

# THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO G U Y A N A



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



April 2008



# A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps/Guyana Invitee:

It is a privilege to welcome you to Peace Corps/Guyana.

I wish to congratulate you on your decision to commit the next 26 months of your life to assisting the Guyanese people in achieving their development aspirations. You are to be commended for having successfully completed the rigorous Peace Corps selection process through which you will become a member of the 20th training class to serve in Guyana since the reopening of the program in 1995. Remember that the next two years of your life is about service. You will compromise your comfort zones, in what you eat, how you dress, how you behave, and how you communicate. Peace Corps is a life-changing opportunity for you and for the community in which you will be living and working. You've taken the first step in what will be a very challenging, but very rewarding experience.

The information contained in this *Welcome Book* represents a general outline of the conditions in Guyana. However, the nature of development work is such that the living conditions and work environment you may find upon arrival may be somewhat different than noted in the book. Although every effort is made to keep this book as a current and accurate representation of the reality in Guyana, changes may occur before you arrive. Guyana offers a special and unique opportunity for a challenging and rewarding tour of service as a Peace Corps Volunteer in primary and community-based education, HIV/AIDS education, information technology, and health education in some of the most pristine and beautiful areas found on Earth. You will be challenged physically, mentally, and emotionally, but I assure you the experience will be unique and rewarding!

Adjusting to the various cultures and environments of Guyana is difficult for many Americans. To be successful, you will need

to be flexible in relating to new and oftentimes difficult sights, sounds, foods, smells, cultural practices, and values. You will at times become frustrated with aspects of your assignment here. You will be part of assisting Guyanese at the community level to achieve their development aspirations through your energy, motivation, creativity, and genuine desire to make a contribution. You will be assigned to a specific project and work under the supervision of a local counterpart or supervisor, which will require you to adapt to new and different modes of interpersonal relations. This will require hard work, perseverance, dedication, and a lot of patience. In general, Americans are accustomed to and expect immediate results from efforts made. In a developmental context, attitudinal and organizational change is a tedious and slow process, and it is this tedious nature of development work that often is most frustrating.

Success as a Volunteer will be measured by the degree to which you are able to positively affect the lives of the people with whom you live and work and the degree to which you are able to assist them in achieving their development aspirations. As a result of this experience, you will grow in knowledge, understanding, self-confidence, and cultural sensitivity. We expect that this journey upon which you have begun will be life-changing and always have a special place in your memories.

The members of the Peace Corps/Guyana staff are among the best in the Peace Corps. Collectively and individually, they will prepare you to live and work in this country and help you make the adjustments necessary to have a successful two years as a Peace Corps Volunteer. However, training and support is only as good as the effort and commitment you make to Guyana, to your community, and to your own Peace Corps experience. We look forward to your arrival!

James Geenen  
Peace Corps/Guyana

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# PEACE CORPS/GUYANA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



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

The Peace Corps first received a formal invitation from Guyana in 1966, the year of the country's independence. From 1966 until 1971, more than 160 Volunteers served in Guyana with the Peace Corps. At that time, education Volunteers broadened the school curricula to include technical and vocational subjects, including home economics, crafts, and manual arts. Technicians, architects, and engineers also assisted in developing and carrying out plans of Guyana's Ministry of Works and Hydraulics. The Guyana program was discontinued in 1971, after the government of Guyana requested all overseas voluntary agencies to leave.

In 1993, the Guyanese government, led by President Cheddi Jagan, approached the Peace Corps about the prospects for the Peace Corps to reopen its program in Guyana. In March 1995, the Peace Corps officially reopened a joint Peace Corps office for Suriname and Guyana. The first Volunteers arrived in 1995, serving in the areas of community health and youth development. In 1997, Peace Corps/Guyana and Peace Corps/Suriname split to form two separate programs. Approximately 30 Volunteers arrive each year to work in the community health project and the education and community development project (which includes information technology). In total, more than 480 Volunteers have served in Guyana with the Peace Corps.

Volunteers serve at sites ranging from the capital city of Georgetown, with a population of 300,000, to small, remote villages with populations fewer than 300. They are affiliated

with a variety of schools, nongovernmental agencies, and government health facilities. The work of Peace Corps Volunteers in Guyana is well-received by the people of the communities in which they serve.

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

Volunteers address educational, health, and technical concerns by providing community health education, literacy, life skills and academic training, and information technology in collaboration with relevant ministries and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). They assist existing efforts to facilitate community involvement, train service providers, and introduce new training and teaching methodologies. Today, there are 36 Peace Corps Volunteers and 1 Crisis Corps Volunteer serving in Guyana in eight of the country's 10 regions.

### ***Community Health Education Project***

Under serious labor constraints, the Ministry of Health in Guyana is attempting to simultaneously strengthen and decentralize the country's health delivery system. Depressed wages and salaries, a declining economy, and the flight of skilled labor to more lucrative labor markets have worsened the situation. Therefore, the need for healthcare providers at all levels is acute.

Peace Corps/Guyana's community health project seeks to support the Ministry of Health's primary healthcare program. Health education Volunteers are usually assigned to work with local health centers, and often conduct health education activities in local schools and with community and youth groups. In collaboration with local staff, they address primary and preventive healthcare issues such as breastfeeding, chronic diseases (hypertension, diabetes) diarrhea, worms,

coughs and colds, nutrition, sanitation, hygiene, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS. Health education Volunteers also work with community leaders, groups, and organizations to facilitate community health assessments and campaigns, and to design and implement community projects.

### ***Education and Community Development Project***

Guyana's process of nation-building is causing vast political, social, and economic changes. These changes are placing the nation's youth, which constitute nearly 60 percent of the population, at great risk.

Guyana's Ministry of Education has recognized an urgent need to refocus the country's education system by improving the literacy and numeracy of the country's youth and by enhancing teachers' skills in providing literacy education. In addition to ongoing projects focusing on training youth in life-skills development, Peace Corps/Guyana's community education project taps Volunteers to work directly with young students to improve their literacy skills and with teachers to promote literacy education.

### ***Community Information Technology***

In March 2000, the Ministry of Education invited Peace Corps/Guyana to play a role in the development of information technology (IT) as a curriculum subject within the school system. This ministry has introduced two educational development projects in some of the country's schools: the secondary school reform project and the Guyana education access project. It is hoped that the two projects will have a direct impact on promoting IT among the nation's young people.

Several Volunteers work directly in the schools, and all Volunteers are encouraged to assist informally with these

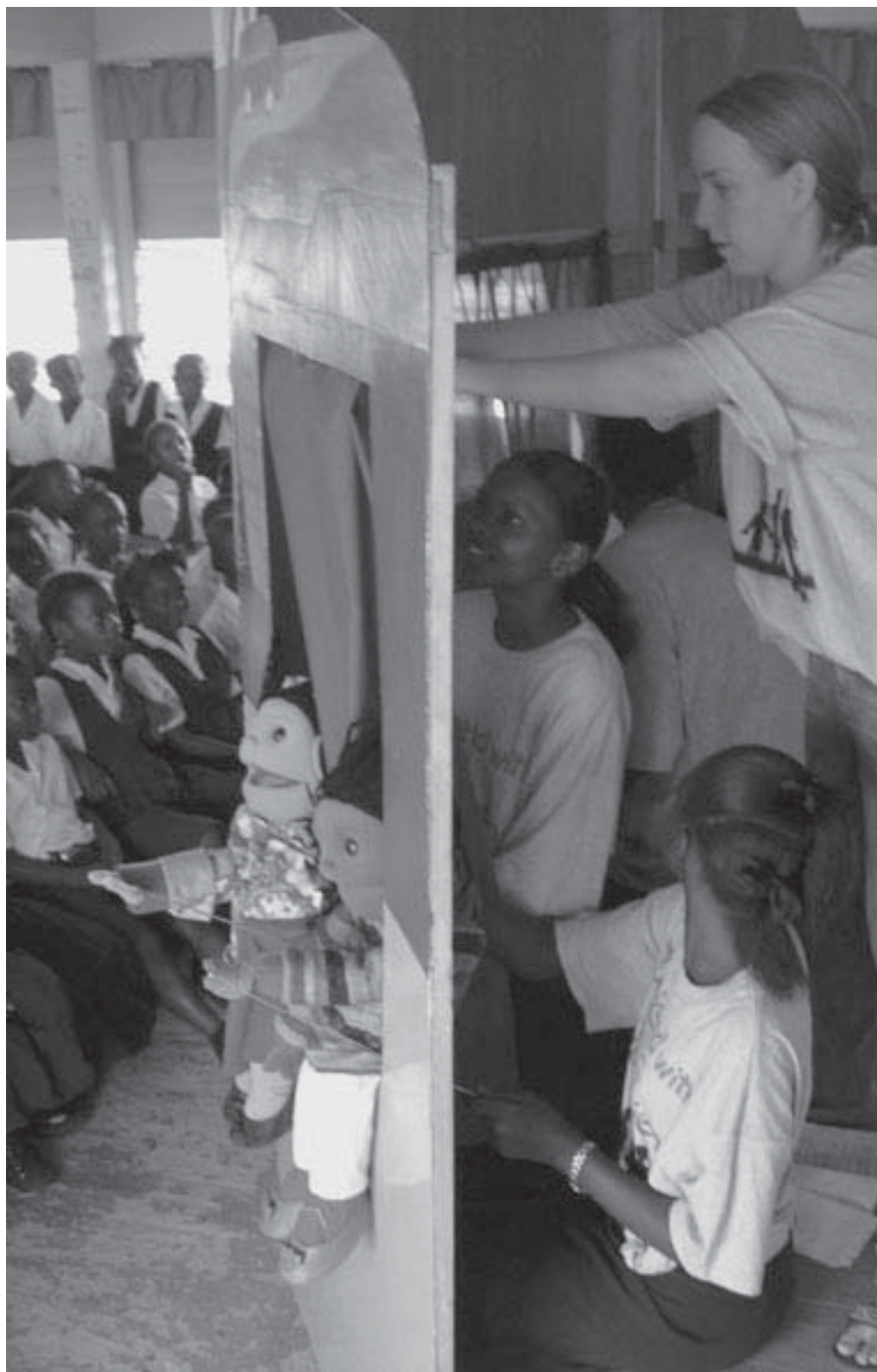
projects in their areas if possible. Activities include teaching students and teachers to use the technology, assisting with setting up computer labs, and interacting with the schools and community groups to ensure that the benefits of this technology reach the communities as well.

