

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# SURINAME



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



March 2008



# A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Invitee,

Congratulations on your invitation to the upcoming pre-service training in Suriname. Like most Invitees, I'm sure that you have many questions about Suriname and being a volunteer. This *Welcome Book* was developed by Volunteers and staff to provide you with information, friendly advice, and resources to start you on your path of discovery.

This book certainly will not answer all of your questions and may even raise more. There are many perspectives on Suriname. In time you will find your own answers, understanding and appreciation for the rich heritage of the Surinamese, the diverse blend of cultures, the beauty of the rain forest and rivers, and the hospitality of the people who welcome you into their lives.

Your role as a volunteer will change throughout your service. You will primarily be a learner at first as you observe the culture, gain language skills, and become integrated into your community. As you work with your counterpart(s) and community members to address your community's needs, you will become a teacher, a mentor, and a cheerleader. The sustainability of your impact will depend largely on what you don't do yourself but what you do with others as you help them help themselves.

A twenty-seven month commitment to the Peace Corps is not made easily or casually. It is a commitment you will make repeatedly and in many ways throughout your service. You will be challenged in every way imaginable and your patience will be tried. But if you come with an open mind, a warm heart, a good sense of humor, and a commitment to serve others and work hard, you will do well. Our trainers and staff are here to support

you, but you are the primary architect of what your success as a Volunteer will look like. We offer you an opportunity to serve the people of Suriname and to have an experience that may change the way you view the world and yourself.

We are looking forward to greeting you upon your arrival in Suriname. In the meantime, read the various books included in the resources page, and take care of things at home so that you can give all your energy to your new life and work in Suriname.

Ann Conway  
Country Director

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# PEACE CORPS/SURINAME HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



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

In 1994, the Peace Corps received a formal invitation from the Government of Suriname to establish a program in the country. It asked for the Peace Corps' assistance in rural community development of the interior Amerindian and African/Maroon communities. The formal agreement between the United States and Suriname was signed in January 1995.

Peace Corps staff arrived in March 1995. The first two Volunteers—with two years of Volunteer experience in another country—arrived in August. In September, the first training group, of eight married couples began the Peace Corps' 12-week intensive pre-service training program (PST). Since then, a new group has arrived annually.

The Peace Corps/Suriname program has changed since its start in 1995. In 1998, Suriname welcomed the first single Volunteers into the program, and in 1999, Volunteers were placed for the first time in the capital to work with health agencies on health issues facing rural communities.

Peace Corps/Suriname collaborates directly with various Surinamese government agencies in assigning Volunteers to rural communities. In addition to the Ministry of Regional Development (RGD), the Peace Corps works with the Bureau of Public Health and the Ministries of Education, Health, and Natural Resources. Through memoranda of understanding, Peace Corps Volunteers in Suriname also have worked with organizations such as UNICEF, the Foundation for Education

of the Moravian Church, the Medical Mission, and the World Wildlife Fund.

During the Peace Corps' first five years in Suriname, Volunteers were assigned to the rural community development project, serving in most regions of the country. This project aimed to improve the quality of life in rural communities by assisting residents in assessing and prioritizing their needs, rebuilding and improving community infrastructure, accessing outside resources, increasing income-generation opportunities, and strengthening local women's and youth groups. Peace Corps Volunteers facilitated the construction and renovation of schools and medical clinics as well as the creation of libraries. They helped villages develop clean water systems, latrines, after-school and during-school enrichment programs, and small enterprise development, including the installation of rice and cassava mills and bakeries. Villagers were empowered to develop proposals that successfully obtained funding from nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), foundations, and banks and other financial institutions to finance village projects. More importantly, Volunteers helped develop the capacity of their communities and organizations to conduct organizational planning and project management beyond the Volunteers' terms of service.

In 2006, Peace Corps, with the support of the government of Suriname, began two new projects: community health education (CHE) and micro-enterprise and tourism development (MED). The purpose of the CHE project is to improve the general health status of community members (men, women, boys and girls) in all targeted communities through health prevention education and capacity building in the areas of nutrition, water and sanitation, and HIV/AIDS education. The purpose of the MED project is to help the

people of Suriname improve their lives by working with government and NGOs to transfer business knowledge, skills and abilities. The focus of the program is income generation, agri-business, and ecotourism.

