

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

P A R A G U A Y



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



February 2007



A WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to the toughest job you'll ever love. You may recall this as a former tagline for Peace Corps. It's not in quotation marks here because it's a reality that I lived as a Volunteer in Paraguay between 1985 and 1988. Whether it becomes a truism for you or not largely depends on you. It depends on whether you treat this experience as a job—it is—and whether you fulfill a commitment to give your all to the community and people who live there for the two years you serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

I want to welcome you to Peace Corps/Paraguay and let you know that my expectation, and that of the staff in Paraguay, is that you will embrace this challenge to professionalism and commitment, and make long-lasting friendships and contributions to Paraguayan development, just as thousands have done before you since the first Volunteers arrived here in 1967.

The country's people make Paraguay an excellent place to be a Peace Corps Volunteer. After you get over the initial shock of having lost most of your privacy because of your guest status, you will find that Paraguayans are very friendly and compassionate. They love to laugh and tell jokes and stories. This makes it important for you to consider two fundamental points as you prepare for your arrival here. First, be prepared to not take yourself too seriously when you are here. Paraguayans will laugh heartily at your language mistakes, and comment on everything from your clothing to your hairstyle to your weight. To the degree you can take a good-natured ribbing, and engage their friendly witticisms with your own, you will find that Paraguayans will "take a shining" to you. Achieving this will not mean that you do not take your job seriously; it just means that you will have recognized that laughter is an integral part of the development process here. Second, please be prepared to practice engaging Paraguayans as just people first, and people with whom you've come to do development work second. Establishing this personal

rapport and friendship first is not just the Paraguayan way; it's just plain good manners and good development work.

It is important to underscore that development work here in Paraguay, as in many other places in the world, is a really difficult job. The first critical step is gaining a rapport with people. The second, more difficult task, is motivating people to engage in, and stick with, a process of working together to assess their current reality and implementing a plan to change that reality. This challenges and frustrates most development workers. It will probably challenge and frustrate you, too. Your degree of self-described "success" as a development worker here will depend on your ability and effort to meet those challenges and frustrations with professionalism, commitment, and personal aplomb.

Of course, along the way, Peace Corps/Paraguay has an excellent staff that is committed to supporting you in your 11 week pre-service training period and throughout your two years of service. Our pre-service training staff will help you begin to learn Spanish and Guaraní, and to help you identify strategies to integrate into your community and work. We also have a very seasoned staff that will identify your future work sites, and assist you throughout your two years of service to navigate the challenges and successes of being a Volunteer here.

Congratulations on your selection to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay. We look forward to meeting you and working with you during what will be one of the most challenging, rewarding periods of your life!

Best regards,

Michael Eschleman
Country Director

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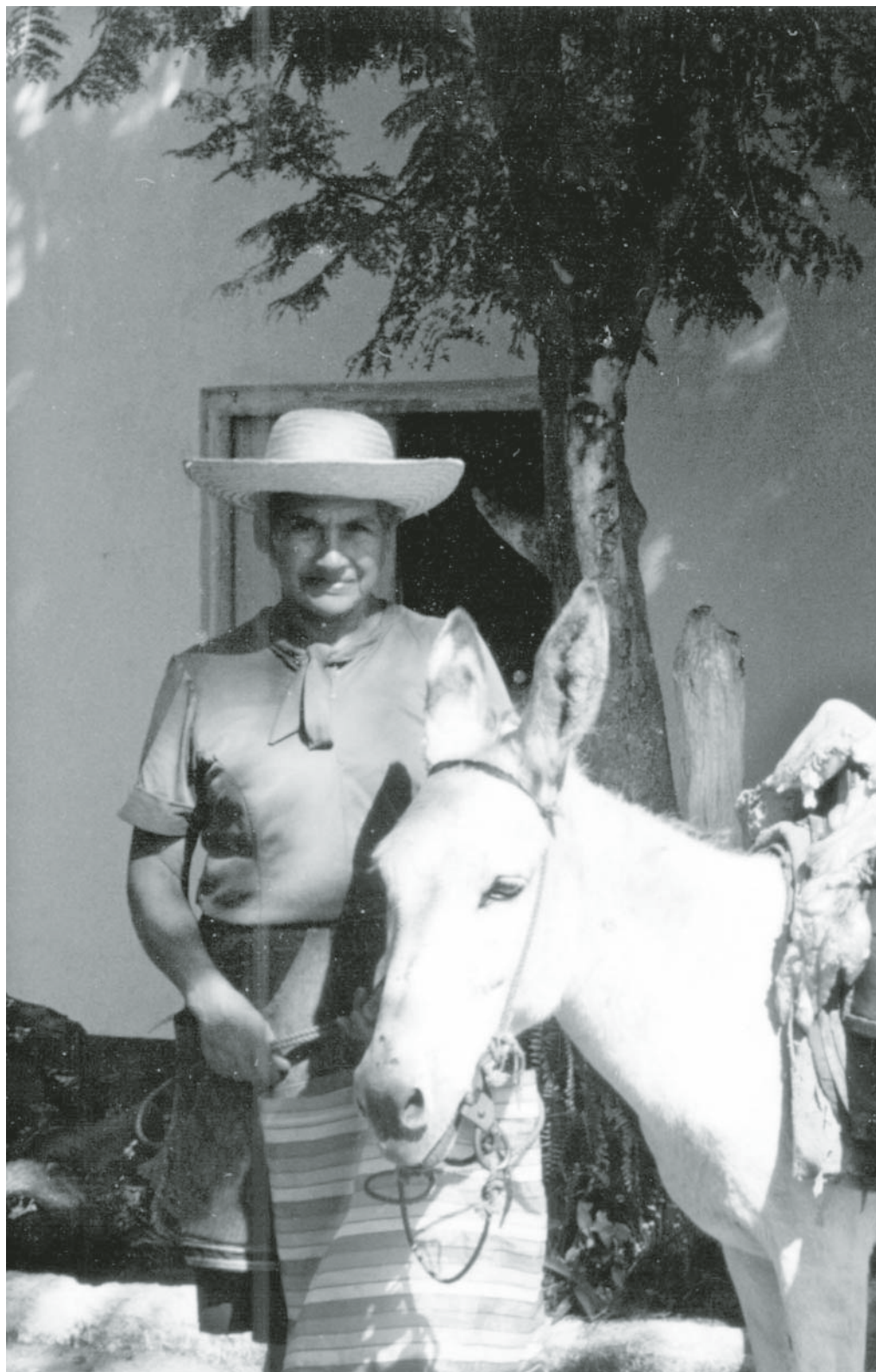
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PEACE CORPS/PARAGUAY HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Paraguay

The Peace Corps has been working in Paraguay since 1967, and the country is one of the oldest continuously operating posts in the Peace Corps. After the government of Paraguay and the Peace Corps signed a joint agreement on November 4, 1966, the first Volunteers arrived in 1967 to work in agricultural extension in rural areas. Before long, projects were also established in the health and education sectors. Nearly 3,000 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Paraguay since 1967, and more than 39 years later, an average of 90 Volunteers arrive each year. Today, approximately 200 Volunteers are working in the six major sectors of agriculture, education, environment, health, small business development, and urban youth development. Many former Paraguay Volunteers continue to stay informed about the country's affairs and assist in development efforts in the country—years after they completed their service. At the same time, returned Volunteers have contributed a great deal to increasing the knowledge and appreciation of Paraguay and its people by Americans.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Paraguay

Peace Corps/Paraguay works in the seven major projects of agriculture, cooperatives/small business development, municipal services development, environment, health, education, and urban youth.

The focus of the agriculture sector is to increase farm productivity and crop diversification of small-scale farmers while ensuring sustained food crop availability for families. Peace Corps/Paraguay's agriculture sector Volunteers work in two areas: crop extension and beekeeping extension. Crop extension Volunteers assist farmers in implementing new agricultural practices related to vegetable production, soil conservation, pest management, small animal husbandry, and the marketing of new products. Beekeeping extension Volunteers address crop diversification and promote beekeeping as a viable option for income generation. Beekeeping has proved to be a suitable project for any family member, including single mothers, who are often the poorest of the poor. The Peace Corps' counterpart agency is the Dirección de Extensión Agraria within the Ministry of Agriculture.

Paraguay suffers from an alarming rate of unemployment and underemployment. Peace Corps/Paraguay's rural economic development project works to create jobs and increase incomes for low-income Paraguayans by providing technical training and assistance to small business owners, rural farmers' associations, and rural cooperatives. They work to strengthen local capacity in the areas of management, accounting, marketing, savings and loan services, educational programs, and administrative and organizational functions.

The municipal services development project began in 1999 to address needs that have arisen as national reforms have led to greater government decentralization. For the first time, local governments have more responsibility, greater fiscal resources, and the potential to improve public services in their communities. As part of this project, Volunteers work with municipal governments to improve the planning and delivery of services to underserved communities.

The environment sector promotes the conservation and sustainable use of Paraguay's rapidly declining natural resources through an agroforestry project and an environmental education project. Environmental education Volunteers assist elementary teachers in integrating environmental education into their regular curricula and into community-based projects, as mandated by the country's educational reforms. Volunteers also promote the incorporation of environmentally sound practices and activities in their respective communities working with host country nationals and local NGOs. Agroforestry Volunteers help small-scale farmers implement soil conservation practices and promote farmer-to-farmer interchange as both a motivator and to spread the adoption of new practices. The Peace Corps' counterpart agencies in this sector include the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Ministry of Agriculture, and several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

The goal of Peace Corps/Paraguay's rural health and sanitation project is to improve infant, child, and maternal health of rural Paraguayans. Volunteers promote preventive healthcare and sponsor seminars on maternal and child care for village nurses, parents, and community members. They also focus on the protection and decontamination of water sources, latrine construction, and the excavation of garbage pits. The Peace Corps' health project counterpart is the Ministry of Health and Welfare.

The education sector consists of two projects: early elementary education, which concentrates on formal education in rural areas; and urban youth development, which focuses on nonformal education in urban areas. The goals of the early elementary education project are to improve the basic skills (reading, writing, math) and health of Paraguayan children during their most formative school years—

kindergarten through third grade—through teacher training and support. Elementary education Volunteers train teachers in improved teaching methods and promote a gender-neutral environment, which, in turn, improves the reading, writing and math skills of Paraguayan boys and girls. The Peace Corps' counterpart agency in this project is the Ministry of Education.

