

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

THAILAND



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



January 2009



A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps/Thailand Invitee,

Congratulations on your invitation to pre-service training. You are about to embark on a life-changing journey. Your time as a trainee and as a Volunteer will be one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences you will have in your lifetime. As you make your commitment to fulfill the mission of the Peace Corps in Thailand, I make my commitment to provide you with a productive, safe and secure, healthy, and rewarding experience in this amazing country.

The Peace Corps has a long history in Thailand going back to 1962. I was privileged to serve as a Volunteer in Thailand myself from 1965 through 1967 and have been serving as country director in Thailand since 2003. Today, Thailand continues to be a wonderful country where Volunteers are not only needed, but wanted. It is important to understand that the Peace Corps is in Thailand at the request and pleasure of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) and that the first goal of the Peace Corps is “to help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women.”

This book will give you a brief overview of the types of projects in which Volunteers are engaged. Serving with the Peace Corps in Thailand is a great experience for most Volunteers, as the Volunteer welcome letters later in this book show. However, there are complexities in any Peace Corps project, and you need to have a good understanding of the challenges you will face.

It is important to understand that training is part of the qualification process prior to being sworn-in as a Volunteer. It is designed to equip you with the skills and knowledge (including language) needed to be an effective Volunteer. You will be expected to develop and demonstrate competence in the Thai language and in cross-cultural, technical, health, and safety and security areas. Be assured that demonstrating a positive intention in all areas, especially in learning Thai, is more important than the specific level of mastery you gain. You will continue learning throughout your service. The support and

encouragement you will receive during this learning process will be extraordinary.

As country director, my highest priority is the safety and security of each Peace Corps trainee and Volunteer. During training and service, you will be expected to learn and demonstrate safety and security competencies that are carefully spelled out. While other staff members and I will do all we can to ensure your safety and security, you must take the ultimate responsibility for your own well-being. This requires that you abide by the safety and security guidelines prescribed to you and that you exercise good judgment in all your actions. That said, Thailand is a relatively safe country in which to be a Volunteer, and the vast majority of Thais will do all they can to ensure that you have a safe stay in their country.

Because the trainers and I, along with everyone on the Peace Corps staff, want you to succeed as a Volunteer, the training you will receive is very intense. Your commitment to serve 27 months performing a tough job in a different culture needs to be a strong one. We hope the information provided on the following pages will help you more fully understand the commitment you are making as you determine if, in fact, this is an assignment you want to take on. Both you and Peace Corps/Thailand must determine if the particular project is a fit for you.

Getting to know, understand, and appreciate the people of Thailand and allowing them to get to know, understand, and appreciate you are undoubtedly the best things you can do to create a safe and productive environment, not only for yourself, but for all of us. After all, that is what the Peace Corps is all about. Please be assured that we are ready to help you as you train for your assignment, settle into your community, and pursue your project activities.

Best wishes and good luck!

John L. Williams
Country Director
RPCV Thailand (1965-1967)

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PEACE CORPS/THAILAND HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Thailand

Thailand was one of the first countries to receive Peace Corps Volunteers, the first of whom arrived in January 1962. More than 4,700 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers in Thailand since that time. Projects in early decades covered many areas, such as secondary and university teaching in English and other subjects, work in agriculture and fisheries, primary health care, malaria control, and soil and water conservation.

As Thailand has changed over the past 40+ years, the Royal Thai Government's requests for assistance have changed. In 1997, the Peace Corps was invited to assist with primary-school educational reform, an area identified by Thais as one of the most important in the country today.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Thailand

In 2003 Peace Corps/Thailand entered into a project agreement with the Thai government's Ministry of Education to implement what is called the teacher collaboration and community outreach (TCCO) project. That project agreement was designed in accordance with the Thai government's educational reform initiative; which seeks to strengthen the skills of primary-school teachers in using student-centered methodologies and in teaching integrated subjects by partnering with teachers inside and outside the classroom. Volunteers assigned to this project also contribute to other areas in which they have interest and expertise, doing outreach in health, the environment, and other areas of community development. The final Peace Corps/Thailand

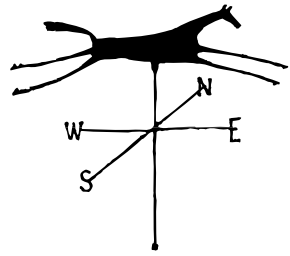
group, Group 119, under the 2003 TCCO project agreement arrived in January 2007. Following a thorough evaluation and modest revisions, a new TCCO project agreement between Peace Corps/Thailand and the Thai government was signed in 2007, which calls for five additional groups of TCCO Volunteers, beginning with Group 120, who arrived in January 2007.

In 2003, Peace Corps/Thailand and its Royal Thai Government partners collaborated to establish a new organizational development and capacity-building project. Volunteers in the community-based organizational development (CBOD) project are assigned to subdistrict administrative offices (SAOs). The CBOD project covers a wide range of development activities that respond to the needs of local communities. Volunteers in this project assist SAO staff and community groups in improving data collection, strengthening project management, and acquiring other skills that will help them initiate and carry out sustainable projects based on community priorities. Volunteers and their Thai partners also identify ways to share promising practices and resources with other SAOs and community groups. CBOD Group 120 was the final group under the initial CBOD project agreement between Peace Corps/Thailand and the Thai government. An evaluation of the CBOD project was conducted in 2006, and Peace Corps/Thailand and the Thai Government agreed that the project should be continued and a new CBOD project agreement was signed in 2007, beginning with Group 121.

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COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THAILAND AT A GLANCE



History

Thailand is a history buff's paradise. The best-known parts of Thai history are the stories of its great kings and the kingdoms they established as they moved southward toward the Gulf of Thailand. Also well-known are these kings' struggles with kingdoms in what are now the neighboring countries of Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. The current Chakkri Dynasty was established in 1782. The fourth and fifth kings of this dynasty, King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn, are particularly remembered for their many achievements in the cultural realm and in affairs of state. In fact, some argue that their statesmanship prevented European powers from colonizing Thailand.

Government

A constitutional monarchy was established in 1932, and the process of achieving a fully democratic society is still unfolding. The greatly revered current monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is the ninth king of the Chakkri Dynasty. Under normal circumstances, the parliamentary system of government includes an elected House of Representatives and Senate. The prime minister is selected from among the members of the House. In September 2006 the Thai military ousted the elected prime minister in a coup and installed an appointed prime minister. In 2007 a new constitution was drafted and approved by referendum in October 2007. Elections for a democratically elected government occurred in December 2007 and a new government was fully formed by early 2008.

Bangkok, the capital, has expanded rapidly over the past few decades. The greater metropolitan area (including Bangkok and Thonburi, on the opposite bank of the Chao Phraya River) has a population of more than 8 million. The country is divided into 76 provinces, which are further divided into districts, subdistricts, and villages. Efforts are currently underway to continue to delegate authority to lower levels of administration.

Economy

“In the waters there are fish; in the fields there is rice.” This favorite Thai saying captures the essence of Thailand as an abundant agricultural society for most of its history. Over the past several decades, a series of five-year national development plans have emphasized the manufacturing sector. Thailand’s economic growth was among the highest in the world until 1997, when the boom abruptly halted and poverty began increasing. Thailand has made remarkable progress in economic recovery in recent years, in spite of world events such as the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the bombing in Bali, the Iraq war, the epidemic of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), and the tsunami disaster in December 2004. Tourism and, more recently, the growth in electronics continue to fuel much of the economy. The Thai government is currently debating the country’s economic future, including the role of subsistence production, the growth of small- and medium-sized businesses, and ways to develop human resources to meet the challenges of the future. The ousting of the elected civilian government in September 2006 had virtually no negative impact on the strong Thai economy.