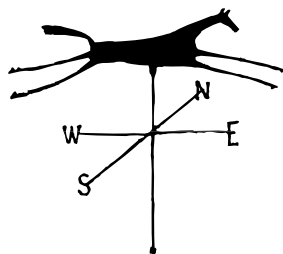
## **Current Activities of Peace Corps in Suriname**

In 2006, Peace Corps, with the support of the government of Suriname, narrowed its focus to two projects: Community Health Education (CHE) and Community Economic Development (CED). The purpose of the CHE project is to improve the general health status of community members (men, women, boys and girls) in all targeted communities through health prevention education and capacity building in the areas of nutrition, water and sanitation, and HIV/AIDS. The purpose of the CED project is to help the people of Suriname improve their lives by working with government, NGOs, and individuals to transfer business knowledge, skills and abilities. The focus of the program is promoting tourism from a business perspective, working with youth to increase employability, and supporting farmers in developing agri-business skills.

More than 300 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Suriname, and 44 are currently serving in the country. Peace Corps/Suriname recruits both singles and couples. Peace Corps/Suriname anticipates welcoming approximately 26 new Volunteers in 2008, most of whom will be placed in rural or peri-urban communities.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: SURINAME AT A GLANCE



## History

Suriname is named after her first inhabitants, the Surinen Indians. The first Europeans settled in Suriname in 1650, but conflicts with Indians and disease decreased their numbers. The first English settlers were sent by Lord Willoughby, the governor of Barbados. The Dutch later gained control of Suriname as part of the Peace Treaty of Breda in 1667. As part of the same treaty, the Dutch lost their colony in New York, then New Amsterdam.

After a troublesome period at the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries, agriculture flourished in Suriname. African slaves were brought in to work on the plantations and soon outnumbered the European settlers. Suriname became infamous in the Caribbean region for its poor treatment of slaves. Many slaves fled into the jungle. Known as Maroons, these escaped slaves often emerged from hiding to attack plantations and free other slaves.

In the 1850s, Dutch farmers arrived to start small farms. They imported Javanese laborers from Indonesia, but their attempt to establish the agricultural importance of Suriname was unsuccessful. Half of the Dutch farmers died within a year, and the Javanese laborers left the plantations after their five-year obligatory work period.

Slavery in Suriname came to an end in 1863. The Dutch were the last Europeans to abolish slavery. When the former African slaves left the plantations in 1873, they were replaced by Hindustani laborers from India. Like the Javanese, these



indentured laborers were required to work on the plantations for a set time period, after which they could return to India or extend their contracts. About 37,000 Hindustanis were brought to Suriname. A movement led by Mahatma Gandhi stopped the flow in 1916.

In the first half of the 20th century, the exploration of Suriname's natural resources began. Rubber, gold, and bauxite soon became important to the country's economy. Alcoa, an American bauxite company, obtained a large claim in the interior of Suriname for a period of 40 years. Bauxite from Suralco, the Surinamese subsidiary of Alcoa, was probably Suriname's most important contribution to the Allied forces during World War II since aluminium made from bauxite was indispensable in constructing airplanes.

During the World War II German occupation of the Netherlands, Suriname was left to fend for itself. After the war, the political status of the Dutch colonies changed. Suriname became an autonomous part of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in 1954.

One of the legacies of Dutch control of Suriname is the separation of different ethnic groups. The results of this segregation can be seen in the major political parties that emerged in the early 1950s. The National Party of Suriname (now known as NPK) found support among the Creoles of African origin, and the Progressive Reform Party (VHP) consisted mainly of Hindustanis.

After the 1973 elections, the NPK-backed government began negotiating with the Netherlands for independence. Suriname became independent on November 25, 1975. As part of the negotiations, the Netherlands agreed to support the young country with economic aid for 10 years, providing 4 billion guilders.

The years immediately following independence were challenging. A military coup in 1980, the withdrawal of development aid by the Dutch, and high inflation rates led to periods of political instability. Despite these challenges, democracy has prevailed in Suriname.

## **Government**

The capital of the Republic of Suriname is Paramaribo. The country is divided into 10 administrative districts: Paramaribo, Commewijne, Marowijne, Nickerie, Coronie, Saramacca, Para, Wanica, Sipaliwini, and Brokopondo. Each district has a district commissioner, who is assisted by a district secretary and *bestuur opzichters*, who are government representatives of the communities in the district.

