

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# B O L I V I A



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



January 2007



# A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Bolivia Trainee:

Congratulations! We are excited that you have accepted Peace Corps' invitation to the upcoming pre-service training in Bolivia. As a former Volunteer, I can recall my excitement and anticipation as I prepared to leave my home and begin my own Peace Corps service in 1970. I, too, had scores of questions and some doubts. I assure you that you are embarking on a journey to effect positive change. Your desire to grow, willingness to work hard, to adapt and to learn, will make you a better person and will doubtless prepare you for a productive life journey with an ever-expanded view of our world. Your Peace Corps experience will be one of the most meaningful and rewarding of your life.

Bolivia is among the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere. The gorgeous landscape, the gracious and warm people, and rich indigenous culture await you. Peace Corps has been tremendously effective in helping to meet Bolivia's critical needs at the grass-roots, community level. The work is hard, challenging, and frustrating. The process of adapting to a new culture, integrating into a new community, and speaking a native language will test your strength and flexibility. But if you are up to this challenge to work hard and represent our nation's best effort at peace, there is no other experience that can match the lifelong friendships you will make and the depth of appreciation and affection you will develop for Bolivia and its people.

Serving as a development professional with few outside resources is a difficult task, especially in a country as vast and poor as Bolivia. You might be one of the first Volunteers to be assigned to your community, or you might follow another Volunteer at a site with continuing development needs. To

reach both your personal goals and the goals of your Peace Corps project, you will need a strong commitment to service, a great deal of patience and tenacity, and considerable initiative.

Peace Corps/Bolivia has an outstanding professional staff. Our aim is to fully support you and all the Volunteers who have chosen this two-year commitment to development, peace, and understanding. We look forward to welcoming you to Bolivia.

Javier L. Garza  
Country Director

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## Map of Bolivia

### **A Welcome Letter** **1**

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

History of the Peace Corps in Bolivia 7

History and Future of Peace Corps  
Programming in Bolivia 7-8

### **Country Overview: Bolivia at a Glance** **11**

History 11-12

Government 12-13

Economy 13-14

People and Culture 14

Environment 14-15

### **Resources for Further Information** **17**

### **Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle** **25**

Communications 25-27

Housing and Site Location 27-28

Living Allowance and Money Management 28-30

Food and Diet 30

Transportation 31

Geography and Climate 32

Social Activities 33

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior 34

Personal Safety 35

Rewards and Frustrations 35-36

<b>Peace Corps Training</b>	<b>39</b>
Overview of Pre-Service Training	39-43
<i>Technical Training</i>	40
<i>Language Training</i>	41
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	42
<i>Health Training and Safety Training</i>	42-43
Role of the Volunteer in Development	43
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	43-44
<b>Your Health Care and Safety in Bolivia</b>	<b>47</b>
Health Issues in Bolivia	47-48
Altitude Sickness	48-50
Helping You Stay Healthy	50
Maintaining Your Health	51-52
Women's Health Information	52
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	52-53
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	53-55
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	55-61
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	56-57
<i>Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk</i>	57-58
<i>Support from Staff</i>	58-61
<i>What if you become a victim of a violent crime?</i>	61-62
Security Issues in Bolivia	62-63
Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime	63-64
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Bolivia	64-65
<b>Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues</b>	<b>67</b>
Overview of Diversity in Bolivia	68
What Might a Volunteer Face?	68-74
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	68-70
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	70-71
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	71
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	72
<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	72-73
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	74

<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>Welcome Letters From Bolivia Volunteers</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Packing List</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Pre-departure Checklist</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters</b>	<b>103</b>





# PEACE CORPS/BOLIVIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



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

The Peace Corps initially entered Bolivia in 1962 with a group of health Volunteers. The program continued to grow over the next nine years, with Volunteers working in public health, agriculture, and community development in rural communities and in education in both urban and rural areas.

In 1970, a coup installed a leftist military government. A number of economic, political, and social circumstances strained the formerly cordial relationship between Bolivia and the United States. At the same time, a popular 1969 Bolivian movie, *Yawar Mallku* (Blood of the Condor), strongly suggested that Peace Corps Volunteers were sterilizing indigenous women. While the film's director denied any association and the film itself was not a documentary, many Bolivians believed the movie to be factual. Public sentiment toward the Peace Corps became increasingly antagonistic, and in 1971, the Peace Corps was expelled from Bolivia.

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Bolivia**

In 1989, the government of Bolivia invited the Peace Corps back, and on April 1, 1990, 11 Volunteers arrived in La Paz. Each of them had already completed two years of Peace Corps service in another country and extended for a third year to facilitate the Peace Corps' return to Bolivia. Working in the departments (states) of Chuquisaca and Tarija, they paved the way for the Peace Corps' reentry.

Many development indicators rank Bolivia as one of the poorest countries in the Western hemisphere. The repercussions of this extreme poverty are manifest throughout the country in high rates of maternal and infant mortality and preventable health disorders, an ineffective educational system, inadequate basic infrastructure, limited access to economic markets and technology, inefficient agricultural production, and environmental degradation.

The Peace Corps' long-term goals in Bolivia mirror those of the Bolivian government and people: To eradicate poverty and provide-at the community level-the knowledge, tools, and capacities to help people improve their own lives.

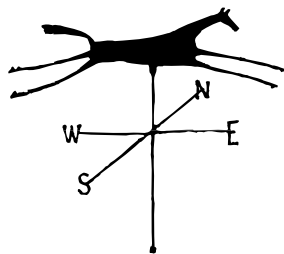
Today, about 140 Volunteers work in five project areas: agriculture (production and marketing), basic sanitation (water systems, latrines, and solid waste disposal), integrated education (nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation education), microenterprise development (business education and community-based tourism), and natural resources (micro-watershed restoration and improvement and environmental education). Volunteers in different projects often work together in an integrated and holistic approach to community development.

Bolivia is a large and vastly diverse country with extensive development needs. Peace Corps Volunteers uniquely address those needs at the grass-roots level. We anticipate that the Peace Corps will continue to be a critical player in Bolivia's development for many years to come.

## NOTES



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: BOLIVIA AT A GLANCE



## History

There is evidence of human settlements in Bolivia as far back as 21,000 years ago. Much later, the Bolivian Andes were home to an extensive pre-Columbian culture. The Tiahuanaco people were one of the most influential groups in the region, ruling the Lake Titicaca region for some 600 years (A.D. 600 to 1200). By the 15th century, however, the Incas (originally a Peruvian highland group who spoke Quechua) had extended their rule through most of what is now Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and northern Chile.

In 1531, the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro and his men stumbled upon the Inca empire. Over the next two years, they took advantage of the disunity of the Incas to secure much of their territory, renaming the area Alto Peru. In 1824, after nearly two centuries of colonization, the Bolivian struggle for independence finally came to fruition when Simón Bolívar's lieutenant, Antonio José de Sucre, defeated the Spanish in the Battle of Ayacucho. Bolivia was formally declared a republic the following year.

Between 1879 and 1935, neighboring countries cast covetous eyes on Bolivia's more than 750,000 square miles (almost 2 million square kilometers) of territory. Bolivia lost significant acreage and, notably, its access to the Pacific, as a result of various border disputes with those countries.

The first half of the 20th century was marked by military coups alternating with weak elected governments. In 1951, the populist Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR)

won the general election, but its victory was usurped almost immediately by a military coup. Fed up with the military's power plays, an armed and angry Bolivian public overthrew the leaders of the coup and reinstated the MNR in a popular revolt that became known as the April Revolution of 1952.

The democratic process was short-lived. A takeover by a military junta in 1964 initiated 18 years of military regimes. Finally, in 1982, national elections took place and the democratic process began to take a firmer hold in Bolivia.

During the past two decades, Bolivia has continued to struggle with high levels of poverty and government corruption. Eradication of illegal coca crops, decentralization of the health and educational systems, and economic restructuring have been strongly opposed by certain segments of society, resulting in frequent protests and civil disturbances. Reducing poverty, improving health and education, implementing democratic processes that support greater local autonomy, and improving the economic sector will be Bolivia's greatest challenges in the coming years.

## **Government**

The national government consists of an executive branch, a two-chambered legislature, and a judicial branch. Bolivia has two official capital cities. As the primary seat of government, La Paz is home to the executive and legislative branches. The judicial branch is located in Sucre. Each of the country's nine departments (states) also has a capital city.

Since 1982, regular elections have led to successful transfers of power from one political party to another. The change in government hasn't been without incidence, though. In the latest series of events, democratically elected President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada was pressured to resign on

October 17, 2003, and the presidency was assumed by Vice President Carlos Mesa. On June 6, 2005, President Mesa resigned, and Eduardo Rodríguez, the president of the Supreme Court, assumed office in a constitutional transfer of power. Rodríguez announced that he was a transitional president and would call for early elections within six months.