### ***HIV/AIDS Response***

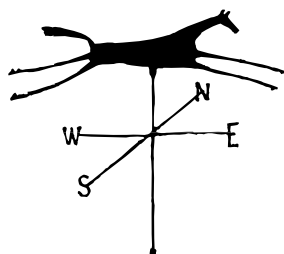
Guyana is one of 15 countries benefiting from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and Peace Corps/Guyana Volunteers are mobilizing the communities in which they live and work to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Volunteers work closely with their communities to conduct HIV education and prevention workshops, identify and build upon small business opportunities for community groups, provide skills training to Guyanese youth, and strengthen community partnerships in response to the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Guyana. Through PEPFAR, small grants are available to these communities to strengthen community and national response to HIV and AIDS. Volunteers also encourage their communities to address other social issues, including orphans and vulnerable children, prevention of mother-to-child transmission, peer education/peer counseling, home-based care, voluntary counseling and testing, behavior change activities, vocational skills training, condom distribution, and community mobilization on HIV/AIDS projects that impact the spread of HIV in Guyana.

### ***Future Programming Directions***

While maintaining sites in coastal Afro- and Indo-Guyanese communities, Peace Corps/Guyana is scaling up its support to Amer-Indian communities in Guyana's interior. Like their fellow Volunteers in coastal communities, Volunteers in these rural, more isolated communities also focus on literacy, HIV/AIDS, and health education, while building and strengthening community linkages. Many Volunteers find they prefer the quieter, more serene savannah over the hustle and bustle of town centers along the coast. It is common to make use of multiple modes of transportation in getting to some of the more rural sites, providing a more traditional Peace Corps experience.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: GUYANA AT A GLANCE



Guyana is a tropical country on the northern shoulder of South America. Its area is about 215,000 square kilometers (83,000 square miles)—the combined size of Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York. Guyana is bordered by Venezuela, Brazil, Suriname, and the Atlantic Ocean. It has a population of approximately 760,000, largely confined to a narrow coastal strip. Also located on the coastal strip is the nation's capital, Georgetown, which lies at the mouth of the Demerara River. The only other sizable population center is the bauxite mining town of Linden, 60 miles upriver from the capital.

## History

Guyana was named by its first people, the Amerindians—semi-nomadic tribes who lived by hunting and fishing. To them, this was a rich land with plenty of water for farming and fishing. They called it *Guiana*, meaning “land of many waters.” Sir Walter Raleigh was the first European to explore the “wild coast” of Guyana. Guyana itself changed hands several times between the French, Dutch, and British before the British finally held it until independence in 1966.

The early European colonists were planters. At first they relied on Amerindians for their labor force, but over time they replaced them with African slaves, who also worked to construct the coastal drainage system and the city of Georgetown. Following a period of slave uprisings and a campaign to end the slave-labor system, slavery was abolished



in 1834. With the end of slavery, indenturing became the new mode of accessing labor. Workers were brought in from the island of Madeira and from China and India (whose people are known in Guyana as East Indians) to work on the estates.

By the early 1900s, a slow transfer of power was underway from the colonial administration to the Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese political groups. Limited self-government was granted in the 1950s, but political conflict and occasional violence between these groups delayed independence. By 1964, though, support began to grow for independence, which was achieved on May 26, 1966. Guyana joined the United Nations later that year, and the country became a charter member of the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) in 1968. On February 23, 1970, Guyana was proclaimed a republic. Guyana is a member of the British Commonwealth and of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). CARICOM's headquarters is in Georgetown.

## **Government**

Guyana is now governed under the republican constitution of 1980, which is a blend of parliamentary and presidential principles. There are two main political parties, whose support is primarily based upon racial lines: the People's National Congress (seen to represent the Afro-Guyanese population) and the People's Progressive Party (perceived as the party of the Indo-Guyanese population). The two main parties are ideologically similar; both support market reforms to increase foreign investments in Guyana. There are also smaller parties that often form coalitions.

Guyana's autocratic culture and economic problems have led to social polarization, racial distrust, political turmoil, and the suppression of truly representative mass institutions, often

referred to as “civil societies.” As such, elections in Guyana are usually disputed. After the keenly contested elections of 1997, members of CARICOM helped arrange an agreement between the two major political parties to end violence and civil strife in Guyana.

President Bharrat Jagdeo was reelected as president in 2001 and again in the August 2006 national elections. He has held the presidency since 1999 after the resignation of President Janet Jagan.

## **Economy**

Guyana is making a difficult transition from a state-directed to a more open, free-market economy. An economic turnaround in 1986–87 that included trade liberalization and an open investment climate contributed to a growth rate above regional and world averages. Recently, legislation was introduced to revise the investment codes and provide small business and microenterprise assistance. However, the combined impact of negative population growth during the past 15 years (“brain drain”), a reduced demand for Guyana’s major exports, and a heavy foreign debt burden present serious challenges to Guyana’s economic development.

The traditional pillars of Guyana’s economy have been sugar, rice, gold, and bauxite. Sugar, its byproducts, and rice account for the majority of agricultural exports, which constitute 35 percent of the gross domestic product, and employ 30 percent of the labor force. Adding to the country’s agricultural exports, tropical fruits and vegetables that have traditionally been grown for domestic consumption are now becoming nontraditional exports. Fishing is also important, with shrimp being an especially valuable product.

While Guyana is a major world producer of bauxite, other extractable natural resources in Guyana have yet to be exploited on a large scale. Other extractable resources include petroleum, gold, and gemstones. The country's petroleum potential is yet to be proven, while gold production has surged with the opening of the Omai mine. All of these economic sectors require major investments in production and infrastructure.

The likely termination of Guyana's access to preferential market arrangements in Britain for its sugar will negatively affect the economy. The building of a bridge between southern Guyana and northern Brazil, and the paving of a 350-mile stretch of dirt road linking Georgetown and the Guyana coast with northern Brazil will undoubtedly boost the economy and link the Amazon with the Caribbean, yet environmentalists warn that the costs may be too high.

## **People and Culture**

For a South American country, Guyana presents a unique profile. The country is the only Anglophone nation on the continent, and it is known for sugar, rice, and cricket playing. Similarly, the mixture of British and Dutch legal and other internal systems is a legacy of past colonization, which previously made Guyana economically, historically, and culturally oriented more toward the Caribbean.

Guyana's culture and people have been influenced by the country's winding history, which includes occupation, slavery, and indenture. Today, a large variety of racial and ethnic groups coexist in Guyana. People of African descent constitute 35.5 percent of the population, people of East Indian descent constitute 49.5 percent, and people of Portuguese, Chinese, Amerindian, and mixed descent make

up the remaining 15 percent. While numerous tribes of Amerindians were the first people of Guyana, today there are only nine: Akawaio, Arawaks, Arecunas, Caribs, Macusi, Patamonas, Wai Wais, Wapishianas, and Warraus.

Guyana's multifaceted culture is well-represented, as each group has brought its own cultural mores and norms, traditions, and festivals. The country's main religions are Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. Festivals and holidays surround religious observances and national commemorations.

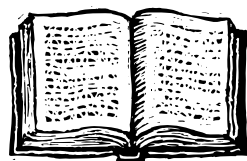
## **Environment**

Guyana's three major river systems, the Berbice, Demerara and Essequibo, together with innumerable smaller rivers and creeks, drain this "Land of Many Waters" and link Guyana's vast forested and savannah interior to the coast. Guyana has a wealth of natural resources and high levels of biological diversity. Fortunately, many regions of the country remain virtually pristine and unexplored simply because of national underdevelopment.

Key current environmental issues include water pollution stemming from mining operations; agricultural and industrial chemicals and sewage; solid-waste disposal in populated areas; deforestation; and flooding, which occurs during the rainy season and exceptionally high tides. The people of Guyana are becoming more aware of the fragility of their natural environment, which is being sharpened, in part, by coastal flooding.



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



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

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own 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 Guyana**

These sites contain general information on countries around the world, look for Guyana and obtain general background notes on history, social, cultural and political background, maps and geographical information.

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

U.S. State Department website publishes background notes and periodic travel advisories for countries around the world. Find Guyana and learn more about its social and political history.

### **<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/res.html>**

Allows you to search for statistical information on United Nations member states.

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

Source of current and historical information about countries worldwide.

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

Website providing comprehensive, reliable, and independent travel information

**<http://lanic.utexas.edu>**

Latin American Network Information Center

**[http://www.panda.org/about\\_wwf/where\\_we\\_work/latin\\_america\\_and\\_caribbean/index.cfm](http://www.panda.org/about_wwf/where_we_work/latin_america_and_caribbean/index.cfm)**

The World Wildlife Federation's Latin America and Caribbean programs

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers**

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

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

**[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.

### **Online Articles/Current News Sites About Guyana**

#### **www.guyana.org**

The site of the Guyanese Embassy in Washington, D.C.

#### **www.guyanachronicle.com**

The site of the *Guyana Chronicle*, a Guyanese newspaper

### **Recommended Books**

1. Abrams, Ovid. *Metegee: The History and Culture of Guyana*. NY: Eldorado Publications, 1998.
2. Mangru, Basdeo. *The Elusive Eldorado: Essays on the Indian Experience in Guyana*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2005.
3. Kempadoo, Peter Lauchmonen. *Guyana Boy*. Yorkshire, UK: Peepal Tree Press, 2nd edition, 2002.
4. Watson, Dennis, and Christine Craig (eds.). *Guyana at the Crossroads*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1992.

### **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, WA: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

## NOTES



# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

Mail service between the United States and Guyana is fairly reliable. Airmail letters from home usually take two weeks to arrive in Guyana and four to five weeks to arrive in the United States from Guyana. Surface mail may take months. The further a Volunteer's site is from a large city, the less dependable and frequent the mail service.

During training, your address in Guyana will be:

"Your Name," PCT  
Peace Corps Guyana  
c/o U.S. Embassy  
100 Young & Duke Streets  
Georgetown, Guyana  
South America

Once you move to your site, you will be responsible for sending your new address to family and friends.