The executive branch of the government is made up of a president, vice president, and cabinet of ministers. The current president, Ronald Venetiaan, is considered both the chief of state and the head of government. The current vice president is Ram Sardjoe. Cabinet ministers are appointed by the president from among the members of the National Assembly.

The president and vice president are elected by the National Assembly. If either one does not receive a constitutional majority vote in the National Assembly after two rounds of voting, they are selected by the larger People's Assembly (with 869 representatives from national, local, and regional councils). The president and vice president are elected for five-year terms. The next elections are scheduled in May 2010.

The legislative branch consists of a unicameral National Assembly with 51 seats, whose members are elected by popular vote to serve five-year terms.

## Economy

The country has a strong agricultural base, producing rice, citrus fruits, sugar, and bananas. Shrimp fishing is lucrative. The other main activities in this sector include livestock breeding and logging. Logging of Suriname's vast jungle interior occurs under a contract awarded to a Malaysian company. It is controversial and the government has come under pressure from the international environmental community to restrict the quantity of trees harvested. Mining, mainly of bauxite, is the principal industrial operation. Commercial gold-mining operates in the interior. There are also thought to be substantial reserves of iron ore, manganese, copper, nickel, and platinum, as well as moderate onshore oil deposits. Apart from processing ores and food products, the industrial sector is largely devoted to the manufacture of cigarettes, beverages, and chemicals.

Foreign aid, especially from the Netherlands, has been essential to Suriname's economy. Since 1993, this aid has been conditional on the introduction of economic reforms. The government of Suriname has been willing to implement all of the conditions. As a result, relations between the two governments have ebbed and flowed with proportional effects on the volume of aid from the Hague.

Suriname became a full member of the Caribbean trading bloc, CARICOM, in 1995. The country's principal trading partners are the United States, the Netherlands, Trinidad and Tobago, and Brazil.

In January 2004 Suriname's currency changed from the guilder (Sf) to the SRD (Surinamese dollar). One U.S. dollar is currently equal to SRD 2.75. There are several official money exchange offices (*cambios*) in Paramaribo. Their rates are usually several points higher than those at banks.



## **People and Culture**

Suriname has a unique mix of people, consisting of 37 percent East Indians, locally known as Hindustani; 31 percent Creoles; 15.3 percent Javanese; 10.3 percent Maroons; 2.6 percent Amerindians; 1.7 percent Chinese; 1 percent Caucasians; and 1.1 percent other. The population, which is concentrated in the coastal zone, is estimated at 439,117 (July 2006 estimate).

Dutch is the official language in Suriname, although for some ethnic groups (especially among the older generation), it is actually a second language. English is also widely spoken. Sranan Tongo, the native language of Creoles, is spoken by the younger Amerindian population, and is the lingua franca among others. Other languages spoken in Suriname include Javanese, Hindustani, Chinese, and the Maroon languages of Aucan, Saramaccan, Matawai, Saikiki, Kwinti, Paramaccan, and Aluku.

## **Environment**

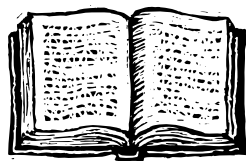
Suriname lies on the northern coast of South America, bordering the Atlantic Ocean to the north, Guyana to the west, French Guiana to the east, and Brazil to the south. The majority of Surinamese inhabit the Atlantic coastal region. The total area is 65,308 square miles (163,270 square kilometers), about the size of Florida.

The climate is tropical with high temperatures and humidity, moderated by trade winds. The geography is characterized mostly by tropical rain forest with a great diversity of flora and fauna. The main rainy season is from April to July, with a shorter one in December and January.

Current environmental issues facing Suriname include deforestation (timber is cut for export) and pollution of inland waterways by gold-mining activities.



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Suriname 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 Suriname**

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

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

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

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

### **[www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm](http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm)**

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

**<http://www.dna.sr/>**

The official site for the National Assembly of Suriname (in Dutch.)

**<http://www.surinameembassy.org/>**

Official Site for Suriname Embassy in the United States.

