

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO MADAGASCAR



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



May 2006



Vila de Mocimboa de Praia
Pemba
MOZAMBIQUE
Nacala
Lumba
Mocimboque

Grand Comore
Moroni
Fombouni
Anjouan
COMOROS
Dzaoudzi
Mayotte
(Administered by France, claimed by Comoros)

Iles Glorieuses (FRANCE)
Cap d'Ambre
Antsirana

Nosy Mitsio
Nosy Be
Hellville
Sesouma
Ambilobe
Vohimarina

ANTSIRANANA
Sambava
Andapa
Antalaha
Antsohihy
Maraositra

Mozambique Channel
Ile Chesterfield
Ile Juan de Nova (FRANCE)
Iles Barren

MAHAJANGA

Mahajanga
Maroveay
Maevetanana
Ambakireny

Nosy Boraha

TOAMASINA
Andilamena
Fenerive
Ambatondrazaka
Toamasina

ATANANARIVO
Ankavandra
Tsironomandidy
Antananarivo
Miandrivazo
Ambatolampy

Brickaville
Moramanga

Morondava

Antsirabe

Mahanoro
Nosy Varika

TOLIARY
Morombe

FIANARANTSOA
Ambositra
Nosy Varika
Fianarantsoa
Ambalavain

Mananjary
Manakara

Toliary

Farafangana

Ampahihy

Faradofay

Ambovombe

INDIAN OCEAN

20
40
45
50

20
25

A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Prospective Volunteers:

Congratulations on making it this far in the long and winding road that leads to becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer in Madagascar. On behalf of the entire staff of Peace Corps/Madagascar, let me say that I am very pleased that you are considering an invitation to join us here as a Volunteer.

I arrived in Madagascar in August 2001 to serve as associate Peace Corps director for the environment project and have been the country director since December 2002. In the time I've been here, I can truly say that this is a fascinating country: It will surprise, delight, and challenge you—all at the same time!

The Peace Corps suffered a tremendous setback in the aftermath of the Malagasy presidential elections in December 2001, in which there was an extraordinary political crisis following the tallying of votes. Supporters of opposition candidate Marc Ravalomanana mounted a general strike and protest against the election results, and in January 2002 Ravalomanana declared victory. Within days, small-scale violence broke out between rival protestors. Incumbent President Didier Ratsiraka imposed martial law in the capital, and prices shot up, goods became scarce, and fuel became nonexistent. All Americans residing in the country in an official capacity were ordered to depart by the U.S. State Department, and Peace Corps/Madagascar was required to evacuate its Volunteers in April 2002. Ravalomanana ultimately gained control of the island and was sworn in as president in June 2002. The State Department lifted its departure order in July. Peace Corps returned to Madagascar

in October 2002.

During your pre-service training, we will ask you on several occasions about your commitment to serve here for two years. Don't be offended by this. We have found that the Peace Corps is not for everybody and that sometimes responsibilities in the United States make it difficult for people to commit to two years at this point in their lives. The pre-service training program is designed to give you a realistic picture of what it's like to live and work in Madagascar. Armed with this information, we hope that you will make the decision that is best for you.

The Peace Corps staff and Volunteers eagerly await your arrival and are ready to help you as much as we can, but in the long run, the success of your Peace Corps experience is in your hands. Be prepared to face frustrations and challenges along with the surprises and delights that this island holds. This is a wonderful opportunity to serve the people of Madagascar and to have an experience that is likely to change the way you view the world and yourself.

I look forward to meeting you.

Bill Bull
Country Director
(RPCV Sierra Leone)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Map of Madagascar

A Welcome Letter 1

Peace Corps/Madagascar History and Programs 7

History of the Peace Corps in Madagascar 7

History and Future of Peace Corps
Programming in Madagascar 7-9

Country Overview: Madagascar at a Glance 11

History 11

Government 11-12

Economy 12-13

People and Culture 13-14

Environment 14-15

Resources for Further Information 17

Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle 23

Communications 23-25

Housing and Site Location 25

Living Allowance and Money Management 26

Food and Diet 26-27

Transportation 27

Geography and Climate 27-28

Social Activities 28

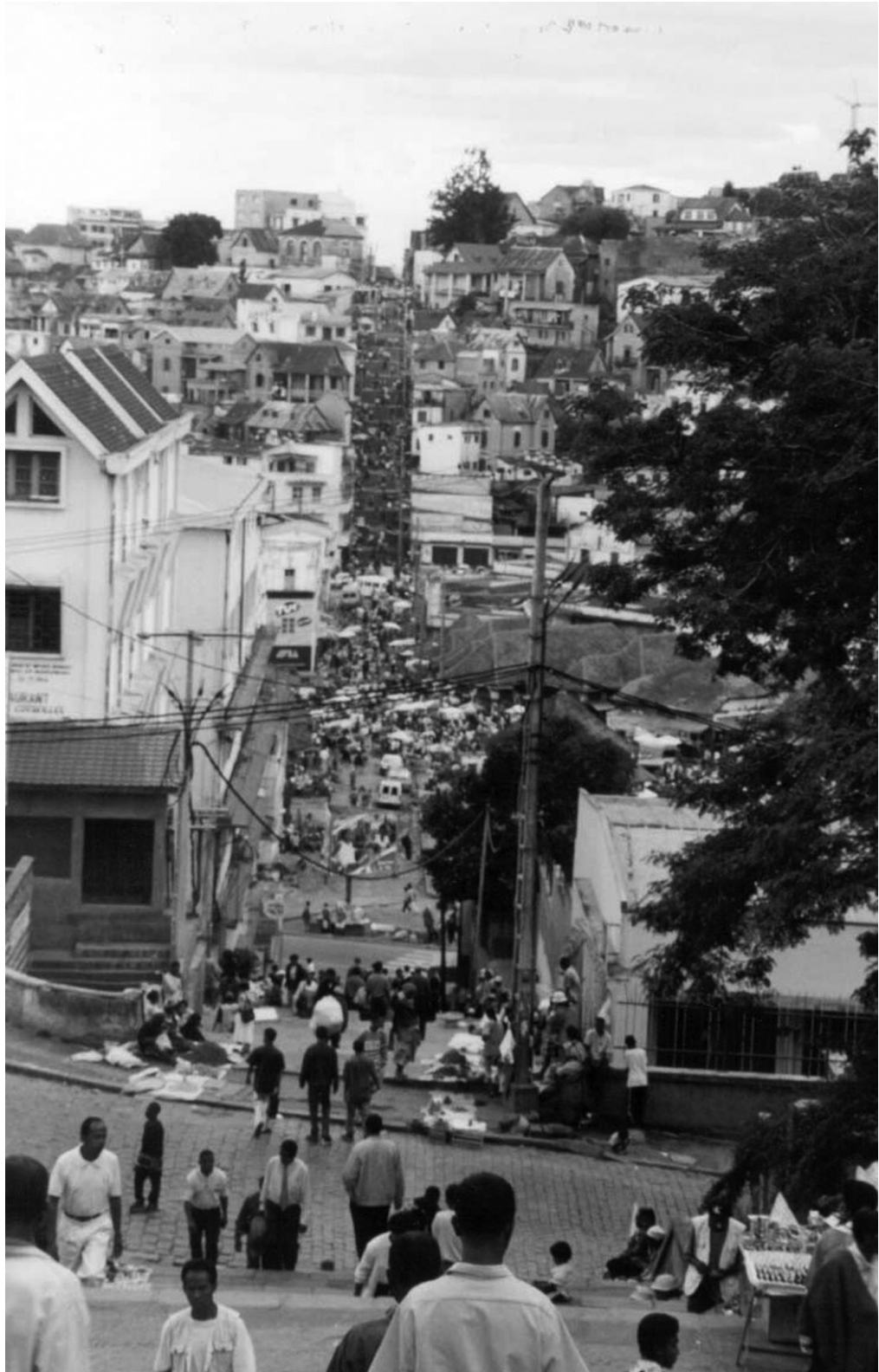
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior 29-30

Personal Safety 30

Rewards and Frustrations 31-32

Peace Corps Training	35
Overview of Pre-Service Training	35
<i>Technical Training</i>	35-36
<i>Language Training</i>	36
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	36-37
<i>Health Training</i>	37
<i>Safety Training</i>	37
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	37-38
Your Health Care and Safety in Madagascar	41
Health Issues in Madagascar	41-42
Helping You Stay Healthy	42
Maintaining Your Health	43-44
Women's Health Information	44-45
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	45-46
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	46-48
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	48-53
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	48-49
<i>Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk</i>	49-50
<i>Support from Staff</i>	50-53
Security Issues in Madagascar	53-54
Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime	54-55
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Madagascar	55-56
Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues	59
Overview of Diversity in Madagascar	60-61
What Might a Volunteer Face?	61
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	62
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	62-63
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	63
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	63-64
<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	64
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	64

Frequently Asked Questions	67
Welcome Letters From Madagascar Volunteers	73
Packing List	87
Pre-departure Checklist	93
Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters	97



PEACE CORPS/MADAGASCAR HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Madagascar

Despite political and economic reform measures, Madagascar continues to face many development challenges. The education system is burdened by overcrowded classrooms, poorly trained teachers, and a severe shortage of teaching materials. Widespread poverty, a poorly educated population, food insecurity, unsafe water supplies, and inadequate health services have resulted in a high rate of infant mortality. Madagascar has one of the highest levels of biodiversity on Earth, but its natural resource base is severely threatened by deforestation, soil erosion, and the decline in overall land productivity. Peace Corps Volunteers in Madagascar teach English, train teachers, conduct health and HIV/AIDS education, and work on natural resources management and community development.