We recommend that you establish a regular writing pattern with friends and relatives in the United States, since they may become concerned if they do not hear from you over an extended period of time. Some Volunteers and their families sequentially number their letters to keep track of how many were sent and received. This is one way of knowing whether someone is just too busy to write or if letters are not arriving. We have found that after trainees have been sworn in and move to their sites, writing habits change as they become more involved in projects and the newness of the lifestyle

wears off. A delay in the mail may also be the result of being in a more isolated site.

As for packages, Volunteers are responsible for paying import duties on items mailed to them from outside the country. The customs process for obtaining sent items is often lengthy, although the duty on items is generally minimal. Customs will notify you directly if you have been sent a package. Peace Corps/Guyana cannot help get these packages released from customs. Small padded envelopes are recommended over boxes.

One alternative to shipping packages through regular mail is to send items through a service such as DHL International or Federal Express. Both companies have offices in Georgetown, but their services are expensive. You can have items sent through these companies to the Peace Corps office in Georgetown, but you must provide the street address and phone number. (The street address for the Peace Corps is 33A Barrack Street, Kingston, Georgetown, Guyana. The phone number is 592.225.5073.) Another alternative is a local company, Laparkan, that offers relatively inexpensive air freight service to Guyana from New York, Toronto, and Miami. Surface mail for packages takes four to six weeks.

We do not recommend that family or friends send you money, airline tickets, or other valuables through the mail. Airline tickets can be paid for in the United States and picked up in Guyana using a reference number. There are also several travel agents in Georgetown through which Volunteers can purchase airline tickets.

### ***Telephones***

International phone service to and from Guyana is relatively good. Volunteers can call the United States collect by placing the call via a Guyanese operator (002) or directly by placing it with a U.S. operator (151 or 165). Do not bring prepaid

phone cards, as they cannot be used without incurring a second charge for the same call. Likewise, calling cards and credit cards do not work from Guyana. Collect calls are expensive, costing about \$7 for the first minute and \$1.40 for each subsequent minute. The rate for direct calls to the United States from Guyana, about \$1.20 per minute, is often cheaper than the rate from the United States to Guyana. Local phone booths and Internet cafés also offer calls to the U.S. Volunteers are not allowed to place international direct calls or send international faxes from the Peace Corps office. For these services, you must use local facilities in Georgetown.

Some Volunteers will have their own landline telephones or easy access to a neighbor's. Some Volunteers will be issued a Peace Corps cellphone based upon certain site conditions. It is possible to purchase your own cellphone in Guyana. However, be aware that many cellphones purchased in the United States will not work on Guyana's cellular phone system. It is possible to buy and activate cellphones in Guyana, ranging from a low of about \$50 to \$550 U.S.

Encourage your family and friends to research local phone companies or look on the Internet to find special deals and offers on international calling.

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

There are computers with Internet access and printers for Volunteer use at the Peace Corps office in Georgetown. Volunteers must provide their own paper, which can be purchased in-country.

There are Internet cafes in all the major towns and many villages that offer services at a reasonable cost. You can use these services to access the Internet or prepare documents. Approximately 80 percent of currently serving Volunteers have Internet access either through an Internet cafe, their work sites, or from home via a landline service.



Upon arriving at site, Volunteers will identify neighbors, co-workers, and leaders in the community who have transportation and communication capabilities since most likely they will not have their own direct access. This process of integration is an integral part of the community entry process. Other local means of communication include police radios, hospital/health post radios, and privately owned radios. All are considered an important linkage in Volunteer communication support.

If telephone/radio communication through host families or neighbors is unavailable within 50 meters from the Volunteer's residence, then Peace Corps will work with the Volunteer to resolve the communication situation.

## **Housing and Site Location**

During pre-service training you will live with a Guyanese family. Most homes in and around Georgetown have electricity and indoor plumbing, as well as televisions and a telephone. Living with a host family facilitates your integration and helps ensure that you live safely and securely in the community.

Following pre-service training, Volunteers will move to their sites and will either continue living with a Guyanese family, live in an independent house/flat provided by the host country agency, or live in a separate house. All Volunteer housing is prearranged by Peace Corps, having been scrutinized by either the Peace Corps' medical officer or the program manager, and approved by the safety and security officer.

Houses in Guyana typically are constructed from wood or cement block and have two to three rooms. Most towns have running water and intermittent electricity. Rivers serve as a main water supply source in many villages.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

During pre-service training, each trainee is given \$500 Guyanese dollars (about \$2.50 US) per day, prepaid every two weeks for miscellaneous expenses, i.e. toiletries, snacks, etc. Transportation costs for official travel are also prepaid every week and are based on actual transportation costs per Trainee. Trainees' daily meals are provided by host families. Nonetheless, you may wish to bring some walk-around cash for training. Former trainees say that \$100 U.S. is adequate.

As a Volunteer, you will be expected to live at the same economic level as the Guyanese people in your community. You will receive a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance to cover your daily expenses. The monthly stipend will allow you to live modestly by the standards of the people in your community, yet not in a manner that would endanger your health or safety. The total amount of your settling-in allowance will depend on the condition of your house and its furnishings.

The living allowance is not a salary. It is meant to cover food, utilities, household supplies, local transportation, recreation and entertainment, incidental expenses, occasional replacement of clothes, and toiletries. The living allowance is based on an annual Volunteer survey and an independent price survey conducted by Peace Corps Guyana staff. The allowance will not change by fluctuations in the exchange rate. The current monthly living allowance is 41,811 Guyanese dollars, about \$200 (U.S.), which will be deposited monthly in a local bank account that you will open at your site. Guyana's largest bank has recently opened branches throughout the country; thus, you will likely have a bank at your site. For Volunteers placed at sites without a local bank, Peace Corps/ Guyana will work with them to arrange an alternative means of accessing the living allowance.

Peace Corps provides reimbursement for transportation for official duties, including Peace Corps sponsored workshops and trainings, medical, and travel to/from site at beginning/end of service. If you plan to travel to the interior of Guyana during your service, you will need some extra cash. For safety factors, though, do not bring large amounts of cash with you to Guyana. Former Volunteers advise using PayPal to receive money. With PayPal the sender and receiver will both need U.S. bank accounts and e-mail addresses. You will also need a check card with a VISA or Mastercard logo. Money can be sent directly to your U.S. bank account and you can then go to Scotia Bank in Guyana and get a cash advance using the check card. (You will be charged a fee, but former Volunteers say this is far cheaper than Western Union and much cheaper than wiring money.)

You may wish to bring additional money for travel to other countries. Credit cards or traveler's checks are recommended for this. If you do bring credit cards, make sure you have a reliable system for making payments on charges incurred while you are away from the United States.

The Guyanese dollar floats against the U.S. dollar, and the exchange rate varies. It has been holding relatively steady since December 2003, at about \$200 Guyanese per \$1 U.S.

## **Food and Diet**

Pre-service training will provide you with an introduction to the Guyanese diet. During training, meals with your host family will mainly be Guyanese dishes and will represent an important aspect of your cross-cultural experience. Guyanese food varies greatly depending upon locale, religious leaning, and ethnic background.

Guyana has been accurately described as the food basket of the Caribbean. Georgetown offers a wide variety of fruits and

vegetables similar to those in the United States. In addition, American standards like peanut butter, pasta, and tuna are usually found in larger towns. In some of the smaller coastal communities and interior sites, the variety of fruits and vegetables can be quite limited.

While many Guyanese consume a variety of meat ranging from the ordinary to the extraordinary (e.g., *labba* and other “wild meat”), there are also many vegetarians in Guyana because of its diverse cultures and religions. Vegetarian Volunteers fare well in Guyana.

Overall, past Volunteers have not experienced major dietary problems. Still, their remarks reflect that there is a much greater variety and availability of foods on the coast than in inland areas. Many fruits and vegetables are seasonal, and you have to adapt to their availability and your access to markets. A recipe book created by previous Volunteers will be made available to you and will help guide your food choices.

## **Transportation**

The main means of transportation for most Guyanese is the minibus. Trainees and Volunteers also use this mode of transportation. The price for traveling around central Georgetown by minibus is \$60 Guyanese (about 30 cents), and special taxi service for the same area costs \$300 Guyanese (about \$1.50). The cost for traveling longer distances and along the coastland varies according to the distance and the location.

Many communities are accessible only by river. *Corials* (paddleboats), speedboats, and jet boats are widely used for this purpose. It is mandatory for trainees and Volunteers who live and work in the riverine areas to use life jackets, which Peace Corps/Guyana provides. Travel among counties

is also highly dependent upon the rivers. While the Demerara Harbour Bridge links West Demerara to Demerara and Georgetown, ferry service exists for crossing the Essequibo, Demerara, and Berbice rivers and for transport to Bartica and other river communities.

Traveling by air is the major form of transportation to areas in the interior of Guyana and to the rest of the world. Approximately six international passenger flights arrive and leave daily. The three major airlines that frequent Guyana are BWIA, North American Airlines, and Liat 1974 Ltd. Airlines. There are also about four daily cargo flights.

## **Geography and Climate**

Guyana is located approximately five degrees north of the equator and is on the northern coast of the South American continent. While Guyana is not an island, it is part of the Caribbean Community and is often described as a West Indian nation.

Guyana's 214,970 square kilometers (approximately 83,000 square miles) are divided into four ecological zones: the coastal plain (25 kilometers wide); the sand belt (about 150 to 250 kilometers wide); the highland, which consists of the four major mountain ranges of Acarai, Imataka, Kanuku, and Pakaraima; and the interior savanna, making up about 11,655 square kilometers.

Guyana is known for its high temperatures, heavy rainfall, small climatic differences, and high humidity. The daily temperature in Georgetown fluctuates between 80 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit, but it varies elsewhere depending on the part of the country. For example, the constant heat and high humidity are mitigated near the coast by the northeast tradewinds. Rainfall is heaviest on the plateau and the coast,

where the long wet season is from April to August and the short wet season is from December to early February. Dry seasons fall in between the rainy seasons. In the savanna, however, there is one long dry season from the end of April to the end of September, and the rainy season runs for the remainder of the year.

## **Social Activities**

Social activities in Guyana vary from place to place. A variety of activities, including dramatic productions, weightlifting competitions, fashion shows, concerts, and beauty pageants, are held at the National Cultural Centre, city and town halls, and community centers in villages. Popular social activities include going to the cinema, discos, weddings, religious festivals and celebrations, folk festivals, and heritage-week activities representing the ethnic groups in Guyana. Fairs and barbecues are also popular events.