In December 2005, Bolivians went to the polls in record numbers. Indigenous leader, Evo Morales, the standard bearer for the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), garnered 54 percent of the popular vote and avoided a run-off in Congress. While the MAS is not a political party per se, the movement represents the hopes of many social groups, unions, and work guilds which banded together to form this political force that was victorious. The Morales government was inaugurated in January 2006.

In 1994, Bolivia passed the innovative Law of Popular Participation, which identified 311 municipalities within the country's nine departments and shifted 20 percent of national revenues to these municipalities for use in development projects. The law aims to provide citizens an opportunity to participate more actively in community decision-making through representative local government. It includes mandates for gender representation, equitable distribution of resources, and popular accountability.

## **Economy**

Although Bolivia is predominantly an agricultural country, it is best known for its mineral wealth—previously gold and silver, and currently tin. Bolivia's economy is dependent on foreign aid from multilateral lenders and foreign governments. Bolivia's principal exports today are natural gas, soybeans and soy products, crude petroleum, zinc ore, and tin. As in

many developing countries, tourism is a growing sector of the economy. After 12 years of moderate economic growth up to 1999 (averaging 4 percent per year), the rate slowed, though in the last three years, it has rebounded slightly, with a growth of 3.5 percent in 2004. Bolivia's GDP per capita was \$914 (U.S. dollars) in 2004, one of the lowest in Latin America.

## **People and Culture**

The most distinctive characteristic of Bolivia is its indigenous people, who make up approximately 65 percent of the population. Quechua and Aymara Indians are the predominant indigenous groups in the altiplano (high plateau) and valleys, while Guaraní Indians constitute the major group in the tropical lowlands closer to Paraguay. Much of Bolivia's rich heritage derives from the dialects, music, and handicrafts of its indigenous peoples.

## **Environment**

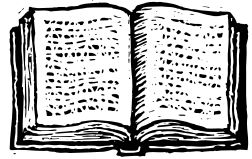
Sharing borders with Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, Bolivia is the fifth largest country in South America. Its unique geographical variations can be divided into four broad regions: the altiplano, with elevations of between 10,000 and 13,000 feet; the valley areas that lie south and east of the altiplano; the hot and unforgiving high desert expanses of the Chaco along the country's southern border; and the hot and humid northeastern lowlands, which are characteristic of the Amazon Basin. With so many ecosystems and climatic zones, Bolivia is rich in biodiversity, supporting many rare species of plants and animals.



Climate varies significantly among these regions. While the valleys tend to maintain a comfortable moderate temperature, the highlands are dry and cool and the tropical lowlands are hot and humid much of the year. The country suffers periodic cycles of flash flooding and drought and, like many other areas in the Americas, experiences occasional tremors and earthquakes.



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



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

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

## **General Information About Bolivia**

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

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

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

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

### **<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/botoc.html>**

A study of Bolivia prepared by the Federal Research Division of the Library of Congress for its Area Handbook Series

**<https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/bl.html>**

The CIA fact book has many up-to-date statistics on Bolivia.

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

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

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to 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.

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

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

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

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

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

Amigos de Bolivia y Peru is the returned Peace Corps Volunteer group for Volunteers and staff who have served in Bolivia and Peru. Its website has information on both countries. The organization publishes a quarterly newsletter for members, which you may receive in-country. Your friends and family may join this group as well.

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

**[www.la-razon.com](http://www.la-razon.com)**

The site of *La Razón*, a La Paz daily newspaper (in Spanish)

**[www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2001/apr/010402.bolivia.html](http://www.npr.org/programs/atc/features/2001/apr/010402.bolivia.html)**

This story about high infant mortality rates and antecedent development issues in Bolivia aired on National Public Radio in April 2001.

**<http://lanic.utexas.edu/la/sa/bolivia>**

A thorough index of English and Spanish articles, research institutions, and information about Bolivia from the Latin American Network Information Center of the University of Texas at Austin.

## **International Development Sites About Bolivia**

**[www.careusa.org/vft/bolivia/index.asp](http://www.careusa.org/vft/bolivia/index.asp)**

CARE offers a virtual field trip to its development projects in Bolivia.

**[www.worldbank.org/lac](http://www.worldbank.org/lac)**

This page focuses on the World Bank's development assistance to Latin America.

**[http://www.partners.net/partners/Program\\_Description\\_EN.asp?SnID=149446726](http://www.partners.net/partners/Program_Description_EN.asp?SnID=149446726)**

The Partners of the Americas' Farmer-to-Farmer project (which is supported by USAID) aims to improve economic opportunities in rural areas of Latin America and the Caribbean by increasing food production and distribution, promoting better farming and marketing operations, and helping conserve natural resources.

**[www.esperanto.com/Quipus/](http://www.esperanto.com/Quipus/)**

The Quipus Cultural Foundation is a nonprofit organization concerned with the promotion and preservation of the culture and art of Bolivia's diverse ethnic groups.

## **Recommended Books**

1. Cramer, Mark. *Culture Shock!: Bolivia* (rev. ed.). Portland, Ore.: Graphic Arts Center Publishing, 2003.
2. Ferry, Stephen (photographer), and Eduardo Galeano. *I Am Rich Potosi: The Mountain That Eats Men*. New York: Monacelli Press, 1999.
3. Healy, Kevin. *Llamas, Weavings, and Organic Chocolate: Multicultural Grassroots Development in the Andes and Amazon of Bolivia*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001.

4. Klein, Herbert S. *Bolivia: The Evolution of a Multi-Ethnic Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
5. Nystrom, Andrew Dean and Morgan Konn. *Lonely Planet Bolivia* (5th ed.). New York: Lonely Planet, 2004.

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

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

### **Books on the Volunteer Experience**

1. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.

5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).



## NOTES



# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

Most Volunteers find Bolivia's postal service to be safe and reliable, but it is considerably slower than in the United States. In general, airmail takes one to two weeks to and from Bolivia, and surface mail can take months.

We do not recommend that people mail you packages, money, or airline tickets. All packages are subject to customs and duty fees that are based on the value of the items enclosed. To avoid potential theft, any items your friends or family send should be limited to those that can fit into padded envelopes. There are excessive customs and duty charges for most mailed goods, which Volunteers must cover from their living allowance.

During training, your family and friends can send you mail at the following address:

“Your Name,” PCT  
Cuerpo de Paz  
Casilla #1603  
Cochabamba, Bolivia  
South America

Once you are sworn in as a Volunteer and move to your permanent site, you will be responsible for sending your new address to friends and family. We recommend that you establish a regular pattern of writing or communicating with friends and relatives in the United States otherwise they

may become concerned if they do not hear from you for an extended period of time. Some Volunteers and their families number their letters in sequence to try to keep track of how many have been sent and received. This is a good way to know whether someone is just too busy to write or letters are not arriving for some other reason.

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

While Internet access availability is spreading quickly, you are not likely to have direct access to the Internet at your site, but you will be able to access the Internet and send and receive e-mail at the departmental capital closest to your site for a reasonable hourly rate. All major cities and many smaller communities have Internet cafés.

While it is difficult and costly to secure personal Internet access via a modem at most sites, many Volunteers in Bolivia still find that having a laptop computer enhances both their communications capabilities and their project work. The Peace Corps does not provide computers to Volunteers, but you may bring your own laptop to Bolivia. If you choose to bring a computer, we encourage you to insure it along with any other valuable belongings.

### ***Telephones***

International phone service to and from Bolivia is relatively good in the major cities. Volunteers do not typically have telephones in their homes and may not have them in their work facilities. Most have access to a telephone company office at their sites or in their departmental capital where they can make and receive calls, as well as send faxes, when necessary. Collect calls can be made from most phones, and AT&T, MCI, and Sprint calling cards can be used from some phones. International long distance is expensive, however, and most Volunteers find it more convenient and reliable to communicate via electronic or regular mail.

More and more Volunteers are either bringing their own or purchasing cellular phones and service at their own expense when they come to Bolivia. Cellular service is generally available only in and near major cities, not in the rural areas where most Volunteers live and work. Peace Corps/Bolivia does not provide cellphones or service, as every site must be accessible by regular phone service or shortwave radio. Bolivia only uses cellphones with DSM or TDMA technology.

## **Housing and Site Location**

During training, you will live with a Bolivian family in one of several small communities in the Cochabamba Valley. Sharing meals, conversation, and other experiences with your training host family is the first step in developing the skills and attitudes that will help you fully integrate into your host community.

Volunteer site assignments are in both rural and urban areas and may be quite far from regional capitals. Associate Peace Corps Directors (APCDs) choose and develop sites prior to the arrival of each training group based on strategic project goals, community requests, and ongoing project needs. Your site may be at a high altitude, in the tropical lowlands, or anywhere in between. During training, your APCD will work with you and the technical trainers to assess which site best matches your skills and interests. Although you will have an opportunity to discuss site placement options with your APCD, you will ultimately be assigned to the site where your experience and work style best match the community's needs.