The first 10 Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Madagascar in September 1993 to initiate the teacher training project, which eventually became the English education project. In August 1994, the environmental project kicked off with the arrival of 13 trainees. The health project began in September 1995. Since reopening in 2002, the Peace Corps has been providing approximately 75 new Volunteers per year in this country. Since the beginning, the program has had a close working relationship with the government of Madagascar.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Madagascar

Peace Corps/Madagascar focuses on three main areas of vital need: health, education, and natural resources management. These projects have evolved over the years based on the needs of the government and the communities with which we work.

Volunteers in the community health project help communities address health issues through behavioral change methodologies and the effective dissemination of health messages. Volunteers work to promote prevention of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), prevention of childhood illnesses, family life skills, and reproductive health. Volunteers also work with community leaders and organizations to disseminate health messages that are critical to mother and child survival.

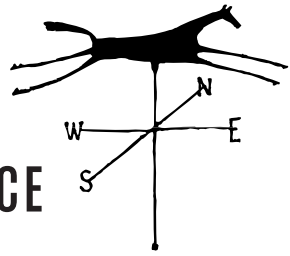
Volunteers in the English as a foreign language (EFL) project are posted to underserved rural communities and work with students, teachers, and the larger community to improve their capacity to speak English. In 2005, President Ravalomanana stated that he wanted English to become the second official language of this country. In collaboration with central and regional curriculum professionals, Volunteers support the government's initiatives to raise the standards of teaching, develop teaching resources, and strengthen the links between schools and their communities. Using the community-content-based instructional approach as well as project design and management training, Peace Corps/ Madagascar Volunteers model the belief that teachers, by definition, are community development workers. As such, Peace Corps teachers and their counterparts use English as a vehicle to promote awareness of community issues, to encourage using schools as a base for community activities, and to develop the future

community development workers of Madagascar—its young, school-age population.

Madagascar has several national parks and protected natural areas. Volunteers in the natural resources management project provide training for managers of protected areas, community members, and groups to improve conservation in these areas. Volunteers are engaged in environmental education, income-generation activities, trail construction, ecotourism, ecological monitoring, community development, construction of fuel-conserving stoves, forestry, and gardening. Their goals are to reduce the degradation of natural resources, to develop the capacity of local individuals and institutions, and to enhance the management capabilities of responsible governmental and nongovernmental organizations.



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: MADAGASCAR AT A GLANCE



History

Madagascar, as the fourth largest island in the world, is often called the “eighth continent.” Madagascar has been settled in the past 200 years by people from Asia and Africa, yet its culture is neither African nor Asian, but an intriguing blend of the two that is uniquely Malagasy.

With thousands of species of plants and animals that exist only on this island, Madagascar is considered a global environmental “hot spot.” From an evolutionary perspective, it is “the path not taken” and is justly considered by many to be a world treasure to be preserved for future generations. While Madagascar supports a fairly large human population whose presence often threatens the environment, the Malagasy work hard at conserving their natural heritage while maintaining their culture and lifestyle.

Government

The nation’s Constitution, which was approved on August 19, 1992, in a national referendum, established separation of powers among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches; a multiparty political system; and protection of human rights and freedom of speech. The president is elected by universal suffrage for a five-year period with a two-term limit. The prime minister is nominated by a bicameral Parliament composed of the Senate and the National Assembly, which is approved by the president. The Supreme Court has 11 members.

Local government consists of 28 regions with decentralized powers. A traditional village council (fokonolona) system supplements the modern political system.

A proportional representation system encourages multiple candidacies. During the legislative elections in 1993, for example, more than 120 political parties entered 4,000 candidates for 138 seats. The last presidential elections, which occurred in December 2001, resulted in tremendous controversy. People took to the streets in protest of what was perceived as vote count fraud and, after months of sometimes violent conflict, overthrew the existing government and installed a new president. The conflict had far-reaching economic effects, with the capital, Antananarivo, cut off from the provinces and the fuel supply dwindling to nothing. In April 2002, as things reached a boiling point, the U.S. Department of State required all Americans residing in the country in an official capacity, including Peace Corps Volunteers, to leave Madagascar. The Department of State declared the country safe again in July 2002, allowing for the arrival in February 2003 of the first group of Peace Corps trainees since the program was suspended.

The current government enjoys tremendous popularity and is working hard to overcome some of the excesses of the previous administration. The Peace Corps has tremendous support in Madagascar, and its need for Volunteers has never been greater.

Economy

The gross domestic product of Madagascar was estimated at \$12.3 billion in 2000, with an economic growth rate of 4.8 percent. The gross national product per capita was \$800 in 2000. To put this into perspective, in 1991, Madagascar was rated the 10th poorest country in the world by the World Bank.

Agriculture constituted 30 percent of GDP in 2000, providing more than 70 percent of the country's exports. Sixteen percent of the cultivated land in Madagascar is irrigated. The major crops include coffee, vanilla, sugar cane, cloves, cocoa, rice, cassava, bananas, and peanuts. There is also widespread cattle raising and extensive fishing.

Industry, mining, and energy were responsible for 14 percent of GDP in 2000. Food processing and clothing manufacturing are important industries. While the country has many mineral deposits, their exploitation has been disappointing. Madagascar is dependent on imported oil and local firewood for energy.

Exports were estimated at \$538 million in 1998. Major exports—primarily to France, the United States, Germany, and Japan—included coffee, vanilla, cloves, shellfish, and sugar.

Imports, including capital goods, petroleum, consumer goods, and food, were estimated at \$693 million in 1998. The main suppliers were France, Japan, and Germany.

People and Culture

Madagascar's population of close to 16 million comprises 18 ethnic groups. The Merina, who are of Malayan descent, dominate the high plateau and the capital region. Each group has its own characteristics, but all share a version of the Malagasy language. Although French is an official language, it is not used much outside of the larger towns.

Many Malagasy are predominantly animist and follow a complex system of ancestor veneration. An intricate set of taboos, or *fady*, governs many aspects of their behavior, including their interactions with one another and their environment and, most important, their treatment

of the dead. Roughly 50 percent of the population is Christian and 2 percent are Muslim.

Environment

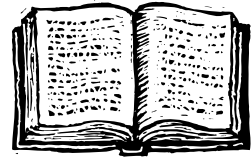
Madagascar is one of the world's most biologically unique areas. Approximately 75 percent of its flora and fauna are endemic to the island. Of special note is the lemur, a primate that is found only in Madagascar and the Comoros Islands. Despite its tremendous biological diversity, Madagascar faces extreme environmental problems. Most pervasive is its slash-and-burn agriculture: Nearly 80 percent of the original forest has been converted to agricultural use, and erosion and depletion of the soil's fertility have rendered a large portion of this land useless. Habitat loss and unsustainable agricultural practices have resulted in the reduction or extinction of several species of plants and animals. For example, nearly one-third of the 45 original lemur species have vanished. Another problem is the lost opportunity for alternative economic gain through the sustainable harvesting or conservation of these resources. Finally, the land degradation has reduced agricultural production, leading to poorer nutrition and health, urban migration, lower incomes, and increased poverty throughout the country.

Most of the remaining forest land is demarcated by the government as protected areas (1.8 percent) and classified forests (6.4 percent). These areas have various levels of protection ranging from nonallowable use to harvesting allowed by permit. However, the management of these areas is often ineffective. The governmental and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) responsible for management are understaffed and undertrained and lack the financial resources to adequately address the pressures exerted on the protected areas from encroaching local populations. Without immediate

attention, the continued destruction of the unique ecosystems of Madagascar will have irreversible effects on the plants, animals, and people of this island nation.



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Madagascar, 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 Madagascar

www.countrywatch.com

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Antananarivo to how to convert from the dollar to the Malagasy Ariary. Just click on Madagascar and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com

Visit this site to learn all you need to know about 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 Madagascar 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 of countries around the world.

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

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

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

www.rpcv.org

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

<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 from countries around the world.

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Madagascar

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/>

The site of BBC News' world edition, from which you can search for news on Madagascar.

<http://air-mad.com/index.html>

A travel site with information on all things Malagasy.

www.wanadoo.mg/

The site of one of the first Internet service providers in Madagascar (in French).