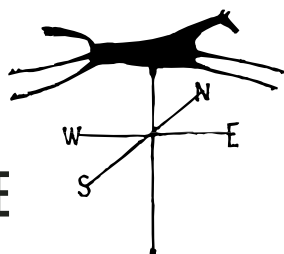
The urban youth development project helps at-risk youth build their self-esteem, better integrate into their communities, and strengthen their employability. Urban youth development Volunteers live and work in marginal urban areas. They involve at-risk youth in educational programs and activities that promote and foster leadership and the development of job skills. Peace Corps/Paraguay's counterpart agencies in this project include the Subsecretary of Youth within the Ministry of Education and Culture and several NGOs.

In addition to the major projects mentioned above, Peace Corps/Paraguay has four initiatives that cut across project lines and provide secondary work opportunities for Volunteers in all project areas: information and communications technology (ICT), HIV/AIDS education and prevention, youth development, and gender and development.

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW: PARAGUAY AT A GLANCE



History

Almost no archaeological research has been done in Paraguay, and the pre-Columbian history of the country is poorly documented. What is certain is that the eastern part of the country was occupied by Guaraní Indians for at least 1,000 years before the Spanish conquest. Evidence indicates that those indigenous inhabitants developed a fairly sophisticated level of political autonomy, with quasi-sedentary, multivillage chiefdoms.

The first Spaniards settled in the territory in the 16th century. They were predominantly young men, as few women followed them to the relatively unpromising region. Following the Spaniards' assumption of power, a mixed, or mestizo, population developed that spoke the language of their indigenous mothers but adopted many of the cultural norms of their Spanish fathers.

The country's colonial history was one of general calm punctuated by turbulent political events. The colony was economically unimportant to the Spanish crown, and the distance of its capital from other new cities on the continent virtually ensured the territory's isolation. Paraguay declared its independence from Spain in 1811.

From independence onward, the country has had a fascinating history of dictatorial governments, from the utopian regime of José Gaspar de Francia (El Supremo) to the suicidal reign of Francisco Solano López, who nearly devastated the country in warfare against the combined forces of Brazil, Argentina, and

Uruguay from 1865 through 1870. The so-called War of the Triple Alliance ended in the near annihilation of Paraguay and set the stage for the formation of a two-party (Colorado vs. Liberal) political system that would persist until the present day.

Following political turmoil during the first three decades of the 20th century, Paraguay went to war again, this time with Bolivia. From 1932 to 1935, approximately 30,000 Paraguayans and 65,000 Bolivians died in fighting over possession of the Chaco region.

Modern-day Paraguayans look with pride on their history of surviving devastating wars and rebuilding their country in the face of great odds. On the other hand, initiative and creativity were stifled for many years during the rule of a series of dictators. From 1870 to 1954 Paraguay was ruled by 44 different men, 24 of whom were forced from office. In 1954, General Alfredo Stroessner took advantage of the strong link between the armed forces and the Colorado Party to overthrow the government; he ruled until 1989.

Although there is little ethnic strife to impede social and economic progress, there is social conflict caused by underemployment and the enormous gap between the rich and the poor. Positive steps to correct these inequities have occurred since the 1989 ousting of the last dictator, and the country is moving toward a fully functioning democracy. However, the tradition of hierarchical organizational structures and generous rewarding of political favors prevails.

Government

Because of Paraguay's long history of dictatorship, the government has always exercised strict control over the political system and economic activities of the country, including local government activities. However, in 1992

Paraguay approved a new constitution that introduced several changes in its political system. The new constitution calls for a process of decentralization in which certain powers are to be transferred to municipal and departmental governments.

Since Alfredo Stroessner was overthrown in a military coup in 1989, Paraguay has undergone a process of democratization. Open elections, liberalization of the press, and public debate of issues have created an atmosphere conducive to change. In May 1993, Paraguay elected its first nonmilitary president in 40 years. In another landmark election in May 1998, Paraguay voted to pass the presidency from one civilian government to another. In March 1999, the assassination of the vice president led to the resignation of the new president. In spite of threats of a constitutional crisis, the presidency passed to the president of the Senate, Luis Angel González Macchi, as mandated by the constitution. The Macchi government, however, was ineffective in making necessary reforms, and the country's socioeconomic difficulties worsened during his mandate. The current president, Nicanor Duarte Frutos, took office on August 15, 2003. Though Paraguay's socioeconomic situation remains difficult, there is some hope among the people that the new government will tackle the country's longstanding problems. Paraguay's current president and government have a legitimacy that the former administration lacked and appear willing to implement some anti-corruption measures within and against the controlling party and the Supreme Court.

Economy

Roughly half the population lives in rural areas, and Paraguay relies on agricultural and forestry commodities for more than 95 percent of its exports. These sectors provide about one-third of the gross domestic product and 45 percent of

the employment. Principal exports have until recently been dominated by two commodities, cotton and soybeans, the former of which has traditionally been the main source of income for farm (campesino) families. However, the export of cotton has decreased over the past decade, while the export of meat has increased. The shift has contributed significantly to rising poverty among campesino families, as meat is produced by large ranches with low labor input. At the same time, dependence on so few export crops places Paraguay in a highly vulnerable position when there are drastic shifts in international market prices, as occurred in 1992, or serious climatic perturbations, as happened in 1998 during El Niño.

Household economic patterns in the countryside vary from basic subsistence to full-wage labor. Most families earn a living from a combination of strategies, with cultivation of some food crops and some cash crops, and occasional outside paid labor of one or more family members. As the population increases and land becomes more scarce, increasing numbers of farm families abandon the land and search for wage-labor opportunities in rural areas or the capital city of Asunción. A traditional release for Paraguay's unemployed has been Argentina, but this option has closed because of that country's own economic difficulties.

People and Culture

In Paraguay, a multitude of customs, beliefs, and art forms contributes to the richness of the culture. These customs and beliefs provide a sense of continuity to Paraguayans, and some may regard change with suspicion. The pace of life and work tends to be slower than that to which Volunteers are accustomed. Indeed, the universal watchword is *tranquilo*, or tranquil.

Paraguayans hold their native language, Guaraní, very dear, viewing it as the vessel that carries and transmits their culture. However, music is undoubtedly the art that has given Paraguay the greatest prestige around the world. It is the country's most efficient means for the dissemination of its culture, even if the common tunes are known as “waltzes” and “polkas” (Guaranías are also a musical staple). Native handicrafts unique to Paraguay include the delicate ñandutí lace. Employing great imagination and skill, Paraguayan women produce some of the world's finest lacework. Ñandutí, which is made in a circular design, takes its name from a Guaraní word meaning spider web.

Environment

Landlocked Paraguay, located in the heart of South America, is a place of great physical beauty and considerable environmental diversity. Surrounded by Argentina, Bolivia, and Brazil, it is linked to the Atlantic through the Paraná-Paraguay River system, which flows south through Argentina. The country lies in the subtropics mostly south of the Tropic of Capricorn. Similar to central Florida in climate, it can be very hot in the summer months and extremely cold in the winter months. Freezes are rare but do occur once or twice each year.

The Paraguay River divides the country into distinct eastern and western regions. Eastern Paraguay is more temperate and has a gentle, rolling terrain with wooded hills, subtropical forests, and fertile grasslands. Rainfall is plentiful for most of the year in this section of Paraguay. So, too, are heat and humidity, especially from October through April, when temperatures typically rise above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. The Chaco in western Paraguay is a low plain covered by marshes, savannas, and dense scrub forests. As one travels westward

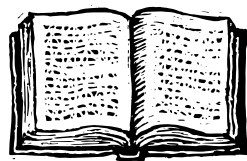
from the Paraguay River, rainfall becomes increasingly scarce and living conditions become increasingly harsh.

Although Paraguay is in many ways more fortunate than more densely populated Latin American countries, it is nonetheless undergoing an alarming degree of environmental degradation. Paraguay's deforestation rate is among the highest in the world, and its fragile soils are subjected to unsustainable farming practices that also involve high use of chemical pesticides and fertilizers. These factors and others have led to decreased agricultural productivity and shortages of firewood, fruits, and lumber.

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RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Paraguay and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we cannot guarantee it. If you do not have access to the Internet, visit your local library. Libraries offer free Internet usage and often let you print information to take home.

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

General Information About Paraguay

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

Visit this site to learn about Paraguay or almost any other country in the world.

www.state.gov/p/wha

The U.S. State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries in the Western Hemisphere. Find Paraguay and learn more about its social and political history.

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

Official website of the U.S. embassy in Paraguay. Includes extensive links to sites about Paraguay as well as up-to-date information on the U.S. diplomatic mission.

<http://geography.about.com/library/maps/blparaguay.htm>

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

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp

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

www.worldinformation.com

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

<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/sa/paraguay/>

The site of the Latin American Network Information Center links to a variety of resources on Paraguay.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

www.rpcv.org

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

www.friendsofparaguay.org

This nonprofit organization was created in 1987 to establish a network of returned Peace Corps Volunteers and others who are interested in improving communication and information exchange in support of social, cultural, and economic development in Paraguay.

<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.

<http://peacecorps.mtu.edu/>

Peace Corps Volunteers in the field and returned Volunteers who are affiliated with the Master's International program at Michigan Tech make regular submissions to this site, including synopses of technical projects and links to technical resources that may be helpful to Volunteers in the field.

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.