Peace Corps/Bolivia regulations require that all Volunteers in Bolivia live with a family or within a family housing compound. It is widely recognized that living with a family helps you fully integrate into your community, vastly improves your language

skills, and enhances your safety and security. Upon arrival to your site, you will live with a pre-assigned family for the first eight weeks of service. After this time, you may choose to live with a different family.

Housing usually consists of adobe bricks (sometimes covered with stucco) or cement. Roofs are often thatched or made of corrugated tin or tile. You may live in a room of a larger house, in separate rooms within a family compound, or in a totally separate small house. You may or may not have electricity or running water, and if you do not have indoor plumbing, you will have use of a latrine. Some Volunteers must construct their own latrines. Electricity and phone service are becoming increasingly more available in rural areas.

No Volunteer site is more than several hours (by foot or regular ground transportation) from another Volunteer's site. In some cases, the Peace Corps clusters Volunteers to provide better peer support and facilitate cross-program sector development.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

During training, your room and board will be provided by your host family. You will receive a small weekly "walk-around" stipend in local currency (bolivianos) to cover transportation expenses from your host community to scheduled training events and other basic expenses (an occasional restaurant meal, snacks, postage, Internet café fees, etc.).

You are expected to live at the same level as the Bolivian people in your community. After you swear in as a Peace Corps Volunteer, your monthly living allowance, which is provided in local currency, is intended to cover your housing, utilities, household and personal supplies, clothing, food, job supplies, transportation, recreation and entertainment, and

miscellaneous items. The amount of the allowance you receive is based on the cost of living in the area or region to which you are assigned. If you receive free housing or food, your living allowance may be slightly reduced.

Peace Corps/Bolivia will open a savings account in your name at a bank near your site and provide you with an ATM card. Your living allowance will be deposited in your account by the first working day of every month.

Volunteers receive three additional allowances. First, you will receive a modest vacation allowance and two days of vacation leave for each month of service (excluding training). After taking the Volunteer oath, you will also receive a one-time settling-in allowance to cover the initial expenses of furnishing a house or room and purchasing basic supplies, which might include a cellphone. Finally, for each month of service, the U.S. government sets aside \$225. This readjustment allowance is a lump sum, made available to Volunteers upon completion of their service, which permits them to resettle in the United States.

The Peace Corps highly discourages you from relying on gifts or savings from home to supplement your monthly living allowance. The effectiveness and quality of your experience depend, in some measure, on living at the level of the majority of the people in your community. However, we encourage you to use vacation time to visit other areas of Bolivia and South America, and you may want to use personal funds for such travel. We recommend that you bring a credit card or traveler's checks in lieu of cash. Visa and MasterCard are widely accepted throughout South America.

Peace Corps regulations prohibit Volunteers from accepting gifts of property, money, or voluntary services directly. Such gifts can cause confusion about the role of the Volunteer,

who might be perceived as a facilitator of goods and funding, rather than as a person who is working to build a community's capacity to help itself and to identify local resources. You are not permitted to solicit materials or funds for your community during your first six months at site so that you have time to engage the community in project identification. To ensure that any request for funding or donations is appropriate for your project and your community, you must have prior authorization from your project director and country director.

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

## **Food and Diet**

As a Volunteer you may choose to prepare your own meals or arrange for board with your host family, a neighbor, or a local eating establishment. Your diet will vary according to your site location, as every region has its traditional foods and specialties. Rice, potatoes, and pasta are available almost everywhere. Meat, fish, eggs, and vegetables may be scarce depending on the season and your site location.

It is challenging, but not impossible, to maintain a strictly vegetarian diet in Bolivia because of the seasonal and regional variations in the availability of certain foods and local customs. Most Volunteers find that exercising flexibility in their dietary preferences simplifies and enriches their experience.



## **Transportation**

As a Volunteer, you will be responsible for arranging your personal and work-related travel and for transporting personal belongings, supplies, and project-related equipment to and from your site. All Volunteers are required to use public transportation when available. Public transportation varies widely; while taxis, minivans, and buses may be available at some sites, some Volunteers may have access only to local cargo trucks. Some sites have daily public transportation to and from major cities, while others have access only once or twice a week. We urge Volunteers to always choose transportation with safety in mind.

Conditions for bicycle riders are very poor in Bolivia. Roads are often bumpy and narrow, shoulders are rare, and unexpected hazards (potholes, uncovered manholes, etc.) are commonplace. Also, motor vehicle operators tend to show little respect to bicycle riders.

That said, Volunteers in some rural sites may request a bicycle for work-related transportation. If the request is approved, the Peace Corps provides a one-time allowance for the purchase of a bicycle and a helmet, which you are required to wear at all times when riding. Volunteers are responsible for the cost of all ongoing bicycle maintenance and repair. Volunteers in cities are not eligible to receive bicycles because they have access to reliable public transportation.

Bolivia is a physically demanding country. Travel is usually long and arduous. Twelve-hour or longer bus trips on dusty roads and great temperature fluctuations (due to extreme elevation changes) are not uncommon. Volunteers must be willing and able to adjust to difficult physical conditions.

## **Geography and Climate**

About the size of Texas and California combined, Bolivia boasts outstanding biological and geographic diversity, ranging from the frigid treeless plains of the altiplano (12,000 to 13,000 feet above sea level) to the temperate and fertile valleys to the stark and unforgiving desert of the Chaco to the tropical jungle lowlands a few hundred feet above sea level.

At nearly 12,000 feet, La Paz is the highest national capital in the world. While some visitors experience problems related to the altitude, most Volunteers adapt to the altiplano's heights within several months.

The altiplano's alternating hills and flatlands are punctuated with breathtaking, snow-covered mountain peaks that reach nearly 21,500 feet. The highland valleys, such as Cochabamba, are generally temperate and contain some of the most fertile soil in the country. The hot, dry expanses of the Chaco are reminiscent of the high desert plains of the Western United States. Bolivia's lowlands feature steamy forests and swamps, along with the bugs, high humidity, and relentless downpours characteristic of the tropics.

Seasonal changes in weather are marked more by the amount of rainfall than by extremes in temperature. Generally, during the rainy summer season (November to March), altiplano temperatures are cool, valley temperatures moderate during the day and cool at night, and lowland temperatures very hot and humid. There can be severe flooding at this time of year that washes out roads, making transportation to and from Volunteer sites difficult. The climate is generally drier during the winter season (May through September), with less extreme weather in all zones (i.e., mild days and cool nights in the altiplano and high valleys and less intense heat and humidity in the lowlands).

## **Social Activities**

Most social activities revolve around daily and special community events. Volunteers are often invited to share family and community events such as birthday parties, local holidays and festivals, sports activities, or just chatting over tea. Integrating into your community is the key to an enjoyable and rich experience as a Volunteer. By spending time in your community and building solid relationships—through both your work assignment and interaction with Bolivian neighbors, shop owners, and other community members—you will have greater opportunities to participate in social activities.

While extensive training will prepare you, you will need to develop a keen awareness of Bolivian culture and customs. Many social events include alcohol consumption. Volunteers are expected to avoid excessive use of alcohol, which is often the determining factor in Volunteer safety incidents. You have to exercise continual, careful judgment under sometimes difficult circumstances, including social pressure to drink to excess.

The Peace Corps prohibits the use of all illegal drugs, including marijuana, and any form of coca ingestion by Peace Corps Volunteers and trainees. Any use thereof is grounds for termination of Peace Corps service. The government of Bolivia, with the support of the United States, has taken a strong stand against the illegal cultivation of coca and the use of illegal drugs. Bolivia's stringent antidrug law mandates stiff prison sentences and does not differentiate between using and dealing drugs. Any invitee who uses illegal substances should not accept an invitation to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

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

Dress in Bolivia is more conservative and more formal than in the United States, and Volunteers should follow the example of Bolivians in attire at their work site and in their community. You will be working as a development professional in Bolivia, and inappropriate dress may make Bolivians less receptive to you.

During training, and as a Volunteer, there will be very few occasions for men to wear jackets and ties and for women to wear dresses. In classroom and office settings in cities and larger rural communities, attire should be conservative to casual: khakis, dockers or nice blue jeans, button-down shirts with collars, polo shirts, casual skirts (knee length or longer), blouses, etc. Also bring plenty of casual clothes that you would wear in nonformal settings (e.g., jeans, T-shirts, work boots) for use after work or while in the field. Clothes should always be untornd, neat and clean.

Women should not wear halter tops, low-cut blouses, miniskirts, and other revealing attire. While young Bolivian women in the larger lowland cities do wear such clothing, cultural stereotypes regarding American women are exacerbated by revealing attire and oftentimes this leads to unwanted attention or harassment. This is especially true outside of major cities like La Paz and Santa Cruz. Similarly, ripped or patched jeans, tank tops, flip-flops, and shorts are unacceptable for men and women during training and in any professional or office setting in Bolivia.