People and Culture

Thailand's unique cultural heritage has developed over more than 700 years of independence. Thais possess a strong sense of freedom (“Thai” means “free”) and are a fun-loving, friendly people.

The majority of the nation's population is ethnically Thai and speaks one of the dialects of the Tai language family, including central Thai, northern Thai, northeastern Thai, southern Thai, and several others. Other ethnic groups include Chinese (the largest); Malays, located primarily in the four southern provinces; five major groups of hill tribes in the north; and people from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar, many of whom originally came as refugees or economic migrants. Though Thais are 97 percent Buddhist, they have a high degree of tolerance for other religions. Other religions and doctrines present in Thailand are Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and animism.

The three pillars of Thai society are the nation, religion, and the monarchy, which are instilled into Thais throughout their lifetime. The key Thai values of generosity, loving-kindness, and smooth interpersonal relationships have served to promote the stability of the country and harmony among its citizens.

Environment

Thailand is a lush, fertile country, rich in flora, fauna, and natural resources. Bordered by Myanmar and the Indian Ocean to the west, Laos to the north, Cambodia to the east, and Malaysia and the Gulf of Thailand to the south, Thailand covers an area of 205,246 square miles (513,115 square kilometers), approximately the size of France.

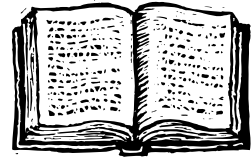
The country can be divided into three main geographical regions: the central plain, which is traversed north to south by the Chao Phraya River and produces most of the country's rice; the plateau and mountains of the north, noted for teak forests; and the southern peninsula, which is responsible for the principal export commodities of rubber and tin.

Thailand's climate is tropical, with three distinct seasons. The weather is relatively cool from November to February, hot from March to June, and rainy from July to October. Humidity is generally high, and the average annual temperature in Bangkok is 84 degrees Fahrenheit, ranging from 80 F in December to as high as 100 F in the hot season.

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RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



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

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, 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 experiences, 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 Thailand

www.countrywatch.com

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

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.state.gov

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

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

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

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

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 around the world.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

<http://www.rpcvwebring.org>

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

www.peacecorpswriters.org

This site is hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers. It is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

<http://www.friendsofthailand.org>

This site is the official site for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers from Thailand, and has resources and information on Thailand.

<http://www.pcthailandgigs.org>

This site was created by Volunteers in Thailand to share information and resources for projects and for special initiatives. It also includes a forum and contact information for global initiatives.

Recommended Books

1. Cooper, Robert, and Nanthapa Cooper. *Culture Shock! Thailand* (rev. ed.). Singapore: Times Publishing, 1986.
2. Cummings, Joe, and Steven Martin (eds.). *Lonely Planet Thailand (ninth ed.)*. London: Lonely Planet, 2001.
3. Fieg, John P. A *Common Core: Thais and Americans*. Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1989.
4. Hollinger, Carol. *Mai Pen Rai Means Never Mind*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
5. Klausner, William. *Reflections on Thai Culture (4th ed.)*. Bangkok: Siam Society, 1993.
6. Wyatt, David K. *Thailand: A Short History*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986.

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 1960s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

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LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

Mail

Thailand has a relatively reliable postal system, and every subdistrict and district town has a post office. In addition to offering routine postal services, some offices are equipped with postal box rentals, overseas telephone facilities, and express mail services. Regular mail within Thailand usually takes two or three days, while express mail takes one to one and one-half days. International mail to and from Thailand takes about two to three weeks.

Your mailing address during training will be:

“Your Name,” PCT
242 Rajvithi Road
Amphur Dusit
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

Only letters will be accepted at this address. Wait until you are assigned to your site and have packages sent to that address. Keep in mind that there are often high customs fees placed on packages, especially for electronics.

Telephones

Public telephone booths that accept both coins (one baht for local calls) and phone cards are available in almost all towns. If a booth is not available, private homes often offer telephone facilities for a reasonable charge, typically a minimal flat fee plus the Telephone Authority of Thailand (TAT) per-minute rate, which depends on the destination and length of the

call. Cellphone systems in Thailand use frequencies of 800, 900, or 1800 megahertz, but 900 is the most effective for up-country sites. Other frequencies may not work in Thailand. Cellphones, which are quite popular in Thailand, can be purchased for as little as 1,400 baht (approximately \$45). Trainees are given 2,000 baht to purchase a cellphone during training, as it is a safety and security requirement. Volunteers regularly use text messaging to communicate with each other, their Thai friends, and with those in the U.S.

Approximately 60 percent of Volunteers live in housing with phones in place. The service charge is about 300 baht per month (which does not include the cost of calls). When Volunteers move to their assigned sites after training, they complete an emergency contact form with their name, address, telephone number (or the number of the nearest neighbor), and a map to their home, which is kept in the Peace Corps office in Bangkok for emergency purposes.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

Shops that provide Internet and e-mail access exist in cities throughout Thailand, even in rural districts. The cost for access is 15 to 20 baht (less than \$1) per hour.

Most offices and schools have computers (but the majority do not have Internet connections), which are in use almost all the time. Most computers in Thailand are IBM or IBM compatible, though there are few Macintoshes. Many Volunteers bring laptops from home. Wireless Internet access (from your personal laptop) is becoming popular and is available in some of the bigger towns and cities. There are plenty of computer repair shops in Bangkok and most other large cities in Thailand. Should you decide to bring your own laptop, you are strongly encouraged to get it insured.

A Note about Blogs and Websites

Blogs and websites are a great way to help you meet the third goal of Peace Corps and a great way to share your experience with friends and family. It is a Peace Corps worldwide policy that Volunteers and trainees with blogs or websites inform the country director of the address. It is strongly suggested that if you do have a website, blog or use other means of electronic communication that you password protect it and provide the password to those you wish to have access. Each country has post-specific guidelines to ensure host country sensitivities are observed. For example, in Thailand it would be inappropriate to post comments deemed negative to the Thai Royal Family. Additional Thailand-specific guidelines will be further discussed during your pre-service training (PST).

Housing and Site Location

In villages and small towns, where most Volunteers live, homes have electricity and indoor plumbing, including toilets (normally of the type known as Turkish or squat toilets) and cold-water showers (occasionally a hand pump must be used to obtain the water). Drinking water must be either boiled or purchased, but is readily available. Other basic amenities (e.g., soap, shampoo, hair conditioner, lotion, sanitary napkins and tampons, towels, film, stationery, stamps, sodas, and instant coffee) should be available in provincial or regional centers, if not in your town. You should also be able to purchase items like an iron, rice cooker, or fan if desired.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer, you will receive a monthly living allowance. At the time of this writing, the monthly living allowance is 7,500 baht (approximately \$240 at this writing), which will be

transferred to your bank account at the end of each month for the following month. Most Volunteers find this allowance to be more than adequate. Like Peace Corps Volunteers worldwide, those in Thailand are expected to live at a level comparable with that of their Thai co-workers. This means that dinners out at expensive Bangkok restaurants or visits to spas designed for European tourists will not be possible. However, the allowance is certainly enough to enable you to purchase the basic necessities and to go to the movies or have a night out occasionally. Because you will receive your living allowance only once a month, you will have to budget wisely.