Current News Sites About Paraguay (in Spanish)

www.lanacion.com.py

Site of *La Nacion*

www.ultimahora.com

Site of *Ultima Hora*

www.abc.com.py

Site of *ABC Color*

International Development Sites

www.usaid.gov/country/lac/py

U.S. Agency for International Development

www.worldbank.org

World Bank (search for Paraguay using the “Countries & Regions” link in the left navigation column)

www.jica.go.jp/paraguay/espanol/index.html

Japan International Cooperation Agency

<http://www.plan-international.org/wherewework/americas/paraguay/>

Plan International

www.unicef.org/paraguay

UNICEF

www.unesco.org

UNESCO (search for Paraguay)

www.worldwildlife.org

World Wildlife Fund (search for Paraguay)

Recommended Books

1. Gimlette, John. *At the Tomb of the Inflatable Pig: Travels through Paraguay*. New York: Knopf, 2004.
2. MacIntyre, Ben. *Forgotten Fatherland: The Search for Elisabeth Nietzsche*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992.
3. McNaspy, C.J. *Lost Cities of Paraguay: Art and Architecture of the Jesuit Reductions, 1607-1767*. Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1982.
4. Miranda, Carlos R. *The Stroessner Era: Authoritarian Rule in Paraguay*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960's*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

Mail

Your mailing address in Paraguay will be:

“Your Name,” PCT [for trainee] or PCV [for Volunteer]
Cuerpo de Paz
162 Chaco Boreal c/Mcal. López
Asunción 1580, Paraguay
South America

Compared with mail in many developing countries, mail between the United States and Paraguay is relatively dependable (an estimated 80 percent of letters arrive). Airmail normally takes two to three weeks to and from Paraguay; surface mail can take months.

The current situation, however, is not normal. As a result of the departure of American Airlines and Varig, only two regional airlines now serve Paraguay with smaller aircraft and cargo space for mail is extremely limited. Packages and other types of correspondence are being delayed for weeks and even months at intermediate points, such as Buenos Aires and Sao Paulo, where they await eventual delivery to Paraguay by other means of transport.

Packages are often opened, and sometimes items are stolen. Paraguayan postal and customs inspectors determine which packages will be sent directly to the Peace Corps office for distribution and which ones will be retained for further inspection. Any package—regardless of content or

weight—may be held at the Paraguayan post office. Should a package addressed to a Volunteer be retained, the Volunteer is responsible for retrieving the package and for paying any fees.

Items with a declared value over \$200 are usually sent to customs. If your package is sent to customs, you will be assessed a tax based on the type of merchandise and its value. Volunteer who receive notification that their package is in customs is responsible for paying any fees and taxes.

We recommend that you establish a regular pattern of writing friends and relatives in the United States because they may become concerned if they do not hear from you for an extended period of time. You may want to tell them, however, that once Volunteers move to their sites and become more involved in their projects, their writing habits often change.

Some Volunteers and their families number their letters in sequence to try to keep track of how many have been sent and received. This is a good way to know whether someone is just too busy to write or letters are not arriving for some other reason.

Peace Corps regulations prohibit Volunteers from accepting gifts of property, money, or voluntary services directly. Such gifts can cause confusion about the role of the Volunteer, who might be perceived as a facilitator of goods and funding, rather than a person who is working to build a community's capacity to identify local resources. You are not permitted to solicit materials or funds for your community during your first six months at site so that you have time to engage the community in project identification. To ensure that any request for funding or donations is appropriate for your project and your community, you must have prior authorization from your project director and the country director.

The Peace Corps has a mechanism in place for you and the communities you work with to access U.S. private-sector funds. The Peace Corps Partnership Program, administered by the Office of Private Sector Initiatives, can help you obtain financial support from corporations, foundations, civic groups, individuals, faith-based groups, and schools for projects approved by the country director. To learn more about the Partnership Program, call 800.424.8580 (extension 2170), e-mail pcpp@peacecorps.gov, or visit www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.donors.volproj.

Telephones

International phone service to and from Paraguay is fairly reliable and accessible to most Volunteers. Volunteers are provided with a cellular phone and a basic calling plan. If Volunteers want to increase their minutes, they must do so with their own living allowance. Although not all areas of the country are accessible by cellphone, most Volunteers are able to call Asunción and to receive international calls with their cellphones.

Recently, the Peace Corps office, in collaboration with the U.S. embassy in Asunción, installed a direct phone line between Asunción and Washington, D.C. This line is mainly for conducting official business with Peace Corps headquarters, but it is available for Volunteer use after office hours and on weekends. Volunteers can place direct calls to the Washington area at no charge, while calls to all other areas are billed at the long-distance rate from Washington. This service has become extremely popular with Volunteers, so a sign-up sheet to regulate use has become necessary. To take full advantage of the service, Volunteers should bring a major telephone company calling card or prepaid phone cards to Paraguay with them to charge toll calls made through this line.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

Paraguay is hardly at the forefront of the “e-revolution,” but Volunteers increasingly are able to rely on the Internet to communicate with family and friends in the United States. There are several Internet cafes in Asunción, and cafes are opening with increasing frequency even in rural towns. There are also computers with Internet access available for Volunteer use in the Peace Corps office. Many Volunteers acquire free e-mail accounts and use these computers to send and receive e-mail while they are in Asunción on official business.

Housing and Site Location

Most Volunteers live and work in rural areas, but more are being assigned to work in urban centers in response to the recent increase in urban migration. The latest census shows that more than half of the population lives in larger towns or cities. Your Volunteer assignment description should indicate whether your project site is likely to be urban or rural. All Volunteers spend some time in Asunción because it is the location of the Peace Corps office, as well as the site of conferences and some in-service trainings.

About 80 percent of Volunteers live in small towns or villages with fewer than 5,000 people, and some of these campo (countryside) sites have fewer than 200 inhabitants. Most (but not all) have electricity, as the country has increased the availability of electricity from 24 percent of Paraguay’s 3 million people in 1978 to more than 60 percent of the current population of about 5.8 million. Generally, streets in the campo towns are unpaved, and there is no running water or indoor toilets. Few people in these towns have traveled outside Paraguay, and many have never even been to Asunción. The only people with cars are likely to be the

doctor, the priest, and a few businesspeople, government officials, and ranchers. Horses, motorcycles, and oxcarts make up the majority of local traffic, while children play freely alongside roaming cows, pigs, and chickens.

For both rural and urban Volunteers, housing in Paraguay is basic. All Volunteers are required to live with a Paraguayan family during their initial two months of service. Some Volunteers then choose to live alone in one- or two-room wood or brick homes; others choose to live with a Paraguayan family for their entire two years of service. Peace Corps/Paraguay strongly recommends that Volunteers, especially single women, consider this option. Living with a family not only helps with community integration, but also decreases personal security risks. If you choose to live with a family, the furniture will be adequate and functional, but probably not overly comfortable. If you choose to live on your own, you will likely need to furnish the place yourself.

Volunteers who live in the capital or other large cities will have easier access to services such as running water, electricity, telephones, public transportation, and the Internet. They will also find many of the same shopping and entertainment amenities found in similar-size cities in the United States.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer, you will receive a living allowance that enables you to maintain a modest but safe and adequate lifestyle. While the living allowance is calculated to enable you to live at the same standard as your Paraguayan neighbors, the Peace Corps requires that Volunteer housing meet minimal standards for security and that Volunteers have the resources to maintain a healthy diet and respectable lifestyle. Living

allowances are reviewed once a year to ensure that they are sufficient to meet basic needs, and they are adjusted by the Peace Corps if necessary.

You will receive three additional allowances: a monthly vacation allowance (along with two days of vacation for each month of service); a one-time settling-in allowance to cover the initial expenses of furnishing a house or room and purchasing basic supplies; and an allowance set aside by the U.S. government of \$225 for each month of service. This readjustment allowance, which is available on completion of service, permits returning Volunteers to resettle in the United States without undue financial burden.

While Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the Paraguayans in their communities and are encouraged to make do with the allowances provided by the Peace Corps, some Volunteers bring additional money or credit cards for extraordinary expenses or for travel during vacations. The Peace Corps strongly recommends that cash be held in the form of traveler's checks to prevent loss or theft. The ATMs that are increasingly available in Asunción and other large cities accept ATM cards from most U.S. financial institutions, including Citibank, the most prevalent and dependable institution for international transactions. Peace Corps will safeguard traveler's checks—not cash—for Volunteers in the office.

Food and Diet

Paraguayans tend to eat more simple meals than people do in the United States. Dietary habits and the lack of agricultural diversity often limit meals to beans, rice, noodles, meat (when available), corn, onions, tomatoes, and manioc. Manioc or mandioca (more commonly known in other countries as

yuca or cassava) is the staple food in rural Paraguay and is as ubiquitous at the table as bread is in other countries. Paraguayan food is not spicy and is quite different from Mexican food (for instance, in Paraguay, a tortilla is a kind of fritter). Most Paraguayans are exceptionally generous and will insist on sharing their food, no matter how little they have.

Volunteers who choose to maintain a vegetarian diet are able to do so with varying degrees of difficulty. Such a diet is much easier to follow if one incorporates eggs and dairy products, and some Volunteers choose to add fish and chicken. While it is possible to maintain a vegetarian diet, it can be very difficult to find the variety of foods necessary to remain healthy and challenging to get Paraguayans to understand such a decision.

Transportation

Most Volunteers live in communities served by a simple dirt road, which may or may not be close to a paved road. Inexpensive bus service is available to almost all communities, although heavy rain can unexpectedly close dirt roads to bus traffic for an unpredictable length of time. While a community may not be a great distance from the capital in miles, getting there may involve a trip of several hours because of the condition of unpaved roads. You will receive assistance in identifying alternative forms of transportation (i.e., a private vehicle, taxi, or truck) from your site in the event of an emergency. Volunteers may, upon request, be issued a mountain bicycle and helmet.

Peace Corps/Paraguay, as mandated by Peace Corps/Washington, prohibits Volunteers from driving or riding as a passenger on any two- or three-wheeled motorized vehicle (such as a motorcycle) for any reason. Moreover, Volunteers

are not allowed to own or drive private vehicles in Paraguay. These prohibitions are in response to serious safety concerns, and violation of the policy will result in the administrative separation of the Volunteer from Peace Corps service.

Geography and Climate

Unlike more tropical countries, Paraguay does have distinct seasons. Summer (November through March) is long, hot, and humid, with temperatures reaching as high as 105 degrees Fahrenheit (40 degrees Celsius). Winter (June through mid-September) is short and mild, with periods of cold weather (down to 30 degrees Fahrenheit) and occasional frosts. Because of the high humidity and lack of indoor heating, cold winter days may seem more severe than they actually are. The short spring and autumn seasons usually are mild and balmy.

