rushed just because



the Americans like things done in a hurry. You will need to be flexible, because things will change on you at the very last minute on a regular basis. You will need to be open to trying out new things and to people asking you very personal questions about yourself and your family. Albanians don't do this to be rude, but because they are very curious and want to know everything about you. They are very friendly in this way, sometimes too friendly, but they mean well. You will be asked if you can help them with a visa—which you can't—or whether you know another American they have met before—which you probably won't.

Most importantly, you will need a sense of humor. The only way you will survive your adventure here is if you are able to laugh off the hard times and even laugh at yourself when you make mistakes. I learned this very fast as I used to confuse the words *byrek* (pie) with *brekë* (underwear) and the words *fle* (sleep) and *flas* (talk)." That last combination used to get me a lot of laughs and stares. I still sometimes go into the post office and ask for a *pulë* (chicken), when what I mean to say is *pullë* (stamp).

Albanians are, by nature, kind and hospitable people, but they are also very cautious. If you treat them with the same respect and kindness they show you, you will leave here with many friendships.

I have had many fantastic experiences as a Volunteer, though I've made mistakes with the culture and language. But now I can just laugh them off because they were learning experiences. Once I came home to my training host family and asked my host father if I could break off a few branches from a tree. I wanted to use them with my training group as trash pickers for a trash-cleaning project at a nearby school. With only about four weeks of language lessons, I may not have been clear on what I was trying say. Because the next thing I knew, my host father and his two oldest sons went outside and came back with a 15-foot tree they had cut down and started cutting it into small pieces for me. After they had cut the pieces, they proceeded to peel off the bark and whittle little sharp points on them. I didn't have the heart to tell them

that about half the pieces would be too big to use, but I was very grateful and embarrassed that they would go to all that trouble for me. Albanians are very kind like that. They had only known me for a month, but were willing to go out in the rain and cut down a tree for me. Wow! (We did find a use for the big pieces: we taught some local kids how to play baseball!)

The families you live with during training and at your site will be invaluable resources. They will be your teachers with the culture and language and an integral part of your introduction to your new community. You will have wonderful times with them and learn a lot.

While personal space is not a well-known concept in Albania, your Albanian family will respect your space, as long as you respect them. Remember they are trying to help you in your transition to Albania and are just as curious and perhaps as scared as you are. You will have days when nothing is going right and it is a struggle to make it through the day. These days are limited and your new-found Albanian friends and fellow Peace Corps Volunteers will be a great source of encouragement.

Albania is a very beautiful country, but has many ironies that will surprise and humor you. There are ancient Roman cities, beautiful mountain ranges, sandy beaches along the coast, and 700,000 ugly concrete bunkers that are now part of the Albanian landscape. I like to walk to the nearby mountains or to one of the 200-plus small villages in my region to explore and meet new people.

Though Albania might not be one of the toughest countries for Peace Corps as far as living, infrastructure, and environment go, the infrastructure is pretty bad and it is probably one of the toughest to serve in mentally. Albanians are a very stubborn, but kind people, who acknowledge that they need to change, but undertake very little change themselves. After 50 years of isolation, several years of war, playing host to Kosovo refugees and then a series of transitional governments, Albanians are looking forward to

the future, but have no idea what to expect. Albanians will say that they wish their country were cleaner, and then throw trash on the ground in front of you while standing five feet from a trash can.

You will see old men going to market riding on a cart pulled by a donkey or a herder taking his sheep to pasture for the day traveling down the road along with Mercedes Benzes driven by 16-year-old kids. You will see Albanians fight over who is going to buy the round of coffee or *raki*, despite living in one of the poorest countries in Europe. Hospitality is important to Albanians and they will insist on paying for you, the foreign guest. You should not refuse too much, as it is their tradition to pay for the guest.

I have had the time of my life here in Albania. Things have not been easy, but I would never trade this experience for anything. I have had experiences and made friendships that will last me a lifetime. When you have Albanians as friends, they are your friends for life, even if you never see them again.

Think carefully before you decide to come here, but I promise you that you won't regret it if you come.

—Robbie Hammer

.....

Gaining the trust of your colleagues is of utmost importance in Albania. I found that at the beginning of my placement, some of my colleagues felt threatened by me. The first month was a struggle of gaining acceptance. I gained their acceptance by getting them to talk about their work and by identifying with their ideas and frustrations. Albanians don't like to be told how to do things or have the impression that you think that you know better.