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

Guyanese are fairly traditional and conservative, especially in smaller villages. Appropriate personal appearance and behavior will help establish your credibility and reflect your respect for the customs and expectations of the people with whom you live and work. From the biggest city to the most remote village site, you will be judged, especially initially, on your appearance.

Guyanese dress well and are always neat and clean. While businessmen do not always wear suits and ties, they do typically wear dress shirts and slacks. Women in business or government only occasionally wear slacks; more often, they wear lightweight suits or skirts with blouses.

Casual clothing can be worn in off hours and in non-formal situations. Remember that the Peace Corps office is a place of official business, so you need to dress and behave accordingly when you are there. Dress sandals may be worn at work by women, but shorts are not appropriate work attire for men or women. Public displays of affection are also not appropriate—even between married couples.

During training, you are expected to dress and behave as you would on the job. Shirts and shoes must be worn at all times. Spaghetti-strap or halter tops convey an unprofessional attitude that is inconsistent with a positive Peace Corps image. Although women should not wear shorts, capris are acceptable. For women, loose-fitting skirts are the most practical for getting around and walking.

Use your own discretion within the parameters noted above in choosing what to wear, and remember neatness, cleanliness, and maintaining a professional appearance in work settings are foremost. In coming to Guyana, it is not necessary to change your entire wardrobe. Many trainees and Volunteers wear the same clothing they wore at home. It is inappropriate for trainees or Volunteers to wear military surplus clothing such as pants, boots, jackets, and backpacks. The Peace Corps wants to be distinguished from the U.S. and Guyana militaries and has tried to keep its image as detached as possible.

For women, a small nose piercing or normal ear piercing is acceptable. For men, earrings are a "fashion of youth" and you very rarely see a man in a professional setting wearing any piercings. Multiple ear piercings or piercings of the tongue, lips, or other parts of the body are generally unacceptable for a professional person in Guyanese culture. Therefore, any such piercings should not be apparent once you arrive in Guyana.



Volunteers or Trainees are not advised to wear dreadlocks. Most Guyanese associate dreadlocks with a specific group or with specific activities, i.e. Rastafarian culture, marijuana use, or criminal activities. Public perception of drug use by a PCV can jeopardize the Peace Corps program in Guyana, as well as the effectiveness of the Volunteer or Trainee, and is not compatible with the image that Peace Corps Guyana wants to project. We believe the Peace Corps experience is worth making these changes and personal adjustments.

Tattoos are accepted in Guyanese culture. However, excessive tattoos which cannot be concealed with clothing in a professional environment can hamper a Volunteers' or Trainees' effectiveness and respect within the community.

## **Personal Safety**

More information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Health Care and Safety chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal security incidents.

The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Guyana.

At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your own safety and well-being.

The crime rate is high in Guyana. While it may be tempting to point to Guyana's poverty when trying to explain this high crime rate, poverty is only a contributing factor, and it does not explain the situation conclusively.

During pre-service training, you will be introduced to behaviors that, if followed, will minimize your risk. Many of these are the same precautions you would take at home (e.g., living in a secure house, avoiding dangerous neighbors, and taking special precautions when moving around at night). Additional steps specific to being a trainee or Volunteer in Guyana, such as getting to know your community, understanding what constitutes appropriate behavior in Guyanese culture, building relationships with trustworthy individuals, and following the Peace Corps/Guyana housing policy, will be presented.

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

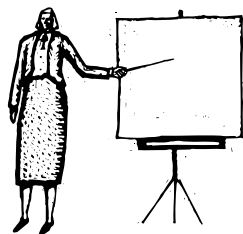
Rewards and frustrations are a reality of life. However, there are some specific frustrations that you are likely to experience while living and working in Guyana. For instance, you may feel that your Guyanese colleagues do not carry out their duties in a manner that reflects an appropriate level of "commitment" to the job. Additionally, there may be long time lapses before decisions on important issues are made. There may also be an absence or shortage of resources that you consider basic to the successful completion of your work. Thus, you may need to slow down your pace and reconsider your expectations for the way business is done in Guyana.

On the other hand, you will have an opportunity to be innovative and work with your counterparts to find alternatives to traditional ways of doing things. You will find the Guyanese to be friendly. People will help you at personal sacrifice. You will experience the change you make in people's lives by simple things you say and do. You will experience satisfaction from working in the interest of others.

Your main satisfaction will derive from helping local people achieve their development aspirations, while learning about a new culture and about yourself in the process. You will encounter unusual social and cultural situations that require flexibility and understanding on your part. As you communicate honestly and demonstrate your interest in Guyana, you will be able to enjoy your community, its customs and people, and your role as a Volunteer. Just as in any community, your village will have a variety of personalities, some helpful and welcoming, others disinterested or unsure of why you are there.



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

You will participate in eight weeks of pre-service training, which will take place primarily in communities outside of Georgetown. Training will focus on four interrelated components—cross-cultural understanding, technical training, health, and safety/security issues. Pre-service training also includes opportunities for continuous assessment, by both trainees and training staff, of trainees' progress in cultural adjustment and adoption of technical skills.

Most of your training will be done in the villages that serve as training sites. On a weekly or biweekly basis, trainees will have sessions in Georgetown, giving them the opportunity to become familiar with the city.

A large portion of training deals with broad aspects of cross-cultural understanding, adaptation, and the role of the Peace Corps Volunteer in development. This part of training is common to all Volunteers regardless of your technical project. To be effective on the job and have a personally satisfying service, it helps to become less of an outsider to the Guyanese community. Trainers will work with you—individually and in groups—to help you adapt to the new culture and be ready for your future site placement.

During PST, you will also learn to understand Guyanese Creole, or Creolese. The training staff will help you identify words and phrases heard in everyday conversations. You will practice Creolese idioms and gestures and learn the common proverbs and folktales that enrich Creolese communications.

### ***Technical Training***

Technical training will be tailored to the job requirements for your project. You will learn new skills and how to modify existing skills to work in the Guyanese environment. Much of technical training will be hands-on. The Peace Corps staff and Guyanese experts will conduct the technical training, with the involvement of currently serving Volunteers. Technical training places a great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

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

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Guyanese host family. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Guyana. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Many trainees form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Peace Corps/Guyana expects that you will respect the customs of your host family's household, such as eating what the family eats without expecting special treatment (with appropriate exceptions for vegetarians and people with food allergies) and adhering to the household's customary hours. You will be considered a member of the family, not a boarder.

### ***Health 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 Guyana. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other STIs are also covered.

## ***Safety Training***

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

## **Additional 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 two training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *In-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- *Close-of-service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

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







# YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN GUYANA



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. The Peace Corps in Guyana maintains a clinic with two part-time medical officers dedicated to Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services for some medical conditions are provided by referral to in-country consultants. Testing and basic treatment are also available in Guyana at local, American-standard hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported to a medical facility in either Panama, Brazil or the United States.

## **Health Issues in Guyana**

Guyana is a tropical country with a dense population along its coastline and smaller, scattered groups in the more remote interior. As in other tropical countries, there is the risk of exposure to mosquito-, food-, and water-borne diseases. Snake and animal bites pose less of a risk.

*Insect-borne diseases:* All mosquito-borne parasitic infections exist in Guyana, including malaria, filariasis, and dengue febrile. The interior of the country has the highest incidence of malaria, with fewer cases reported on the coast. Filariasis and dengue fever are increasingly affecting communities on the coast, especially during rainy seasons, while isolated cases of leishmaniasis, a fly-borne disease, occur primarily in the interior and on the Brazilian border. Volunteers in Guyana are required to take malaria prophylaxis throughout their Peace

Corps service and are encouraged to protect themselves by using insect repellents, sleeping under treated nets (which Peace Corps/Guyana provides), and wearing appropriate clothing. Mosquitos in Guyana are chloroquine-resistant, hence Volunteers are required to take Lariam or other recommended prophylaxis.

*Food- and water-borne diseases:* The country's heavy rainfalls and high tides often create floods on the coast and in some remote communities, resulting in outbreaks of water-borne infections. These include amebic and bacillary dysentery, typhoid fever, helminthic infections, hepatitis A, and other diarrheal diseases. To decrease the risk of infection, Volunteers are provided with training on water purification methods and are encouraged to boil their drinking water as an extra safety precaution. Volunteers are also given typhoid vaccines, however this only provides 70 percent protection.

*Animal bites and snake bites:* Although there is a low risk of being bitten by a poisonous snake in coastal areas, bites can occur inland in jungle areas. There have been no reported cases of rabies among dogs. However, because Volunteers may travel to neighboring countries that do have rabies, they are given rabies pre-exposure vaccines. Volunteers are discouraged from keeping monkeys and snakes as pets for health reasons.

*HIV/AIDS:* Guyana has the second highest rate of HIV/AIDS infection in South America, and other STIs are also prevalent. Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To reduce risk, use a condom every time you have sex. You will receive more information from the Peace Corps medical officer about this important issue. The Peace Corps medical unit stocks male condoms.

*Substance abuse:* There has been an increase in illegal drug use in Guyana. The Peace Corps prohibits the use of all illegal drugs, including marijuana, by Volunteers and trainees. Invitees who use illegal substances should not accept an invitation to serve in the Peace Corps. Invitees should disclose prior use of illegal drugs/substances for medical clearance. Although Guyanese social occasions often include alcohol consumption, Volunteers are expected to avoid excessive use of alcohol, which is often a factor in Volunteer safety incidents. You will need to exercise your good judgment under sometimes difficult circumstances, including social pressure to drink in excess. Peace Corps/Guyana's alcohol policy provides further guidance to Volunteers.

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

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical office. However, during this time, 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 in-country, and it may take several weeks for shipments to arrive. Also, please try to switch to generic forms of any medications you take before coming to Guyana as the name-brand may not be available.

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

## **Maintaining Your Health**

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

The most important of your responsibilities in Guyana is to take the following preventive measures:

Many diseases that affect Volunteers are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These diseases include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, giardia, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific recommendations for your site in Guyana during training.

Malaria is endemic in Guyana, so it is extremely important to fully comply with the recommended drug regimen for prevention of malaria, a disease that can be fatal if left untreated. Failure to adhere to the regimen can result in administrative separation.