Because of Paraguay's southern latitudes, the length of daylight also differs according to the season. In the winter, the sun may set by 5 p.m. In September, the country goes on Daylight Savings Time, and by mid-December it is light outside until nearly 8:30 p.m. Paraguayans adjust their social and business calendars according to these differences. In the winter, activities are compressed, and people are in bed by 10 p.m., but in the summer, people may not even eat dinner until after 10. At the same time, activities slow down remarkably during the summer, especially in rural areas, and a long midday siesta divides the workday into early morning and late afternoon periods.

In the eastern part of the country, there is no marked rainy or dry season, and there is apt to be abundant rain throughout the year. Summer rains tend to be short and intense, while winter rains tend to be longer and lighter. There are months with little or no rain and months when it rains nearly every day.

Social Activities

Recreation in smaller towns often centers on the family, with an occasional dance, soccer game, or horse race to attend. In the evening, many families gather with friends for volleyball games. The losers pay for drinks, which might be soft drinks (gaseosas) or beer. People frequently sit in clusters (often limited to one gender or age group) to drink the ubiquitous yerba maté, a common local drink made from the leaves of a shrub native to the region, either cold (tereré) or hot (in the early morning or in wintertime). During the hot summer, an important social activity is likely to be bathing in the local arroyo, or small stream. The electrification of the countryside has increased the popularity of telenovelas (soap operas). Volunteers often participate in organized groups, such as ecology clubs or youth groups, that meet occasionally for selected activities.

In Asunción and larger towns, there is a wider variety of options for social activities, including movie theaters, nightclubs, restaurants, and sporting events. Volunteers usually take advantage of their rare weekends in the capital to see the newest movies and enjoy some night life. Volunteers also have access to the swimming pool at the U.S. embassy while in Asunción.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Cleanliness and a neat personal appearance are very important to Paraguayans, as they are for Volunteers who represent the Peace Corps and the United States. You must dress appropriately when meeting with government or other officials. Shorts, tank tops, and flip-flops are inappropriate except around your home or for recreational activities. Whether you work in a school or office setting, in rural or urban Paraguay, proper attire will help establish your

professional credibility. It also reflects your respect for the customs and lifestyle of the people with whom you are living and working.

Although affluent Paraguayans in Asunción may be influenced by international trends and fashions, most Paraguayans view shoulder-length hair, dreadlocks, ponytails, tattoos, and earrings on men with suspicion. It is not unusual for a person to be labeled a *drogadicto* (drug addict), based on appearance alone. Therefore, Volunteers are not permitted to have facial piercings (nose, tongue, eyebrow). Tattoos for both men and women should remain covered until Volunteers have been at their sites for at least six months and can realistically judge the degree to which these would be accepted by community members. Female Volunteers should always wear bras outside their homes. Male Volunteers with beards must keep them well-trimmed and clean.

If you do not cut your hair and remove body rings before you arrive in Paraguay, you will be asked to do so before you are placed with a host family during training. Adherence to these rules is considered to be a sign of your motivation and commitment to adapt to your new environment. If you have reservations about this, or if you view this as an unacceptable sacrifice, you should reevaluate your decision to become a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay. If you decide to conform to the country's norms, you will be amply rewarded by the great adventure and lasting friendships that await you.

Personal Safety

More information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is outlined in the Health Care and Safety chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps

Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Paraguay Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal security incidents. 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 Paraguay. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Rewards and Frustrations

Volunteers have a variety of reasons for joining the Peace Corps, but high on the list must be the desire to help others. Most Volunteers bring an abundance of motivation and enthusiasm to their service. These are not lost in serving others, but are necessarily tempered by the process of learning about the daily realities of a different culture. So while Volunteers should not expect to “change the world,” they can look forward to making a tangible impact.

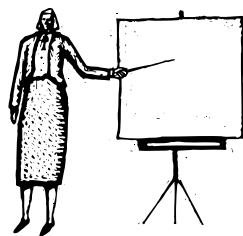
Being a Volunteer requires adjusting to alternative ways of thinking, living, and working. Such adjustments are neither simple nor painless. The people you work with may have strong feelings of pride and nationalism, so your own enthusiasm for change, however well intended, may be misunderstood. You will constantly need to take into consideration the emotions, needs, traditions, institutions, and way of life of the people you work with.

Your satisfaction will come from your commitment to learning and the flexibility you possess to deal with new values and experiences. After living and working with the people of another culture, Volunteers often develop strong ties that are reflected in strong emotions. Intense feelings of desperation, satisfaction, anger, happiness, anxiety, and peace of mind will crop up over and over. These feelings are the heart of the Volunteer experience. But in the end, it is a rare Volunteer who does not feel that the experience was one of the most important in her or his life.

NOTES



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Peace Corps/Paraguay's pre-service training consists of 11 weeks of intensive in-country training in five major areas: language (Spanish and Guaraní), community development and personal adaptation, technical job orientation, Volunteer safety and security, and health. By the end of training, each trainee has to pass qualifying criteria in each of these areas to be sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

The training center is located in the town of Guarambaré, which is approximately one hour by bus from the capital, Asunción. Trainees also make visits to Volunteer sites to begin preparing for the realities of life in Paraguay. After eight weeks, trainees spend a week at the site to which they will be permanently assigned.

Trainees live with a Paraguayan family during the entire training period, sharing meals, conversation, and other experiences. The families live in small satellite communities within a few kilometers of Guarambaré, whose residents are from the lower-income to middle-income strata of Paraguayan society. Trainees spend most of their time in language classes at their satellite training facility. Technical, cultural, and community development studies are combined with practice of new skills at the community level, often in cooperation with nearby schools, organizations, and community groups. Combining formal classroom study with ample opportunity for practicing a new language and cultural and technical skills has proved to be an extremely effective way of preparing Volunteers to work as independent professionals during their service.

Throughout training, you will be encouraged to continue examining your personal motivation for serving in the Peace Corps and your level of dedication and commitment. By the time you are sworn in as a Volunteer, you should have made an informed and serious commitment that will sustain you through a full two years of service.

Technical Training

The training center is staffed by technical specialists who present a detailed curriculum tailored to the job requirements specified by Peace Corps/Paraguay. Technical training will prepare you to work in Paraguay by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer; in fact, you will be involved in practical, hands-on training during your first week in-country.

Technical training will include sessions on the economic and political environment in Paraguay and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Paraguayan agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

The importance of language ability cannot be emphasized enough, especially because Volunteers in Paraguay need to gain competency in two languages. Your ability to share information, serve as a community resource, and integrate into Paraguayan culture will be directly related to your ability to communicate not just in Spanish but also in Guaraní. Because of the importance of competency in Guaraní, all

language training will be in Guaraní once you reach a basic level of Spanish. Therefore, you are strongly urged to initiate Spanish language studies before you leave for Paraguay. Guaraní is not an especially difficult language for an English speaker, but it is much easier if one has basic competence in Spanish. (Invitees choosing to come to Paraguay to improve their Spanish skills should think twice, since most Volunteers will speak Guaraní at their sites.)

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

Cross-Cultural Training

The overall goal of personal and cultural training is to help you work within Paraguay's cultural norms and modify behaviors when appropriate. You will learn about issues related to cross-cultural adjustment and isolation and methods of dealing with them. A key element of this training is living with a Paraguayan host family, who will be your greatest resource for easing the transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Paraguay. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

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

gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

Health Training

Health training is designed to enable trainees to become more self-sufficient. As a Volunteer, you will be expected to practice preventive healthcare and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies.

You will learn how to use locally available food to prepare nutritionally balanced meals. You also will be given basic medical training and information. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Paraguay. Mental health and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered. Current Volunteers will participate in some of the health sessions to highlight the value of peer support in health maintenance.

When Peace Corps Volunteers are confronted with difficult situations or crises, they are most likely to go to a friend, rather than to someone they do not know very well. Although ideally a Peace Corps Volunteer will complete service without facing major problems, sometimes a Volunteer is presented with a difficult problem or situation. During pre-service training as well as in-service trainings, you will learn to deal with sensitive issues such as depression and stress, as well as how to help other Volunteers when they experience difficulties.

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces risk in your home, at work, and during travel. 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 also be briefed on the post's emergency action plan.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system throughout the two years of service that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their language, technical, and community development skills. During your service, there are usually four training events. The titles and objectives of those trainings are as follows:

- *Reconnect in-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their language, safety and security and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three months.
- *Project design and management workshop*: Provides Volunteers and community contacts with the skills necessary to identify needs, set priorities, and design sustainable community projects. This workshop is usually held after the sixth month of service.
- *Technical in-service training*: Provides focused technical training towards the close of the first year of service and helps Volunteers review their first year, reassess personal and project objectives, and plan for their second year of service.
- *Close of service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the transition after Peace Corps service, reviewing their work and personal experiences as well as identifying future aspirations.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through to the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN PARAGUAY



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Paraguay maintains a clinic that is staffed full time by a physician and a registered nurse, who take care of Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Paraguay at local, American-standard hospitals. If you become seriously ill or have a condition that cannot be handled adequately in-country, you will be medically evacuated to either Panama or the United States for treatment.

Health Issues in Paraguay

The most common illnesses that plague both Paraguayans and Volunteers are also found in the United States, such as colds, bronchitis, diarrhea, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, STDs, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more acute in Paraguay because certain environmental factors raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of certain illnesses and injuries. For instance, problems associated with cultural adaptation may exacerbate emotional problems or contribute to alcohol abuse. However, the most common ailments, which are easily preventable, are those associated with unclean water and poor food preparation, such as diarrhea and giardiasis (caused by a common parasite). Hepatitis is much rarer, but it can also be transmitted by polluted water or poorly prepared food.

Paraguay is fortunate to be free of many of the diseases endemic to tropical areas, such as amebiasis, Guinea worm, and typhoid fever. But there are seasonal upswings of dengue fever, which is transmitted by mosquitoes. Although its symptoms include severe muscular pain and headaches, dengue fever is rarely dangerous and normally requires a short period of bed rest. Malaria is rare, therefore Volunteers do not need to take malaria medication, but Volunteers traveling outside of the country may be exposed to malaria or other diseases not normally encountered in Paraguay.

Volunteers are issued mosquito repellent and mosquito nets, which can be effective in the prevention of mosquito-borne diseases.