Access to a U.S. dollar account is possible throughout Thailand via ATMs with Cirrus or Star networks. Bring your ATM card and use those funds for vacations, etc.

Food and Diet

The food in Thailand is extraordinary. A popular joke is that Thais are either eating, talking about what they recently ate, or planning what to eat next.

The staple food is rice, so you will find a variety of rice (or noodle) dishes for all three meals. For example, you might have boiled rice with some type of meat for breakfast, fried rice or noodles with or without meat for lunch, and boiled white or brown rice with curry or stir-fried vegetables for dinner. Breads, rolls, and doughnuts are available in almost all convenience shops (including 7-Elevens and AM/PMs). In these mini-marts, Volunteers can also occasionally find cereals, spaghetti, and peanut butter. All kinds of vegetables and fruits are available year-round, and tofu can be found in most locations.

Food stalls in district towns offer reasonably priced cooked food and are open from early morning until late at night. Food

stall vendors generally meet the Thailand Ministry of Public Health's standards for sanitation and food handling.

Volunteers can cook for themselves, buying meat, rice, vegetables, and fruits from local fresh food markets at their sites. Food is relatively cheap and can be purchased comfortably with the monthly living allowance. Vegetarians can also eat well in Thailand, but some may find it difficult to maintain a strict diet, especially in some social contexts.

Transportation

The transportation system in Thailand is good and convenient. One can travel to and from sites to other towns, including Bangkok, via air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned buses or, on a few regional routes, by trains (with sleepers) or airlines. Transport within towns is typically by covered pickups with two rows of seats or by bicycle. Car transportation arranged by a school or office is sometimes available to schools that are too far to reach by bicycle. Driving or riding as a passenger on a motorbike is strictly forbidden. Finding a consistent means of transportation can be a challenge, especially in the early months of service. Peace Corps will provide you with a monthly transportation allowance. The Peace Corps provides a mountain bike and bicycle helmet to every Volunteer for travel to offices and schools, for errands, and for pleasure, and trainees and Volunteers are expected to be comfortable riding a bicycle 5 to 10 miles per day. The bicycle will be the only mode of transportation during pre-service training for daily travel between homestay locations and language and technical training sites.

In addition to a helmet, Peace Corps also provides the following bike accessories:

- Water bottle
- Flat tire patch kit

- Headlight
- Taillight
- Bicycle tools
- Lock (key lock)
- Mudguards

Other bike accessories are available locally at reasonable prices.

Geography and Climate

Thailand is a tropical country with generally warm weather (averaging 84 degrees Fahrenheit or 29 Celsius). The heat peaks in March and April to about 95 F (35 C), with some cooler days in November, December, and January. The hotter months are followed by the rainy season, which can last from April to November. On most days the rains last from minutes to hours—they are not the typhoon-driven rains of some other tropical countries. A few Volunteer sites are located in the mountains of the north, where temperatures can drop to 59-68 F (15-20 C) in the cool season, which can feel rather cold in houses without insulation. Snow does not fall in Thailand.

Social Activities

You will spend much of your free time playing sports, eating, going to movies, attending Thai festivals and cultural events, and socializing with your Thai colleagues and neighbors. Dating as it is known in the United States will be noticeably absent. Your ability to adjust to and enjoy this kind of social life will be an important aspect of your success as a Volunteer.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Following is a basic description of the dress and personal appearance standards expected of trainees. Although they may seem somewhat restrictive, they are designed to help you make the transition into your new Thai community and to maintain the good reputation of the Peace Corps. Upon first arriving in the country, you may have too little knowledge of Thai customs and beliefs to make informed decisions on appropriate dress. Although you will see some Thais dressed less conservatively, following these dress standards will help you avoid unintentional offenses and incorrect assumptions on the part of Thais. Once you are at your worksite, it will be up to you how you dress. By then you will have enough knowledge of Thai culture to make informed decisions.

You will hear references to *riap roiy*, a Thai term that means “appropriate and complete.” When used to refer to clothing, *riap roiy* means appropriate professional clothing, which in Thailand is very similar to what people in America wear as teachers or office workers. For men, this consists of a collared shirt, nice pants, a belt, and casual dress shoes. For women, it consists of a dress or skirt with a modest hemline (below the knees) and a blouse with a neckline at or above the collarbone (i.e., no cleavage visible) and sleeves. If the blouse or skirt is thin, a camisole or slip is necessary. If you follow these standards, you are unlikely to offend anyone in Thailand. It will also reduce the amount of unwanted attention you will receive. (For more information, see the packing list later in this book. You will be happiest if you bring clothes in your personal style that fit within these guidelines.)

Male Volunteers should know that long hair, beards and moustaches, and earrings are generally not worn by Thai men and are not appropriate, particularly in the rural provinces. If male trainees arrive with any of the above, they will be

taken to the barber. Multiple-pierced ears and body piercings are also not appropriate for either gender. Tattoos that are not discreet, especially for women, may also cause unwanted attention in rural areas of the country. If you have large tattoos, be prepared to wear clothing that will cover them.

Peace Corps/Thailand emphasizes community integration and intentional relationship building as the most effective way for Volunteers to enter and be accepted into Thai communities. Feedback from Thai counterparts and supervisors also indicates that the first three months at site are critical, and Volunteers need to be at their site as much as possible in order to be viewed as a community member. The first 30 days after being sworn-in, Volunteers cannot leave their sites except for medical, and visitors are not allowed the first three months.

Peace Corps/Thailand is very serious about Volunteer professionalism, as each Volunteer also has the responsibility to represent Peace Corps so the image and reputation of the agency will meet the high standards we are expected to maintain. It is disrespectful to the people of Thailand, to Peace Corps/Thailand, and to fellow Volunteers to act or behave in any less than a professional manner. To be successful in Thailand you will need to develop good relationships. Trainees and Volunteers are expected to adhere to the following professional standards:

- Show respect for the people and culture of Thailand at all times.
- Observe local standards of behavior, dress, and protocol.
- Comply with policies that ensure your safety and security.
- Strive to integrate into your community and Thai society, spending more time with Thai colleagues and counterparts than with other Americans and expatriates.

- Consider learning the local language as an ongoing responsibility during your entire service.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, only drink in a socially appropriate, culturally respectable, sensitive, and safe manner, respecting yourself, your country, Peace Corps, and the people of Thailand.
- Behave as a professional colleague of your Thai co-workers, other Volunteers, and Peace Corps staff, resolving any differences through openness and respectful dialogue, avoiding gossip, rumor, or personalization of any conflicts.
- Be completely open and honest with Peace Corps staff about difficulties you face as a Volunteer or trainee, enabling a collaborative approach toward resolution of any problems.
- Recognize that you are a co-owner of the Peace Corps/Thailand's public image, along with staff and the more than 7,000 Volunteers who have served in Thailand before you.
- Understand that as a development worker, you should embrace a grassroots community-based approach to development, working to meet the needs and wishes of as many community members as possible.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue 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. Thailand is a relatively safe country, especially in the provinces where Volunteers live and work. Although petty crimes and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, most Thailand 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 Thailand. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

In addition to the emergency action plan described later in this book, Peace Corps/Thailand has an emergency contact system (i.e., a phone tree) for contacting Volunteers, which is tested periodically. Peace Corps/Thailand's emergency action plan is coordinated with the U.S. Embassy. For reasons of safety, Volunteers in Thailand must obtain approval from the Peace Corps office in Bangkok for vacations, and Volunteers must also notify the office when staying overnight in a place other than their home. The office will ask for specific travel plans, including dates, hotel names, and telephone numbers.