Pierced ears are acceptable for women. Younger Bolivian men in the larger cities occasionally wear earrings. Male Volunteers should not wear earrings, especially outside of major cities. Other body piercing is not appropriate for Volunteers in Bolivia. Hair and beards should be neatly trimmed and clean at all times.

## **Personal Safety**

More information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is outlined in the Health Care and Safety chapter. It is an important issue that cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. 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 Bolivia 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 continual safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Bolivia. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being. It is your responsibility to inform Peace Corps/Bolivia of your whereabouts. For some independent adults this may be frustrating, but is of utmost importance.

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

Volunteers in Bolivia must demonstrate a great deal of flexibility and maturity. It takes considerable sensitivity and effort to establish your credibility both as a professional and as a member of your community. With most Bolivians, you will need to develop friendly social relations before you can proceed with satisfactory work relations.

The challenges and rewards of Peace Corps service depend in large part on an individual's attitude and commitment, and each person's situation is different. Still, there are some common occurrences that you are likely to find annoying or frustrating at some point, such as having to repeatedly explain your role as a Volunteer to people, lack of technical support from your counterpart or supervisor, numerous delays during the course of your work and daily life, lack of privacy, gossip about you, and perceptions that you are a wealthy foreigner.

Other frustrations faced by Volunteers result from inadequate infrastructure, including poor roads, infrequent and unreliable public transportation and communications, and lack of access to water and sanitation facilities. Volunteers also occasionally get impatient with or bothered by uninformed community health and hygiene practices, antiquated educational approaches, an inappropriate dependence on external resources, and lack of community organization.

Successful Volunteers demonstrate a high level of self-motivation, a willingness to make personal sacrifices, and the ability to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity. An optimistic attitude and a sense of humor are also essential characteristics of successful Volunteers.

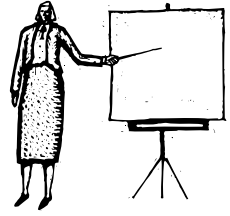
There are few more enriching experiences than living and working in a new culture, interacting with people different from you, and developing an awareness of diverse values. Most Volunteers find that the rewards of Peace Corps service far outweigh the challenges. Volunteers in Bolivia report strong gratification from developing new technical and language skills, discovering formerly untapped personal strengths and abilities, broadening their global perspective, deepening their cultural understanding, and helping others live happier, healthier, and more productive lives.

## NOTES





# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training consists of 11 weeks of in-country training in five major areas: technical training, language training (Spanish); cross-cultural training; health and safety training; and the role of the Volunteer in development. By living with a Bolivian family and sharing meals, language, and other activities with them, you will begin to adapt to the realities of life in Bolivia while you prepare to become an effective community development worker.

Classes are conducted in the small communities outside the city of Cochabamba. At 8,000 feet above sea level, the Cochabamba area tends to be warm during the days, but a sweater or jacket may be needed after sunset. You will spend time with your entire training group at the nearby Peace Corps training center on Wednesdays.

By the end of training, you must demonstrate that you have completed the learning competencies within all of the training components (technical, language, cross cultural, health and safety, role of the Volunteer in development) before you are sworn-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Most trainees are able to achieve these competencies, provided they give 100 percent of themselves during the training activities and make use of their time with their host family and within their host community to practice language and experience Bolivian culture.

Completion of the learning competencies is measured through a transparent staff evaluation process with each trainee. This process includes open feedback between each trainee and staff on learning progress. Peace Corps staff evaluates each trainee's demonstrated motivation, productive competence,

emotional maturity, social sensitivity, ability to adjust to Bolivian culture, and general cultural awareness. Written exams within each training component also form part of the fulfillment of the learning competencies and the evaluation process. A trainee who does not complete the learning competencies will not be recommended to the Peace Corps/Bolivia country director for swearing-in as a Volunteer. The country director makes the final decision whether a trainee will be sworn-in or separated from the Peace Corps.

Training is a time to reflect on your decision to serve as a Volunteer in Bolivia for the next two years of your life. We expect a strong commitment from Volunteers. If you develop doubts during training, you will have the opportunity to discuss your feelings and options with the Peace Corps staff and fellow trainees. Pre-service training is a dynamic, intense period of learning, and you should be prepared to work hard and commit to doing your best during this time.

### ***Technical Training***

Technical training will prepare you to work in Bolivia by building on the skills you already have and by helping you develop new skills that address the needs and goals of your project plan. Peace Corps/Bolivia staff, Bolivian 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 economic and political environment in Bolivia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will become familiar with your technical sector's plan and goals and will meet with your counterpart and the organizations that are collaborating with the Peace Corps to facilitate Bolivia's development process. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your

project activities and to 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. Experienced Bolivian language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of up to four or five people. Additional weekend tutoring is also available.

Your language training will incorporate a multifaceted approach. In addition to classroom time, there will be field trips, a community development activity, and other assignments outside the classroom. One of the most important language-learning tools at your disposal is your host family. Time spent interacting with them will help you improve your ability to communicate within the context of Bolivian culture.

Unless you are already at an advanced level prior to arriving in Bolivia, your language training will focus on Spanish. While other languages are spoken in Bolivia, almost all communities have some residents who can communicate in Spanish. Whether you also receive instruction in a native language during pre-service training will depend on your level of Spanish, your site assignment, and input from your APCD. The goal of language training is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so that you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

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

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Bolivian host family in a small rural community near Cochabamba. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Prior to your arrival, your host family will participate in an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and help them identify ways to help you adapt to Bolivia. Out of respect for your host family, you must comply with Peace Corps/Bolivia's policies regarding approved time away from your host community during training. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures. You will have a chance to practice these skills with other trainees in your host community through a unique community development activity designed by Peace Corps/Bolivia trainers.

### ***Health and Safety Training***

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

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

## **Role of the Volunteer in Development**

Through a variety of sessions, visits and guest speakers, you will be required to demonstrate your ability to work as a development facilitator. We will provide you with a “tool box” of techniques for use in your work as a Volunteer. The main areas addressed are gender analysis, working with community groups, development sustainability, and non-formal education. Included within this training component is a complete Community Development Activity (CDA) in which you will practice using the skills you learn.

## **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

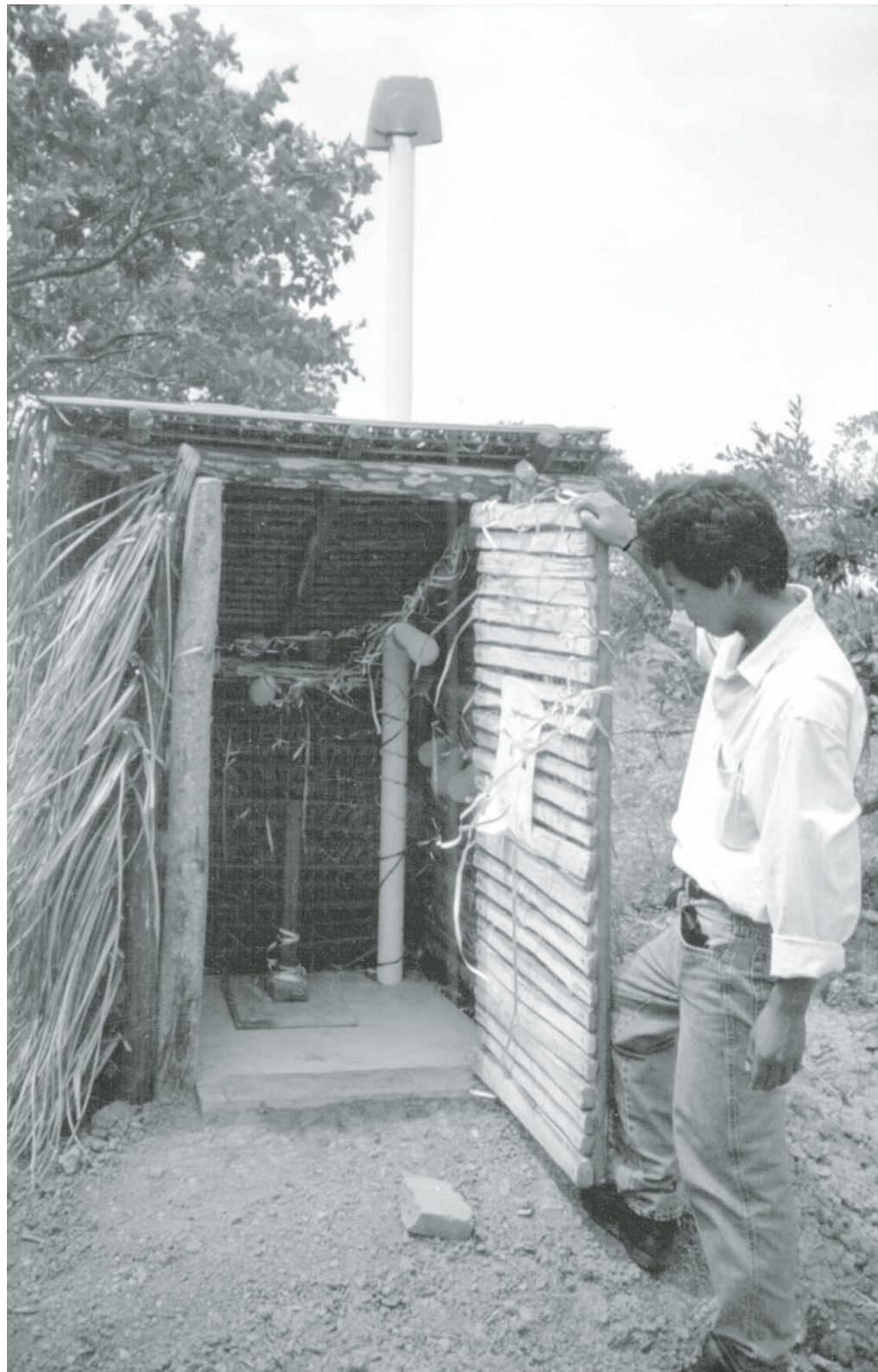
In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During your service, there are usually six training events. The titles and objectives for those events are as follows:

- *Reconnect in-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to share their experiences and reaffirm their commitment after having served for three to four months.
- *Language enhancement in-service training*: Assists interested Volunteers in upgrading their language skills after having served for three to four months.