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 Paraguay, you will be briefed on the basics of healthcare by the Peace Corps medical officer. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items for you during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive. You might consider switching from name-brand to generic drugs, as the Peace Corps medical officer may not be able to purchase certain name-brand prescriptions. You will have physical exams at

midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Paraguay will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Paraguay, 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 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. The most important of your responsibilities in Paraguay is to take the following preventive measures.

You must ensure that your drinking water is safe. Many Volunteers live in communities with hand-dug wells, and that water is not as safe as water drawn from deep wells. Consequently, you will need to boil or otherwise treat your water. Water filters are not issued by Peace Corps/Paraguay because the Peace Corps medical officer has determined that they are not needed in most communities in Paraguay.

You must ensure that your food has been prepared properly, whether by you or by others. Always eat foods that are well cooked and raw vegetables that have been cleaned with boiled or treated water. And remember that food spoils rapidly without refrigeration in a hot and humid climate. The medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Paraguay during pre-service training.

Always use the Peace Corps-issued mosquito net when sleeping to protect yourself from insect-borne illnesses such

as dengue fever. Do not take medications other than those in your medical kit without the advice of the Peace Corps medical officer, and never have injections other than those given by the Peace Corps medical officer or by someone recommended by the medical office. It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let the medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injury.

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

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. Note that the medical office does not carry every type of birth control pill.

Women's Health Information

Pap smears will be done at midservice and at the close of service. Mammograms are done for women over age 50, also at midservice and the end of service.

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of

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

Female Volunteers should consider bringing a one-year supply of feminine hygiene products (especially tampons) as they are expensive and not always available near their sites.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

- Ace bandages
- Acetaminophen (Tylenol)
- Adhesive tape
- Alarm whistle
- American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*
- Antacid tablets (Di-Gel)
- Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Polymycin B)
- Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)
- Band-Aids
- Butterfly closures
- Cepacol lozenges
- Condoms
- Dental floss
- Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
- Hydrocortisone cream
- Ibuprofen
- Insect repellent lotion

Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Latex gloves
Lip balm (Chapstick)
Mycelelex
Oral rehydration salts
Pepto-Bismol tablets
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
Scissors
Sterile gauze pads
Suctrets lozenges
Sunblock (Pre-Sun)
Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Opti-Clear)
Thermometer (Tempa-DOT)
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 immediately 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 wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it with you to Paraguay. If you have any

immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment after you arrive in Paraguay.

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

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair you will use and a spare. If the first 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. The Peace Corps discourages you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an

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

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

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

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

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

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

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

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

Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

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

Support from Staff

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

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

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure that the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff provides support by reassessing the Volunteer’s work site and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect

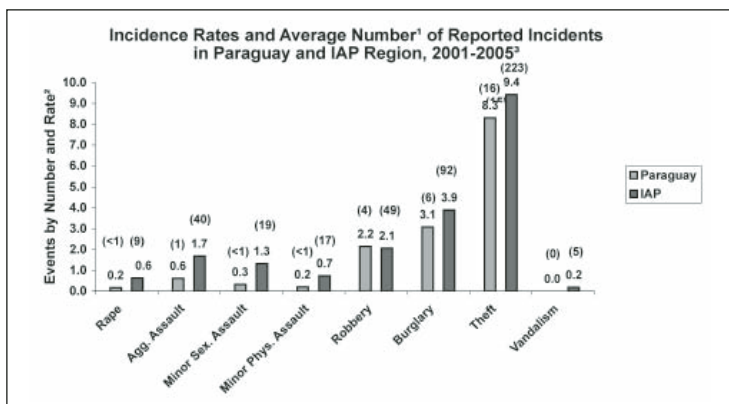
their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Paraguay as compared to all other Inter-America and Pacific (IAP) region programs as a whole, from 2001–2005. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

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

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

The chart is separated into eight crime categories. These include vandalism (malicious defacement or damage of property); theft (taking without force or illegal entry); burglary (forcible entry of a residence); robbery (taking something by force); 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).



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

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

³Data collection for Paraguay began as of 2001

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

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

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of violent crimes. The Peace Corps will give you information and training in how to be safe. But, just as in the U.S., crime happens, and Volunteers can become victims. When this happens, the investigative team of the Office of Inspector General (OIG)

is charged with helping pursue prosecution of those who perpetrate a violent crime against a Volunteer. If you become a victim of a violent crime, the decision to prosecute or not to prosecute is entirely yours, and one of the tasks of the OIG is to make sure that you are fully informed of your options and help you through the process and procedures involved in going forward with prosecution should you wish to do so. If you decide to prosecute, we are here to assist you in every way we can.

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

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

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

Security Issues in Paraguay

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

There is clear evidence that the rate of crime increases as general standards of living fall. In Paraguay, the number of unemployed is increasing with migration from rural to urban areas, and the rate of poverty is increasing as salaries fail to keep up with inflation. Volunteers must respond to these changing circumstances by increasing their vigilance when away from their sites and by ensuring that their homes and personal property are secure. Peace Corps/Paraguay has hired a safety and security coordinator to assist Volunteers and staff with security concerns.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

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

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers than at their sites, where their “family,” friends, and colleagues look out for them. While whistles and exclamations are fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. And always walk with a companion at night.

Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Paraguay

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

The Peace Corps/Paraguay office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact your safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network, which is tested periodically so that any problems can be resolved.

Volunteer training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Paraguay. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout your two-year service and is integrated into language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training, including Volunteer-led initiatives such as the Peer Support Network.

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

work sites. Site selection is based on a variety of factors, including relevant site history; access to medical, banking, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Paraguay'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, you will gather with other Volunteers in Paraguay at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers **immediately report** any security incident to the Peace Corps medical officer or safety and security coordinator. Volunteers are also encouraged to speak with their project director or the country director about security concerns or possible threats to security. 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.

NOTES



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

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

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

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Paraguay, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care or avoided altogether; 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. You will participate in discussions on diversity and sensitivity during pre-service training and Peace Corps staff will be on call to provide support, but the challenge will ultimately be yours.

Overview of Diversity in Paraguay

In the past 100 years, there has been significant immigration to Paraguay by groups from Europe (principally Italians and Germans), the Middle East (principally Lebanese and Syrians), and Asia (principally Japanese and Koreans). There is also a very small community of Paraguayans of African descent. Some of the immigrants have blended into the general population, but others maintain themselves apart to varying degrees.

Although Volunteers are usually readily accepted by their communities, the constant answering of personal questions, the lack of privacy, being considered a rich foreigner, and the need to be aware of different social norms can be real problems for many Volunteers. As a novelty in the community, you may also be the subject of considerable gossip. In addition, as in most Latin American countries, North American women do not have some of the freedoms to which they are accustomed.

The Peace Corps staff in Paraguay recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training and in-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. You will learn to deal with issues such as depression and stress, as well as how to help other Volunteers when they experience difficulties. 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 U.S. culture.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Machismo manifests itself in obvious and subtle ways, and both Paraguayan men and women generally adhere to male dominance at work, in the home, and in community matters. Female Volunteers may be targets for harassment, particularly if they disregard norms for behavior and dress. Male Volunteers, on the other hand, may be viewed as sexual competitors and be pressured to discuss their “conquests.”

Female Volunteers in Paraguay face the kinds of unwelcome attention from men that Paraguayan women experience. Some of this attention can be avoided by dressing and behaving in culturally appropriate, more conservative manners.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Because of Paraguay's general lack of experience with diverse ethnic groups, some Volunteers of color have encountered verbal harassment, especially in Asunción or when traveling away from their sites. African Americans are most often mistaken for Brazilians, and due to the commonly held

Paraguayan stereotype of the Afro-Brazilian soldier who fought against Paraguay in the War of the Triple Alliance, Volunteers should be prepared to hear and receive negative remarks about skin color or hair.

Asian-American Volunteers are often mistaken for Koreans or Japanese and may be questioned about whether they are “real Americans.” While Hispanic Volunteers may enjoy some advantages because of their ethnic background, they may also face irritating questions about their “true” nationality or their inability to speak the local languages Spanish and Guaraní.

As a Volunteer of color in Paraguay, you should be prepared to handle offensive remarks or attitudes, which stem primarily from ignorance, and a lack of direct contact with people of color. Once you become established in your community, such harassment will be less common, though you will probably continue to encounter it outside your site. In many cases, these incidents provide opportunities to educate people about America’s diversity. There are Volunteer support groups to address diversity issues in Peace Corps Paraguay.

Volunteer Comment:

“As a Colombian-American Volunteer I have always viewed myself as having some unique advantages, along with some inconveniences. Having the same *pinta* or characteristics as a Paraguayan (brown hair, brown eyes) certainly allows me to blend in with the masses and hide my *yanqui* (yankee) attributes. It’s kind of like having an on-and-off switch ready at my fingertips. When I want to find some solitude I simply stop playing the role as *yanqui* and play the Paraguayan: I just act naturally and speak only *castellano* (Spanish)—it’s not that hard for me. I can eat without being stared at and walk into any town without anyone taking a second glance. Now that can be difficult when you are a blue-eyed, blonde

male or female, speaking *castellano* with an American accent. However, I have confronted some unforeseen hurdles in my time here in Paraguay. For instance, speaking *castellano* with no accent and having Paraguayan attributes automatically eliminates the fact that I could be a Colombian-American. Many people can't see past the physical attributes. Some Paraguayans will ask themselves, 'How can he have origins from Colombia and be from the United States?' The idea of living in a melting pot in the USA is still something that many Paraguayans are learning about. When they see me it is difficult for many of them to understand my background and perceive me as an American citizen with a professional background. As a result, when I am working alongside Paraguayans, I don't have that immediate credibility that many Volunteers experience upon initial contact in their communities. Throughout my experience though, I have used this minor inconvenience to teach others about the diversity that exists in the U.S., and as an advantage in various work situations. Each one of us comes down here with a special set of characteristics and will have to juggle them in our own way. But I believe that is part of the experience and is what molds us as people and as Volunteers in our communities. My advice to you is to embrace your uniqueness and use it to your advantage in making your two years that much more interesting! Good luck!"