On the other hand, there is great respect for ideas. So the most fruitful conversations tend to be brainstorming sessions where the ping-pong of ideas flows and it is possible for all members to "own" the ideas and adopt them as their own. However, follow-through on ideas can be weak. There is an attitude here that once the idea is in

place, the implementation will work itself out. I've found a frustrating lack of understanding as to how long it takes to develop an idea and to implement a project well. I've found myself in situations where final products are expected in an unreasonable amount of time, with no tolerance for delay. It is essential to develop a detailed implementation timetable with deadlines and responsibilities clearly spelled out. The first reaction will be, "Why so long?" Just ignore it and make sure everyone knows what to do by when, and follow up on seeing that deadlines are met. There is a tendency to do everything at the last moment, and the results often appear hurried. That's when the blame game can start.

Albanians are very intelligent people, enthusiastic and full of life. Once you gain acceptance, it's a pleasure to be included in the community. They are extremely communicative with well-developed conversational and storytelling skills. They also have well-developed senses of humor. Learn to participate in the banter. It is your ticket to becoming a part of what goes on around you. Humor can be off-color. It is not considered an insult to women to tell suggestive jokes in the workplace; in fact, most jokes are off-color. Women laugh. Women also tell these jokes. And the atmosphere is friendly. Self-righteousness has no place here and will quickly alienate you from your colleagues.

Albanians are also very direct. They will tell you in complete innocence that you are too fat or too thin or too tired looking. In the same vein, they will offer advice: go on a diet, eat more, get more sleep. You must learn to take these "intrusions" for what they are—a culturally honest way of showing concern. Do not be insulted!

Albanians respect their elders and the knowledge that comes with age and experience. Being an older, experienced Volunteer is a real advantage here. There is a certain formality in relationships that will need to be respected until you know someone really well. Everyone should be acknowledged, and an apology is expected if you are concentrating or distracted by something and don't notice. This can be frustrating at work because people enter and exit rooms constantly during

work hours. For instance, someone may need to use the only copy machine and it happens to be in your room, or to use the computer you are working on for something urgent, or to talk to one of the colleagues who shares your room, or even to talk to you. For all of these interruptions, you are required to greet and be greeted. Everything comes to a halt for these formalities, even if it's a good friend. There is no culture of not interrupting. I often come back to work after hours when no one else is around, or work at home, to get some peace and quiet.

I am finding my posting in Albania fascinating. It is a completely European environment with a long and complex history of Western culture so there is familiarity on a certain level. I have considered a third year since many of the projects we are getting off the ground will probably require an extra year to see through to fruition.

—Judy Green

.....

If I had to put my impression of serving in the Peace Corps in Albania in a few words they would be, “Is this really the Peace Corps?” That may be because I work in a program where Volunteers are in a professional setting with local engineers, urban planners, and even politicians (and dress in business casual). I have been assigned to work with a national park in southern Albania. As a landscape architect, I have had national parks as clients, but I had never worked for a national park. It is an excellent opportunity for professional development with an international slant. My resume will not skip a beat by my two years of service and I will have had the chance to travel in Europe as well.

Albania is one big paradox. It has the history and culture of an ancient civilization, but it lacks the sophistication of Europe. There are no such things as credit cards, shower curtains, or electricity. But things are changing fast.

Albania is also one of the few places left in the world where they actually like Americans (we helped with Kosovo, which they won't forget). The mountains and the southern coast are

dramatic and beautiful; the roads are terrible; the apartment flats from the socialist period are very ugly; and in the town of Lac where I lived for three months during training, there were pigs on the sidewalk in front of the Internet café—a land of contrasts.

—Gary Wimberly

.....

Food: has been better than I expected—you will eat pretty well here. Salt and olive oil (plenty of each) are the condiments of choice. Vegetables and fruit are generally abundant. Vegetarians will have fun trying to explain their aversion to meat, but their choices will be respected.

Landscape: the country can be absolutely beautiful at times and shockingly ugly at others. There is more urban decay than I expected, but 50 years of totalitarian rule and lack of money can do that. There is a lot of trash. Be prepared to see piles of trash placed in some surprisingly prominent places—in the center of small towns for example. Though city locations will vary, there is a sameness to them in terms of buildings and houses. You will quickly learn that Albanians build their homes in stages, so when you see metal bars sticking up from the roofs of so many houses, it's because they plan to build another floor if and when they have money to do so.

People: the people are generally extremely generous with food, time, lodging, whatever they have. Americans are almost universally liked and appreciated (at least the first time you meet—the rest is up to you!).