International Development Sites About Madagascar

www.unaids.org

Site of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, with thorough information on the worldwide AIDS epidemic.

www.usaid.gov/regions/afr/country_info/madagascar.html

Provides an overview of the Agency for International Development's projects in Madagascar and other valuable information.

www.worldbank.org

Find Madagascar for several documents related to developmental aid.

www.cominit.com/index.html

The site of the Communication Initiative has general information on development issues.

Recommended Books

1. Bradt, Hilary. *Madagascar: The Bradt Travel Guide*. Chalfont St. Peter: Bradt Travel Guides, 2005.
2. Garbutt, Nick. *Mammals of Madagascar*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.
3. Jolly, Alison. *Lords and Lemurs: Mad Scientists, Kings with Spears, and the Survival of Diversity in Madagascar*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, Co., 2004.
4. Lanting, Frans (photographer). *Madagascar: A World Out of Time*. New York, NY: Aperture, 1990.
5. Lambek, Michael. *The Weight of the Past: Living with History in Mahajanga Madagascar*. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002.
6. Sharp, Lesley A. *The Possessed and the Dispossessed: Spirits, Identity, and Power in a Madagascar Migrant Town*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993 (out of print).
7. Tyson, Peter. *The Eighth Continent: Life, Death, and Discovery in the Lost World of Madagascar*. New York: Avon Books, 2000.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. If you expect U.S. standards of mail service, you will be in for some frustration. Mail takes a minimum of two to three weeks to arrive in Madagascar. Some mail may simply not arrive (fortunately this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen). Advise your family and friends to number their letters and to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes. Packages take six to nine weeks by airmail and about six months by surface mail. If someone is sending you a package, it is a good idea to keep it small and to use a padded envelope; that way it will be treated as a letter.

Despite these delays, we encourage you to write to your family regularly and to number your letters. Family and friends typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail service is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly.

Volunteers in Madagascar may receive packages but are responsible for all duty fees, which may be imposed on food and cosmetics and are based on the items’ value. Also be aware that packages containing valuable items may occasionally get lost or held up.

Your address during training will be:

"Your Name", PCT Peace Corps
Corps de la Paix
B.P. 12091
Poste Zoom Ankorondrano
101 Antananarivo
Madagascar

Once you have become a Volunteer, you will receive your mail directly at your assigned site.

Telephones

You will not have routine access to a telephone during training, although the training site does have telephones for emergency use. While international phone service is available in major cities, it is very expensive. Calling cards (such as those available from MCI, Sprint, and AT&T) do not work in Madagascar. So while calling the United States is possible, it can be a frustrating experience, and if you are calling from outside a major city, it will take longer to get a line. Writing letters is the best method of regular communication with family and friends.

Few Volunteers have phones in their houses although many are now buying personal cellphones so family and friends can call them. But, many of the Volunteer sites do not have cellphone service so these can only be used when the Volunteers go to a larger town.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

Few Volunteer homes have electricity, so bringing a personal computer to Madagascar is not recommended. Computers are available for use by Volunteers at the Peace Corps office. Although some of the major cities have Internet cafes, it is best to assume that, at best, you will have only limited access to the Internet and e-mail.

The staff at your post in Madagascar would like to request that you set up a unique email address to use during your Peace Corps service. You can leave this address with all friends and family before you leave. And having the email address that we request will greatly facilitate communication with you once you are at your site.

Please set up an email account at yahoo.com that looks like this: pcvfirstnamelastinitialmg@yahoo.com. So, for example, if your name is Samson Thomas, your e-mail address would be: pcvsamsontmg@yahoo.com. We appreciate your assistance in helping us communicate with you!

Housing and Site Location

Volunteers are posted throughout the country. Housing conditions here vary from mud houses with thatched roofs to modern cement houses with running water and electricity. Your project, the area of the country, and the availability of housing all have a role in the type of home you will have. Many Volunteers have only a pit toilet and a thatched shed for taking bucket showers. Environmental Volunteers tend to live in more remote areas (near the national parks and protected areas), while education and health Volunteers generally live in areas of greater population density.

During training, you will live with and have most of your meals with a host family. A homestay is considered one of the most important aspects of the training program and is required for this period. Trainees generally stay in a village with three or four other trainees and one or two staff members. Volunteers often form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer, you will receive a modest living allowance that will allow you to live on a par with your colleagues and co-workers. The amount of the allowance is based on regular surveys of Volunteers and the cost of living in Madagascar. The living allowance is usually deposited quarterly, in local currency, in Volunteers' bank accounts, so an ability to manage funds wisely is important. The allowance is currently equivalent to approximately \$128 per month. In addition, you receive a monthly travel allowance.

You will also receive a leave allowance of \$24 per month, which is standard across all Peace Corps countries and paid in local currency along with your living allowance.

Volunteers suggest you bring cash and credit cards for vacation travel. The amount depends on the amount of traveling you plan to do while serving in Madagascar. Some local banks offer ATM cards, but only for local accounts. Only a few Malagasy establishments accept credit cards, so they are mostly useful for travel to other countries.

The local currency is the Malagasy ariary (MGA). The current exchange rate is approximately 2,150 ariary to the dollar.

Food and Diet

The staple food in Madagascar is rice, which is eaten with vegetables, beans, or meat. Many fruits and vegetables grow in Madagascar, and with a little creativity one can enjoy a varied diet. Most Volunteers prepare their own food. Some, after becoming more familiar with their site, hire someone to help with household work, including cooking. Meat and dairy products are available in the larger towns, but they can be expensive.

If you are a vegetarian, you will be able to eat well in Madagascar after you learn about local foods and their preparation. Some Malagasy are not familiar with vegetarianism and will not be prepared to serve a vegetarian meal if you are a guest in their home. However, a sensitive explanation of your preferences will be accepted. Most vegetarian Volunteers have no difficulty after an initial adjustment period.

Transportation

Volunteers' primary mode of transport is public buses and taxi brousses (small vans usually loaded with people and goods). Buses and minibuses travel among towns on irregular schedules (i.e., when full), so travel in Madagascar is never a timed affair.

Many Volunteers use mountain bikes. If you plan to ride a bicycle, wearing a helmet is required, and we ask that you bring one with you from the United States. If you do not have one when you come, Peace Corps will provide you a helmet, but it will likely be one that was used by former Volunteers. The Peace Corps issues men's bikes to Volunteers, which can be difficult for a woman in a skirt to ride. Many female Volunteers wear shorts under their skirts to solve this problem. Volunteers are not allowed to drive or operate motor vehicles or motorcycles (two- or three-wheeled) in Madagascar.

Geography and Climate

Madagascar is south of the equator, so its seasons will be the opposite of what you are accustomed to. At the winter solstice, for example, when the sun is directly over the Tropic of Capricorn, the weather is warm. Conversely, at the time of the summer solstice in June, the weather is cool.

Madagascar has a tropical climate with rainy and dry seasons. During the rainy season (November to March), southwest tradewinds drop their moisture on the eastern mountain slopes and blow hot and dry in the west. North and northwest monsoon air currents bring heavy rains in summer, decreasing as one moves southward, so that, for example, the rainfall in Fort Dauphin is half that in Tamatave. During February and March, eastern Madagascar can be hit by cyclones, which may impact other areas, particularly in the north. The dry season runs from April to October.

Seasonal changes in temperature in Madagascar are also influenced by altitude and latitude. From December to April, the coastal regions are very hot and dry in the west but very hot and wet in the east. Average midday temperatures in the dry season are 86 degrees Fahrenheit (30°C) on the coast.

From December to April (summer), the central plateau is warm, with periods of rain. In June, July, and August (winter), the central plateau gets very chilly, while the west coast is warm and dry and the east coast is warm with occasional showers.

Social Activities

There are several radio stations in Madagascar, some of which play popular music. Many Volunteers bring shortwave radios so they can listen to international broadcasts (BBC, Voice of America, Radio Nederlands, etc.). Madagascar has no cinemas.

The most common form of entertainment is socializing with friends and neighbors. Music is very important to the Malagasy, and singing together can be a lot of fun. While Volunteers are encouraged to remain at their sites to develop relationships with people in their community, the Peace Corps recognizes that occasional trips to the capital or to visit friends are also a necessity. Vacation time is allotted for non-work-related and approved absences from one's site.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the challenges all Peace Corps Volunteers have is attempting to fit into the local culture and act like a professional while at the same time maintaining one's own cultural identity. It is not an easy thing to resolve, and we can only provide you with guidelines. You will be working as a representative of a government ministry and will be expected to dress and behave accordingly, whether you are in training, traveling, or on the job. While some of your counterparts may dress in seemingly worn or shabby clothes, this is undoubtedly due to economics rather than choice. The likelihood is that they are wearing their best. A foreigner who wears ragged, unmended clothing, however, is likely to be considered an affront.