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Although senior Volunteers may encounter hardships related to the rugged living conditions and the difficulties of learning two languages, many have served very successfully in Paraguay. Seniors may find peer support within the Volunteer community to be inadequate, as the majority of Volunteers are under age 25. Seniors have sometimes formed informal support groups to deal with the specific issues seniors share.

Volunteer Comment:

“As a senior Volunteer in Paraguay I could not feel more accepted and respected by both country nationals, especially adolescents, and my fellow Volunteers. There are no words to describe the feeling that I have when people in passing greet me warmly as *señora* or when I am invited to an *asado* (barbeque) or a birthday party. I find that people in my site are always interested in hearing my thoughts about a topic and in problem solving together. My fellow Volunteers, the majority of whom are younger than my own children, have consistently included me in their social and work-related activities and I never lack the company of someone fun to dine or dance with when the Volunteers come together as a group.”

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Gay and lesbian Volunteers should be aware that homosexuality is considered taboo by most Paraguayans and that they therefore must exercise discretion regarding their sexual orientation. Although Asunción has a cosmopolitan atmosphere, to develop productive social and professional relationships and for reasons of personal security and well-being, most Volunteers find that they must reconcile their lifestyle to the demands of extremely conservative communities. Gay and lesbian Volunteers have a support and resource network that can be of assistance.

Volunteer Comment:

“After living in an open and accepting community in the States, it was hard at first to live my life back in the closet. As a woman and a gay Volunteer, I especially feel the pressure my community puts on me to have a boyfriend and get married. A sense of humor is essential in responding to

the comments I hear. Fortunately, I have been able to find support among my fellow Volunteers, and have encountered Paraguayans outside my community I can be open with. And I keep in touch with the gay community at home through e-mails, phone calls, and magazines my friends send me.”

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Paraguay is overwhelmingly Roman Catholic, and Paraguayans have little experience with other religions or with people who have no religious affiliation. While Paraguayans tend to be tolerant of non-Catholics, they may be curious about your beliefs, which could lead to seemingly rude behavior. On the whole, however, they recognize a difference between “belief” and “practice,” and some non-Catholic Volunteers simply state that they are not “practicing.” Those who feel uncomfortable skirting the issue in this way usually find that if they state their beliefs in a nonchallenging way, they will be accepted by their community. Be aware that very few Volunteer sites will have a place of worship other than a Catholic church or chapel.

Jewish Volunteers have been surprised to discover a certain degree of anti-Semitism in Paraguay as a result of General Alfredo Stroessner’s open-border policy toward Nazis and World War II war criminals. It is not unusual to see swastikas and other anti-Semitic graffiti, and Jewish Volunteers should use caution when visiting German communities. It is also advisable to get to know the members of your community before “coming out” as Jewish. Kosher food products and religious paraphernalia are not available in Paraguay, but there is an active Chabad House and a Reform synagogue in Asunción.

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, of performing a full tour of Volunteer service

in Paraguay without unreasonable risk of harm. Peace Corps/Paraguay staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations in training, housing, job sites, and other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

That being said, Volunteers with disabilities may face particular challenges as a result of the lack of infrastructure in Paraguay to assist them. They may also find that, as in many parts of the world, some people hold prejudicial attitudes toward people with disabilities and may discriminate against them. In spite of these difficulties, physically challenged Volunteers have served successfully in Paraguay.

NOTES



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Paraguay?

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

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution. It is a good idea to pack any prescription drugs you take in your carry-on luggage. Please check the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website for a detailed list of permitted and prohibited items at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

What is the electric current in Paraguay?

The current is 220 volts—any electrical appliance of 110 volts that you bring will require a transformer.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance

and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. Often Volunteers bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash because the Peace Corps cannot provide safekeeping for your cash and it is not currently feasible to open a U.S. dollar bank account. 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?

Volunteers often state an interest in traveling and learning about other cultures as main reasons for wanting to join the Peace Corps. You are encouraged to use your vacation time to travel around Paraguay and other countries. Each Volunteer accumulates two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service (this totals your first six months in-country), or the last three months of service. The first few months are important for establishing good relations with your community, and in the last few months you are expected to be finishing up projects and saying goodbye. We also suggest that you plan vacations to coincide with low levels of activity at your site.

Family and friends are welcome to visit you six months after you have sworn-in for service, and as long as their stay coincides with your planned vacation time and does not interfere with your work. However, you should advise them not to purchase any nonrefundable tickets until you are able to speak with your associate Peace Corps director (APCD) about any scheduling conflicts with mandatory in-service training events. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. Consistent with the Peace Corps' worldwide policy that prohibits nonmarried couples from serving together,

Peace Corps/Paraguay does not permit a Volunteer's "significant other" to establish permanent residence with the Volunteer during service. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

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

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Paraguay do not need to get an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks and a lot of walking. On occasion, a Volunteer may choose to extend for a third year to serve as a coordinator. Volunteer coordinators will need to obtain a local driver's license since they are permitted to drive Peace Corps vehicles. Your U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

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

This is not a requirement, but if you wish to bring something, a simple token of friendship is sufficient. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; picture frames, 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 not assigned to their permanent sites until approximately the eighth week of pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selection and development. You will have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, many factors influence the site assignment process and the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Your Volunteer assignment description will give you some idea of the kinds of sites Volunteers in your sector live in. Some of the more remote sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital, but most sites are within half that distance.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. Although your family may be tempted to try to contact you directly, precious time may be saved in the event that you need to go home if the office is contacted first. Also, it is hard on a Volunteer to receive bad news through impersonal means such as e-mail; Peace Corps staff can provide the personal support that a Volunteer may need when the news is delivered. During normal business

hours, the office's number is 800.424.8580, extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574. For nonemergency questions, your family can get information from the Paraguay desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580, extension 2515, 2516, or 2525.

Can I call home from Paraguay?

Yes. As mentioned earlier, Peace Corps/Paraguay has a direct telephone line from Asunción to Washington, D.C., that is available for Volunteer use after office hours and on weekends. Calls made to the Washington area are free, but calls to all other areas are billed to Volunteers at the long-distance rate from Washington, D.C. To take full advantage of the service, you should bring a major telephone company calling card or prepaid phone card to Paraguay to bill nonfree calls made through this line. Volunteers who call home from their site (or the telephone office nearest to the site) usually place collect calls, since the telephone company, COPACO, is unpredictable about accepting calling cards and credit cards.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

Do not bring a cellular phone with you, since it probably will not be compatible with the system in Paraguay. Although not every site is within the range of cellular service, you can purchase a cellphone in Paraguay at a modest price. More and more Volunteers purchase their own cellphones, and the Peace Corps will pay the cost of calls to the office by cellphone for Volunteers without regular telephone service at their sites.

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

Many businesses and individuals in the capital and in some larger cities have Internet access, and Internet cafes are

springing up even in some of the more provincial towns. Volunteers posted at rural sites, however, may be limited to sending and receiving e-mail on their occasional visits to the capital. The Peace Corps office has computers with Internet access that Volunteers can use. Before leaving the United States, many prospective Volunteers sign up for free e-mail accounts, such as Yahoo or Hotmail, that they can access worldwide.

It is strongly suggested that Volunteers not bring a laptop computer due to the threat of theft and environmental conditions. Should Volunteers decide to bring their laptop computers, they are responsible for insuring and maintaining the equipment themselves. The Peace Corps will not replace stolen computers and strongly encourages those who bring computers to get personal property insurance. Because of the high value of laptops, owners may significantly increase their risk of becoming a victim of theft. Be aware that you probably will not find the same level of technical assistance and service in Paraguay as you would in the States and that replacement parts could take many weeks to arrive. High humidity and dust, which are difficult to avoid, also pose problems. Also note that being able to gain Internet access via a laptop is unlikely because very few Volunteers have a telephone line in their home or adequate lines at work. If you bring a laptop, be sure to bring a high-quality surge protector (electrical lapses and surges are common), which is more expensive in Paraguay than in the United States.

How can people send items to me in Paraguay?

We do not recommend that people mail packages, money, or airline tickets to Volunteers. There are modern supermarkets and well-stocked stores in the capital that should supply you with all your needs. Customs duties may exceed the value

of the items sent, and picking up a package often requires an entire day's travel to the city. Finally, packages can mysteriously disappear in transit.

Should it become necessary to send a package, however, we recommend that it be sent through courier service only, such as FedEx, UPS, DHL, or U.S. Postal Service Express Mail. Correspondence sent via courier arrives in three to five days. Valuables, such as digital cameras, iPods, and other attention-getting items, should not be sent due to theft.

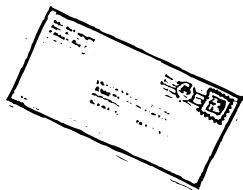
Use the following address for DHL mailings:

PCV name
Cuerpo de Paz
Chaco Boreal 162, c/Mcal. Lopez
Asuncion 1580
Paraguay

To avoid sending an airline ticket overseas, a family member can purchase the ticket in the United States, and you can pick it up at the airline's office in Asunción, using the reference number provided by your family member.



WELCOME LETTERS FROM PARAGUAY VOLUNTEERS



Bienvenidos y Felicidades! You are coming to the wonderfully tranquilo nation of Paraguay. Although we don't have beaches or mountains at our disposal, we do have what is important for your next two years: hospitality. It might take you a while to understand the Paraguayan hospitality due to your lack of language skills or the culturally different way Paraguayans express hospitality, but I can guarantee Paraguayans love taking care of Volunteers and opening their homes up to us.

I have been in Paraguay for two years, and am serving a third year as a Volunteer coordinator. For my two years, I was a rural economic development Volunteer. Every morning, in Villarrica, the departmental capital of Guairá, I woke up to the sun shining in my face (no alarm!) and with the thought of drinking *maté* with my co-workers at the yogurt cooperative/factory (co-op). Unlike back home, I pleasantly got out of bed, jumped on my bike, and was off to the co-op. We would drink *maté* every morning while catching up on the local gossip. (Although you will learn this when you get here, *maté*, the hot tea you drink, is a noun and a verb. For example you can say, "Wow, your *maté* is *rico*!" or you can ask your friend, "Hey, wanna *maté*?" Trust me, these will be your common phrases in Spanish and Guaraní. In addition, your first lesson of cultural integration will be to learn how to *maté* and *tereré* (the cold tea). Hopefully you will enjoy it as much as we do here. After *maté*, we ate breakfast. You will discover that Paraguayans have unique food eating order rules. Therefore, I would *maté* first, then eat breakfast. Luckily for me, I spent every morning drinking yummy yogurt, usually with bread bought from the local *señor* who came by on a horse and cart. Finally, after our morning ritual, we got down to business.