- *Midterm conference*: Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year and planning for their second year of service.
- *Project meeting (biennial)*: Improves technical skills and promotes communication and support within project sectors.
- *Project design workshop (done in conjunction with project meeting)*: Assists Volunteers and their counterparts in designing effective community projects and applying for outside funding.
- *Close of service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

There may be opportunities to attend additional specialized trainings offered to Volunteers in your project sector. 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 BOLIVIA



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/Bolivia maintains a clinic in the Cochabamba office with a full-time and several part-time medical officers who take care of Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Bolivia at local, American-standard laboratories, clinics, and hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to the closest American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

## **Health Issues in Bolivia**

Altitude sickness, malaria, leishmaniasis, Chagas' disease, infectious diarrhea, tuberculosis, and hepatitis are among the diseases that commonly occur in the Bolivian population. Preparing for and adjusting to altitude is discussed in detail at the end of this section.

Because malaria is endemic in some areas of Bolivia, taking an antimalarial medication and sleeping inside a mosquito net are mandatory for Volunteers assigned to those regions. Leishmaniasis, a parasitic disease transmitted by the bite of some species of sand flies, can be prevented by wearing protective clothing and insect repellent and avoiding the outdoors when sand flies are most active (dusk to dawn). Chagas' disease, which is transmitted via the bite of a reduviid bug, is also endemic in many areas of Bolivia. This disease can

also be prevented by sleeping in a mosquito net (provided by Peace Corps) and by living in a house with well-plastered walls and screened doors and windows.

Following instructions to ensure that your food and water are fresh and cleaned appropriately will help you avoid stomach bacteria and intestinal parasites. You may also be exposed to colds, flu, and other respiratory illnesses. Taking standard precautions (e.g., washing your hands frequently, taking the provided vitamins, etc.) will reduce your risk of becoming ill.

### **Altitude Sickness**

Approximately 25 percent of people arriving in La Paz or other high-altitude locations experience an unpleasant period of acclimatization that may persist for a few days. Symptoms of altitude sickness include headache, nausea, vomiting, respiratory distress, and insomnia. Although there seems to be a genetic predisposition to altitude sickness, it is not possible to tell in advance who will have problems. Those who have had previous difficulties are likely to have similar problems each time they go to altitudes above 8,000 to 10,000 feet. Those with preexisting medical problems or respiratory infections such as colds, bronchitis, or pneumonia should delay travel until they are fully recovered. Individuals with hypertension, diabetes, angina pectoris, asthma, or emphysema should see a physician for clearance prior to visiting high altitudes. La Paz is at almost 12,000 feet, while Cochabamba, site of the training center and Peace Corps office, is at 8,000 feet.

There are two approaches to minimizing the unpleasant symptoms of altitude sickness: taking prophylaxis prior to arrival and treating symptoms after arrival. The health unit at the U.S. embassy in La Paz recommends that adults take 125 milligrams of the prescription drug Diamox (acetazolamide)

by mouth twice a day for two days prior to travel, on the day of flight, and for three days after arrival. (Diamox is not recommended if you are allergic to sulfa drugs.)

Whether or not you take Diamox prior to traveling to Bolivia, there are a number of steps you can take to prevent or treat altitude sickness after your arrival:

1. Drink plenty of fluids. You need considerably more fluids than your normal intake. Avoid alcoholic drinks initially, and drink only in moderation after several days. Limit carbonated drinks, or allow them to go flat before drinking them. Limit mineral water because of the high salt content. Gatorade can be very helpful, since it provides fluid and electrolytes.
2. Reduce food intake. Frequent small, light meals are best. Physicians in Bolivia recommend increasing carbohydrate intake (e.g., pasta and potatoes) and eating desserts or candy.
3. Limit your activities. Although you should avoid overexertion, the frequently given advice to lie down during the initial hours at high altitude can actually increase a headache if overdone. Athletic adults are more likely to develop serious complications, so avoid intense physical activity until you are well adapted.
4. Use recommended medications if necessary. Other than Diamox, acetaminophen or aspirin (two tablets every four hours) taken with a full glass of water is the best medicine for an altitude headache. Avoid other medications for what is commonly known as “soroche,” such as Coramine, Micoren, or diuretics other than Diamox. They can increase symptoms or even be dangerous. Coca tea cannot be used in any form for altitude sickness or for rehydration.

5. It is unlikely that you will need oxygen, but if you experience shortness of breath or a severe headache, inform the Peace Corps medical officer or any staff member immediately.

## **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 Bolivia, 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 training center medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive. Also, please try to switch to generic forms of any medications you take before coming to Bolivia.

You will have physicals midway through your service and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Bolivia will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Bolivia, 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 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. Your most important responsibility in Bolivia is to take preventive measures to avoid altitude sickness, malaria, leishmaniasis, Chagas’ disease, food- and waterborne intestinal disorders, respiratory illnesses, alcohol- and drug-related problems, STDs, skin disorders, minor injuries, and sunburn and heatstroke.

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

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

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

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

## **Women's Health Information**

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also 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.

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase at your site or the closest departmental capital, the Peace Corps medical officer in Bolivia will provide them. If you require a specific feminine hygiene product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

## **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
- Antacid tablets
- Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)  
Band-Aids  
Calamine lotion  
Cough suppressant tablets  
Condoms  
Dental floss  
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)  
*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*  
Eye wash  
Gauze pads  
Hydrocortisone Cream  
Ibuprofen 200 mg. tablets  
Insect repellent  
Iodine tablets (for water purification)  
Latex gloves  
Lip moisturizer with SPF 15  
Oral rehydration salts  
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)  
Pepto Bismol tablets  
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)  
Scissors  
Sterile gauze pads  
Tinactin (antifungal cream)  
Tylenol  
Tweezers  
Whistle

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

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose existing or 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, contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it with you to Bolivia. 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 shortly after you arrive in Bolivia. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. Although the Peace Corps will provide you with multivitamins, it 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 an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

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

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

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk.

Property thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems. In addition, more than 84 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2004 Peace Corps Volunteer Survey say they would join the Peace Corps again.

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

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

### ***Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk***

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

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

- **Location:** Most crimes occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). Specifically, 43 percent of assaults took place when Volunteers were away from their sites.

- Time of day: Assaults usually took place on the weekend during the evening between 5:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.— with most assaults occurring around 1:00 a.m.
- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 82 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 55 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Forty percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.

### ***Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk***

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

#### Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

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

#### Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

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

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

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

***Support from Staff***

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

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

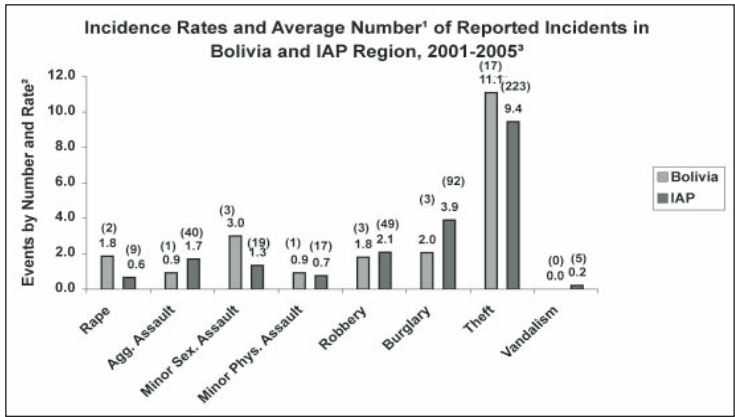
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents

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

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

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

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way to compare crime data across countries. An "incident" is a



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

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

<sup>3</sup>Data collection for Mongolia began as of 2001

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

specific offense, per Peace Corps' classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.