Malagasy regard one's dress as an expression of one's respect for others. Neatness of appearance is valued more than being stylish. Unfortunately, just one inappropriately dressed Volunteer could cause a Malagasy host agency to form a negative opinion about the Peace Corps and share it with other officials at national and regional meetings. Volunteers are therefore expected to dress appropriately to avoid jeopardizing the credibility of the entire program.

Following are Peace Corps/Madagascar's guidelines for Volunteers' dress. (They have been formalized in response to advice from people in Madagascar and other countries where the Peace Corps works and are meant to inform, not to offend.)

- Women's dresses and skirts should fall to or below the knees.
- Men and women should wear shorts only at home, when exercising, or when doing work for which Malagasy counterparts are also wearing shorts. If shorts are worn in public, they should be of walking length for both men and women.

- Hair should be clean and combed. Men's hair should not be longer than shirt-collar length, and beards should be neatly trimmed.
- Men should not wear a hat indoors.
- Flip-flops should not be worn as professional footwear.
- Female Volunteers should wear appropriate undergarments, including bras and slips.
- Excessive body piercing or tattoos should not be visible.

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. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Madagascar 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 Madagascar. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Rewards and Frustrations

Although the potential for job satisfaction is very high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations.

Perceptions of time are very different from those in America. The lack of basic infrastructure can become tiring. Host agencies do not always provide expected support in a timely manner. The Malagasy generally perceive Americans as very rich. Adapting to a new culture as a Peace Corps Volunteer is often described as an intense series of emotional peaks and valleys.

As a Volunteer, you will be given a great deal of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you will ever have. Often you will need to motivate yourself and others with little guidance. You might work for months with little visible impact and without receiving feedback on your work. Development is a slow process. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty AIDS causes has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV/AIDS, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV positive people and working with training staff, office staff and host

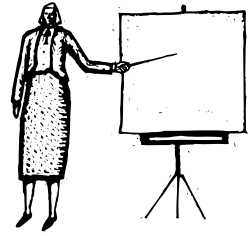
family members living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, domestic violence and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength, so that you can continue to be of service to your community.

To overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Madagascar feeling they have gained much more than they sacrificed during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, your service could be a truly life-altering experience.

NOTES



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training will provide you with the essential skills needed to successfully complete your service in Madagascar. During training, you will learn what you need to know to integrate into your community and to develop and implement an appropriate work plan with your community and counterparts. Training has five major components: Technical training, cross-cultural training, language instruction, personal health and safety training, and the role of the Volunteer in development.

The training in Madagascar is community-based, which means that the bulk of it takes place in the community instead of at a training center. Community-based training is a more difficult training model in some respects, as the learning environment is real, not artificial. Most of your time will be spent in villages similar to the one in which you will be placed as a Volunteer, living with a Malagasy family and working in village schools. The learning environment is designed to provide you with experiences and meetings that will help you develop the knowledge and skills you need in your work as a Volunteer.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Madagascar by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Malagasy 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 include sessions on the environment,

culture, economics, and politics in Madagascar and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Malagasy agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

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

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

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Malagasy host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families have gone through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the

purpose of the pre-service training program and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Madagascar. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families. Cross-cultural and community development will be covered to help improve your skills of perception, communication, and facilitation. Topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, and traditional and political structures are also addressed.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You are expected to practice preventive healthcare and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. As a trainee, you are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that Volunteers may encounter while in Madagascar. Sexual health and harassment, nutrition, mental health, and safety issues are also covered.

Safety Training

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

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

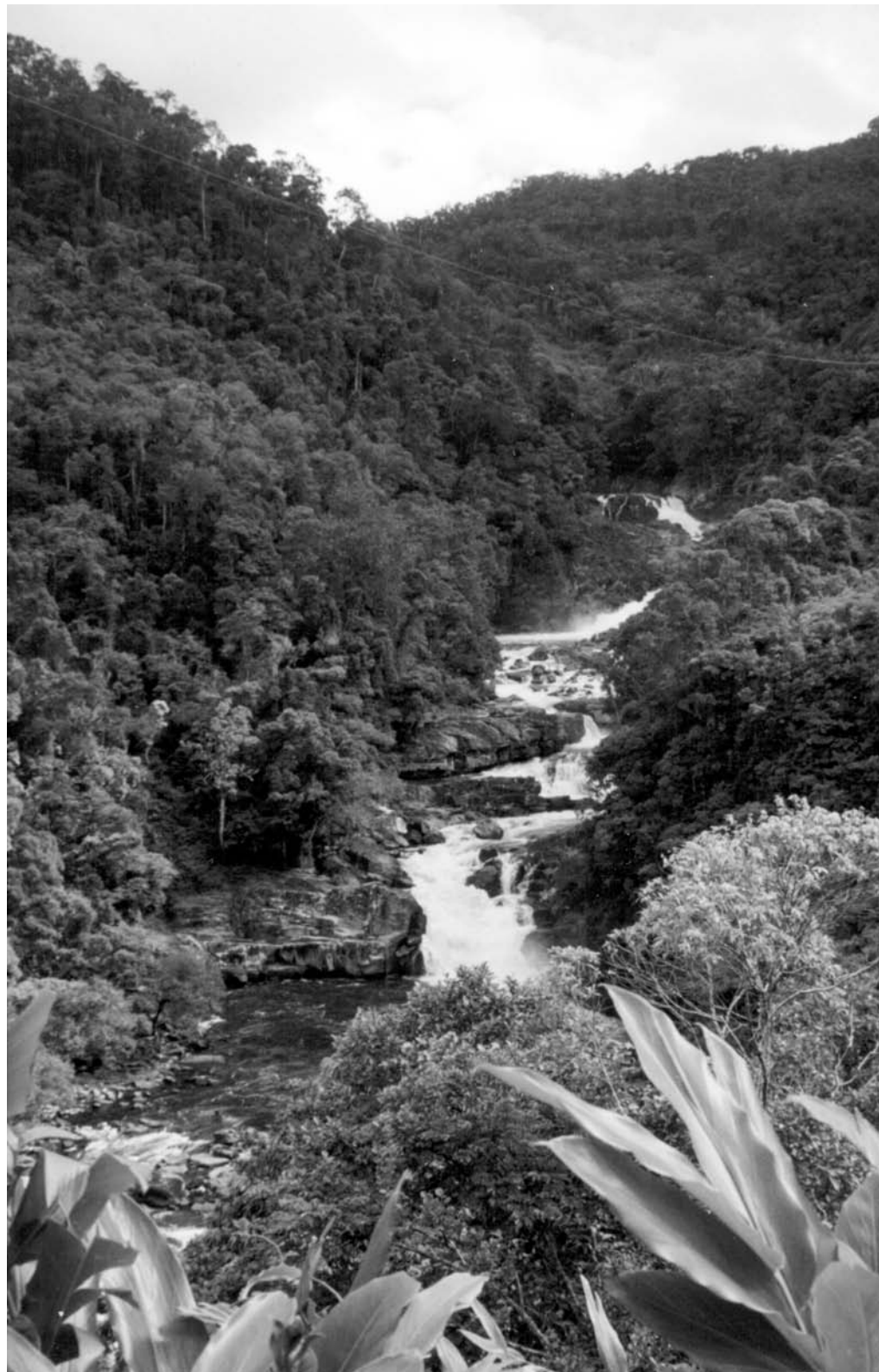
In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides trainees and Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During

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

- *In-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- *Midterm conference (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service)*: Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- *Close of service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

The number, length, and design of these 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.

NOTES



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN MADAGASCAR



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. Peace Corps/Madagascar maintains its own health unit with two medical officers, who are responsible for the medical care of trainees and Volunteers in Antananarivo as well as at their sites. The Peace Corps has further medical support from the area medical officer based in Kenya and from the Office of Medical Services in Washington. In case of severe illness, you will be evacuated to a nearby country or the United States for medical care.

Health Issues in Madagascar

Most of the medical problems seen in Madagascar are also found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, skin infections, headaches, minor injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, adjustment disorders, and emotional problems. For Volunteers, these problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Madagascar because local factors raise the risk of or exacerbate the severity of certain illnesses. The medical problems specific to Madagascar are typical of those in any developing tropical country. Malaria, HIV/AIDS, schistosomiasis, gastrointestinal infections, typhoid fever, and hepatitis are all common illnesses, most of which are entirely preventable with appropriate knowledge and interventions. Because malaria is endemic in Madagascar, taking antimalaria pills is required of all Volunteers. You will also be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, meningitis, tetanus, typhoid, and rabies.

It is important for Volunteers to know that counseling services in Madagascar are extremely limited, with no therapists available for extended monitoring of mental health conditions. Also, there are no Alcoholics Anonymous facilities or support groups for recovering alcoholics. Alcohol is an integral part of many social interactions, and you may experience pressure to drink.