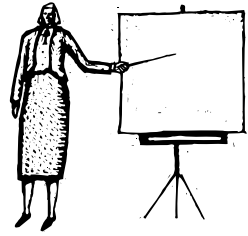
Rewards and Frustrations

Most Volunteers find that the main challenges of service are not physical hardships or safety and security issues, but psychological stress caused by limited language, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and differences between Americans and host country nationals in values and expectations. Lack of structure in some situations and social pressure to fit into the role of guest, teacher, and official are issues for many Volunteers. While frustrating, these challenges present opportunities for tremendous learning.

NOTES



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training provides you with solid technical, language, health, safety and security, and cross-cultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes to prepare you for living and working safely and successfully in Thailand. Pre-service training is rigorous and demanding, and sometimes not all trainees qualify for Peace Corps service.

Peace Corps/Thailand's training program is split into two parts. Part one (10 weeks) is community-based and prepares you to live and work safely and productively at your site for the first three to six months. We have successfully used a community-based training design since January 1997. In this training model, four or five trainees live and study in villages located a few kilometers from a central "hub" site in a larger town. Most language, cross-cultural, and technical sessions and activities occur in the training village. Throughout pre-service training, you will primarily ride bicycles to the small group training, and the hubsite where you will study with the larger group for one or two days per week.

You will live with a Thai host family in your training village, which will help you learn about and adjust to Thai culture and practice your Thai language skills. You will also take part in various cultural activities and excursions, visit a current Volunteer's site, and visit your future permanent site.

Please note that about two-thirds through PST you will learn where your permanent site will be for your two years in Thailand. Prior to this time, staff will be finalizing site identification and preparation, as well as finding out more

about you in order to match your skills with what the host agency has requested.

Part two of PST (10 days) occurs after you have been at your site for approximately three months. This is a time for Volunteers and their Thai counterparts to explore and share their initial experiences of working together.

You will be asked to identify technical, language, cross-cultural, and other topics about which you would like further training. Thailand Volunteers feel that the timing and structure of this part of training are invaluable.

Technical Training

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

Technical training will prepare you and your Thai partners to accomplish project tasks and achieve project goals. This component will include sessions on your technical area, as well as sessions on the environment, economics, politics, gender, youth, and community development in Thailand and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and meet with the Thai agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated by experienced trainers and Peace Corps staff throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

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

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 you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of PST, you will live with a Thai host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Thailand. 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 entry, Thai versus American social values, gender and development, and political structures.

Health Training

During pre-service training, the Peace Corps will give you basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive health care and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Session topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Thailand. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are also covered.

Safety Training

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

Additional Training During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical, language, and cross-cultural skills. Volunteers are supported in continuation of their language learning throughout their service. Reimbursement for tutoring in Thai or in another local language is provided. Language training is provided during PST II, and at the mid-service conference.

Language proficiency is evaluated before swearing in and at the close of service.

During your service, there are usually two training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *Mid-Service conference*: Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- *Close-of service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

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



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN THAILAND



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of each Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to health and medical issues. The Peace Corps in Thailand maintains its own health unit with qualified and experienced Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs) and support staff to take care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services such as diagnostics, evaluation, and treatment are also available at local, Western-standard hospitals. If you become seriously ill or injured you will be transported either to a Thai medical facility (in Bangkok or the provincial hospitals where you serve) or to the United States.

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 Thailand, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, before you leave the training site to travel to your jobsite, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of this kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the health unit. 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 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 will have physical exams at mid-service and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem or injury during your service, the Peace Corps health unit in Thailand will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Thailand, you may be sent back to the United States for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The most important of your responsibilities in Thailand is to take preventive measures, which include the following:

Adherence to recommended standards for food and water preparation. Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. The health unit will discuss specific recommendations for Thailand during pre-service training.

Prompt reporting to the health unit. Strict adherence to prevention techniques for vector-borne diseases such as dengue fever and malaria is extremely important. Significant illnesses, injuries, and any possible exposure to a rabid animal (through bites, scratches, or contact with animal saliva) must be reported to the health unit immediately. The PCMO will consider many factors in deciding the appropriate course of therapy necessary to prevent rabies. The PCMO will administer all necessary rabies immunizations.

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

Use of condoms to protect against the spread of AIDS and other STDs. Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV/AIDS and other STDs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risks, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your partner is a host country national, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV or other STDs.

Wearing a bicycle helmet. Most Volunteers own a bicycle and use it for getting around their communities. Peace Corps requires that Volunteers wear a helmet whenever they are on a bicycle. (Note: Volunteers are not permitted to ride on motorcycles. This infraction will be cause for immediate administrative separation from service.)

Other preventive health measures specific to your area of assignment will be discussed once you arrive in Thailand. Volunteers are expected to comply with all medical treatment and care recommended by the Peace Corps Health Unit or referral facilities.

Women's Health Information

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention, but also have programmatic ramifications. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

Feminine hygiene products are available throughout Thailand. Tampons are available in Bangkok and large cities. If you prefer a specific product, please bring a six-month supply with you.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

Ace bandages
Adhesive tape
American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook
Antacid tablets (Tums)
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)
Aquatabs water purification tablets
Band-Aids
Butterfly closures
Caladryl
Sepsasoothe (cetylpyridinium/benzocaine) throat lozenges
Condoms
Dental floss
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)
Aquatabs water purification tablets
Lip balm (Chapstick)
Electrol plus (Oral Rehydration Salts)
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Tempa-Dot
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
Robitussin-DM lozenges - cherry cough drops
Scissors

Sterile gauze pads
Purified Water Eye Wash
Clotrimazole Cream (fungal infections)
Tweezers
Un-aspirin (acetaminophen 325mg) tablets
Hydrocortisone cream
Ibuprofen
Gloves (1 pair)
Sunscreen
Whistle

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and take it to your pre-departure orientation. If you 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, either at your pre-

departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Thailand. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, we will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications (e.g., St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, and 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 and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace it, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. 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; in addition, the amount of dust in the air can irritate your eyes. 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 more than 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future

participation in health care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you close your Peace Corps service, you will be entitled to the post-service health care 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 pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling 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.

By far the most common crime incidents that Volunteers experience are thefts. Frequently these occur in crowded locations, such as markets or on public transportation, or are due to Volunteers leaving items unattended. More serious assaults, however, do occasionally occur. Based on information gathered from incident reports worldwide in 2007, the following factors stand out as risk characteristics for crimes against Volunteers, many of which can be avoided with appropriate actions. Assaults consist of physical and sexual assaults committed against Volunteers; property crimes include robbery, burglary, theft, and vandalism.