Check with the Peace Corps medical officer before taking any locally purchased or prescribed medications. Some drugs that have not been approved for use in the United States by

the Food and Drug Administration are available in developing countries, and many drugs that require a prescription in the United States can be purchased over-the-counter in other countries. Trainees and Volunteers are also discouraged from using local traditional and non-traditional preparations, for example, herbal teas, etc. Should you fall ill during your pre-service training, you should not accept treatment from your host or homestay family. Although they may be well-intentioned, often the care is more traditional, rather than medically based.

Traveling around Guyana requires water travel. Trainees are encouraged to learn how to swim before arrival and are provided with information during pre-service training on water travel. Volunteers are provided with life jackets and are expected to wear them when traveling by boat.

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 Peace Corps medical office. Birth control pills do not prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, such as herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis, etc.

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

Culture shock and adjustment to a new country can be a trigger for a Volunteer who is mentally or emotionally challenged. Volunteers must be aware of the limitations of their medical conditions and understand Guyana will not be able to adjust to their needs, but rather, they will need to

adjust to Guyana. Integrating with a cross-section of your community, including responsible and matured individuals should assist to buffer any culture shock.

The Peer Support Network, comprised of Volunteers, is available for moral support and Peace Corps staff encourages Trainees and Volunteers to utilize this source as often times other Volunteers have experienced similar challenges and frustrations, and have developed coping strategies that could as be as equally effective.

## **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. Guyana currently cannot provide the required services for pregnant Volunteers in-country.

Feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase at the local market. The medical unit will provide them only in cases of emergency. 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***

### **Medication:**

Antacid tablets  
Antibiotic ointment  
Antifungal cream  
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner  
Diphenhydramine HCL 25mg (Benadryl)  
Lip Balm  
Oral rehydration salts  
Pseudophedrine HCL 30mg (Sudafed)  
Normal saline eye wash  
Aspirin  
Ibuprofen 400mg tablets  
Hydrocortisone cream 1%

### **Other Health Supplies:**

Ace bandages  
Adhesive tape  
*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*  
Gloves  
Gauze pads  
Safety Whistle  
Band-aids  
Butterfly closures  
Dental floss  
Male condoms  
Insect repellent 30-35% DEET  
Sunscreen SPF 30  
Scissors  
Oral thermometers (disposable)  
Mosquito net

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

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

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

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it with you to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment shortly after you arrive in Guyana. 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. You may want to consider switching from a name brand to generic drugs as your Peace Corps medical officer may not be able to purchase your name brand prescription. As well, please be advised that the medical office does not carry every type of birth control pill. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will



order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

You are encouraged to bring copies of medical prescriptions signed by your physician. This is not a requirement, but they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs. During your Peace Corps service, your healthcare will be managed by the Peace Corps medical officer in conjunction with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, DC. Peace Corps is not obligated to comply with any instructions from your doctor at your home of record while you are in the Peace Corps.

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

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

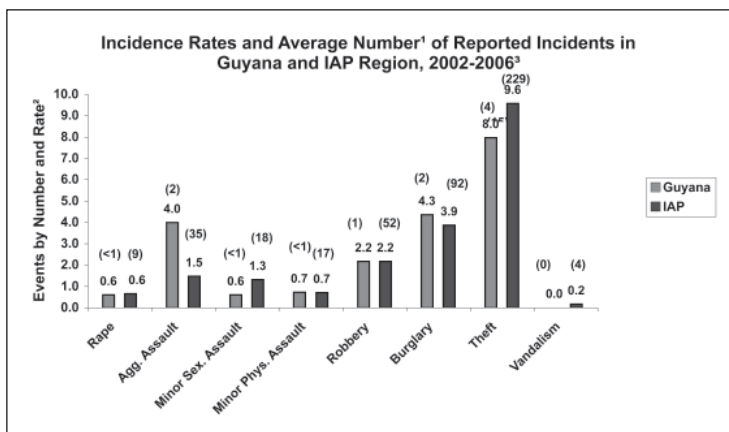
The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Guyana as compared to all other Inter-America and Pacific region programs as a whole, from 2001–2005. It is presented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



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

<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 other sexual assaults. Numbers of incidents are approximate due to rounding.

<sup>3</sup>Data collection for Guyana began as of Jan. 1, 2002; due to the small number of V/T years, incidence rates should be interpreted with caution.

Sexual Assaults are termed Other Sexual Assault and Other Physical Assault per CIRF definitions as of the year 2006. Prior to CIRF and prior to 2006, Sexual Assaults were termed Minor Sexual Assault Assault and Minor Physical Assault per ANSS definitions.

Source data on incidents are drawn from the Crime Incident Reporting Form (CIRF); the information is accurate as of March 5, 2008.

successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

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

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

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

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

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



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

## **Security Issues in Guyana**

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime exists in Guyana. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in 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.

Guyana is considered a low-risk country for terrorist activity, but a high-risk one for petty crimes and aggravated assaults, including the use of weapons. As in the United States, you cannot be too careful. Walking alone at night or simply being alone in an isolated area can put a person at risk of being robbed, harassed, or even physically and sexually assaulted. In late 2002 and early 2003, there was an upsurge in drive-by killings, shootings, kidnappings, and armed robberies. However, security forces are working hard to bring these crimes to an end, and more recently, there has been a marked decline in criminal activity.

Factors that contribute greatly to Volunteers' safety under these circumstances are minimizing high-risk behaviors like going out alone late at night and living alone rather than with a family; following community standards for behavior; using "street smart" common sense; and complying with the Peace Corps' safety and security guidance. Should you become a victim of a physical or sexual assault during your Peace Corps service, Peace Corps staff will be there to assist you. It is important that you involve the medical office to receive appropriate care, including care for your emotional well-being, as well as to address legal issues. Both the medical staff and the safety and security coordinator will keep all information confidential.

The definition of what constitutes sexual harassment differs from culture to culture. What may be considered inappropriate in a professional or social situation in the United States may be considered the norm in Guyana. Female trainees and Volunteers are occasionally subjected to comments with sexual overtones. It is a part of the Guyanese culture for a man to make comments to a woman he finds attractive. Such comments sometimes occur in the workplace, a situation that might constitute sexual harassment in the United States. Male trainees and Volunteers may find themselves in uncomfortable situations as well. For example, a Guyanese man may discuss women in a way that a male trainee or Volunteer finds offensive.

You will have to find ways to cope with such situations. While we encourage you to ignore inappropriate comments or unwanted attention, this does not mean that you are expected to put up with all harassment. As in the United States, each individual needs to decide where to draw the line. Current Volunteers and staff are good resources for dealing with these issues.

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

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

Volunteers attract unwanted attention both 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 eye contact, and do not respond to unwanted attention. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. And always walk with a companion at night.

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

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

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

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

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

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Guyana's detailed **emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of

civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Guyana at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers **immediately report** any security incident to the Peace Corps safety and security coordinator or medical officer. The Peace Corps has **established protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to current and 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 its 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 Guyana, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Guyana.

Outside of Guyana'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 misconceptions, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Guyana 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 the cultural differences that you present.

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

## **Overview of Diversity in Guyana**

The Peace Corps staff in Guyana 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 for Volunteers and Trainees. We look forward to having male and female trainees 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.

The Peace Corps cannot control every host country national's treatment of Volunteers, and some of you may experience subtle discrimination or even blatant bigotry. Through training, we will try to prepare you, individually and as a group, to cope successfully with these challenges. The country director is responsible for seeing that, within the Peace Corps family, the rights of all Volunteers are respected. No matter what your background, the staff in Guyana is committed to giving you the support that you need to be an effective Volunteer.



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

The following information is provided to help you prepare for the challenges you may encounter in Guyana based on your ethnic or racial background, sexual orientation, age, religious beliefs, or disabilities. The text is intended to stimulate thought and discussion and may or may not be applicable to your own Volunteer experience. We want to make all Volunteers aware of issues that one particular group or another may face. As you read, you might ask yourself, “How would I feel if that happened to me?”

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

Gender roles in Guyana are markedly different from those in the United States, and you will need to understand these gender roles to be effective in your project and satisfied personally. Guyanese women have traditional roles, especially in rural areas, where they run the household, prepare meals, clean, and rear children. In addition, some work in the fields, run small businesses, and care for farm animals. Young, single women generally do not live by themselves. Those who do are often perceived as women who do not live a decent life. Men also have specific roles, and “manliness” is very important. Men are expected to be dominant in almost all aspects of society; they are expected to smoke, drink, pursue women, be strong, and discipline their wives and children.

In Guyana, it is common for women, including Volunteers, to be verbally harassed by men on the streets. Although it is unusual for a man to try to touch a woman, he might whistle, make comments on your looks, or ask you for a date or for sex. North American women are obvious targets because they are so visible and have a reputation of being liberal (sometimes interpreted in the local context as being promiscuous) in male-female relationships. Female Volunteers

must learn to handle these situations and may have to accept certain constraints male Volunteers do not have to accept.

Male Volunteers also encounter harassment, but much less frequently. If you do not drink, smoke, or like to pursue women openly, you may be kidded or chided for not being manly enough. Male Volunteers who cook, wash clothes or dishes, and clean the house often seem strange to their neighbors. Pre-service training will orient you to these local customs and gender roles.

**Volunteer comment:**

“As a female Volunteer of color in a culture that can be a bit overtly sexual, it is sometimes hard to deal with being ‘hassled’ all the time. Once I moved to my site, I realized that all the ‘hey, baby’ comments and all the whistling was mostly just a way for the Guyanese to get your attention because in small communities a white person stands out. If you lived all your life in a white community and all of a sudden you saw a black person walking down the street, wouldn’t you stare and want to talk to him or her? If you are a female Volunteer, you have to have thick skin and learn quickly how to handle the local men. In this culture, it’s almost expected for men to try hard to get the attention of women, especially white women. Try not to take comments about your body personal, either. As a Volunteer, you must always put everything in context. Having size here is considered a good thing so the comments are meant to be compliments. Remember to always put every experience you have in its proper cultural context.”

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

Volunteers of color in Guyana may face specific challenges. In Afro-Guyanese communities, for example, African-American Volunteers may be treated according to local social norms because it is assumed they are Afro-Guyanese. This can have

both positive and negative outcomes. Within the Volunteer corps, you may be the only minority trainee or Volunteer in a particular project.