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

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

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

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

**[www.lanic.utexas.edu](http://www.lanic.utexas.edu)**

The site of the Latin American Network Information Center provides current news and resources on Latin America.

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

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

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

**<http://www.rpcvwebring.org>**

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

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

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

**[www.peacecorpswriters.org](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://groups.yahoo.com/group/pcsuriname>**

This site is hosted by RPCV's from Suriname. It is used for trainees, returned, and current Volunteers of Peace Corps/Suriname to stay in touch and post announcements. (Permission to join group must be requested before access is granted.)

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

**[www.surinam.net](http://www.surinam.net)**

Site of the "Suriname Info Desk"

**[www.stinasu.sr](http://www.stinasu.sr)**

Site of the Foundation for Nature Conservation in Suriname

## **International Development Sites About Suriname**

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

Information about the World Wildlife Fund's work in Suriname

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

Conservation International and their projects in Suriname

**www.paho.org**

Pan American Health Organization

**www.unesco.org**

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural  
Organization

## **Recommended Books**

1. Hoefte, Rosemarijn. *In Place of Slavery: A Social History of British Indian and Javanese Laborers in Suriname*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998.
2. Price, Richard. *The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People*. Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.
3. Price, Sally. *Co-Wives and Calabashes* (Women and Culture Series, 2nd ed.). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993.
4. Hoefte, Rosemarijn and Peter Meel (editors). *Twentieth Century Suriname: Continuities and Discontinuities in a New World Society*. Kingston; Jamaica, W.I.: Ian Randle Publishers, 2001.
5. Suparlan, Parsudi. *The Javanese in Suriname: Ethnicity in an Ethnically Plural Society*. Tempe: Arizona State University Program for Southeast Asian Studies, 1995.

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

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

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

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

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







# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

Mail typically takes three weeks to a month to travel between the United States and Suriname by air. A package sent by surface mail can take up to six months to arrive.

Mail for Peace Corps/Suriname is received at a post office box in Paramaribo. During pre-service training, your mail will be picked up and delivered by staff to your training site once a week. Once training is completed, mail is picked up by Peace Corps staff at the central post office and distributed to Volunteers' mailboxes in the Peace Corps office in Paramaribo.

Your mailing address will be:

Peace Corps/Suriname  
"Your Name"  
P.O. Box 9500  
Paramaribo-Zuid, Suriname  
South America

Mail can be sent from the central post office (Surpost) in Paramaribo, satellite post offices in districts, or a few stores in the capital. Packages to the United States can only be mailed from one post office located two kilometers from the Peace Corps office in Paramaribo.

Postcards and letters weighing less than 1 oz (a typical envelope and two page letter) from the continental U.S. requires 90 cents postage as of September 2007, check with [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com) for current rates.

On average, packages can take 3-4 weeks to arrive in Suriname from the U.S. It's typically hot in Suriname so select the contents accordingly. All packages require an appropriate box or envelope, postage, customs form, and customs form envelope. The appropriate customs form and the customs form envelope can also be found at the [www.usps.com](http://www.usps.com) website.

The Peace Corps has a mechanism in place for you and the communities you work with to access U.S. private sector funds. The Peace Corps Partnership Program, administered by the Office of Private Sector Initiatives, can help you obtain financial support from corporations, foundations, civic groups, individuals, faith-based groups, and schools for projects approved by the Country Director.

### ***Telephones***

Public telephones are available in the capital city and surrounding suburbs. To make a call from a land-line phone, you will need to purchase a telephone card. Telephone cards are readily available in small corner stores, at gas stations, and at any of the Telesur offices in Paramaribo. It is possible to place international calls using these cards.

Some villages in the interior of the country have telephone service, usually one phone at a local store that serves the entire village. Other villages have only high-frequency radios for communication. Because the possibilities of making calls from the interior are so limited, most Volunteers call home when they are in the capital.

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

Three computers are available for Volunteers' project-related work at the Peace Corps office in Paramaribo. Volunteers have initiated a sign-up system to ensure that those who wish to use the computers have equal access.

Internet connections in Suriname are not as fast as what you may be used to in the United States. Connections are typically slower in the afternoon, when people leave work or school and head for one of the many Internet cafés in Paramaribo. Prices at the internet cafés are reasonable (\$1.50 to \$2 per half-hour). Funds for Internet fees are included in your living allowance. Most Volunteers do not have Internet or e-mail access in their communities. Some Volunteers bring a laptop (or have it sent to them), however, it is not encouraged due to the possibility of theft and since not all sites in the interior have reliable electricity.