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 Madagascar, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as we 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 new shipments to arrive.

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

Maintaining Your Health

As a Volunteer, you must accept a certain amount of responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The old adage “An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Madagascar is to take preventive measures for the following:

Malaria is present throughout the year in most of the country. It can kill you if left untreated, so prevention and early recognition of infection are extremely important. It is important that you take the malaria prophylaxis, and other preventive measures are strongly encouraged. The Peace Corps will teach you how to do a blood slide and how to treat malaria in the case of infection.

Rabies is also prevalent in the region, and you will receive a series of immunizations against it during training.

Schistosomiasis, or bilharzia, is a parasitic infection contracted by swimming in infected water. Because most bodies of water in the country harbor the parasite, you should avoid swimming in known contaminated water. Symptoms of infection can take some time to develop, so the Peace Corps routinely screens for it at midservice and end-of-service physical examinations.

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

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These diseases include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worm, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Madagascar during pre-service training.

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

Volunteers are expected to adhere to an effective means of birth control to prevent unplanned pregnancies. Your medical officer can help you decide on the most appropriate method to suit your individual needs. Contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical officer. If you are using a contraceptive currently be sure to bring a supply of several months to post with you.

Women's Health Information

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

Most feminine hygiene products can be purchased on the local market. If you require a specific product, please bring a large supply with you. The Health Unit cannot guarantee you a specific brand.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

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)

Band-Aids

Butterfly closures

Calamine lotion

Cepacol lozenges

Condoms

Dental floss

Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)

Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)

Iodine tablets (for water purification)

Lip balm (Chapstick)

Oral rehydration salts and Gatorade

Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)

Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)

Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)

Scissors

Sterile gauze pads
Tetrahydrozaline eyedrops (Visine)
Tinactin (antifungal cream)
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment 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 bring 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 Madagascar. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription medication

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

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

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

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary healthcare from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish,

you will be entitled to the post-service healthcare benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age and/or preexisting conditions might prevent you from reenrolling in your current plan when you return home.

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

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

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

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

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

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

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

Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

- Know the environment and choose safe routes/times for

travel

- Avoid high-crime areas per Peace Corps guidance
- Know the vocabulary to get help in an emergency
- Carry valuables in different pockets/places
- Carry a “dummy” wallet as a decoy

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

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

Support from Staff

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

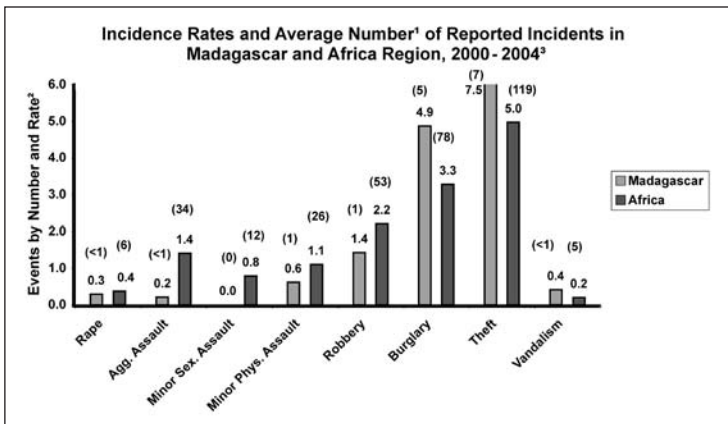
The major responsibilities of the Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security Division are to coordinate the office's overseas operations and direct the Peace Corps' safety and security officers who are located in various regions around the world that have Peace Corps programs. The safety and security officers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

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

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Madagascar as compared to all other Africa region programs as a whole, from 2000–2004. It is presented to you

in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy. To fully appreciate the collected data below, an explanation of the graph is provided as follows:

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



¹The average number of incidents is in parentheses above the bar and equals the average number of reported incidents for each year from 1999–2003.

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

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS) and Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS), as of 7/29/04.

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

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

Security Issues in Madagascar

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 Madagascar. You can reduce your risk of becoming a target for crime 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, especially in large towns, are the favorite work sites for pickpockets.

The most important safety risk in Madagascar you should be aware of is road travel. Public transport is rudimentary, and vehicles often are in poor condition, are overcrowded,

and travel too fast. What is more, the roads are often in a state of disrepair. It is important to use common sense when traveling on any form of public transport and, if you are uncomfortable, to voice your concerns to the driver. Motor vehicle accidents, although infrequent, are the biggest cause of fatalities and serious medical problems among Volunteers worldwide.

In addition, there are certain areas in Antananarivo where robberies and muggings are more frequent. These will be pointed out to you, and you are advised either to avoid walking in these areas altogether or to make sure you are not alone if you must go through these areas.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

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

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and at their sites, but receive far more negative attention in highly populated centers, where they are anonymous, than in smaller towns, where “family,” friends, and colleagues look out for

them. While whistles and exclamations are fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. Keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. You should always walk with a companion at night.

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

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. Peace Corps/Madagascar's safety program is outlined below.

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

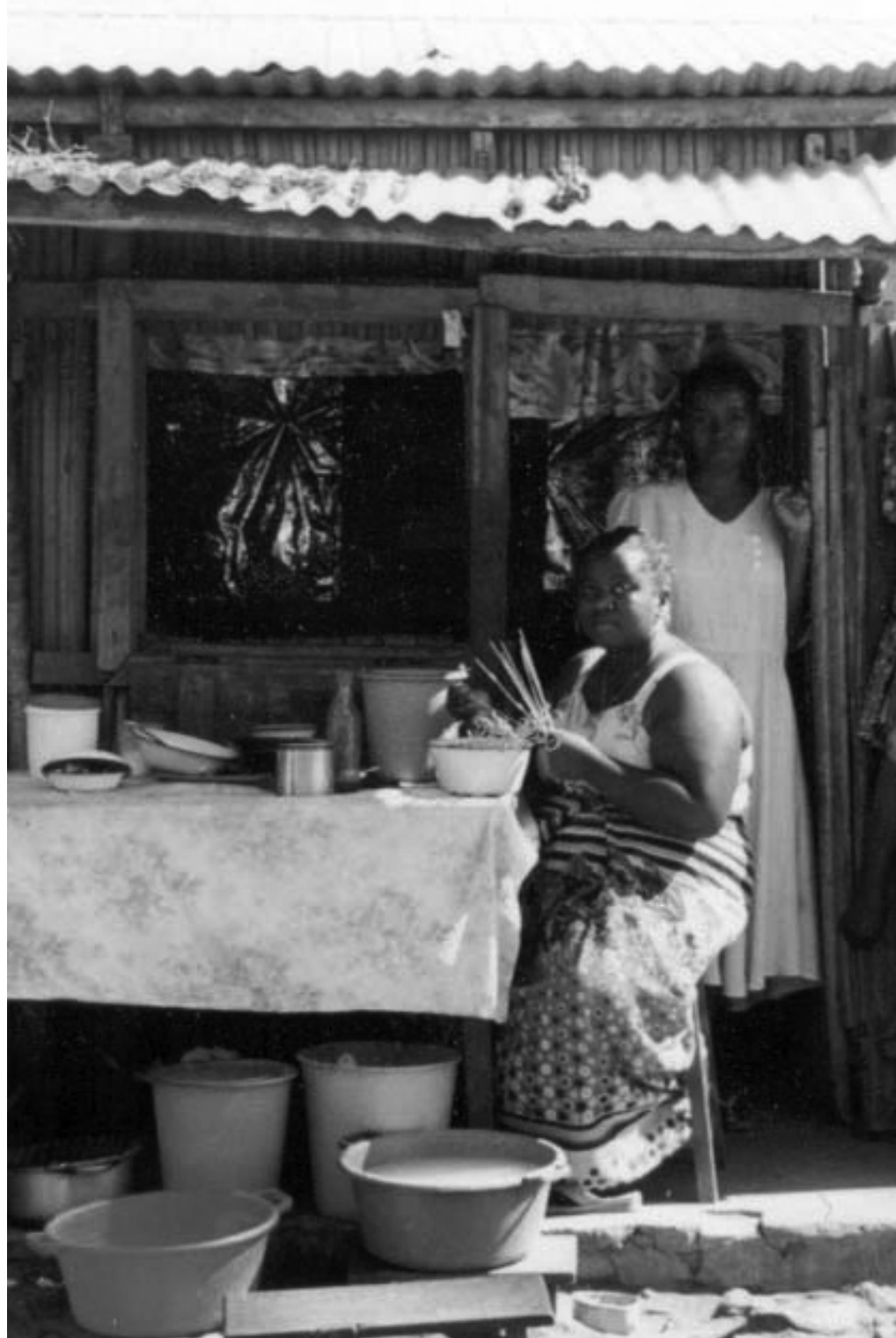
Volunteer training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Madagascar. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training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

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

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Madagascar's **detailed emergency action plan** in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, Volunteers in Madagascar will gather 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 medical officer. The Peace Corps has established protocols for addressing safety and security incidents in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

NOTES



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

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

Outside of Madagascar's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What is viewed as "typical" cultural behavior or norms may be a narrow and selective interpretation, such as the perception in some countries that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Madagascar 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 differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Madagascar, 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 your pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Madagascar

The Peace Corps/Madagascar program has benefited from having Volunteers from a variety of cultures, religions, ethnic groups, and ages and is firmly committed to maintaining this type of diversity in its program. Our primary goal in this regard is to ensure that each of our Volunteers has an equal opportunity to enjoy a rewarding and positive experience during the two years of service to Madagascar.