Work: I think for many of us the work (or lack thereof) has been the most challenging aspect of our service. Depending on what you will be doing, be prepared to put aside your Western notions of initiative, planning, productivity, and collaboration. Planning for the future is still a new concept. Albanians were told what to do by the central government for 50 years, so the idea of taking initiative and working on something without being told to is still new. Generally, people here adhere to a hierarchical style of management (i.e., “the boss is the boss, he or she tells me what to do, and I do

it. I generally do not do more than I am told to”). Working together and collaborating on ideas are second nature to Americans, but still new here. You may have to work hard at getting different groups to see the benefit of sharing ideas and working together.

There can sometimes be a disconnection between the organization that has requested a Peace Corps Volunteer and the people you ultimately work with. Your colleagues may need some time to get used to the idea of working with you without feeling threatened by your presence. Depending on your job, be prepared to look outside your prescribed role to find fulfillment. Ultimately, you will have to work harder to find a sense of accomplishment.

Like anybody, I am occasionally frustrated by what goes on here, but I am usually buoyed by the fact that our presence in Albania is received so positively.

—Ted Feeny

.....

I didn't really know what to expect when I first got off the plane in Rinas. Albania is a country full of contradictions. It's a country you'll love one minute and hate the next. But what will make your experience worthwhile are the wonderful people you will meet and places you will visit.

Albanians are some of the most curious, generous, and hospitable people I've ever met. Strangers will strike up conversations with you if you just smile or say "hi" to them. They enjoy talking to foreigners and even love you when you speak in *Shqip* (Albanian language). They'll invite you to their homes even if they've just met you. But Albanians also like to ask the most personal questions, usually without intending to. Albanians are blunt. They'll tell you if you're fat or skinny to your face without thinking that they're offending you. Be prepared to answer questions about how much money you have or are making as a Volunteer. Albanians are kind and generous. Even if they're poor, they will bring you their best food and drinks (homemade wine or *raki*). Albanians take pride in what they serve you. Don't be surprised if random

people start giving you gifts like sweets and fruits, or invite you for coffee, when you first get to your site. Sometimes they'll want something in return (like ask you to tutor their kids in English or help them get a U.S. visa), but most of the time they're just kind. When you live with your host family, they'll expect you to be part of the family, paying them visits and calling them on occasion after you move to your permanent site or apartment.

Albania is a beautiful country. Expect to find old castles on mountains, unique landscapes, and gorgeous valleys. At the same time, be prepared to find dumps of trash and rivers turned into sewage canals. Take the time to travel around the country. But expect to find crazy *furgon* (mini-buses) drivers. They can fit their vehicles into the smallest possible area and stop in the middle of the road to talk to a fellow driver. You'll wonder who gave them their driver's license.

If you think Albania has warm, Mediterranean weather, think again. In the winter, it can get really cold in Albania, especially up in the mountains. It can get so cold that you can see your breath in your room and you'll dread putting on cold clothes. There's no centralized heating in most Albanian homes. Even if you have an electric or gas heater, you're lucky if there's power 24/7 or you don't smell gas in your room. Bring a sleeping bag! I wouldn't have survived this past winter without it.

Life in Albania is slow. Be prepared to sometimes be bored at home and at work. Bring lots of music and books to keep your mind busy. If you're used to working with computers and lots of paper, lower your expectations. Work in Albania is not about doing paperwork, but about maintaining relationships, usually built by sharing cups of coffee. Don't expect to be told what to do. You can be a strategic planner one day, IT helpdesk the next, and English translator the third. Your job and experience here will be what you make of it.

—Anna Gutierrez



You will be safe here. For some reason, many people think of Albania and think it is dangerous here. There is crime here, but the crime consists of very high-level crime that you won't be involved in and low-level petty theft, which most often happens in the capital. I have lived in several cities and towns in the U.S. and feel safer here. The only exception is the drivers here. For some reason drivers here think they are more important than any pedestrian and drive with the thought that it is the pedestrian's job to get out of the way. As far as the Kanun-related bloodfeuds, they do exist and are pervasive across the north of Albania. I live in the south, and I know nothing of them here. Volunteers who are in the north say how they know people whose families are involved in them and it is heartbreaking to see, as often men NEVER leave their house in their entire lives from fear of being killed in the street due to being involved in a blood feud. There are entire towns where only women are outside due to them. You will not be placed anywhere where bloodfeuds are pervasive like this, and as a foreigner, you are exempt from them as long as you do not align yourself with one family against another.