### ***Private donations***

Peace Corps regulations prohibit Volunteers from accepting donations directly. Donations can cause confusion about the role of the Volunteer, who might be perceived as a facilitator of goods and funds, rather than as a person who is working to build a community's capacity to identify local resources. You are not permitted to solicit materials or funds for your community during your first three months at site so that you have time to integrate into the community and help members identify possible projects. To ensure that any request for funding or donations is appropriate for your project and your community, you must have prior authorization from your Program Manager and the Country Director. To learn more about the Partnership Program, call 800.424.8580, extension 2170, e-mail [pcpp@peacecorps.gov](mailto:pcpp@peacecorps.gov), or visit [www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.donors.volproj](http://www.peacecorps.gov/index.cfm?shell=resources.donors.volproj).

### **Housing and Site Location**

Trainees are placed with a host family for most of pre-service training. Volunteers are located at sites in the interior, in districts or in the capital.

The sites in the interior are along the Suriname and Marowijne rivers or in the savanna region. Interior villages often do not have running water or electricity, or have those services for a limited number of hours each day. Houses are rustic, consisting of a thatch or tin roof and wood-plank walls. Because villages are asked to provide housing for Volunteers, the size, condition, and style of housing can vary widely. Some Volunteers are placed in District sites best characterized as small towns; or they may work in the capital city, Paramaribo. Volunteers living in these areas generally have access to running water and electricity day and night as well as other conveniences.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

Volunteers receive a living allowance in the local currency (Suriname Dollars—SRD), which is deposited into a bank account in Paramaribo. Volunteers based outside of Paramaribo receive a transportation allowance, which pays for one trip to the capital per quarter. This allowance is also deposited into the bank account and is intended to cover one trip per quarter for Volunteers to come to the capital to take care of banking and other needs. Volunteers who need to pay rent also receive a housing allowance.

It is important to manage your money. Setting up a system of budgeting will be important. The living allowance is determined by an annual living allowance survey to ensure the amount is sufficient to meet basic expenses. In the interior, there is little to spend money on other than food and beverages. However, things tend to be more expensive in the interior, so most Volunteers buy a supply of food to take to their sites when they are visiting the capital.

Transportation between interior sites can be expensive. Volunteers are expected to live within the means of the living allowance. Peace Corps discourages use of outside funds brought or sent from home as it prevents you from living at the same level as the people in your community. You may, however, want to bring a small amount of money for travel in Suriname and surrounding countries during your vacation time. Very few places in Suriname accept credit cards, and those that do only accept American Express, MasterCard or Visa; likewise, a few ATMs accept major credit cards. Bank fees between 1 percent and 5 percent are not uncommon when using a credit card in Suriname.

## **Food and Diet**

Because of the diversity of cultures represented in Suriname, there is a variety of food options. In rural villages, rice is a staple of the diet. Meals usually consist of a large quantity of rice served with a small piece of meat and a small serving of vegetables. Most people in the interior also grow their own cassava and other vegetables to sell at markets. Volunteers are encouraged to plant their own gardens for a steady supply of fresh vegetables and to model a healthy diet.

Vegetarians can maintain a healthy diet in Suriname. Adequate levels of protein are available locally in texturized vegetable protein products, and in a variety of beans, lentils, and nuts. Many vegetarians find that the greatest difficulty lies in explaining vegetarianism to members of their community, where meat is highly valued and served at many social gatherings.

Learning to prepare local cuisine can be rewarding. Suriname has many of the spices and ingredients needed to prepare many ethnic dishes. Chinese, Indonesian, Creole, Indian, and American food is available at restaurants in the capital.

## Transportation

Most Surinamese in the city and district use public transportation, usually small buses that accommodate 15 to 26 people. These buses run on regular routes and are regulated by the government. Each route has a name or number and an established fare (generally 1 SRD to 2 SRD). After 9 p.m., fares increase and some routes are not available. Most Volunteers rely on buses. There are also several reputable taxi companies.