- **Location:** Most assaults (53 percent) occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). Specifically, 36 percent of assaults took place when Volunteers were away from their sites. Most property crimes occurred in the Volunteer's residence or another Volunteer's residence, followed closely by public areas. Forty-eight percent of property crimes occurred when Volunteers were away from their sites
- **Time:** Assaults usually took place during the evening, between 6 p.m. and 11 p.m.— though the single hour with the largest percentage of assaults was 1:00 a.m. (8 percent) Property crimes were more common in the middle of the day, from noon to 9 p.m.
- **Day:** Assaults and property crimes were more commonly reported on weekends (48 percent and 49 percent, respectively).

- Absence of others: Assaults and property crimes (64 percent and 53 percent, respectively) occurred more frequently when the Volunteer was alone.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults and property crimes (64 percent and 85 percent), the Volunteer did not know or could not identify the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: 23 percent of all assaults and 4 percent of all property crimes involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.

Risk factors can vary within countries throughout the world that are served by the Peace Corps. A Volunteer in Thailand may face risks specific to this country in addition to risks associated with living in a developing country.

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 with local people who are respected in the community
- 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 trusted by your community 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.” This office is led by an associate director for safety and security who reports to the Peace Corps Director and includes divisions which focus on Volunteer safety and overseas security and crime statistics and analysis.

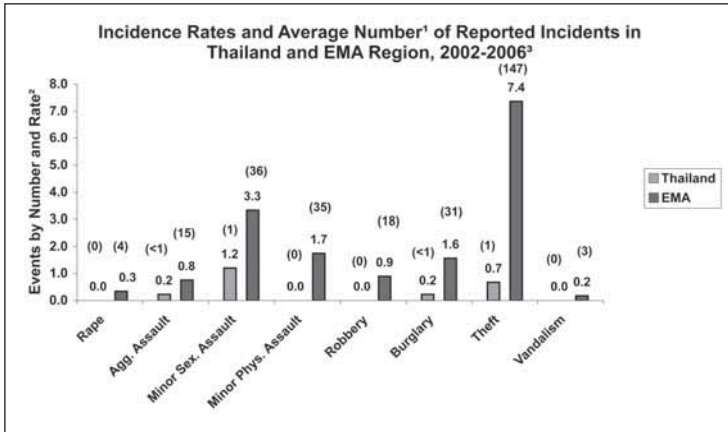
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace

Corps staff members provide support by reassessing the Volunteer's worksite 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 Thailand as compared to all other Europe, Mediterranean and Asia (EMA) region programs as a whole, from 2002–2006. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

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

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



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

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

³Data collection for Thailand began as of 2002

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS), Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS), and Crime Incident Reporting Form (CIRF); the information is accurate as of 05/29/07.

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

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

areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes and, naturally, crimes that occur overseas are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities through the local courts system. If you are the victim of a crime, it is up to you if you wish to pursue prosecution. If you decide to prosecute, Peace Corps will be there to assist you. The Office of Safety and Security, through our regionally-based Peace Corps safety and security officers, will work with the security officer at the U.S. Embassy and the staff at the Peace Corps office in-country to coordinate with local police and prosecutors. One of our tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. We are here to provide support and assistance every step of the way. Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country.

If you are the victim of a serious crime, get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps as soon as you can so we can get you the help you need.

Security Issues in Thailand

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 Thailand. 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 worksites for pickpockets and they present potentially inviting targets for terrorist groups, which are present in Thailand. As of April 2005, Volunteers in Thailand are restricted from traveling to the five southernmost provinces of Yala, Narathiwat, Pattani, Songkla, and Satun. This restriction may be lifted or expanded at any time the country director believes it is appropriate. In May 2008, the restriction was lifted from Satun Province.

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 house is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Thailand, 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 Thailand may require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers tend to attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are more likely to receive negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network ("family," friends, and colleagues) who look out for them. While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, 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 Thailand

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. Thailand's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Thailand office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be offered in the newsletter 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.

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

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart

agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Thailand'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 Thailand at predetermined locations until the situation resolves itself 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 health unit. 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 special efforts to see that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent years. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other, despite our many differences.

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

Outside of Thailand's capital and other cities, many residents have had relatively little sustained exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles, though they may have had some contact with the many tourists who visit each year. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes.

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

Overview of Diversity in Thailand

Although the majority of Thailand's population is both Buddhist and ethnically and linguistically Thai, there are regional linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic differences. The presence of many non-Thai groups also contributes to the diversity of the country. Thais generally emphasize their commonalities and the strengths that diversity contributes to their country. When differences are expressed, it is generally in subtle ways that require linguistic and cultural understanding to grasp. Thais' emphasis on tolerance, maintaining smooth relationships, and a sense of order creates a generally welcome environment for Volunteers.

Despite the ideal of social harmony, there are some conflicts, which are readily apparent in the tabloid press. Thailand's social structure includes an inherent hierarchy, with competing beliefs about who is entitled to what. Thais often attempt to hide conflict from guests, something you may

experience with your colleagues. Nevertheless, Thais manage to find extraordinarily beautiful ways to maintain harmony in the face of diversity, many of which you will no doubt find intriguing.

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Thai hospitality is legendary. You are unlikely to experience direct confrontation if you practice the basic do's and don'ts introduced in pre-service training and balance your needs with those of your Thai co-workers and community members. Of course, the Peace Corps cannot control every host country national's treatment of you, nor would you want such intrusion. You should be able to handle most situations on your own. Some Volunteers may experience blatant bigotry, but subtle discrimination is more common. Part of your role as a Volunteer is to promote, through your actions and behavior, a more thorough understanding of the United States and Americans among the people in your community.

Thai people are very direct in regards to physical appearance in a manner that may be considered rude by American standards. Volunteers should expect to hear comments about their height, weight, hair, etc.

The following information is provided to help you prepare for challenges you may encounter in Thailand based on your gender, ethnic or racial background, age, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, or disabilities.

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

In recent years, the proportion of female Volunteers in Thailand has reached close to 75 percent, including those who are married. Most female Volunteers experience a high degree of security in their communities and when they travel within the country. Physical harassment is not common, but precautions still need to be taken. The higher status of men compared with women can manifest in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. For example, women are often expected to take on more work than men are, and they often do so. This can be frustrating for both female and male Volunteers. Additionally, young females may face an uphill battle to gain the respect of their male Thai counterparts as age and experience is often valued over youth and enthusiasm—especially for women.

Volunteer Comment:

“As a trainee I felt complimented as people remarked on my beauty, and other times I felt humiliated and treated more like a doll than a person.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Many Thais are not well-informed about the ethnic and racial diversity of the United States and they, therefore, expect Volunteers to be Caucasian. In addition, many Thais view lighter skin as more beautiful, a perception based more on an aesthetic bias than any racial prejudice and one that existed long before encounters between Thailand and the West. African-American Volunteers, in particular, should not take Thais' views of skin color personally and should try to see them within this context. In addition, people in villages

may have a difficult time seeing some people of color as Americans.

Unfortunately, in recent years, heroin smugglers have used West-African nationals to smuggle drugs out of Thailand, which has led to a belief among some Thais that American blacks are Africans who smuggle drugs. Fortunately, professional and personal relationships between African-American Volunteers and their Thai counterparts have broken down these stereotypes.