An additional note on safety is that 99 percent of Albanians LOVE Americans—almost unconditionally. There are historic reasons for this, as President Wilson is seen as helping make sure that Albania was kept as a sovereign country rather than being eaten up by its neighbors, and of course the U.S.'s lead role in the Kosovo situation. They do have a generally negative view of what is going on politically now with the U.S., but less so even than many Americans. The pro-American sentiment takes on surreal dimensions, as during the elections last summer. During almost every event for each of the parties you could see three flags waving in the crowd: the Albanian flag, the political party's flag, and the American flag. It is nice to know that most Albanians are generally positive toward us.

I must say that I and most Volunteers love it here. There are minor cultural differences, and I have gotten (mostly) used to those differences quickly. It's a great place, people befriend you quickly here and there are many people who

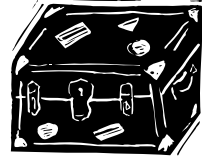
are excited to talk to you. When I am on long bus rides, and we have a coffee break, other passengers often fight with one another about who is going to sit and hang out with me and buy me a coffee, and this is descriptive of my interactions with Albanians in general.

—Chris Cudebec

## NOTES



# PACKING LIST



This list is based on the experience of Peace Corps Volunteers generally. You will need an assortment of clothing for work, play, and socializing. Keep in mind that Albanians dress stylishly, even if their clothes are worn. Don't expect to replace clothing at the same rate that you might in the United States. You also will need your own money for your purchases. Many Peace Corps Volunteers throughout the world end their service with the same clothing (albeit well-worn) that they started with.

Use the list as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. Do not bring anything that is so valuable or precious that you would be traumatized if you lost it. Although dry cleaners exist, it is best to avoid bringing clothes that need dry cleaning. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on checked baggage. Though clothing and shoes can be expensive, you can get most things you need in Albania if you look hard enough. If you choose to buy clothing, you will probably need to use your own money as your living allowance provides only a very modest amount for clothing.

## **General Clothing**

- Slacks and jeans
- Shirts for summer and fall
- Warm shirts, turtlenecks, and sweaters for winter
- Shorts and T-shirts for relaxing in hot weather

- Long underwear
- Light socks for summer and heavy socks for summer
- Warm hats and gloves
- Sweats or heavy pajamas
- Heavy winter coat
- All-weather coat
- Bathing suit

### ***For Women***

- Dresses for summer and for the rest of the year
- Underpants and bras
- Several pairs of pantyhose and tights
- One spring jacket and one fall jacket that matches other clothes

### ***For Men***

- Collared shirts for work (it is better to dress up than to dress down)
- Underwear
- A few ties
- At least one jacket or suit for special occasions

### ***Shoes***

- At least one pair of good-quality sandals that are good for walking
- Dress shoes for work that are good for walking (women should also bring a pair of pumps)
- Sturdy, thick-soled walking shoes
- Plastic shower shoes
- House slippers—essential for living with a host family
- Warm, insulated, and sturdy winter boots

## **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Any favorite nonprescription medical supplies (those provided by the Peace Corps may not be your favorite brands)
- A three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, to last until the Peace Corps can order more
- Two pairs of eyeglasses (if you wear them), along with your current prescription
- Contact lens solutions (not supplied by the Peace Corps and not readily available in Albania)
- Small supply of cosmetics (the quality in Albania varies)

## **Kitchen**

- Two pairs of strong rubber gloves—you will probably do laundry by hand, and dishwasher may be freezing
- Sturdy travel water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)
- A few favorite cooking tools or utensils
- Basic cookbook
- Packaged mixes for your favorite sauces, salad dressings, and soups
- Your favorite spices (Mexican, Chinese, Indian, and Italian ones can be hard to find)

## **Miscellaneous**

- Tough but flexible luggage (the roller/backpack combos work especially well)
- Backpack
- Money pouch
- Camera
- Sunglasses
- A pocketknife (e.g., Swiss Army or Leatherman type) or tool kit

- Duct tape
- Good flashlight with rechargable batteries and charger
- Alarm clock
- Watch
- Compact sleeping bag
- Sewing kit
- Books and music



## 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).

## Passport/Travel

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

## Medical/Health

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

## **Insurance**

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

## **Personal Papers**

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

## **Voting**

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

## **Personal Effects**

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

## **Financial Management**

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



# CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

**Peace Corps Headquarters**

**Toll-free Number:**

800.424.8580, Press 2, then  
Ext. # (see below)

**Peace Corps' Mailing Address:**

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

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/ Local Number</b>
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia	Ext. 1875	202.692.1875
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: albania@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2421	202.692.2421

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



# PEACE CORPS

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters

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