Roads to the interior are dirt and bauxite and receive little maintenance. During the rainy seasons, mud holes and erosion are common. In the dry seasons, roads become dusty washboards. Travel on rural roads can be rough.

Most Volunteers make a portion of the journey to their sites in mini-vans or “DAF trucks.” DAF trucks are essentially semi-trailers filled with old airline seats or wooden benches. The ride is rarely comfortable, and the trucks are typically filled to capacity with people and their cargo. Some Volunteers must then transfer to a dugout canoe from the DAF truck to reach their site. The average travel time from the capital to a Volunteer’s site is about four hours. For some, travel time may be twice that.

***Peace Corps Volunteers are not permitted to operate any motorized vehicles or ride on the back of motorcycles or mopeds.***

Part of the Volunteer settling-in allowance may be used to buy a locally appropriate form of transportation, such as a bicycle. Life vests are issued to those using boats for transportation.

***Helmets must be worn when riding a bicycle; a life vest must be worn whenever traveling on water.***

## **Geography and Climate**

Suriname is in the tropics, and much of the country is covered in rainforest. Sites located in the savanna region are drier, but still experience high humidity. The average temperature is 90 degrees Fahrenheit with 80 percent humidity. During the dry seasons, temperatures climb higher and rain may not fall for up to three months. The rainy seasons provide a brief respite from the heat and bring a lot of moisture. Clothing is subject to mildew in the rainy seasons. The country's red clay soil and mud from the roads will stain clothes.

## **Social Activities**

Establishing relationships with members of your community is vital for almost every aspect of life as a Volunteer. Not only will you feel more connected, but the more community contact you have, the easier it will be to access information and resources to develop projects. Birthdays and local holidays are celebrated with food, dancing, and sometimes fireworks. Work parties provide social interaction, as does involvement in the daily activities of life. Men hunt and fish in small groups and work together on their farms. Women may share daily chores, wash together at the river and tend gardens.

In the capital, Volunteers enjoy restaurants, participating in arranged 5 km walks, listening to music and spending time at the riverfront area. Nightlife is generally safe in groups.

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

Beginning with staging in Miami, Peace Corps/Suriname will expect you to represent yourself as a professional development worker. As a professional, your appearance is very important just as it is for professionals in the U.S. Cleanliness, neatness (no ripped clothing), and personal hygiene are highly valued by Surinamese people. Walking shorts, not basketball-type shorts, and sandals, not flip-flops, may be acceptable for some in-country traveling situations and at appropriate occasions during technical training. Tank tops for men are not appropriate in urban and semi-urban settings. Light, short-sleeve shirts for men and blouses for women are best for Pre-Service Training but t-shirts are also okay if they are neat and in keeping with professional attire.

In general, professional clothing in the capital and more urban sites is more conservative than in the Interior. Men dress in casual business attire: short or long-sleeve collared shirts, trousers, and closed-toe shoes. Women's attire tends to vary more, but skirts or slacks with a t-shirt or blouse and nice sandals or closed-toe shoes are common. Women rarely wear their hair loose, so bring some hair ties or clips. Volunteers who live in a village setting usually follow the norms specific to that community: traditional garments, shorts, sandals, and t-shirts.

To maintain the Peace Corps' professional image, men are not permitted to wear earrings or long hair (no ponytails), nor are Volunteers permitted to wear nose rings or apparent piercings, even though some of these styles are found in parts of Surinamese society. Many Surinamese associate these styles with specific groups or activities (tourists, counterculture lifestyles, drug enthusiasts, etc.) that are not compatible with the image that the Peace Corps wants



to project. We believe the Peace Corps experience is worth making these changes and adjustments. Once a Volunteer has successfully integrated into his/her community, it may be possible to wear these styles of jewelry.

The people of Suriname are generally friendly. Greetings are very important. Handshakes are appropriate for both men and women. In some settings, one is expected to greet each person at the gathering. When meeting someone for the first time, handshakes and names are exchanged, surname first. You will receive more information on Surinamese cultural norms during training.

## **Personal Safety**

Information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Health Care and Safety chapter. These issues 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 rich or 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 rarely in Suriname. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help Volunteers reduce their risks and enhance their safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Suriname. At the same time, you are expected to take primary responsibility for your own safety and well-being.