Once you move to your site, you may work and live with individuals who have a limited or stereotypical understanding of the United States and its citizens. A Volunteer of color may not be perceived as being North American. A Volunteer with a Hispanic surname may be considered a citizen of a Latin American country rather than the United States. Likewise, a Volunteer of Asian descent is not likely to be perceived as being North American and may be called by ethnic names common in Guyana, such as “Chinese girl.” Out of ignorance or stereotyping, some people in your community may view you as less professionally competent than a white Volunteer. In any community where you are not known, you need to be prepared for staring, pointing, comments, and prejudice. Finally, you should be prepared to hear derogatory terms and racial epithets that would be completely inappropriate in the United States. In some cases, the terms may indeed be used in a derogatory manner, while in other cases the terms may be locally appropriate words that are not intended to hurt anyone’s feelings.

Suggestions for how to respond to these issues will be provided during pre-service training. Both the Peace Corps staff and a peer support network of trained Volunteer counselors are available to provide support.

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

Maturity and age are generally respected in Guyana, and older Volunteers are likely to find it easier than younger Volunteers to integrate into their communities. Younger Volunteers often have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals in their communities. In addition, older Volunteers tend to be harassed less often.

As the majority of Volunteers are in their 20s, older Volunteers will work and live with individuals in the Peace Corps community who may have little understanding of, or respect for, the lives and experiences of senior Americans. Your interactions with Peace Corps staff may also be different. Staff may not always give you the personal support you expect, while you may be reluctant to share your personal, sexual, or health concerns with staff. You may find that younger Volunteers look to you for advice and support. While some seniors find this a very enjoyable part of their Volunteer experience, others choose not to fill this role.

Training may present its own special challenges. Older trainees may encounter a lack of attention to their specific needs for an effective learning environment. You may need to work with staff to develop an effective individual approach to learning.

Finally, Peace Corps service may present certain social and logistical challenges for senior Volunteers that younger Volunteers do not face, such as handling family emergencies, maintaining lifelong friendships back home, giving someone power of attorney to attend to financial matters, and so forth.

### **Volunteer Comments:**

“As a third-year Volunteer serving in Guyana, I have found few disadvantages to be an older adult here. That being said, I did have a more difficult time during training when I was the only person in my group whose age exceeded 30 years. Mostly this difficulty resulted from the tendency of the younger trainees to not quite know how to deal with me socially. As I am similar in age to most of their parents, it seemed uncomfortable for many of them at first to interact socially with me. I think it's important for the older Volunteer to make clear from the outset that you are

not here to be their surrogate parent. How one goes about doing that depends on each individual and each individual circumstance. Once that's accomplished, the result is quite positive. I have developed solid friendships with many younger Volunteers during my time here."

"As to the advantages, Guyana is a country whose culture has an in-born respect for older adults. As a 'big person,' you are afforded certain courtesies and privileges that a younger Volunteer may not get. As an education Volunteer, I found that teaching in the schools was probably easier for me being older. The fellow teachers as well as the students tended to look to me for guidance, and treated me with deference. I don't mean to imply that younger Volunteers are not treated well, just that being an older Volunteer, I believe, affords greater latitude. However, this extra deference carries an additional responsibility to live up to the community's expectations."

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

In Guyana, although strides are being made to bring rights and dignity to all persons in Guyana who do not identify as heterosexual, sexual orientation is still a closeted issue. The topic is rarely discussed by Guyanese, and it is likely that many consider homosexuality to be immoral. Male homosexuality is illegal in Guyana, although the law has never been enforced. In some instances, basic civil liberties may be ignored, and homosexuals may be harassed in bars or on the streets if it is obvious the person is homosexual. There are certainly homosexuals in Guyana, but they are likely to live in the city, away from their home communities.

One of the challenges for both lesbians and gay men is dealing with harassment or a lack of sensitivity and awareness by people of the opposite sex who may find them attractive. Lesbians have to deal with constant questions about

boyfriends, marriage, and sex (as do all women). Gay men must deal with *machismo*, talk of conquests, girl watching, and dirty jokes.

Acceptable U.S. styles for hair, earrings on men, extensive body piercing, and certain mannerisms or clothes may be viewed with suspicion or disfavor in your community (see section on Professionalism, Dress and Behavior). Gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers should be aware that they will not encounter the level of openness and acceptance to which they may be accustomed in the United States. In order to gain respect and live and work effectively in the community, gay, lesbian and bisexual PCVs will need to exercise discretion regarding their sexuality. Same-sex relationships with host country nationals bring a host of other issues which can adversely impact a Volunteer's safety and security, as well as their effectiveness.

Volunteers who decide to reveal their sexual orientation often confide in a Peace Corps staff member with whom they feel comfortable. Most Peace Corps Guyana staff have worked with gay and lesbian Volunteers before and are quite comfortable working with and supporting our diverse corps of Volunteers. Peer support plays a critical role for all Volunteers, but can often provide especially needed support for diverse Volunteers. An additional resource is the lesbian, gay, and bisexual returned Peace Corps affiliate group of the National Peace Corps Association.

**Volunteer Comment:**

“As a gay PCV in Guyana, it has been a valued affirmation to have the respect, advice and support from the PC/Guyana staff members who have earned my trust, and the inclusive embrace, goodwill and understanding of my peer PCVs. In my community I feel that my professional credibility and

personal integrity have been established without having my confidential privacy compromised or diminished. It came as a pleasant surprise to find a politically active and socially inclusive gay community in G'town that was eager to welcome me to Guyana.”

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

The three major religions in Guyana are Islam, Hinduism, and Christianity. Christian Volunteers may find it difficult to accept and work within the boundaries placed on personal behavior by non-Christian religions. For instance, a Hindu or Muslim woman's tendency to be submissive or her unwillingness to be away from home for long periods can be hard to accept by Westerners. This situation may also pose challenges for Volunteers who want to organize women's groups.

#### **Volunteer Comment:**

“Coming from a background without much exposure to organized religion, the prominent and public role of religion in Guyana was a little daunting at first. However, people are generally friendly and will be eager and happy to have you learn about their religious practices whether it's simply as an observer or, as you get more comfortable, a participant. You will find the Muslims, Hindus, and Christians in Guyana very welcoming no matter what your personal views are as long as you are respectful.”

### ***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, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Guyana without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. Peace Corps/Guyana 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, Guyana is not an easy post for Volunteers with disabilities. Wheelchair ramps at building entrances and handrails along walkways, for example, are almost nonexistent. Elevators are rare, and may not work because of disrepair or lack of reliable electricity. Blind people have few resources upon which to rely.

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

Our experience has been that when trainees or couples live together during training, they spend most of their time with each other rather than sharing in the rich cross-cultural experience of spending time with new friends and host families. While married couples may stay together with the same host family during training, it is incumbent upon them to take full advantage of the homestay period to engage with the family and community. During training sessions, couples are expected to behave in a professional manner. Overt displays of affection are not considered acceptable behavior in Guyana. In addition, a request to be absent from training when your spouse is mildly ill, for example, will not be automatically granted.

Couples should consider how varying degrees of enthusiasm about Peace Corps service, different adaptation to the physical or cultural environment, and homesickness will affect their lives. A husband and wife may have to deal with changed marital roles resulting from local societal expectations. A married man may be encouraged to take on a more dominant role in the relationship, or be ridiculed for performing domestic tasks or refusing to have extramarital affairs. A married woman may find herself in a



less independent role than she is accustomed to or may be expected to perform traditional domestic chores instead of holding a professional job. These expectations can create tensions for a couple at work and at home. Finally, couples need to consider how they will cope with competition (e.g., one spouse learning new skills faster than the other) or differences in job satisfaction.



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. 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 receivers, as a source of news in rural areas, are permitted), automobiles, motorcycles, or motor scooters 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 Guyana?**

The electric current is 110 volts in urban areas and 110 volts with some 220-volt outlets in rural areas. The 110-volt outlets use the same type of prongs as in the United States, but the 220-volt outlets have three prongs in the British style. Three-prong adapters are available in Guyana.

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

Upon being sworn in, each Volunteer accumulates two vacation days per month, but you are not allowed to use your vacation time during training and your first three months as a Volunteer. The first months at your site are important for establishing good relationships with the Guyanese in your community, so you are encouraged to remain at your site. Because adaptation to a new culture occurs over many months, the Peace Corps suggests that you postpone any vacations until at least six months of service. During the last three months of service, you are expected to be saying goodbyes and finishing projects, so vacation is not authorized in that period. Given that you will probably want to take your vacation when your family or friends visit, please plan their visits to coincide with your vacation time. Trainees are not allowed to have visitors during pre-service training. Additionally, Volunteers are not permitted to have visitors during the first three months of service as this is when the Volunteer should focus on integrating into his/her community; nor should Volunteers have visitors during the last three months of service since Volunteers will be working to wrap up final activities in their communities and preparing to depart Guyana. Exceptions must be approved by the Country Director and Programming and Training Officer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Though this is not a requirement, we encourage you to bring an inexpensive gift for your host family. Some suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; photos to give away; decks of cards, coloring books and crayons for children; scented candles or potpourri; perfume; or nail polish. Do not get carried away; a token of friendship is sufficient.

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and cross-cultural skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, many factors influence the site selection process and the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Remember that Peace Corps service

is about the needs of your community! Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within a few hours from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital.

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

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, 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. The number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580, extension 1470. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580, extension 2515, 2516, or 2525.

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

You may receive international phone calls at the Peace Corps office, but placing direct-dial international calls or sending faxes from the office is not allowed (although you can place an international call with an AT&T account or other long-distance credit card with prior approval from the country director). You must use local facilities in Georgetown for these services. Volunteers may place long-distance calls and send faxes within Guyana from the Peace Corps office with the prior approval of a staff member.

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

It is fine to bring your own cellphone, but be aware that all costs related to, and problems that arise from, your cellular service in Guyana are your responsibility. Peace Corps/Guyana does not require that Volunteers have cellphones. If you are considering bringing a cellphone, it is also important to know that cellular service is fully digital and only some models of

U.S.-bought cellphones will be compatible with the service. Finally, not all sites will have cell coverage.

**Will there be e-mail and Internet access?**

**Should I bring my computer?**

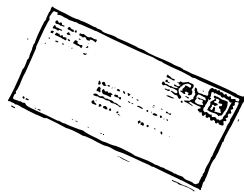
There are computers with Internet access and printers available for Volunteer use in the Peace Corps office. Volunteers must provide their own paper. All the major towns and many villages have Internet cafés, which offer services at a reasonable cost. Most Volunteers serving in Guyana do not bring their own computers as they can be difficult and expensive to maintain given the dust, heat, humidity, and power surges. Any Volunteer who decides to bring a laptop is strongly encouraged to acquire personal property insurance. The Peace Corps cannot be responsible for loss or theft of personal items, including computers.