Many Thais are not familiar with the term “Hispanic American” or many of the countries in Central and South America. They may ask you what country you trace your ethnicity to and refer to you as that nationality rather than as American. You may have to remind Thai co-workers and friends that you are indeed an American. Thais have become aware of some Spanish-speaking countries through the media. Male Volunteers of Mexican descent may be affected by stereotypes stemming from the many boxing matches between Thai and Hispanic boxers. Volunteers of Cuban descent may be asked about Fidel Castro and Cuba. Colombian Americans may be asked about the violence associated with the drug cartels in South America.

Volunteer Comments:

“An image of a Hispanic American is usually tied to the country of origin of that person’s family. However, the important thing is to remember and remind our Thai hosts that Hispanics from various countries of origin are Americans.”

All Volunteers of color may find that Thai co-workers initially do not respect your professional skills as much as they respect the skills of white Volunteers. However, most Volunteers find acceptance and respect once personal relationships

have been developed and professional competence has been demonstrated. Speaking Thai and showing respect for Thai cultural norms will help, and providing information about your family and your life in the United States will assist in breaking down stereotypes. If you are shy, you may have some trouble allowing Thais to indulge their curiosity by touching your skin, hair, and clothes. Sharing pictures of your home and family in the United States is one way to help people get to know you as an American and as an individual.

Possible Issues for Asian-American Volunteers

It is common for Asian Americans to be mistaken for Thais, which can have both benefits and drawbacks. One advantage is that Asian Americans blend better into the community and, thus, may not receive as much unwanted attention in public. A disadvantage is that Thais may initially expect you to have the language skills of a native speaker. Thai friends told one Asian-American Volunteer that they were disappointed they did not get a “real American” as they had requested. This Volunteer also felt that her Thai co-workers initially valued her less than they valued Caucasian Volunteers because they thought an Asian American was not very different from a Thai. But once people know you are not Thai, you are likely to receive the same celebrity treatment that most foreigners receive in Thailand.

If you are an Asian American, Thais may ask you about your ethnic origin, wanting to know the country of your ancestors. Thailand is home to many Asian minority groups related to contemporary Chinese, Burmese, Khmer, and Lao peoples, many of whom lived in the area before there was a distinct country known as Siam (later Thailand). The small Vietnamese population arrived primarily in the 1950s, and most have remained in the northeastern Thai towns and cities where they took refuge

Volunteer Comments:

Yes, I am Asian. Filipino, to be exact. But I am also American and I've spent the past five years of my life living in California and while I am very Filipino, I am also very Californian. I also happen to be a Peace Corps Volunteer, which means I sort of work for the United States government. None of what I wrote above would be a source of confusion for people living in the United States or for anyone who has had experience with American diversity. But for the people of rural Thailand, I am an anomaly!

To the people of rural Thailand, I am:

- a "farang" who does not have blond hair or blue eyes;
- an Asian looking man (they all think I am Thai ... or Chinese ... or Japanese ... or Korean) who does not speak Thai, Chinese, Japanese, or Korean;
- an English-speaking Asian-looking man who wears farang clothes who does not speak Thai, but loves rice, but does not drink beer out of a straw; and
- a Farang who looks like a Thai man because I am darker than a white man, but I am also lighter skinned than a Thai man so, therefore, I am Chinese, but I speak English so, therefore, I am American, but I have black hair (not blond) so I am Thai, but I am.....

You get the picture.

Traditionally, the only contact people from very rural Thailand have had with farangs have been with the older white men who have married women from their villages. So when they heard they would be receiving a visitor from the United States, I can only imagine the images that danced in their heads—tall, white skin, blond hair, blue eyes ...

And of course they got me!

And thus the ensuing confusion (and the fun of it all):

Brian, a current serving Volunteer who hosted me for two days, was called a liar by a person in his village for introducing me as an American; Brian's principal was a little more polite and did a decent job of masking his disbelief; the person who met me in the bus station at my village told me I did not look American; I heard "mungkan kon Thai" (same as Thai) echo through the mouths of my city hall's staff when I arrived to meet the mayor; and the supervisor of my education service area office gave me the "I have a meeting with an American in a couple of minutes, what can I do for you?" look.

Anton Turuc

Group 119 – TCCO Project

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Thai government workers are subject to a mandatory retirement age of 60 (with exceptions for some with specialized skills), so Volunteers over 60 will have Thai co-workers who are younger than they are. Thais give great respect and importance to senior family members, and senior Volunteers often receive similar deference and respect, though this does not necessarily translate to greater respect for their professional competence or technical knowledge. Your co-workers may smile, nod, and appear to agree with you when the opposite is true, perhaps because they do not want to offend you.

Although more seniors are joining the Peace Corps today, most of your fellow trainees are likely to be under age 30, and the Thai training staff is largely composed of recent college

graduates. Generally, seniors are warmly accepted by other trainees; still, there may be times when you miss interacting with people of your own age, especially in social situations.

The Thai language trainers recognize the different learning styles and needs of seniors and will endeavor to provide the most suitable training for older trainees. However, it will be important for the trainee to communicate his or her own learning styles to trainers and work together to adapt the language training to meet those needs.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Thais do not usually view bisexuality and homosexuality as sinful or unnatural, nor are there criminal penalties against sexual acts between members of the same sex. However, some bisexual and homosexual Volunteers have found it necessary to adjust their behavior to be effective in their jobs and respected by members of their communities. Most choose to remain “in the closet” to Thai friends and co-workers at their sites.

Physical contact in public between members of the same sex (such as linking arms while walking down the street) is a common way for Thais to show affection, and it is important for Volunteers to realize that such displays of affection likely are nonsexual in nature. Volunteers who are accustomed to being part of a large gay community in the United States may not get the support to which they are accustomed. However, gay communities do exist in urban centers such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and you will probably find significant support within the Peace Corps community.

All women will have to deal with questions or teasing about boyfriends, marriage, and sex. All men will have to deal with questions about American women and girl watching and may

be pressured by co-workers to visit brothels. During pre-service training, trainees are encouraged to think through these issues and plan possible responses.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

A high degree of religious tolerance exists in Thailand. Volunteers who refrain from drinking for religious reasons find that once this message is conveyed to their counterparts, it is typically respected and honored. It is doubtful that any religious issues will arise, unless one breaks the Peace Corps' prohibition against proselytizing by Volunteers.

Possible Issues for Married Couples

Serving as a married couple is typically very different than serving as an individual. There are unique challenges for couples wherever they serve. However, these challenges have proven to be particularly evident in Thailand--especially for women and for younger couples. Thai culture is patriarchal and married women often find that Thais will not address them directly, preferring to address the husband instead. Married women may find that Thais, especially Thai women, judge them poorly if their husband does not seem "cared for" to Thai standards. When viewing Thai gender roles and expectations from an American perspective, there is clearly a double standard. Married men may face questions (sometimes joking and other times serious) about the number of minor wives they have. It is not unusual for husbands to receive invitations to visit prostitutes or to take a second wife, often in front of their wives. On the other hand, if a Volunteer wife seeks to go out somewhere on her own or seeks to establish her individual identity as a Volunteer independent of her husband, the host community may have difficulty accepting that both the wife and husband are separate and equal as individual Volunteers. It isn't impossible to serve successfully as a married couple in Thailand. However, it is important

for married couples to understand from the beginning that these are issues they are likely to face. Couples will have a chance to talk with currently serving married couples during PST in order to discuss strategies for addressing some of the challenges.

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

Thais' respect for others extends to individuals with disabilities, and the country has made efforts to help disabled individuals have productive jobs and lives. One example is the tradition of blind masseuses and masseurs in Thailand. In addition, schools are beginning to mainstream those with disabilities into regular classrooms.