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

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

***What if you become a victim of a violent crime?***

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

Crimes that occur overseas, of course, are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities in local courts. Our role is to coordinate the investigation and evidence collection with the regional security officers (RSOs) at the U.S. embassy, local police, and local prosecutors and others to ensure that your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country. OIG investigative staff has extensive experience in criminal investigation, in working sensitively with victims, and as advocates for victims. We also, may, in

certain limited circumstances, arrange for the retention of a local lawyer to assist the local public prosecutor in making the case against the individual who perpetrated the violent crime.

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

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

## **Security Issues in Bolivia**

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle. Peace Cors/Bolivia has a strict out-of-site policy. You must also minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Bolivia. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the



community or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns, for instance, are favorite work sites for pickpockets and scam artists.

Extreme poverty and a poor economy have led to an increase in petty crimes in Bolivia. It is important to be especially alert and cautious in bus terminals, taxis, and other places frequented by travelers. Sessions will be held during training about common robbery scams and how to avoid them. For both economic and social reasons, harassment (especially sexual harassment) and assaults have also increased. Almost all recent incidents of harassment or assault of Volunteers have involved alcohol consumption by either the Volunteer or the assailant. Volunteers, especially women, should avoid going out alone, particularly at night and in larger communities.

### **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 home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Bolivia, do what you would do if you moved to a new city in the United States: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can significantly 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 Bolivia may require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers than at their sites, where “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 culturally inappropriate eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. And always walk with a companion at night.

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

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. Bolivia’s in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Bolivia staff will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided via publications, meetings, and other methods. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network.

**Volunteer training** will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Bolivia. 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

service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training.

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

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

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers fully comply with Peace Corps/Bolivia's out-of-site policy and notification system, and **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.



# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

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

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

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Bolivia, 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 Bolivia**

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

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

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

Gender roles in Bolivia are markedly different from those in the United States. Most Bolivian women, especially those in rural areas, have traditional roles: They run the household,

prepare meals, clean, and rear children. Many women also work in the fields, run small businesses, and care for farm animals. Men also have specific roles, and “manliness” is considered very important. Although many Volunteers are bothered by these gender roles, it is important to understand them to be effective in your work.

It is not uncommon for women to receive stares, unwanted sexual comments, and offers of dates on the street or in other situations. Female Volunteers are obvious targets because they often look quite different from Bolivian women. Female Volunteers must learn how to handle these situations and sometimes have to accept constraints on their behavior that male Volunteers do not face.

Male Volunteers also encounter harassment, though less frequently. If you do not drink, smoke, or like to pursue women openly, you may be teased about not being manly enough and pressured to participate in these activities. Male Volunteers who cook, wash clothes and dishes, and clean the house may seem strange to their neighbors.

All Volunteers have to adjust to the gender norms and different ways of doing things in Bolivia. Pre-service training will orient you to these norms and customs.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“The constant catcalls and attention from men can initially be intimidating and incredibly annoying. After a while, though, you just kind of learn to ignore it. You know not to make direct eye contact in certain settings and situations. It becomes kind of like white noise, where it’s just something you live with, but it does not really interfere with day-to-day activities.”

“Men are under a lot of pressure to drink, which is considered manly. Alcohol is a big problem in Bolivia, and male Volunteers especially need to have strategies to tactfully avoid being pushed to drink to excess.”

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

Volunteers of color may encounter verbal harassment on the street—especially when away from their sites in larger towns or cities. African Americans may be mistaken for Brazilians. Asian Americans may be called “chino” or “china” even if they are not of Chinese descent. However, comments or jokes regarding race or ethnicity are more likely to be made in a descriptive sense than in a derogatory sense, and most Volunteers of color are able to cope with them. For Anglo Americans who have had little experience with being the only one of their kind in a community, being the center of attention because of one’s nationality, regardless of race or ethnicity, may sometimes feel uncomfortable.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“In the altiplano, people of African descent are considered ‘lucky,’ and rural community members, especially children, often try to touch them for good luck. This is not meant in a derogatory way, but it can be bothersome. African Americans learn to deal with it. Maturity, tact, good humor, and honesty go a long way.”

“Bolivians (particularly in rural areas) tend to think of all Americans as Anglo. You will probably be subjected to a variety of questions, comments, and cracks regarding your race or ethnicity. Many of them will be innocent and arise from misinformation or unfamiliarity with other races and



cultures. Some of them may be mean-spirited, but that happens in the United States, too. The thing that you will find most helpful is maintaining a positive attitude about yourself and approaching the issue with patience and confidence.”

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

Extended families are an important aspect of Bolivian culture, and maturity and age are generally respected. Because Volunteers tend to be in their 20s or 30s, however, senior Volunteers often find developing a peer support system within the Volunteer community a challenge. Many seniors with little or no prior foreign language experience also find learning Spanish to be difficult. We highly recommend that you begin studying Spanish before your arrival in Bolivia.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Training is often the most difficult period for senior Americans. Language learning can be tough. Harder than that, though, is coping with feelings of isolation. Intellectually, you know even before arriving in Bolivia that most new Volunteers are in their 20s or maybe in their 30s, but it isn’t until you have almost no access to people from your own culture who share your interests or your frame of reference that you realize the extreme gap between generations. It can be somewhat lonely and frustrating in the beginning.”

“Making friends and contacts at your site is much easier. Age and experience are definitely respected, and you will meet many people with whom you can connect.”

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

As in many other Latin American countries, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals do not enjoy the degree of understanding and acceptance they have come to expect in the United States. Some gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteers feel isolated because their opportunities for self-expression in their community and workplace are limited. Peace Corps/Bolivia is committed to providing an open forum for communication and peer support for gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Being gay or lesbian is not well-accepted in most Latin American cultures. You can be ‘out’ with Peace Corps staff and Volunteers, but you will need to be very discreet in your community. You will probably find that you are more accepted and effective if you just avoid conversations about sexual orientation and limit your social activities at your site to purely friendship.”

“In the big cities there are gay communities and you can socialize, but you must be careful. You are still an American and still perceived by many to be rich, ‘easy,’ etc. Bolivia celebrated Gay Pride Day recently in Santa Cruz and La Paz, and little by little things are beginning to change, but it is a very slow process.”

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

Spiritual practice is a strong aspect of Bolivian culture. While the majority of Bolivians practice Roman Catholicism, there are a growing number of Evangelical Christian congregations. There is also an active Mormon community, as well as small groups of Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and other religious faiths, in several of the larger cities. Most Bolivians in small communities have had no exposure to non-Christian religions.

Peace Corps/Bolivia encourages Volunteers to continue practicing their religious observances in a way that is sensitive to the specific circumstances at their site. But while adhering to your faith is encouraged, Peace Corps policy strictly prohibits proselytizing or missionary efforts by Volunteers during their service. It is especially important that Volunteers not align themselves with any specific religious group in their work and instead develop cordial working relationships with leaders from all religious groups in their communities. In some communities, a rivalry has developed between Catholics and Evangelicals, and working with only one religious group could seriously damage your effectiveness as a Volunteer.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“While a highly spiritual people, most Bolivians don’t have much experience or understanding of world religions or alternative beliefs (e.g., agnosticism or atheism). Many don’t know much about the other Christian denominations that are familiar to us in the United States. They have kind of a ‘you’re either Catholic or Evangelical’ attitude.”

“Those who practice other religions (Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, etc.) will be the objects of mild to extreme curiosity. Still, the fact that you have a religious faith is considered the most important thing, even if it is not one that is readily understood or recognized by members of your community. Volunteers who reveal that they are unaffiliated with an organized religion or are agnostic or atheist may be cajoled, questioned, and urged to conform to some organized religious practice.”

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

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, of performing a full tour of Volunteer service in Bolivia without unreasonable risk of harm. Peace Corps/Bolivia staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations in training, housing, job sites, and other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

That being said, Bolivia can be geographically, physically, and emotionally challenging for anyone. Trainees with disabilities must be pre-approved by the Peace Corps/Bolivia medical officer to ensure that appropriate site placement options and medical services are available to accommodate them, and therefore may be restricted to certain areas of the country despite their personal preferences. Co-workers and community members may be standoffish or curious about disabilities, but Volunteers who are willing to candidly respond to questions, and to demonstrate that they are capable regardless of their disability, are likely to gain their community's respect and acceptance.

## NOTES



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. Peace Corps allows 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. The larger piece of checked baggage may not exceed 62 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

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

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

It is 220 volts.

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

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for

vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

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

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

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

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available. Peace Corps/Bolivia strongly recommends that you purchase personal property insurance before you leave if you are taking valuables such as a laptop computer, digital camera, etc. Personal articles insurance information is provided in your invitation kit as well as during staging, or you may contact your own insurance company.

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

Volunteers in Bolivia do not need to get an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating



motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus, minivan, or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minivans to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a third-year Volunteer or technical specialist may be authorized to drive a Peace Corps vehicle. Should this occur, the Volunteer will need to present the Peace Corps with a valid U.S. driver's license to obtain a local driver's license and be fully trained in vehicle operation.