All Volunteers, regardless of background, will find themselves addressed frequently as a *vazaha*, or foreigner. Madagascar is a traditional, patriarchal culture, and current Volunteers emphasize that serving here is more difficult for females than for males. Among the challenges of living and working in Madagascar is coping effectively and constructively with the differing status of women and men and the different standards of behavior to which they are held.

Age is positively viewed in Madagascar. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. Conversely, older Volunteers may at times feel isolated within the Peace Corps community in Madagascar as they tend to be few in number.

In Madagascar, as in other traditional societies, members of American ethnic minorities may have less freedom to “be themselves” than they do in the United States. It may be difficult for them to find or establish a support network, and they are likely to encounter prejudicial beliefs or expectations on the part of some Malagasy (e.g., that they will learn the local language and adapt to the climate and culture more easily than other Volunteers; that they are not as technically competent as other Volunteers; or that they are not “real” Americans).

Americans of all backgrounds, however, have dealt with these issues and have had productive and fulfilling experiences in Madagascar. They have also brought new depth to the second goal of the Peace Corps, which is to promote a better understanding of the American people by the Malagasy people they live and work with.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

There is great variance in Malagasy views of gender equality. In remote villages, gender roles are clearly defined, while in larger towns, gender roles are less strictly characterized. But wherever they live and work, the behavior of female Volunteers will be more closely scrutinized and more often criticized than that of their male peers. Although the Peace Corps emphasizes understanding of and sensitivity to other cultures, it may occasionally be necessary to explain why you

believe something or behave a certain way. Female Volunteers should expect frequent questions from host country counterparts and friends regarding their marital status and whether they have children.

Volunteer Comment

“It has been difficult to have men realize that I am equally capable of working with them. This is particularly true in terms of manual labor. More often than not, a man will try to remove the angandy from my hands in the belief that I cannot work. Like all things here, it’s a learning experience for everybody.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

There is great ethnic and racial diversity among Malagasy. Having been settled by people from Malaysia, India and other parts of Asia, Africa, and Europe, Madagascar features a mosaic of cultures and lifestyles that can shift from region to region and sometimes from village to village. While the Malagasy strive to maintain a harmonious relationship with one another, there are some tensions among the different groups. In particular, the dominant group living around the capital is considered somewhat suspect by the people living on the coast. Volunteers can expect to be treated very politely but need to be aware that behind the politeness may lie some unstated ill will.

Volunteer Comments

“My family is Sri Lankan American, and since Seattle does not have a huge Sri Lankan community, I’m used to standing out and being asked ‘What are you?’ I wondered about how my ethnic background and my physical appearance would affect my service. For the most part, it has been an unexpected blessing. For the first time in my life I can

blend in. Depending upon whom I'm with, how I am dressed, and whether or not I've opened my mouth, people often assume I am Malagasy. There is a significant minority of Indian Malagasy here, known as Karana. People often assume that I am one of them, but with that come the stereotypes and resentments associated with that cultural identity. There is growing resentment here toward Karana, who are generally members of the merchant class. They are perceived as rich, refusing to integrate, and speaking only French rather than Malagasy."

"Tourists and expatriates are still a novelty that comes with a special name, *vazaha*, or foreigner. Chances are that you will hear kids scream this at you. This can be unsettling, especially when you have worked hard at learning the local language and culture. Keep this in mind, because some of you will be the first Volunteers at your site. If you are of North Asian descent—a Chinese American or a Japanese American, for example—people will ask if you are a *sinoa*, a Malagasy of Japanese descent."

"I have had to answer a lot of questions about America—especially since I look nothing like the American people they thought they were going to encounter. Besides answering the not-so-subtle question 'Don't all Chinese people know kung-fu?' it has been fun sharing with the people the United States I know—and starting to understand the Madagascar they know."

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

The Malagasy people are respectful in all interactions, yet they reserve a special place for senior citizens, so much so that it may be difficult for Malagasy to help guide an older Volunteer in culturally appropriate behavior for fear of seeming disrespectful

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers need to know that Madagascar has a very strong cultural taboo against homosexuality. However, homosexuality is accepted among foreigners who visit the country. Homosexuality is not illegal per se—it is not even mentioned in Malagasy law—but public displays of behavior associated with homosexuality can affect a Volunteer’s acceptance into the culture by confirming his or her “vazaha-ness.”

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Whether or not you practice a particular religion, you will probably be exposed to religious practices that are different from those in the United States. Although the country has many Christians and some Muslims, animism is the dominant religious belief. The practices of fady, a ritualized system of taboos and cultural mores combined with ancestral veneration, have tremendous significance for Malagasy, though there will, of course, be differences in the degree depending on your location. Be prepared to tolerate views and practices very different from your own.

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

The Malagasy are enormously tolerant and respectful, and it is inherent in their culture that they be helpful to all. This carries over into their treatment of people with disabilities, even though there is very little infrastructure in the country to accommodate individuals with disabilities. Nevertheless, the Peace Corps’ Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, of performing a full tour of Volunteer service in Madagascar without unreasonable risk to yourself or interruption of your service. Peace Corps/Madagascar staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations in training, housing, job sites, and other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

NOTES



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds this allowance. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight allowance of 50 pounds for any one bag.

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

What is the electric current in Madagascar?

It is roughly 230 volts (it ranges from 190 to 260 volts), 50 cycles. Fewer than half the Volunteers have electricity at work or at home. Batteries are available locally (though they may be of poor quality), and “D” cells are more easily found than “C” cells.

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. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. Visa, in particular, is accepted by a few tour operators. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

In order to facilitate payments to you in U.S. dollars near the end of your service, post will need your U.S. banking information to facilitate direct deposits. We will need: The name of your bank, address of your bank, account number, and ACH routing number, and whether the account is checking or savings. Most of this information is on a deposit slip or a voided check. Please bring this information with you.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training, but we suggest that you wait six months before having visitors because you will be more integrated into your site. Extended stays by visitors at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable or sentimental items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive

appliances are subject to loss, theft, humidity and water damage, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Madagascar do not need to get an international driver's license. Operation of motorized vehicles is prohibited. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. You might want an international license for vacationing outside of Madagascar, but bear in mind that most are valid for only one year.

What should I bring as gifts for Malagasy 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 after an extensive interview process with staff. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical skills and interests and medical needs prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with ministry counterparts. If feasible, you will have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, or living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you might ideally like to be. Most Volunteers will live in small towns or in rural villages and will usually be several hours from the nearest Volunteer.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, you should instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580 extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574. For nonemergency 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 Madagascar?

Yes, but generally only from larger towns. Calls from Madagascar to the United States are quite expensive. We recommend letter writing and setting up calls from home for special occasions. International phone cards do not work in Madagascar.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

No. The systems in Madagascar are different from those used in the United States, the costs for service are very high, and the coverage area is limited. Key Peace Corps staff carry cellular phones to ensure that they can be reached at all times in case of an emergency, and some Volunteers purchase cellphones locally for the occasional access they provide.

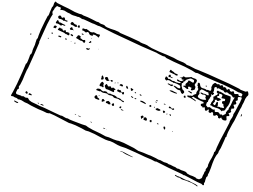
Will there be e-mail and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?

There is sporadic Internet access in many of the major cities. While some Volunteers consider Madagascar fairly hi-tech, they have come to accept a different standard. Although many of the larger cities are "wired," this does not mean that an

Internet connection will work on any given day. It is better to rely on “snail mail” and be happily surprised if you happen to get lucky with e-mail. As for bringing a personal computer, it is hard to know ahead of time if you will ever be able to use it. It is more likely that you will be worried about its being lost, stolen, or “fried” by an unstable electrical system. In other words, bringing a computer really is not worth the risk.



WELCOME LETTERS FROM MADAGASCAR VOLUNTEERS



Getting Started

When you arrive, the days of training will be tough, confusing, and frustrating, but at the same time rewarding, entertaining, and exciting. So be prepared to work hard and learn a lot about your new life in Madagascar. You will meet a fabulous training staff and, of course, the rest of your training group—instant bonding will occur.

—Angela Sherbenou

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First of all, try to adhere to the 80-pound baggage limit. I found it difficult to do, but I did it. When I arrived at site, I discovered I had 79 more pounds of stuff than my neighbors. It was a bit humbling, I must say.