## Rewards and Frustrations

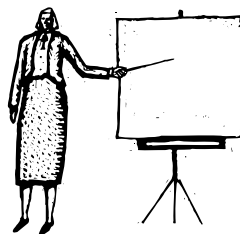
The lack of infrastructure in Suriname, as in many developing countries, can cause frustration with travel, communications, and Volunteers' ability to help their community complete tasks quickly. The pace of life in Suriname is slower than what you may be used to in the U.S. People do not follow strict times for meetings or gatherings. Functions may be canceled because of rain or some other reason. In Maroon communities, where people live close together, privacy is not a strong value. People here have a different sense of personal space and think nothing of touching or using what you may consider your personal belongings. In Amerindian villages, you may have more personal space and privacy, but you may also experience feelings of isolation. Houses are farther apart, and there is less emphasis on visiting daily with other members of the community. Members of both cultures are quick to observe physical characteristics and comment on them. Volunteers sometimes are the subject of comments such as, "You got fat!" or "You have a big butt!" In most cases, these comments are meant as a complement! Overall, Americans are well-received, but they are automatically viewed as wealthy. It is not uncommon to be asked for one's possessions. All of these things can take a physical and emotional toll on Volunteers. On the other hand, Peace Corps Volunteers learn more about the local cultures than most other outsiders do. They also learn about themselves and their own culture. Being accepted into a community and culture, learning about differences, discovering commonalities, and sharing your knowledge while you learn from them make the frustrations worth it.

Peace Corps service offers you opportunities you may never find elsewhere. You are likely to leave the Peace Corps a stronger person than you ever thought you could be.

## NOTES



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training (PST) consists of 11 weeks of intensive in-country training in five major areas: language (in Dutch, Sranan Tongo, Saramaccan, or Aukan), cross-cultural adaptation, technical skills, health, safety and security, and administration. Peace Corps/Suriname uses a community-based training (CBT) model. This means that most of your learning will take place at the community level and is experientially based. For most of the 11 weeks, you will stay with a Surinamese host family—sharing meals, language, and other experiences which provide an important opportunity for you to work on cultural understanding and adaptation. At times you will return to a central training site to share experiences with other trainees, participate in sessions, and coordinate various training activities.

Host families are carefully chosen by the training staff based on suggestions from current Peace Corps Volunteers. The families are carefully screened by the Peace Corps medical officer (PCMO) and the safety and security coordinator (SSC). Some of the families live within walking distance of the training site; others require the use of public transportation to reach the site. Most homes have electricity and running water (tap points). Since some people in these communities sleep in hammocks, it is possible you may sleep in one. PST staff is available to support you during this homestay. Staff members are also important resources to help you process your experiences in cultural understanding and integration.

### Volunteer Comment:

“Homestay is an invaluable time with a host family. You are fed, cared for, watched, and questioned with a continuing curiosity. Our homestay family generously opened their

home and lives to us, providing guidance and insight into Suriname culture, lifestyle and behavior. Try to speak the language with your host family, their friends, and neighbors as often as possible. This will be your best opportunity for a jump start with the language. Suriname is a unique country with several fascinating ethnic groups and homestay is a terrific way to learn about a certain group. If you're able to attend a family wedding, baptism, birthday party, or funeral, go for it! We toured our family's farm and their grandchildren often visited. Peace Corps supports homestay hosts financially, so you don't need to feel as though you are using their food or fuel. We didn't bring gifts when we arrived because we didn't know our family. But we all gave thank you gifts at the end of our stay because we were extremely grateful for their patience and hospitality.”

Trainees are divided into two or three groups or communities at a community-based training site. The site placement is based on the language you will need during your assignment. The language and technical trainers assigned to each training site conduct formal classes and support you in completing self-directed, community-based projects and activities. Although you will spend much of your time in language classes, you will also have classes on cross-cultural, technical, community development, and health and safety topics. Assignments and projects in the community will provide trainees with experiential learning based on the content of the classes.

In addition to community-based activities, you will join your full training group at a central location for certain general sessions such as medical, safety, and administration. These sessions also give you time to reconnect with your group and share experiences. Toward the end of PST, you will also have the opportunity to meet with your counterpart or community

partner at a two-day conference. Together, you will discuss the relationship between the Peace Corps Volunteer and the community, the expectations of the host agency, or community and the skills and experiences you bring to the assignment. You will also develop a work plan to guide your first three months at site.