I worked with my co-op on several projects while also helping them improve their business skills. For example, I taught them about competitive pricing and how to create various product sales and expense reports to analyze

profitability. In addition, I worked with two adult employees without high school education and trained one in accounting and the other in Excel for financial analysis. With my fellow business and municipality Volunteers, we designed a three-day computer training course for our Paraguayan counterparts. They were trained in areas such as hardware components, maintenance (dust and heat are major problems in this country), troubleshooting, and software skills.

I am now spending my third year working in the Peace Corps office as the information and communications technology (ICT) coordinator promoting the Peace Corps' ICT initiative and helping other Volunteers work in this area. My job ranges from helping education Volunteers work with local school computer centers to providing resources to an agriculture Volunteer working with the local radio program to promote soil conservation.

As you can see, being a Peace Corps Volunteer requires an open mind and flexibility. In the next two years, you will help better the lives of the people in Paraguay, and, in turn, they will better yours. ¡Suerte!

— Christie Bell

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Congratulations! This is it! You're really going! Receiving this book is only one of many exciting moments you'll be having over the next couple of years.

As an urban youth Volunteer in Asunción, I don't live the *tranquilo* life other Volunteers talk about. Instead of chickens and cows, I am awakened by the sound of buses and people on their way to school and work. I start my day early, with a little exercise or yoga before heading over to teach life skills at the school or coordinate projects with the municipality. My afternoons are spent meeting with youth or women's groups, or helping out at the community library. On weekends I am busy with youth group meetings and workshops, and the occasional soccer or volleyball game. With so many kids around, there's always someone to play with, as well as plenty of youth and families to visit and drink *tereré* with. In my neighborhood, there's always lots going on, which means tons of groups to work with and projects to work on.

I've decided to live with a family for my entire two years for safety reasons and also to help me feel more connected to my community. I have my own room with a bathroom and a small gas stove so I can cook for myself. In addition to the family I live with, I have a few families in my neighborhood who treat me like another daughter. They take care of me when I'm sick, explain things to me when I don't understand, share their celebrations with me, and help make my experience in Paraguay so much richer.

As a vegetarian, it was hard at first for Paraguayans to understand why I didn't want to share their food with them. Fortunately, there are people in my community that want to learn how to cook without meat, so we often cook together using soy and vegetables. I've also learned how to cook the typical Paraguayan foods without meat.

My best advice is to start studying Spanish now, because knowing even just a little bit will make your adjustment so much easier. Once you get here, make sure to study Guaraní, it means so much to Paraguayans if you can say even just a few words. Also, bring photos, magazines, posters, music, and a stuffed animal from home to help you feel more comfortable in this new and different place. And don't worry, you'll have lots of friends among the other Volunteers, as well as in your community, who will be there for you and support you the whole way through!

— Elena Foshay

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Congratulations on your invitation to Peace Corps/Paraguay! You have probably been going crazy lately looking in your local library or on the Internet for any updated information that pertains to Paraguay. When I started researching this country, the only book I found was copyrighted in 1980! When I received my invitation I asked myself, "Don't they mean Uruguay?" Well, since then, I have figured a few things out and I can assure you that Paraguay is a real country and is located right in the heart of South America. But to explain the reasons for its obscurity in the rest of the world would be to test my knowledge of its history, culture, and diversity, not to mention my writing

ability. Describing what this country symbolizes immediately becomes challenging because: First, due to the country's complexity, my two years and three months in this country still aren't sufficient enough to tell you what Paraguay is and why it is the way it is; second, the community I lived and worked in was so distinct in and of itself that I would be sharing with you only a fraction of the country's true nature; and third, you've got to see it to believe it.

Paraguay may be the size of California, but when you start talking about its geography, demographics, and culture it is amazing just how much uniqueness this small country can pack in. To give you an idea, my community, Campo Aceval, is approximately 550 kilometers northwest of Asunción located in the Chaco (which stems from the quechua word, *chacu*, meaning place of abundant game) region. This amazing place could be characterized as one of the last frontiers (or as others like to say, the last wild, wild West) that exists in South America. The Chaco is located in the *occidente* (west) region, which represents 60 percent of the country's land mass and where only three percent of the country's population lives, leaving the *oriente* (east) region with the burden of accommodating the rest of the 97 percent with only 40 percent of the land mass! Of this three percent, all different walks of life are represented in the region: Paraguayans, Brazilians, Braziguayos (mix of Brazilians with Paraguayans), Argentineans, South Africans, French, Canadian, and German Mennonites, and numerous indigenous tribes such as the Ayoreo, Quechua, and the Nivacle. This diversity was one of the distinctive factors that helped mold my memorable experiences during my two-year service. Nowhere in my life had I rubbed elbows with such a mixture of people, not to mention living in one of the last great South American wildernesses with 100 different species of mammals, 400 bird species, and diverse flora and fauna.

As a rural economic development Volunteer, I lived and worked with a milk production cooperative and approximately 100 of its milk producers. My project was dedicated to serving the cooperative's members via improved administration and accounting practices, developing and implementing project plans to increase milk production, and conducting secondary

projects directed toward youth development in my site. My site was very remote, but had electricity and a respectable selection of goods, fruits, and vegetables. One of the more challenging tasks in my site was collecting water. The majority of the water that got tapped out of the ground was mostly salty and so other means had to be devised to collect *agua dulce* (fresh water). The way I gathered water was to use my zinc-aluminum roof to capture the rainwater and collect it in an underground cistern made of brick, called an *aljibe*. That is just one example of the obstacles that I confronted in the first few months in my site. As I overcame them, I became even more confident to take on the challenges that presented themselves during the rest of my service. And the outcomes from some of these humorous, unique, and, oftentimes, difficult situations were what contributed to making this experience a life-changing one. Remember, as a Volunteer, your creativity, flexibility, and dedication are some of your best assets.

For me, this journey gave me the chance to gain a new perspective about the kind of world we live in and insight as to the role that I play as a Volunteer—not just as a Peace Corps Volunteer, but as a life-long volunteer. Yes, necessity is ubiquitous and help is scarce, but knowing how to meet the needs with knowing how to help is the first step. By joining the Peace Corps I hope you are open to learning some life-long lessons on how to help and bring this world and the community that you'll live in that much closer to a better way of life.

I hope that your decision leads you to living this great experience and joining our team here in Paraguay to help lift the lives of the people, take in the culture, and live two unforgettable years. Yes, think globally, act locally—but make it local Paraguay!

— Roberto M. Hernández

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As an environmental education Volunteer, I worked extensively with the rural schoolteachers on how to integrate environmental issues and themes into the curriculum. One way of doing this was through day-long workshops using

didactic materials and dynamic classroom activities to teach integrated planning, trash management, and a general introduction to the environment. Southeastern Paraguay desperately needs environmental educators, since it is in one of the most diverse and threatened ecosystems in South America, and community members don't realize what treasures they have in their backyard. In the introductory workshop, I talked about the national park that was about 25 miles from the community. I asked for a show of hands from the teachers of who had visited the park, and not one teacher had been there. They certainly did not know that 8,000 species of plants make that ecosystem their home. Just a few months earlier, I had visited the park with other Volunteers, and I showed the teachers my pictures of the park's deforestation and its biological diversity. Throughout the workshop, Araceli (a young dynamic teacher with whom I had previously organized an educative summer camp for kids) raised her hand and asked questions, took notes, and had a smile on her face. In their evaluations, the teachers wrote that they were impressed by how much more a foreigner knew about their own environment and took interest in it.

A couple of weeks later, Araceli decided to organize a field trip for the special "Excursion Day." The whole school, including four teachers, many parents, and about 50 children loaded up into a big truck and headed toward the park. A park ranger gave a talk about the importance of the park; and the children listened to the birds, noticed native orchids while walking through a trail, and played environmental games. And because of the spark I created with that teacher, she, in turn, motivated other teachers in the community to be interested in the environment. My workshop empowered the teachers to want to share the park with all the students, who will remember that trip for a long time. They will remember that trip when they discuss deforestation in their high school science class, or when they help their youth group start a tree nursery. And the teachers will hopefully want to go back to the park the next year and the year after that and continue the important lesson of environmental appreciation.

As a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, you will learn about the local environment, about the local health, economic,

and political issues, and the local traditions. I had no idea when I came to Paraguay about the difference between a lapacho and timbo tree, for example. I had little experience with environmental education, Spanish, and speaking in front of groups. Through pre-service training, interactions with the community members, and resources in the Peace Corps office, you will pick up the skills, knowledge, and confidence you need to do all those things listed on your Volunteer assignment description. Throughout your service, you will also be faced with people who are not used to change, people who do not understand the importance of the things you are trying to teach, and this may be one of your biggest challenges. But you will also find people who are enchanted with your work and ideas. Those are the people that you will motivate, and those are the people who will carry out change. In my community, Araceli will be a leader and motivator long after I have left the country, and she will continue to stress the importance of the environment, use my environmental didactic materials and games, and positively affect her community.

— Elizabeth Zenker

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So you have been invited to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Paraguay, and you're wondering what exactly that means. I am a health coordinator and I live in the capital city of Asunción. Before becoming a coordinator, I served for two years in the poorest Department of Paraguay, San Pedro. My bus ride was eight to ten hours from the capital with two of those hours being on off-asphalt dirt roads.

My site in the countryside was what you could call normal for rural Paraguay. There were about 600 habitants, and the schools I worked in had about 150 students from kindergarten to seventh grade. I worked primarily with teachers and local masons. With the teachers, I taught basic health themes like: dental health, nutrition, parasite prevention, and gardening; with the local masons, I taught and built brick ovens, cement floors, and sanitary latrines, and promoted a "new technology" for Paraguayans—composting latrines. I also worked with many families one-on-one on nutrition and other self-

empowering health issues. Speaking Guaraní was a big part of my everyday life, in fact just as much as *tereré* (famous Paraguayan tea) was a part of my everyday life, so don't think you can get by with Spanish only.