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

We ask that you not bring gifts for your host family. Future trainees and Volunteers may not be in a position to provide gifts, and it would be unfair to develop an expectation of gifts in host communities.

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

You will be assigned a site between the sixth and eighth week of pre-service training. This gives the associate Peace Corps director the opportunity to assess your skills and interests and to get your input and that of the training staff before deciding on the best possible site match. Keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. While a few Volunteers live in larger cities, most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural communities and are within three hours from the nearest Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the nearest departmental capital.

### **How can my family contact me in an emergency?**

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services

immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580, extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580, then extension 2515, 2516, or 2525.

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

While Volunteers do not typically have telephones in their home or work facilities, most have access to a telephone company office at their site or in their departmental capital where they can make and receive calls. Collect calls can be made from most phones, and AT&T, MCI, and Sprint calling cards can be used from some phones. International long distance is very expensive, however, and most Volunteers find it more convenient and reliable to communicate via electronic or regular mail.

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

Some Volunteers purchase cellular phones and service at their own expense. Cellular service is generally available only in and near major cities, not in the rural areas where most Volunteers live and work. The Peace Corps does not provide cellphones or service, as every site is accessible by regular phone service or shortwave radio. If you want to bring a cellphone, make sure it is compatible with Bolivian cell technology, which currently uses GSM or TDMA—not CDMA technology.

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

All major cities and many smaller communities have Internet cafés. Although you are not likely to have direct access to the

Internet at your site, you should be able to access the Internet and send and receive e-mail in your departmental capital for a reasonable hourly rate. While it is difficult and costly to secure personal Internet access via a modem at most sites, many Volunteers in Bolivia still find that having a laptop computer enhances their communications capabilities and their project work. If you choose to bring a computer, we encourage you to insure it along with all your other valuable belongings.



# WELCOME LETTERS FROM BOLIVIA VOLUNTEERS



Talking with my parents the other day, they said, “We can’t believe it’s been almost three years since you and Chloe (my wife) left for Bolivia.” The memory of packing our bags, tying up loose ends, and bidding farewell to our family and friends doesn’t seem like such a long time ago. We remember the feelings of fear, doubt, and excitement for the experience ahead. You are about to undertake one of the greatest leaps of faith of your life. You are leaving behind all that is comfortable and familiar for the unknown.

Many of you are probably wondering if you have the personal and technical skills necessary to carry you through the two-year service. Trust us when we say you are not alone in this process. Your fellow invitees (soon-to-be trainees) are working through the same issues and many Volunteers before you have also faced similar dilemmas. This is natural and, believe it or not, you will be confronted by even more profound questions throughout your service. So, welcome to the club and welcome to Peace Corps/Bolivia.

Bolivia will change you in unexpected ways. We can honestly say that we are not the same people as those who stepped off the airplane in La Paz. And, as a Peace Corps couple, our marriage has grown incredibly, too, having shared such a powerful transformation together. As a trainee and Volunteer, you will pass through cycles of growth and adaptation in a new culture that will challenge you to look deep inside yourself to constantly define and redefine your values. Peace Corps gives us the privilege to intimately experience how the majority of the world lives, an opportunity that few Americans ever get. This is a gift that will also bestow upon you great responsibilities of providing resources and solutions to your community.

So spend some time before you depart pondering what you want from your time in Bolivia and what you are willing to give. Also realize that we don't have all the answers and we must open ourselves up to learn from our communities. We promise that if you share of yourself, you will receive many wonderful rewards in return from Bolivia and you will leave here more empowered and wiser having made a positive impact in the world.

— Tom Boutureira & Chloe Dowley  
(married Volunteer couple)

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I wish I had brought black-and-white film to Bolivia.

This place is a country that at times bursts with brilliance in everything from the Carnival dancers' bright attire to the jagged red rock formations of the valleys. For these scenes, standard color film serves me well.

My Peace Corps service here, however, has been an experience of severe contrasts whose beauty and pain can be captured much more effectively in black and white. Contrast wasn't meant to be colorful.

On the good days, my small adobe house, eight hours from anything close to civilization, is a wonderful place to live. I bask in the simple life and the tranquility, and I consider myself lucky to be free from the electrical lines and phone lines that had tied me down in so many ways. I walk for hours through a wide valley surrounded by rolling, but rocky hills to the communities where I work, and remind myself that I used to go on long hikes like this to escape from reality. Now, such hikes are my reality.

I read by candlelight and write letters with ballpoint pens and notebook paper, and I tell my friends how overrated the Internet is. I remember all those bumper stickers and clichéd pieces of advice that remind us of what we really should be doing in life. And I smile to myself because I think I might be getting it right for once.

On the bad days, I wonder what I am doing in this place. The roof leaks, the water service is erratic at best, and three

burros just knocked over the rock wall out back and ruined most of my onion garden. I can't call my sister on her birthday, and I can't envision eating one more potato. I walked two hours to a meeting that no one attended, and on the way back I contracted some strange fungus that made my foot swell to the point I couldn't get my shoe on!

I truly enjoy my work as a rural sanitation Volunteer. In a world of stupefying technological advancements, it's troubling that so many are still left without the most basic of necessities. At the same time, it's gratifying to work with these neglected villages—of sometimes as few as 15 families—on water systems and latrines.

I am making a difference, I tell myself, when the five-year-olds I taught how to squat properly are actually following my instructions, or when the illiterate farmers have paid attention to my classes and now know how to use a pipe wrench, or when water rushes for the first time from a faucet and the community celebrates the event all week. Hope remains alive in those times.

There are, of course, other days when these differences I make are so infinitesimally small that my work seems almost worthless. I'm the good guy, a hero of sorts, when I help bring in financing for a water system, but after the system is built, no one wants to hear me repeat my mantra of sustainability at every meeting. Pay your monthly water tax, clean your tank, and don't use the drinking water tank for irrigation. Their faces say, "We've heard this before. We don't care."

On a realistic level, the few projects I've completed are constantly at risk of getting washed away in the pervasive lifestyle of unsanitary conditions. None of this really makes a difference.

Bolivians, in general, and particularly the 300 or so who live in my town, are genuinely warm, helpful, and decent people. These kind people not only helped this stupid white guy survive life in a very foreign world, but were responsible for my success at work and my growth as a person. I was welcomed at everyone's home (friend and stranger alike),

wedding, baptism, funeral, and parties celebrating the various holidays here. It's an overwhelming feeling.

At the same time, I've never been so alone—and sometimes lonely—in my life. Family members and close friends from home are not only physically distant but truly in another world. They don't understand my stories, my troubles, and my happiness in this strange place—not because they don't care but because it's impossible to understand without being here.

Everything familiar has been stripped away, and to adjust to this change I've left behind what I knew—and that includes the people I care about. The letters, the occasional phone calls, and care packages are pleasant reminders of those people, but there is no substitute for their being with you.

These contrasts, while stark and exaggerated, have taught me that the differences in two ends of the spectrum are all a matter of perspective. There is very little we control in our lives, especially here. A wise old co-worker once told me that 10 percent sounded right, and I'm beginning to believe him.

It's all about attitude because we can control that.

The niceties of home are soon forgotten. They are fondly remembered, but not truly missed, and the curveballs that Bolivia throws at you become commonplace after time. No one ever enjoys a prolonged bout with unfriendly intestinal amoebas or a 12-hour bus ride with smelly animals, wailing children, and overly talkative locals, but one comes to accept these inconveniences.

I never imagined that my Peace Corps service would take me where it has, and even after reflecting on the last two-and-a-half years, I still wonder how it all happened. Through all the contrasts and borderline schizophrenic feelings, I've ended up in one of those gray areas in-between, a gray area that with the right perspective would be seen as a very nice place on black-and-white film.

— Rich Brickman

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When I first told people that I would be spending the next two years in Bolivia, the comments from my friends varied. “Oh, yeah! I saw that *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* movie.” Or “So you’re going to Africa, huh?” The fact that nobody knew much about Bolivia made me wonder what this country was all about.

Now, more than two years later, I find myself getting ready to say goodbye to the place I’ve called home and the people with whom I’ve laughed, cried, sweated, and shared my life. To put into words all the things that have happened and all the things I have felt during my Peace Corps service in Bolivia would be impossible. But there are a few things that I have learned and think I will forever remember about my time here.

Family and friends are important. In Bolivia, every day is a day made especially for family and friends. Whether it be sitting outside someone’s home talking or throwing a party on the sudden arrival of a long-lost friend, one thing is made clear: Family and friends come first.

Time operates on a different speed in Bolivia. In our society, we schedule our world around the clock as if it were some quantity to be used sparingly. In Bolivia, time is something less precious in that it exists only as a framework or reference point. Here, things begin when they begin and end when they end. If a meeting is scheduled for 8 a.m., then it could conceivably start by 10:30 (bring a book!). Understanding this (and having the patience and flexibility to accept it) is key to living in Bolivia.