Volunteers with disabilities need to be aware of the rigors of the Peace Corps/Thailand program during both training and service. Trainees and Volunteers are expected to arrange their own transportation to the various training venues and workplaces. Any special accommodations needed during training and when at one's site, such as an alternative to travel by bicycle, should be made known during the placement process in the United States, prior to arrival in Thailand.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



How much baggage am I allowed to bring to Thailand?

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 as of this writing. 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. Updated information will be provided prior to departure.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters, shortwave radios, 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.

What is the electric current in Thailand?

It is 220 volts.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries, and it is advisable to have access to some money—whatever amount will suit your own travel plans and needs. Credit cards and traveler's checks

are preferable to cash. You will also have access to your U.S. dollar account, via ATMs, if you desire.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

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

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Thailand 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, bicycles, minibuses, and trucks to lots of walking.

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

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

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until near the end 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 selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site-selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns and are usually within one or two hours from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 12-hour or longer bus ride from the capital.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, you should instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

Can I call home from Thailand?

Yes, it is relatively easy to call the United States from Thailand. Locally purchased cellphones are very common among Volunteers in Thailand. Although a large proportion of Thailand Volunteers also have a telephone in their home, you should not assume that you will have one because home telephones are still a luxury in many provinces. If you do not have a home or cellphone, there are phones for international calls at almost all post offices in Thailand.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

Peace Corps Thailand will provide you with funds to purchase a cellphone during pre-service training as it is a safety and security requirement, so there is no need to bring your own. Public phones are also readily available throughout Thailand.

Will there be e-mail and Internet access?

Internet shops exist near most Volunteers' sites, either in their community or within an hour's travel. Internet access is

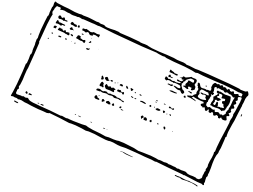
very cheap and is the mode of communication preferred by Volunteers, who communicate regularly by email with both Peace Corps staff and friends and family back home. Please note that during the 10-week pre-service training, Internet access will not be readily available.

Should I bring my computer?

A computer is not necessary for your work because most offices have computers. However, many Volunteers enjoy having laptops for personal use. We suggest you purchase personal insurance if you plan to bring your laptop to Thailand.



WELCOME LETTERS FROM THAILAND VOLUNTEERS



Congratulations for being assigned to Thailand!

As a Volunteer in the 50+ group (actually 60+), I have had very positive experiences at my site in Loei province. I'm just starting my third year in Dansai as a CBODer (community-based organizational development Volunteer).

I found pre-service training challenging and fun. The most challenging part was learning Thai. The second most challenging was moving in with a family that didn't speak English when I didn't speak Thai. The fun part was getting to know the other trainees and the Peace Corps staff. They were a very diverse group of people with impressive backgrounds.

I've realized a few things during my two years here that may be helpful for you. One is that you are working in their community and must accept their pace even if you find it excruciatingly frustrating. Patience has its rewards. Progress happens. A smile and politeness are great community entry tools. If you don't give up on the Thais, the Thais will support you as much as they can. Also, the Thais have a great sense of humor and like to have fun.

Developing a network at your site, as well as nationally, is as important as it is in the U.S. The fastest way to build one is by showing up for events whenever you're available. I've met the most interesting and helpful people at the most boring events.

Finally, don't let the little setbacks discourage you. You're just as much a mystery to the Thais as they are to you. Keep showing up until they become comfortable with you.

Good luck to all of you. I look forward to meeting you someday.

Norma Abe
CBOD Group 118

Welcome to Peace Corps Thailand!

Congratulations on your acceptance and the beginning an awesome adventure. This surely has been one of the best, most challenging times of my life, and I'm excited that all of you get to come experience it also.

In the year and few months I have been in Thailand I have seen and heard so many new things. From a new, tonal language to Buddhist monks walking the streets; from temples where your community gathers to rice fields where your community works; from school prayer to proud nationalism-- Thailand is full of surprises and eye-opening events. Oh, and don't sweat the language. Our group received a language CD before coming to staging and I remember listening to it and thinking there was no way I'd ever be able to understand those sounds, much less say them. But, with time and practice you'll be able to do both.

Most of you have probably heard that Thailand is the land of smiles. A smile can go a long way here, even if you have no idea what people are saying day after day. Try to remember not to take things too seriously, as the people around you are probably struggling trying to learn as much about you as you are about them.

Before leaving the U.S., I can remember thinking about how long of a journey was about to unfold. Two years is a big commitment and can seem like an age. But as training comes and goes and your new community slowly becomes home, you might find yourself realizing that those two long years are quickly becoming only one. And that one year all of the sudden becomes only six months. It goes by quicker than you might expect or want, so take in every day as if it is your first. Remember that curious desire to find and experience new things that led you to join the Peace Corps in the first place.

Remember your good intentions, hopes, and dreams and try to embrace the great things you'll find and the great places you'll go.

Peter rumbach
PCV Group 119
Chaiyaphum, Thailand

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Congratulations on being accepted to Peace Corps Thailand!

You are going to embark on one of the most exciting journeys of your life. As a Volunteer in Thailand you will have plenty of opportunities to have an immediate impact on your community. If you persist and overcome the many obstacles you will face, then you will complete your service as a much stronger person than before you came. I am convinced that our time in Peace Corps exposes our true character since we have so much control over our daily schedules and activities once training is finished. Therefore, I encourage you to allow wisdom to be your guide, temperance your motto, and patience your temperament. I've seen Volunteers exceed expectations and accomplish great things, and I've also seen Volunteers allow folly to sink their service. I am confident that you, too, have the potential to do wonderful things for this nation. Just always remember your purpose here and your path will take care of itself.

Quilen Blackwell
CBOD
Peace Corps Thailand
Group 119

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I am not a “normal” Peace Corps Volunteer. I am Chinese American, and I am married. My husband and I joined the Peace Corps to learn how to live fully immersed in another culture. We got what we asked for. When I joined the Peace Corps I thought I knew a thing or two about culture. My parents are both immigrants to the United States. Thus, I did not have your typical American childhood. A majority of my relatives live in Malaysia, and thus many summers were spent visiting relatives abroad. After college my then-boyfriend (now husband) and I spent the summer teaching English in rural China. I thought I had this culture thing down. I had always imagined that the hardest part about being a Volunteer would be the logistics of living (housing, food, water, transportation), not culture. I was wrong.

Culture is much more than food, dress, and holidays. It's a completely different way of thinking. What is common sense to you is not common sense to someone else. For example, the fact that I am Chinese, and American, is baffling to Thai people. Most Thai people think that all Americans are “white.” If you are Asian they will think you are Thai. If you have a husband who is “white,” they will think you are his translator. Your experience as an American ethnic minority will be different from a majority of your fellow Volunteers. It's important to acknowledge this. Laugh, be flexible, educate others, and allow yourself to be frustrated ... it's OK.