What I can honestly say about the Peace Corps is this: Living in the countryside of a foreign country has been the most challenging and rewarding experience of my life. I frequently see people from my community, and they always tell people, "That is my American son." To know that I made a difference in those peoples' lives, and that they will always be a reflection point for the rest of my life, makes me forget about all the hardships, and smile.

Prepare yourself for one of the best experiences of your life. The great staff and I will be waiting for you with smiling faces, and a hand when you need it.

— Clay Smaine

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I am an early elementary education Volunteer. I live in a large pueblo called Eusebio Ayala located about an hour and a half from Asunción. I have been here in Paraguay for a little over a year and a half. I share a small, three-room house with my husband, Tomas, who is serving as an environmental sanitation Volunteer, and our dog, Osito.

Serving in the Peace Corps as a married Volunteer has really been an amazing experience. Even though we have different primary work projects, we have been able to spend so much of our time together and have jointly worked on many projects. We are currently working on a school library project in our community and plan and teach many workshops together. During the week we co-teach in one of the local elementary schools and try to organize projects in our community. On the weekends, we pass the time cooking and talking with our new Paraguayan friends and neighbors.

Each Volunteer's experience is very different here and much of it will depend on what type of community you live in (urban verses rural) and your own personal talents and interests, which you will be able to share with your Paraguayan community. Paraguayans are incredibly welcoming, kind, and loving. You will meet so many new friends and will most likely

find a second family and a home away from home. You will get to try new foods, learn new traditions, and see a whole different way of life.

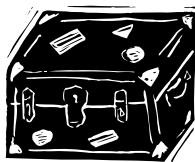
As a married couple, you will get to change perceptions about traditional male/female and husband/wife roles by how you go about your day-to-day lives. For example, sharing cooking and cleaning responsibilities or even just disagreeing with each other about your ideas and opinions. Most importantly, being a married Volunteer means you will always have someone close by to support you and cheer you when you need it most and to help you figure out all the new and strange things that you will be faced with.

Don't worry too much about what to bring with you, almost anything you can think of can be bought in Asunción. The most useful things we brought with us were pictures of our family and our life back home that we could share with our new friends to help them get a better idea of who we are and what our lives were like before we arrived in Paraguay. Good luck to all of you.

—Jamie Steinfeld



PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Paraguay and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that every experience is unique. 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. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 23 kilo, or 50 pound, weight restriction per bag, and a 2 bag limit. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Paraguay. There are modern shopping malls in Asunción. Most small appliances, such as blow dryers and CD players/radio, are available. Clothes can be purchased or made for a modest price, and thrift stores offer used American clothing.

The standard for work attire in Paraguay is neat and professional, but not fancy. This “business casual” applies during pre-service training as well as Volunteer service. Volunteers working in different professional capacities will need different sets of clothing although, in general, Volunteers should be prepared to have a couple of good business casual type outfits. For example, municipal services development, rural economic development, and Volunteers working within the school system will need more clothes for an office setting than will a Volunteer placed in a rural setting. Think in terms of comfort, versatility, and, most important, durability. Since there are extremes in weather, separates that coordinate well and that can be layered on or off as needed are useful. Remember that it gets really hot in the summer and, although it does not freeze in the winter, homes in Paraguay are not insulated and are drafty—imagine going camping in 40°F weather. It is a very good idea to bring a mummy-type sleeping bag for the cold (comes with a stuff sack, is lightweight, and easy to pack). Thick-soled shoes are best purchased in the

United States because of price and quality, and men's sizes over 10.5 and women's sizes over 9 are difficult to find in Paraguay.

It is also important to consider the color of your clothing. Volunteers generally recommend darker colors because they are less likely to show dirt. However, Volunteers working in beekeeping will need light-colored work clothes, and early elementary education Volunteers working with teachers should bring navy blue pants or skirts and white shirts or blouses. Red and royal blue are the colors of the main political parties. Wearing these colors inside a municipality may have political implications. Business casual is recommended for municipal services development Volunteers. For both men and women, simple, nonflashy clothing will open more doors and minds. Everything on the general clothing list applies to both women and men. Also, Paraguayans wear a shirt called Ao'poi for formal occasions as well as business casual which is very popular with Volunteers in Paraguay. Most Volunteers buy at least one of these shirts during training.

Do not pack anything precious or expensive that you could not reasonably part from. This includes laptop computers. While they may be a great tool, laptops increase the threat of theft and are susceptible to the extreme conditions in-country (humidity, dust, bugs etc.). The incidence of theft is on the rise, and Paraguay's high humidity and dust can damage expensive equipment.

General Clothing

- Two or four pairs of durable, dark-colored pants or jeans
- Long underwear for the winter
- Six or more T-shirts

- One or two long-sleeved shirts or flannel shirts for layering with sweaters and sweatshirts
- Two winter sweaters/sweatshirts/fleece shirts
- One medium jacket (fleece generally works great, but other windbreaker types of jackets will work as well)
- Hooded raincoat
- Two or three pairs of shorts to wear around the house or for sleeping or exercising, etc. (Paraguayans very rarely wear shorts in public)
- Six to eight pairs of socks—include, cotton, wool, and synthetic blend (your personal favorite is best)
- Your favorite hat for sun protection (baseball hats work well, but wide-brimmed are best to keep the sun off your neck)
- Warm hat and gloves for winter—a necessity!

For Women

- Ten to 15 pairs of cotton underpants and five to 10 bras (including sports bras)
- Four or five nice shirts (this can include blouses, some sleeveless, nice long-sleeve or short-sleeve)
- Three or four lightweight, loose-fitting, knee-length skirts or lightweight pants (you should have at least one for nice occasions)
- Something nice for swearing in and special occasions (this can include nice pants, a skirt and blouse or dress)
- Three or four tank tops for layering (only for non-professional dress at home or exercise; tank tops should not be worn for training or professional activities)
- Swimsuit (you will wear them at Volunteers events. Paraguayan women usually wear shorts and T-shirts to swim).

For Men

- Dress shirt and tie for swearing in and other special occasions
- Cotton underwear (boxers are difficult to find in Paraguay)
- Three or four short-sleeved, button-down shirts with collars for work settings (they are cooler in the summer than T-shirts or polo shirts)
- Three pairs of khaki-style pants
- Two pairs of durable, dark-colored pants or jeans
- Three to four short-sleeved, button-down shirts—if Volunteers don't have these, the *Ao'poi* shirts are a great substitution!
- Swim trunks

Shoes

- For women, one pair of flat shoes (in a basic color like black and with thick soles)
- At least one pair of sandals for summer (sandals are not normally worn by men at work)
- One pair of tennis shoes or all-terrain shoes, preferably in a dark color to hide the red dirt (good ones are expensive locally)
- Flip-flops (available locally)
- One pair of durable hiking or other boots (preferably waterproof)
- For men, one pair of informal, closed-toe dress shoes

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Contact lens solutions (available in Paraguay but expensive)
- Makeup (if you are picky about brands)
- Good supply of tampons (only o.b. brand tampons, pads, and panty liners are available locally)

- Sunscreen (only if you have a favorite brand; the Peace Corps provides some)
- Three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use (to last you until the Peace Corps orders refills)
- Two pairs of eyeglasses, if you wear them
- Two or three bandannas or handkerchiefs (available locally)
- Extra toothbrushes (available in Paraguay, but expensive)
- Shampoo, toothpaste, deodorant (one-month supply)

Kitchen

- Small, basic cookbook and/or favorite recipes
- Dietary supplements you take other than multivitamins
- Ziploc bags (they are essential for keeping out bugs, ants, etc.)

Miscellaneous

- Travel bag or small daypack
- Large backpack for longer trips (one with an internal frame is recommended)
- Flashlight or headlamp
- Sunglasses with UV protection (but note that most Paraguayans do not wear them, so they will set you apart)
- Set of sheets to fit a double-sized bed
- Washcloths and bath towels, preferably lightweight (available in Asunción, but expensive)
- Sleeping bag—considered essential by Volunteers, especially in winter.
- Portable CD player or iPod and travelling speakers, (inexpensive, good-quality radios and tape players can be purchased locally)

- 220-volt adapter, preferably with a surge protector (small ones cost about \$20 in Paraguay)
- Camera and replacement batteries (an expensive camera is not recommended without insurance)
- Portable games such as cards, Uno, checkers, chess, etc.
- Tent (optional)
- Travel alarm clock
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman tool
- Water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)
- Photos of your family, friends, and home (a good conversation starter)
- Duct tape (considered a must by many)
- Frisbee, baseball glove, and other recreational or sports equipment
- Prepaid phone card for calling home (can be purchased locally)
- Reference books (Peace Corps/Paraguay has a good general reference library for most work-related needs)
- Permanent markers (available locally, but expensive and of poor quality)
- Therm-a-Rest air mattress (great for visitors) or yoga mat (some Volunteers swear by these)
- Rechargeable batteries (regular batteries are available in Paraguay)
- Money belt or travel wallet/pouch to wear under clothes while travelling on bus
- USB flash drive (it doesn't need to be fancy or big; in Paraguay, the USB drives work better than disks when transferring files to/from Peace Corps office to/from Internet cafes to/from other computers)

NOTES



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



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

Family

- ☐ Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470; after-hours duty officer: 202.638.2574).
- ☐ Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

- ☐ Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- ☐ If you wear glasses, bring two pairs, and consider bringing prescription sunglasses.
- ☐ 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 healthcare during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in coverage it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated.)
- ☐ Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

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



CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number:

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

Peace Corps' Mailing Address:

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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Inter-America and the Pacific	Ext. 1835	202.692.1835
Programming or Country Information	Shawn Wesner Desk Officer E-mail: paraguay@ peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2515	202.692.2515
	Kim Coyne Desk Assistant E-mail: paraguay@ peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2516	202.692.2516
	Saba Firoozi Desk Assistant E-mail: paraguay@ peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2525	202.692.2525

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.544.1802
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 9-5 EST 202.638.2574 (after-hours answering service)

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