Poverty doesn’t mean poor. In the United States we tend to think of Bolivian peasants as poor. This may certainly be true in economic terms. However, when it comes to spirit, I’ve learned that they are some of the richest people in the world. Too many times, I’ve been to the houses of the poorest of the poor and experienced their overflowing kindness, generosity, and pride. From them, I’ve learned that being poor in spirit is a much greater tragedy than lacking a large house and cable TV.

Don’t forget to smile and laugh! In Bolivia, and I now believe in all the world, a smile and a good sense of humor will go a

long way toward endearing you to your neighbors. The ability to laugh at yourself is imperative to your sanity. If you can laugh at yourself and make others laugh with you, life gets a whole lot easier.

I think a returned Peace Corps Volunteer from the sixties said it best when he said that this land, this country, leaves an indelible mark on you that you'll carry for the rest of your days. Nobody leaves here untouched by the kindness and generosity of the Bolivian people. The friends you make and the experiences you have during your time in Bolivia are sure to leave lasting changes.

As I near my time to leave this place, I think back on all the wonderful things that have happened to me here and find myself truly thankful that I was able to spend two years in a country like Bolivia.

Were there hard days? Of course, but aren't there always?

Was it easy? When you relax, anything is easy.

Am I sad to leave? More than anything.

Would I do it again? In a heartbeat.

I think that the qualifier for any type of experience is whether you can positively answer these questions. In my case, the answers are positive. I hope they are the same answers you'll have after two years here.

Welcome to Bolivia! You'll be glad you came.

— Matt Cohen

.....

Welcome to Peace Corps/Bolivia!

Having just completed two years of service in this beautiful heart of South America, I can guarantee how welcome you will feel in Bolivia!

When I first told others in the U.S. that I would be leaving my comfortable life to go to the poorest nation on this southern continent, some responses I got were, "Why would you want to do a thing like that?"; "What if you get sick?"; and "You have got to be kidding—you will be making next to nothing!" Maybe you have received similar reactions.

Despite these discouraging comments, we have continued our “call” to join the Peace Corps, to help those less fortunate, and to maybe have some adventures along the way. Peace Corps/Bolivia certainly opened all the doors for me to be able to do just that.

I began this new chapter of my life in Bolivia with people who would ask, “How are you?” and then WAIT and LISTEN for the response, even if they were on their way to work, to an appointment, or walking into a meeting. These are people who have “got it” enough to realize that the other person is much more important than the clock or the almighty dollar!

One of the moments that brought mist to my eyes was when my host brother and sister asked if they could make a tape recording to send to my family, “to thank them for doing without you so that you could come here to help us.”

What I learned: Having an entire week’s plans change without notice helped me become so much more flexible; living and laughing with the locals who, at first, seemed so different guided me to become more tolerant. Waiting for that bus and standing in yet another phenomenally long line made me more patient. Not knowing from moment to moment if the electricity or water would go out taught me how to live with ambivalence. Working with next to nothing and re-using what would have been tossed long ago in the U.S. showed me how to be so much more resourceful. And observing the Bolivian folk rejoice in the companionship of their relatives certainly taught me the true meaning of family.

Could you not feel loved when the children surround you with toothy grins and hugs? I hope that this nation full of beautiful green plazas, incredibly inexpensive taxi rides and breathtaking scenery will touch your soul as it has done for mine.

Peace Corps/ Bolivia is a challenge, a completely different world as we know it. Many different languages, customs, manners, ways of dealing with confrontation, and efficiency must all be taken in stride.

Take away the physical, social, and language differences and what is left if the commonality of humanity. The Bolivian folks are very warm and hospitable. They took me into their homes, shared their food, and showed me the family photographs. We are all the same inside.

Now that I have returned to my comfortable life in the U.S, I am often asked: “If you had to do it all over, would you?” Without a doubt! “Was it worth it?” Over and over again. Working in a developing nation proved to me what I went to find out: that one person CAN make a difference!

Remember those negative reactions that we initially got? They have now changed to, “I always wanted to do something like that!” or, “Wish that I could have been so brave!” So take a moment to relax and reflect, and slow down. You are soon to be a guest in a country far from the hectic “American” pace that you are used to, and you will be immersed in a unique, colorful culture that centers on family and friends. The amount of energy and devotion that you put into your community will come back to you ten-fold.

Taking a family photograph will create an immediate bond. It may be the only recuerdo (souvenir) that they have of their family and will serve as a great keepsake of you for them.

Keep in mind that you may be the first and only North American that the folks in your village will ever meet. What impression do you want to leave?

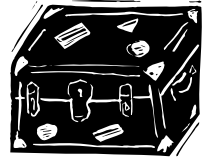
Welcome to the start of a new chapter of your life! May it bring you as many rewards as it has brought to me!

— Monica R. Parks, R.N

## NOTES



# PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled and reviewed by Volunteers serving in Bolivia and it reflects their experience and needs. 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 so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. For example, if you are a business sector Volunteer, your attire is probably more formal than if you are an agricultural or water sanitation Volunteer. Plan and pack accordingly. You can always have things sent to you later. Many items of clothing and other items can be purchased in Bolivia. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight restriction on baggage. Clothes should be sturdy and practical (i.e., easily washable and without need of ironing).

## **General Clothing**

- A few pairs of pants (khakis, dockers) for work and casual wear
- A few pairs of jeans
- A few pairs of shorts
- Casual skirts and dresses for women
- Shirts or blouses
- One or two dressier outfits (jacket and tie for men; skirts and blouses or dresses for women); note that many Volunteers report that except for swearing in and few social events, dressier clothes were the least useful things they packed)
- Bathing suit
- 12 pairs of good-quality cotton underwear
- Enough socks to get you started (available in Bolivia)

- Jacket or poncho for rain and cool winter days
- Heavier jacket
- One or two sweaters (available inexpensively in Bolivia)
- One or two sweatshirts
- Gloves and a wool hat and/or sweatshirts with hoods for cold mornings
- Sweatpants
- Baseball cap or wide-brimmed hat (the Bolivian sun is fierce!)

### **Shoes**

- One pair semi-dress shoes (loafers or something similar) for dressy and professional settings (no high heels needed for women)
- One pair of tennis shoes
- Two pairs of running shoes, if you run (quality sneakers are available in Bolivia)
- Hiking boots
- Sturdy walking shoes
- Flip-flops or shower sandals

### **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Good-quality sunglasses (polarized; with UV protection)
- Start-up supply of soap, shampoo, shaving cream, sunblock, etc.
- Tampons (Peace Corps provides some but if you prefer your own brand bring them. (Many brands are available locally, but are expensive)
- Lip balm with UV protection (more provided in you medical kit)



- Any particular brands of over-the-counter medicine you prefer including vitamins (Peace Corps issues medicine for most everything but usually has only one brand of each type) and a three-month supply of any prescription drugs
- Towels (available in Bolivia)
- Contact lens solutions, if you wear contacts (locally available, too)
- Disposable razors (available locally)

### **Miscellaneous**

- A good Spanish-English dictionary (Note that a 3,000-word-and-phrase dictionary is provided in training)
- Sturdy backpack or duffel bag for short trips
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman tool (be sure this is NOT in your carry-on luggage!)
- Fanny pack
- Money belt or other hidden passport/money carrier
- Photos of family and friends
- Light, stuffable, and warm sleeping bag (preferably waterproof)
- Camping equipment
- Flashlight
- Camera
- Money for your first day or two in-country and for vacation travel
- Books to read and exchange
- Diary or journal (notebook or bound paper) to maintain a two-year site diary.
- Cassettes or CDs to listen to and exchange
- Travel water bottle (Nalgene)

- Solar shower
- Laptop computer and 220-volt adapter
- Alarm clock (battery powered)
- AM/FM radio

Note: Among the items you do not necessarily need to bring (because they are available locally or provided by Peace Corps) are: sheets, pots and pans, dishes and utensils, cassette/CD player, blank CDs, batteries, kerosene burner, mosquito net and mosquito travel tent, water filter, and standard first-aid and medical supplies.

## 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; 24-hour 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 personal passport.)

## **Medical/Health**

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

## **Insurance**

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your healthcare during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting conditions to arrange for the continuation of their supplemental health coverage. If there is a lapse in 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 birth certificate, certificate of marriage or divorce.
- Check your passport and verify there are no errors. It is important that your name is correctly spelled for future banking and identification paperwork in Bolivia.

## **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 cover the entire period of your Peace Corps service (from staging to close of service). (Two pamphlets about such insurance should be in your invitation kit.)

### **Financial Management**

- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, extension 1770. (Deductions cannot be made until after you have been sworn in as a Volunteer at the end of pre-service training.)
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.





# CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

## Peace Corps Headquarters

### Toll-free Number:

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

### Peace Corps' Mailing Address:

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

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

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

# PEACE CORPS

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters

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