Try not to compare yourself to other people. Some people will learn the language quickly, and some will learn very slowly. Sometimes they will ask you who speaks Thai better, you or your husband. Sometimes they will give your husband, and not you, special treatment because he is white and male, and you are female and Asian. If you are Asian they will expect you to speak Thai, because ... most people think you are Thai. Be prepared for people to be either confused, or

think you are stupid when you don't speak like a native. Be prepared for them to compliment your husband's two words in Thai, and say nothing about your effort. Fortunately I have a wonderful husband. We support each other. If he is better at something than I am, he is always quick to mention that I am better than him at something else. If he gets special treatment he is quick to make sure that I am acknowledged as well. We support each other.

Every Volunteer will have a different experience. My husband and I were sent to a rural Hill Tribe village up north with not much more than a couple noodle stands. Other Volunteers live in more suburban areas with 7-Elevens and Tesco Lotus (like a Wal-Mart). It's important to remember you cannot compare these experiences. Neither experience is better than the other.

Mixed experiences can make Peace Corps get-togethers after long periods of time apart feel like "story-topper" competitions. Each Volunteer will have a unique story and experience to share, so it's important to listen. Listen instead of waiting for that person to finish speaking so you can have your turn. When my husband and I return from our jobs at the end of each day we make sure to take the time to talk and listen to each other. It really makes a difference. It allows us to really digest our experiences. If you are not married you will have other Volunteers as your support network. Most Volunteers call each other regularly (you will have cellphones) to digest their experiences.

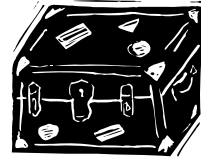
Try not to have expectations, and just let life happen.

Best of luck, Lisa Chuang

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PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Thailand and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight limit on baggage. Although you can get almost everything you need in Thailand, underwear, clothes, and shoes in larger sizes may be hard to find here.

One strategy is to pack a box or two with items you probably will not need until after training and arrange for someone to send the boxes to you by surface mail once you get to your site.

Most worksites have computers and many also have Internet, and Volunteers who own a laptop find it useful. If you do bring a computer please also consider personal insurance.

Riap roiy (appropriate and complete) professional dress for men consists of non-denim pants such as chinos or Dockers, collared shirts (long- or short-sleeved button-down shirts or polo shirts) in conservative colors and patterns, and casual dress shoes. Professional dress for women consists of knee-length or longer dresses or skirts and blouses.. Women should also bring casual pants for biking and nicer pants for rare work occasions. It is somewhat common to see women wearing pants to the office, but not in the schools. A slip or camisole should be worn under thin material, and blouses should have sleeves and modest necklines. Revealing one's upper thighs, stomach, shoulders, and cleavage is generally

frowned upon, even outside a work setting. All clothing should be clean and neatly pressed. Shoes for work should have a back strap. Note that all-black outfits are generally worn only while in mourning, although black slacks with a colored top are frequently seen..

Note that the Riap Roiy standard of dress is mandatory during pre-service training, including skirts for women, and time for shopping is extremely limited.

For both men and women, T-shirts and jeans are fine to wear after hours, and shorts (preferably ones that reach the knee) are fine to wear when working out. Thais do not generally wear shorts in public except in very relaxed situations. Tank tops are not recommended for women. When you are in your own home, however, what you wear is up to you.

General Clothing

- Two or three pairs of lightweight pants (jeans can be hot, but bring them if you like them because they are expensive to buy here)
- Two or three pairs of knee-length shorts or, for women, capris for biking (which can be changed when arriving at work)
- Four to seven short-sleeve shirts
- Sweatshirt or fleece top (it can get chilly in the cold season)
- One or two sweaters
- One lightweight jacket, windbreaker or raincoat
- Three to five pairs of socks, and one pair of hiking/fleece socks
- One or two belts
- Athletic clothes—shorts, T-shirts
- Baseball cap or other hat

- Handkerchiefs (to keep dust out of mouth while biking, wetting down to cool off and mopping up sweat)
- Exercise-style, sweat-wicking T-shirts for biking

For Women

- Four or five work outfits (see description above), including an assortment of lightweight, knee-length skirts, a couple of pairs of nice pants and capris or long sports shorts for biking.
- Bathing suit (a one-piece is best)
- Lots of underwear in breathable fabrics
- At least one black skirt (below the knee) for funerals

For Men

- Four or five dress shirts
- Two or three polo-type shirts (polo shirts with the Thailand emblem in appropriate colors are readily available and can be purchased for under \$10 each and are appropriate for almost all occasions)
- Four or five casual dress pants
- Two or three pairs of lightweight pants (jeans can be hot)
- Two or three pairs of knee-length shorts
- One or two neckties
- Lots of underwear (cotton is recommended since you will likely be showering at least twice per day)
- Bathing trunks (Speedo-style swimsuits are not recommended)
- At least one pair of black trousers for funerals

Shoes

(Note: It is customary and expected that shoes are removed before entering a house and some offices (including the Peace Corps Office in Bangkok.) Lace-up shoes and boots are not

recommended. For women, you may want to choose flats rather than heels.)

Flip flops are readily available, but if you have large feet you may want to bring a pair as you may have difficulty finding larger sizes.

- One pair of dress shoes (loafer style for men and pumps or low heel closed toe shoes with back strap for women) for work and on occasions such as meetings with government officials, funerals, your swearing in ceremony, etc.). PC requires shoes with back strap during training
- One pair of sport sandals (e.g., Chacos, Tevas, etc.)
- One pair of athletic shoes (if you have large feet and play soccer you might want to pack a pair of cleats as soccer is very popular)
- One or two pairs of slip-on shoes (you will often have to take off your shoes before entering a building)

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Contact lens supplies (these are available in big cities)
- Solid deodorant (only roll-on is available here)
- Cosmetics (they are expensive here)
- Tampons or alternative sanitary methods, e.g. Diva Cups, etc. (local selection is limited)
- Athletic supports and braces if you need them
- Universal sink stopper (for washing clothes in the sink when traveling)
- Travel towel (towels are readily available here, but you may want a travel towel that is compact and packable)

Miscellaneous

- Camera
- Small alarm clock
- Small backpack for weekend travel
- Guidebook about Thailand (e.g., *Lonely Planet*)
- Three-month supply of prescription medications
- Second pair of prescription eyeglasses
- Swiss army knife or Leatherman tool
- Games (e.g., Scrabble and Uno)
- Photos of your life in the United States to show to Thai friends
- Souvenirs from home to give as gifts (e.g., magazines, coins, postcards, stamps, cool pens, etc.)
- Walkman/iPod-type device
- Tape recorder or MP3 recorder for taping language lessons
- Durable water bottle that is easily washable
- A voltage converter—if you are bringing any electronics
- Contact information for resources in America (former employers, school loan information, colleges, organizations, etc.), which can be useful for obtaining materials during service or for applying for jobs near the end of service
- Credit card (Visa is the most widely accepted), ATM card, and/or traveler's checks
- USB pen drive/micro-storage device (for copying and sharing computer files)
- Teaching materials from the U.S. (useful for TCCO Volunteers)
- Access to some U.S. funds, perhaps \$200 for vacation, or must-have purchases.



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: **301-790-4749**).
- 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.
- If you plan to travel after your service ends obtain a personal passport. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish your service, so if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing 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.
- Continue to maintain a banking account in the U.S., and notify the bank that you are moving to Thailand.
- 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 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 Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia	Ext. 1875	202.692.1875
Programming or	Desk Officer	Ext. 2414	202.692.2414
Country Information	E-mail: thailand@peacecorps.gov		

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

PEACE CORPS

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