—Lisa Pye

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My biggest piece of advice is to not to get too wound up in the minutiae. If you forget something, there are ways of getting it here. Don't plan on taking care of last-minute details at staging. That's a pain. And if there's a movie you want to see or a place you want to go to before you leave, go.

—Heather Bryant

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A few questions to ask yourself before deciding to come to Madagascar: Have you ever wanted to be a celebrity? Are you a results-oriented person? Do you ever find yourself stating the obvious just to have something to say? Could you see yourself changing some of your standards? How do you feel about chickens? These are just a few of the questions I found

myself searching for answers for during my first couple of months in Madagascar.

—Oliver Pierson

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I truly find life here fascinating, but perhaps just as interesting is other people's reaction to living in Madagascar. During our training, we stayed with a Malagasy family, something I enjoyed a great deal. But one trainee came back to the training center a little distraught and disillusioned. "Liz," he exclaimed, "I was a cross-cultural hostage during my homestay." I reveled at this comment, a ludicrous contention born, I fear, out of the understandable frustration that Americans feel as a result of our vulnerability in a land and a culture so different from our own. However, with time, you will meet many Malagasy who will help you adjust and adapt to your new life here.

—Liz O'Donnell

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Making the decision to join the Peace Corps and leave what is familiar to you is the first of many challenges. However, when you get to your training site and realize that with each day one thing becomes more familiar to you and more like home, you begin to open your eyes to what is about to be the next two years of your life. At first, this is a dreamlike state, and you question everything. But as the days go by, you don't question anymore; you simply accept and absorb. When your host family considers you as one of their own, when you make a joke in the native language and people respond with genuine belly laughter, or when you wake up and recognize Madagascar as home, then you know you made the right choice. Getting started is just the beginning; the rest is the reward.

—Kim Muller

Pat yourself on the back; you have selected a great place to live for the next two years!

—Rene Van Slate

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Working in Madagascar

Some Volunteers are sent to sites where they continue the work of the previous Volunteer stationed there. However, Moramanga was a new site. I had stressed that I wanted to be assigned somewhere that encouraged creativity; maybe that's why I was sent here. Professionally, I'm given a free hand to develop my materials and strategies.

—Rene S. de Turnier

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I'm a parks and wildlife Volunteer in the environment sector. I live 100 km from the northwest coast, in a village with around 4,000 people, on the south end of a huge deciduous forest that will soon be the Ankarafantsika National Park. I'm in the forest on a daily basis, and I make it out to the coast once or twice a month. It is very hot, sunny, and dry where I live. There are two other Volunteers nearby, whom I see at least twice a month, and I've cooperated with them on some projects. I work with a U.S. nongovernmental organization, Conservation International, which manages the conservation and development projects in and around the forest. I'm working on developing ecotourism and infrastructure in the park, and on a few development projects in my village. I usually work an eight-hour day.

—Oliver Pierson

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“Work” is a relative term in Madagascar. Many days you

wonder exactly what your “work” is here. It is frustrating when you spend days or months preparing for something and it falls through because of extraneous circumstances. The rewards of your work do not come from the number of projects that are successful or even the number of thank-yous you receive. The rewards are the patience and skills acquired that you didn’t have before coming. They are apparent through the kids in your village who know your name and sing it from the hilltops as you walk by. They include the realization that you have changed along the way and will remember the people you lived with for the rest of your life.

—Kim Muller

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During our in-service training, the associate Peace Corps director for education posed the following question to us: “What do people in your town think the Peace Corps is all about?” “The people in Morandava,” I replied, “think the Peace Corps is a subsidiary of the American entertainment industry.” Whether you like it or not, you will be entertainment for your city, village, or hamlet. Your mere being will captivate the undivided and unwanted attention of some folks who have an unsatiable appetite for anything or anyone American. You will be bombarded with questions, ranging from “Are all Rastafarians in America gangsters?” to “Is the Ku Klux Klan still active in the United States?” Everyone, I’m convinced, wants to hear stories about life in America and to learn English. Indeed, working with such eager and enthusiastic students is pure bliss. As an English teacher, I have entered my ideal galaxy.

—Liz O’Donnell

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Cultural Issues

I speak for many of us when I say that we are in love with this country and the beauty of its people, culture, and scenery. Okay, I'm not enamored of the guys who hiss at me and call me "Cherie," but I try to remember that there aren't many 5-foot-10 white women on whom to lavish attention. On that note, I'm six inches taller than 98 percent of the people living on the plateau, including the men. If you're tall, be prepared to stick out even more than usual!

—Deming Herbert

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Before arriving in Madagascar, I had all of these preconceived notions that I would be totally isolated, live in a grass hut, and eat grubs for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, but I was all right with all of that and decided to come anyway. However, life here is much like anywhere else, minus a few of those Western luxuries. There are family gatherings, national holidays, presidential elections, local radio stations, popular culture, new fads, supermarkets, dance clubs (so remember your dancing shoes), clothing stores, roadways, etc. What Madagascar has that you might not be used to includes people telling you what they think in the most honest and pure way; a slow-and-steady mentality; a family that does not translate into blood relatives but into anyone who is Malagasy; being a visitor who is the most honored of guests; and cultural beliefs and practices you'll come to know as *fady* (taboos), which can include anything from smelling your food to stepping into a doorway with your left foot.

Madagascar is inhabited by some of the poorest people in the world, but it is also inhabited by a world-renowned and unique biodiversity and a mixture of cultures that one can find only on this island. There are 18 official dialects and many more ways of life. Each area of the country is like a separate

country altogether. Madagascar has beautiful beaches, rain forests, rice paddies, and place-specific elements like tsingy formations, scrub brush, limestone outcroppings, lemurs, and fossae. As an environment Volunteer, one couldn't ask for a better assignment! It is also a place that is in so much need of conservation and development that it makes being an environment Volunteer that much more challenging and rewarding. Life here is a struggle, but when you see what you are struggling for, it makes it all worthwhile.

—Kim Muller

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Going with the flow has come to mean everything from adjusting to a new language and culture to being the object of constant scrutiny and amusement to sharing my domicile with large rodents that seem to regard said domicile as a maternity ward. But adjusting is what we are doing. Jackie and I knew we had crossed a line when we were sitting in our favorite breakfast establishment and saw a rat run across the floor. We had crossed a line because we didn't get grossed out, we didn't leave, and we didn't lose our appetites. We just laughed ourselves silly and ate our food.

—Heather Bryant

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Madagascar will confront you with a whole new set of images, faces, shapes, ideas, and flavors, not to mention languages. During my first few weeks here, I felt like my brain was on a sensory overload setting; everywhere I looked I saw something new and incredible, be it the beauty of the sun setting over the rice paddies and deep red hills or the heart-wrenching sight of homeless children carrying babies as they ran through traffic begging for money. Don't worry. As different as Madagascar is, the differences that at first seem so vast soon fade. You get comfortable here. This is a country

of laughter—I laugh all the time, usually at myself but also with my friends and neighbors, about anything or nothing. No doubt you’ve read or heard about the poverty of Madagascar, and although you’ll see physical signs of it every day, poverty does not dominate people’s behavior and attitudes here. As I laugh, chat, work, and play with my friends and acquaintances here, those images seem very far away, and after over a year and a half, I still feel lucky to have been posted to Madagascar.

—Oliver Pierson

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Food

Food is not a problem for town dwellers; the outdoor markets are full of fruits and vegetables, and shops have plenty of things like chocolate and often things like cheese and yogurt. The only thing I have to buy in the capital is olive oil. I don’t think anyone among us has much difficulty maintaining a vegetarian diet, although some have chosen to return to eating meat. But food security issues that are nonexistent in towns definitely surface at the village level.

—Deming Herbert

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One thing you’ll do, if you are like me, is have food security issues. I am an extremely picky eater; my friends and family were convinced I would starve to death over here. I haven’t. If you are willing to eat beans, you can survive training and life at your site as a vegetarian, though some days you may not be happy about it. I refuse to eat beans, so I went back to being an omnivore. It has been alarmingly easy, so easy, in fact, that I was recently appalled to learn that I had gained 10 pounds. So much for my food security issues. This is not to say, however, that there won’t be foods you miss.

—Heather Byrant

Madagascar is blessed with a great variety of food crops. You can get anything here from mangoes to apples and cherries, litchis to peas and carrots, all in their correct season. There is even an amazing supermarket in the capital where you can stock up on your favorites, like cereal, peanut butter, and dairy products. Of course, they are costly! When you first arrive in-country, you might not be able to think of anything other than your favorite foods and how you will manage without them. Eventually this will fade, and you will crave rice and beans—or at least I do. Malagasy food is based on rice, but the *loka*, or side dishes, are amazing. One favorite of every newcomer is sakay, or hot pepper. What part of the country you wind up in will determine what you will normally eat, but there are always trips into the bigger cities for medical, banking, or vacation purposes that allow you to indulge in specialties. I would definitely suggest having some of your favorite American food sent in care packages; it is always a fun surprise.