# WELCOME LETTER FROM GUYANA VOLUNTEERS



Dear Invitee,

Finding half of an anaconda in the middle of the road in the suburbs of Georgetown during the first week of training was the first mystery: Why only half? Where was the other half? Are they here, in the suburbs? (apparently, yes). Most importantly, are there more?

The second mystery was when I was given my site placement. I'd taught in American high schools for over twenty years and am a self-confessed technophobe. So, why was I placed in a primary school? Why with obsolete and broken computers? Why with a job description that seemed to describe somebody else? Most importantly, can I do this?

The third mystery (really, it's the fourth, but that's because the third mystery is solved now that I found the nest where the scorpions in my house were coming from) happened just yesterday. I arrived at school, with a population of 300 kids, grades 1 through 6, and six of the seven teachers — and the headmaster — weren't at school for the day. It's very elementary math: one teacher, me, and 300 kids = chaos. What's going on here? Doesn't anyone else care? Is the system that broken? Is this just part of culture shock? Most importantly, what the hell am I doing here?

I think back to that advertisement in the *Washington Post* that I had randomly opened to. A full page ad with two photos side by side — on the right, a flat road ahead, very straight and very narrow into the distance as far as you could see. On the left, the front seat view from a roller coaster car as it was ascending a steep incline with the crest just up ahead and the crazy high speed descent out of view but just about to happen. The headline of the ad read: "So, what road is your future on?" That's when I knew the Peace Corps was the right decision for me.

That was more than a year ago, as I was starting my application process, many months before my invitation and edition of the *Welcome Book*, and I've been in Guyana only five months now. And it has been a roller coaster ride with mysterious twists and turns to which I do not — and may never have — the answers or a clear sense of direction. Which, after all, may be trying to have too much control over the ride (have you ever seen a roller coaster with a driver's seat or steering wheel?).

So, give yourself over to the adventure of it all. Truth to tell: there will be frustrations, obstructions, mysteries, culture shocks, set-backs, unpleasant surprises, yes. But there will also be rewards, new friendships, laughter, fulfillments and the satisfaction of being sure that the road you have chosen is NOT on the straight and narrow, and that “come what may”, you have chosen to put yourself “out there” for the twists and turns that are Guyana, more exciting and nerve-wracking and frightening and thrilling than any theme park ride. And watch out for the anacondas!

— Topher Williams, PCV GUY 19

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Dear Invitee,

I am a Health Volunteer and I work in the Ministry of Health's Adolescent and Young Adult Health and Wellness Unit's Youth Friendly Services program where I work with the program coordinators to convert health centres to be youth friendly. I will admit that my Peace Corps assignment is ideal and rare, and only came to me after I was removed from my original assignment for security reasons. I, like most volunteers in Guyana, started my service in a village working with pre-natal mothers and youths teaching life skills, basic nutrition, reproductive health and development and, curiously enough, phonics.

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer is not for the faint of heart and those who have endured their service have all come out changed but stronger people. My journey as a female volunteer has been a challenge and my journey as a minority

volunteer has been grueling. Most Guyanese people are under the belief that all Americans all are white with blonde hair with blue eyes, because that is all they see on television and in films. So I, as a minority volunteer, have the honor to teach Guyana about the rich diversity of America. It has not been easy. I have seen complete disappointment in the eyes of my Guyanese co-workers not getting a white American; but it has been rewarding for me to help redefine what being American means.

I know you may be envisioning a lot about Peace Corps and what it means to be a Volunteer but one thing I can say without any hesitation is to expect nothing, imagine nothing, envision nothing. The less you expect the better. A lot of people join Peace Corps with high hopes and big plans to save the world and end up being disappointed. They never open themselves to the unexpected riches that Guyana and Peace Corps service has to offer. Just be open to anything and everything. Peace Corps service is not like traveling; it is not like an internship; it is not like missionary work; and it is nothing like college. Peace Corps is Peace Corps, so be sure you want this. Being a Volunteer is a series of highs and lows and every Peace Corps Volunteer I have ever met says that there are a lot more lows than highs. But it comes down to the person, if you really want to be here, and your ability to adapt (in more ways than one).

I will end this by saying that being a Peace Corps Volunteer has to be one of the greatest experiences of my life and I would recommend it to anyone.

— Malane Cobourne, PCV GUY 17

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Dear Invitee,

Welcome!!! First of all we bet you've never heard of Guyana. You probably thought it was a country on the west coast of Africa, but you're wrong. Welcome to South America! Forget about having to learn Spanish; this is a Creoles country, more a part of the Caribbean than Latin/South America. The people, the music and the food are so diverse they offer something

for everyone's taste. The food is so "nice" we started off as "fine, fine" girls but would now be considered "tick up" from the large amounts of roti and 7-curry we consume. But not to worry, the heat creates a constant sauna that if you're lucky enough you'll sweat the weight right off.

We opted to write this letter jointly as we lazily enjoyed the a/c (a rare treat) in the Peace Corps lounge. Dallas is a health volunteer working with youth regarding health issues/life skills. Tosha is an education volunteering developing a "Parent Education" manual for a child labor organization. Work can be challenging but it's what you make of it and you can always find support and encouragement from other PCVs. So we hope to see you soon and don't forget to "walk" with your umbrella!

— Tosha Alba and Dallas Ellington, PCVs GUY 19

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Dear Invitee,

Congrats on receiving your invitation to join Peace Corps Guyana! We commend you on making it this far, as we know the process is lengthy and filled with anticipation. But now you can take a deep breath and look ahead to all the exciting changes the next two years in Guyana holds for you.

You may be anxious about leaving home, but you'll be surprised how quickly you will be able to call Guyana home. Guyana is the land of many water, and also many ethnicities, many religions, many mini-buses, and many delicious fruits. It's a diverse country and therefore volunteers are placed in a variety of sites, ranging from a quiet Amer-indian village with no electricity to the hustle and bustle of Georgetown, and everything in between. The transition from your busy American life will be made easier by your community that is anxiously awaiting your arrival and will greet you with open arms. Working in a developing country you will be presented with many frustrations. Your community members may seem apathetic in their work pace, but remember that as Americans we are accustomed to a fast-paced, go-go-go, work style. You may find your Guyanese co-workers telling you "don't take stress". Take their advice, take a deep breath, and go with the flow.

I am currently a Health volunteer located in a charismatic coastal town and my primary assignment is in the local Maternal Child Health Clinic. There, I talk to numerous mothers about breastfeeding, nutrition, and other pertinent health topics.

Don't think that it's all work and no play here in Guyana. You will have ample time to lime with your friends, gaff with your neighbors, or curl up in a hammock with a good book. Remember, you won't be alone in Guyana. You have fellow Peace Corps Volunteers and staff to help support you through the two years.

The next two years will be unlike any other two years of your life. Get excited. Come with an open mind and there will nothing you can't survive. Guyana and all of the current volunteers are anxiously awaiting your arrival. Come see what it's all about!

— Lauren Scott, PCV GUY 17

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Dear Invitee,

Bless up! You're coming to Guyana, the Land of Many Waters (and many ethnicities, many religions, many spicy dishes, many mini-buses, many mosquitoes, and many other manys). You may be anxious about leaving the good ol' U.S. of A., but don't worry, soon enough you'll be able to call Guyana home. Two years may seem like a long time now, but all of the laughter and delicious cook-up will help pass the time in the blink of an eye. After you arrive, you'll soon be welcomed with open arms by a Guyanese community ready to ease your transition. The comforting sounds of the local Soca, Hip-Hop, Reggae, and Celine Dion should also help to soothe your soul. I realize it's hard to know what to expect, but wild expectations are all part of the experience. Speaking of experience let me tell you a little bit about what I do down here.

I'm a Volunteer in the information technology sector, and I teach computer classes at a school attached to the Y.W.C.A. It's an all-girls vocational school filled with young women eager to gain employable skills. All but a few students have

never touched a computer before, so it's my job to start them at square one (i.e., turning on a computer) and get them to the finish line (i.e., producing professional-looking documents and spreadsheets). It sounds simple enough, but working in Guyana presents its own unique challenges. For instance, a spider crawling out of a computer in a classroom full of teenage girls tends to bring a lesson to a screeching halt. But these are the types of trials and tribulations that make the Peace Corps an experience of a lifetime.

Don't think, however, that Guyana is all hardship and strife. There will be ample opportunities to lime away the afternoon with your new buddies, or spend some quality time with yourself in a nice cozy hammock. Many Volunteers also get involved in community sports programs, health and/or environmental clubs, small businesses, and many other community activities. Your experience will really be what you make of it. So "breeze out" while you can, and prepare yourself for some serious change. Guyana is definitely ready to have you here—just remember to "walk on the corner."

— Eric Terpstra

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First Off, congratulations for making it this far! We all know this is no easy process, nor an easy decision to make. On behalf of all the Volunteers I would like to say welcome to Peace Corps/Guyana. You are definitely in for an experience like no other!

Guyana is a country of many people, many cultures, many ways of life all blended together. The struggles and challenges here are many, but the possibilities are endless. Every day is an eye-opener to a life much different than anything I have ever known. The country is full of rivers, forests, gold teeth, bling-bling, upbeat music, and all sorts of new food, sounds, and smells.

Anyway, I could go on forever, but it is best to see for yourself. I look forward to meeting you and hope that your time spent in Guyana is as enlightening and fulfilling as one can possibly dream.

— Andrea Taylor

Congratulations on deciding to join the Peace Corps/Guyana family!! I am a health Volunteer attached to a hospital in Region 3. I know that when I was preparing to leave all I wanted was to know what the heck I was getting myself into. That's why I think that these Volunteer letters are so important.

So I sweat—A LOT. I walk everywhere. I use an umbrella when it's not raining. I ride “boom boom” buses because I think it's fun. I eat curried everything. I talk to countless mothers about breastfeeding, HIV, vaccines, nutrition, and development. I have a Guyanese family that I love. I listen to Soca, Chutney, Reggae, and Dancehall music. I'm lousy at making roti. I use funny phrases like “me nah know” and “me nah able wit duh” in conversation. I go to tons of weddings. I am obsessed with my hammock. I teach computer classes. I visit schools, churches, homes; talk to pastors, teenagers, children, and teachers. I hand-wash my clothes. I hate ironing. I use a pointy broom. I dance to music in the streets, in the minibuses, in my head. I smile at people until they smile back. But that's just me. I can't tell you what to expect for yourself. I can tell you that during your service, you will be more frustrated, nervous, and depressed than you ever thought possible. You will also be happier, more content, and prouder than ever before. You will be discouraged AND inspired every day by the people of Guyana.

I guess the only advice I can really give you is to come to Guyana with an open mind and an open heart. You will be surprised how fast you will call it home.

— Elizabeth Bender







# PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Guyana and is based on their experiences. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight restriction on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Guyana (with the exception of clothes in big and tall sizes).

You are likely to be either teaching in a school or working as an educator in a health center or NGO, so keep that in mind when choosing appropriate professional clothing to bring. The climate is another consideration when packing. We recommend cotton or linen clothing for comfort, but synthetic materials or blends may be easier to wash and they maintain their shape better, especially during travel. Since clothing is generally washed by hand in Guyana, often with a scrub brush, clothing can wear out faster than normal so durability is important. There are a few dry cleaners in Guyana, but they are expensive. Avoid bringing items that are susceptible to mildew and mold (e.g., suede shoes).

If you bring new clothing or equipment, remove price tags to avoid possible taxes at customs. The Peace Corps provides some funds for the purchase of clothing, but it is advisable to take advantage of the greater variety and quality in the United States. There are many good tailors and seamstresses in Guyana who can make many styles of clothing at reasonable prices.

## **Packing List**

### ***Necessities***

- Sturdy backpack for traveling on three- to four-day trips.
- Pen drive (also called thumb drive or flash drive) holds more data than floppy disks (floppies get destroyed by the humidity).
- Envelopes (the ones that peel off an adhesive strip and stick). The humidity will destroy the adhesive on ordinary envelopes.
- A large bottle of your favorite brand of shampoo or conditioner.
- Camera (keep in mind that the climate here is tropical so very expensive cameras may not fare well in this climate).
- Regular film (A roll goes for about \$5-\$10; developing costs are comparable to that in the States).
- Back-up batteries for cameras that require special sizes.
- Digital cameras (Make sure you bring your USB cord, CD-ROMs for backups can be purchased in-country. 4 x 6 prints cost 25 cents. Also consider uploading your images to an online developer, having the prints sent to a U.S. address and then shipped back down to you by friends or family. Some Volunteers even have photo printers) Note that Advantix film can be developed at Acme or Galaxy photo shops in Georgetown.
- A few disposable cameras are useful if you don't want to use your regular or digital camera (e.g., to the river).
- Toothbrushes and toothpaste.
- Contact lens solution (very expensive down here—recommended to bring from home; remember Peace Corps discourages the use of contact lenses).

- Pocketknife (be sure to pack it within your checked baggage at the airport).
- Head lamp.
- Sturdy water bottle (e.g., Nalgene) (1 or 2).
- A hat/cap for protection from the intense sun.
- Sunglasses (avoid bringing expensive sunglasses unless you're especially good at looking after them).
- Bandannas (to use as sweat rags) (2).
- Long-sleeved shirts (good for sun protection and bug protection), preferably of a breathable material.
- Shoes that you will be comfortable in for two years (if you're hard to size); Tevas, Chacos, or Crocs are highly recommended by many Volunteers. Unless you plan on exercising, athletic socks and sneakers are hot and uncomfortable. If you do exercise, bring tennis/trail running shoes.
- Money belt (key to avoiding losing all your vacation money as you walk through Georgetown).
- Plastic storage bags (e.g., Ziploc bags). Note that these and garbage bags are readily available here.
- If you are a teacher or if you plan on teaching, bring comfortable closed-toe dress shoes. Some headmasters (i.e., principals of schools) are real sticklers about this.
- Bed sheets (should be thin and easy to wash and dry).

### ***Conveniences***

- There are plenty of books around amongst other Volunteers and in the Peace Corps Volunteer lounge, but bring a few to add to the mix. Also, a dictionary is always useful.
- Laptops (with the exception of IT Volunteers): You have the chance of being placed at a site without

electricity for two years. About one in every three Volunteers bring laptops. You may also wish to buy a cheap desktop (\$100-\$150 U.S.) when you get to your site and see your electricity situation. Voltage stabilizers are also helpful if you want to prevent damage to your computer due to power instability. Guyana does not charge customs on computers so shipping after arrival is also possible.

- Don't bring pots/pans; you can purchase them down here.
- Mattress covers are helpful for keeping the bed bugs away.
- Mobile phone: Only GSM services available.
- Photos from home. They're nice to decorate your house, and your Guyanese friends will love looking at photos of your friends back in the States.
- CDs, CD player, iPod, MP3 player, or other portable music player). Also bring small speakers and a solar charger. If tight on money, purchase a CD player that plays MP3s, and then burn all your MP3s to CD-ROMs. Many songs can fit on one disc.
- Pajama pants are nice to keep the mosquitoes away at night.
- The latest versions of the GRE, GMAT or MCAT study guides. While the Volunteer lounge has copies, they're rather outdated.
- Bottle/can opener (of the key chain variety).
- Map of U.S. or world can be useful for students or even self.
- A board game or cards (UNO, etc.) is nice to bring. Scrabble is popular and readily available amongst several Volunteers.
- Musical instrument (if you play).

- Breathable raincoat (if you can afford it or have it already).
- Dress socks—thin and light (these can protect your feet from mosquitoes in your home).
- Light jacket or long-sleeved shirt.
- Thin towels, like the ones from hotels (easier to pack and dry quickly) (2).
- Health Volunteers often benefit from a good medical reference book.
- Favorite brand of coffee (if you're a coffee person). Note that you can get locally grown stuff that is not bad; it can be boiled and then strained.
- IT Volunteers may benefit from small tool kit for computers. Victorinox (Swiss Army) sells a special pocket knife that IT Volunteers have found useful. Depending on your site, you may already have tools there, but a kit is always nice since you can't really do much to a computer without a screwdriver.
- Rechargeable batteries and a plug-in recharger and/or solar recharger.

### ***For Men***

- It is not necessary to purchase and/or bring down a blazer.
- At the most, bring down only two button-down long-sleeve shirts and matching ties. Male Volunteers who are health educators typically wear short-sleeve polo shirts and khakis.

### ***For Women***

- Showing midriff is unacceptable. Bring belts and shirts that are long in the torso.
- One pair of long shorts.

- Two to three dress slacks.
- Two summer dresses (if you have them).
- One semi-formal dress (for swearing-in ceremony). Custom tailoring is readily available and affordable.
- Two to three knee-length skirts.
- Three to four long skirts.
- Casual tops (tank tops can be worn outside of work, though they stretch out quickly with hand washing, so it's a good idea to bring some boy's cotton undershirts or tanks that won't stretch to put underneath clothes).
- Light cotton button-down shirt.
- One to three pairs of pajama pants.
- One to two half slips (e.g., one white and one black). These are available cheaply in Guyana.
- Soccer shorts (instead of cotton/spandex shorts).
- Loose-fitting shirts (you will want the breathability during the dry season).
- Casual clothes like jeans, tanks, fun T-shirts for around the house.
- Do not bring expensive jewelry; you will make yourself a target for thieves.
- If you use make-up, bring your personal supply down—the availability in-country is both expensive and of poor quality. If you have a specific brand of face wash, be sure to bring that down.
- Tampons are not always readily available and, when can be found, are expensive. Consider bringing a three-month supply and ask your family to send them after that. Pads ARE readily available and are NOT expensive.

## **Shoes**

- Sturdy pair of combined running and walking shoes.
- Hiking boots, but only if you are an avid hiker as they can be very hot to wear in this tropical climate.
- Two pairs of sport sandals (Tevras, Chacos, Crocs or similar brand).
- One or two pairs of casual sandals.
- One pair of dress shoes.
- Flip-flops (can be bought in Guyana).

## **General Advice**

- Due to sweat, hand washing and humidity, T-shirts and other clothes will slowly get destroyed. The detergents and sun drying are very abrasive on clothes (cotton will go faster than synthetics). So, for example, bring two pairs of jeans instead of just one. Any dryfit or quick-dry stuff is really great, especially for travel.
- Electricity can range between 110-240 volts (in the U.S. everything is 110 volts). You can purchase converters (transformers) in-country. Remember this when bringing down electrical appliances (e.g., laptops, chargers, etc.) Also, sometimes the current is not “clean,” i.e., it fluctuates.
- If you play soccer, it wouldn’t hurt to bring your soccer cleats and ball. Perhaps even a small ball pump.
- Some health Volunteers wear sandals (e.g., Tevas, Chacos, or Crocs) to work. Cheap shoes can be bought in-country.
- You can buy almost any clothes in-country, but size and quality could be a problem.

- Bring a few favorite recipes. Almost all kitchen items are available in Guyana. Keep in mind you may not have an oven at your site.
- Buy your iron in Guyana.
- Drink mixes (Crystal Light, etc.) are not as readily available down here—request that these be sent from home to your address.
- Peace Corps provides you with generic mosquito repellent and sunscreen.
- Note to family and friends: Things trainees like to get in packages include candies, hand sanitizers, magazines, photos from home, drink mixes, coffee, special teas, games, etc.



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

## Passport/Travel

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

## Medical/Health

- ☐ Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- ☐ If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.

- ☐ Arrange to bring a three-month supply of all medications (including birth control pills) you are currently taking.

## **Insurance**

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

## **Personal Papers**

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

## **Voting**

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

## **Personal Effects**

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

## **Financial Management**

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



# CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

## Peace Corps Headquarters

### Toll-free Number:

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

### Peace Corps' Mailing Address:

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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Inter-America and the Pacific	Ext. 1835	202.692.1835
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: <a href="mailto:guyana@peacecorps.gov">guyana@peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2515	202.692.2515
	Desk Assistant E-mail: <a href="mailto:guyana@peacecorps.gov">guyana@peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2516	202.692.2516
	Desk Assistant Email: <a href="mailto:guyana@peacecorps.gov">guyana@peacecorps.gov</a>	Ex. 2525	202-692-2525

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.544.1802
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 (24 hours)



# 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