—Kim Muller

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Daily Life

Perhaps the most important thing to keep in mind is that all Peace Corps experiences are genuine. I believed in the “live in a mud hut, dig for worms” myth, and I was initially disappointed to live in town in a nice house with electricity and running water in my kitchen. (My latrine and cold water outdoor shower keep me grounded.) So don’t feel that it’s not the Peace Corps if you aren’t rubbing sticks to start fires, although some of you might resort to that out there in your mud huts. Madagascar offers a wide range of living and working experiences, and life is still pretty challenging even if there’s a cold drink waiting at the end of the day.

—Deming Herbert

If I could overlook the inconveniences caused by the rains, I'd find much to like here: Moramanga is in the high plateau region. The weather is like our temperate regions—never too hot. However, taking a cold shower every morning, when the temperature is about 40 degrees Fahrenheit, brings out A LOT of goose pimples. Don't forget, our seasons are reversed. It is true that one of the leaflets distributed to invitees mentioned the cold weather. However, it didn't seem very meaningful when I read it back in the States. Besides, we were informed that we could only take two suitcases, and woolens take up a lot of room in baggage. Unfortunately, I brought too many spring and summer items instead of the heavier clothing I need. Of course, you might be assigned to a tropical site.

—Rene S. de Turnier

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I would have to say that nothing constitutes routine for a Peace Corps Volunteer. There are always surprises, shocks, adventures, and letdowns. However, what you relish every day to keep you sane and uniquely you are the routine things—like washing your clothes, cooking your meals, reading, singing out loud to your music, and just being in your own head for relaxation. Madagascar is a great place that has so much opportunity for a motivated person. You just need to let it guide you, and you'll accomplish great things.

—Kim Muller

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I just got back from my daily *mofo* run. Three women in Bevoay (the name of my little village, which literally means “lots of gators”) make these *mofo*s (rice-flour bread things), and I am by far their most devoted customer. Along the way, I was thinking about coming back to my house and writing this, and looked around for some letter content that would be of interest to you. I guess what stands out the most at this point,

however, is within myself, in how much my own attitudes and perspectives toward things I see here in Madagascar have mellowed out. Five months ago, I was dropped off here on a three-day site visit during pre-service training. The only thing I remember about those 72 hours is terror! A big part of my fear was realizing that I did not have a clue what daily life as a Volunteer would look like. The point is that nothing can prepare us for this experience as far as what to expect—every site is so different. The essential thing is just to come with a conscious determination and commitment to learn. Fear can be blinding. Once the cloud of dust fear kicks up has settled, an open mind more than anything else is what it takes to adjust and have a good experience.

—Anita Deeg

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The poverty here can be overwhelming and extremely depressing. Many people here truly suffer: Seventy-five percent of the population lives in poverty. I work in a roofless school (cyclone Cynthia ripped the roof off the building in 1991), and when I first saw the battered facility, I asked the Volunteer whom I replaced, “You mean it isn’t a condemned building?” He chortled and replied, “No, it just means you won’t be doing much teaching there during the rainy season.” Yes, *la vie est dure ici*, as many, many people will tell you, and financially the people are poor. However, you will find the people here extremely generous, and you will discover that the language, culture, and traditions here are very rich.

—Liz O’Donnell

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What do I hate? The dichotomy that I live in. While I live at the village level, I have my *vazaha* (foreigner) life too. It is frustrating. Sometimes you feel like you have so much to offer (and you definitely do), and other times you feel like you have

nothing. What do I love most? That I'm finally "treading lightly on the Earth," like I always dreamed about doing when I was at home. I'm finally traveling and having my own adventures instead of reading about someone else's. And I'm doing my best to serve to the best of my ability.

—Dana Profirio

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Health and Happiness

One of the first things on your mind before you come is health and safety. Once you are here for a while, it becomes one of the things you concentrate the least on. As long as you are active (and it is hard not to be), are wise with your decisions, know that every time you are sick you will get better, and take care of yourself first and foremost, health and safety are assured. Madagascar has as many health issues as any other developing country, but a Volunteer's life is surrounded by safety nets—like your village constantly looking out for you, the healthcare the Peace Corps provides, and the mental happiness you get when around people you laugh, smile, and play with every day.

—Kim Muller

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Life here presents many challenges, physically and emotionally, and I often extend my limits. Never have I experienced such crippling loneliness or mind-numbing boredom as I did my first three months at site; yet, neither have I experienced such intense moments of jubilation or personal accomplishment. Clearly you will be on an emotional roller-coaster ride for the next two years of your life.

—Liz O'Donnell

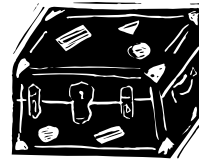
As I flip-flopped along those village paths I thought I'd never master and thought about writing this letter, I realized that fear has given way to contentment, comfort in familiarity, and happiness. Friendship has soothed the loneliness—a rudimentary understanding of the language works miracles. I have found new and creative ways of functioning happily. It's hard to describe: Life here definitely penetrates into things within oneself that were previously undiscovered. As soon as I let an open mind take over, I started to see why destiny brought me here. It is an extraordinary feeling.

—Anita Deeg

NOTES



PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Madagascar and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight restriction on baggage. (Luggage should be tough, lightweight, lockable, and easy to carry.) And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Madagascar.

General Clothing

- Lightweight all-weather jacket
- Hooded sweatshirt or fleece
- Knit hat and gloves
- Swimsuit (one-piece and very sturdy)
- Bandannas or handkerchiefs
- Baseball cap or straw hat for sun protection
- Good-quality lightweight raincoat and heavy-duty poncho
- Slacks and shirts or blouses (some sleeveless)
- Shorts and other clothes for lounging around (e.g., drawstring pajama pants or doctor's scrubs).
- For women, dresses or skirts (below the knee for teachers, with no slits above the knee and not tight-fitting), including a dressy outfit
- For women, cotton slips (short and long)
- For men, a button-down shirt and tie for special occasions

- Plenty of underwear, bras (including a sports bra), and socks
- Belt
- Money belt
- Quick-drying shorts for biking

Note: The three ideal characteristics of clothing in Madagascar are dark colors, many pockets, and the ability to withstand rain and mud splatters (i.e., quick drying and breathable). In general, one should dress conservatively. It does get cold, so bring some warm clothes. Do not bring a lot of clothes, just three or four outfits for staging and the beginning of training; you can buy just about anything in local markets.

Shoes

- Sandals such as Tevas or Chacos
- Sneakers and/or hiking boots (at least two pairs of shoes)
- Professional shoes for teachers (with closed toes and comfortable for standing)
- Dress shoes for special occasions

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Enough deodorant, shampoo, toothpaste, sunscreen, lotion, etc. to last you through training
- A few toothbrushes
- Tampons without applicators (e.g., o.b.); a basic selection of pads and tampons without applicators are available through the Peace Corps. If a specific brand/type is preferred, please have them sent to you.
- Razor and extra blades
- Manicure set
- Hair-cutting scissors, if so inclined

Miscellaneous

- Bicycle helmet
- Sturdy water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)
- Leatherman or Swiss army knife
- Compact sleeping bag for cold weather
- Indiglo watch
- Bungee cords or backpack straps
- Chair that folds out into a sleeping mat
- Flashlight or headlamp with extra bulbs
- Shortwave radio
- Solar-powered rechargeable batteries with recharger
- Duct tape
- Scissors
- Good envelopes
- Glue
- Dictionary
- U.S. stamps for sending letters with travelers (and for mailing in student loan deferments, taxes, etc)
- Battery-powered alarm clock
- Double-size flat sheets and a couple of towels
- Sewing kit
- Sunglasses
- Cash (which you can keep in the safe at the Peace Corps office)
- A voided check or deposit slip from your U.S. bank account
- Games (Scrabble, cards, chess, Frisbee, etc.)
- Walkman/iPod with favorite music
- Musical instruments (harmonica, guitar, etc.)
- Videotapes of some favorite or new movies to share at the Volunteer house in the capital

- A few novels (to swap after reading)
- Hobby materials like sketching pads and pencils
- Day pack or a small backpack without a frame
- Sturdy gardening gloves
- Good-quality large umbrella

NOTES



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



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

Family

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

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a six-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 away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in supplemental health coverage, it is often difficult and expensive to be reinstated for insurance. This is especially true when insurance companies know you have predictable expenses and are in an upper age bracket).
- Arrange to continue Medicare coverage if applicable.

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

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



CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number: 800.424.8580, Press 2, then
Ext. # (see below)

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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Africa Region	Ext. 1850	202.692.1850
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: madagascar@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2302	202.692.2302
	Desk Assistant E-mail: madagascar@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2308	202.692.2308

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

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