Another important aspect of pre-service training is assessment, a process that continues throughout Peace Corps service. During training, you will evaluate yourself and be assessed by training staff. The goal of assessment is to provide specific feedback concerning your progress in relation to the pre-service training competencies for effective Volunteer service. Failure to meet the competencies could prevent a Trainee from becoming a Volunteer.

Trainees' performance is evaluated in all five major areas of pre-service training. In addition to meeting the required competencies, you must demonstrate personal behaviors that positively reflect and support the goals and image of the Peace Corps in Suriname. As part of the assessment process, you will also complete a self-evaluation on personal attributes, such as taking initiative, motivation, cultural and social sensitivity, responsibility, flexibility, and emotional maturity. This process encourages you to reflect on your original motivation for joining the Peace Corps and on your current level of commitment so that by the time you are invited to swear-in as a Volunteer, you are making an informed, serious decision that will sustain you through two years of service.

### ***Technical Training***

Technical training prepares you to work in Suriname by building on the skills you have and by helping you develop new skills needed to be an effective development worker. The Peace Corps staff, Surinamese nationals, and other

Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training includes sessions on the economic and political environment in Suriname and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Surinamese agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them.

### ***Language Training***

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

Additional help and tutoring is provided to trainees who need more support in learning the language.

In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is for you to acquire a basic foundation so that you can continue to develop language skills once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn-in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies for ongoing language learning during your service.

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

During most of your training, you will live with a Surinamese host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Host families go through an



orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain Peace Corps' mission and goals, their role in your training and how they can support you in adapting to life in Suriname. This experience is a rich, rewarding learning opportunity. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will learn community development tools and techniques, project planning, monitoring and reporting, conflict resolution, gender and development, and Suriname political structures.

### ***Health and Wellness 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 Suriname. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid contracting HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are also covered.

### ***Safety and Security Training***

During the safety and security 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

Peace Corps is committed to ongoing quality training throughout Volunteer service. 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 three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *Reconnect and Project Design and Management 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 four months. The focus of the training is to strengthen the tools you need to implement projects within your community.
- *Mid-Service Training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to review the successes and challenges of the Volunteer's service, to share ideas, to review the project and get feedback, and to provide additional skills and support as necessary. This workshop is usually held after one year of service.
- *Close-of-Service Conference*: Prepares Volunteers for their re-entry into American culture, school, and the job market. Volunteers are also encouraged to identify ways they can support the Peace Corps' third goal of taking their experience back home. Volunteers also plan how they will make the transition out of their project and their communities. Peace Corps staff uses the conference to obtain feedback on the project, training, and issues, such as Volunteer support.

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



# YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN SURINAME



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 Suriname maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer and a medical assistant who support Volunteers' primary healthcare needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are available at local hospitals that meet American standards. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to Panama or to the United States.

## Health Issues in Suriname

Suriname has a tropical climate, which, more than likely, is vastly different from the climate where you live. Skin infections, for example, are common and easily worsen in Suriname's climate. Because of this, you must wash your hands and feet often. Dermatitis, skin abscesses, fungus infections, diarrhea (of many types and of varying severity), common colds, bronchitis, sore throats, and earaches are common medical problems among Volunteers in Suriname. Most Volunteer illnesses can be treated in-country.

If your site is in the interior of Suriname, a malaria-endemic area, you will take mefloquine as a malaria prophylaxis. Mefloquine has been shown to be the most effective and practical drug for preventing malaria in areas with significant chloroquine resistance, but it is not foolproof. Therefore, you will need to use protective clothing, insect repellent, and a mosquito net (provided by Peace Corps/Suriname)

as well. For Volunteers who are not able to use mefloquine, doxycycline is recommended. Although Malarone has been approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration for use as a malaria prophylaxis, it is recommended only for Volunteers who have a contraindication for, or intolerance to, both mefloquine and doxycycline. ***Volunteers must continue prophylaxis medication for the duration of their stay in a malarial area. Failure to do so may result in administrative separation from the Peace Corps.***

Accidents associated with transportation are a serious concern in Suriname. You must wear a helmet when riding a bicycle and you should wear a seat belt when riding in motor vehicles that have them. You are not allowed to drive a motorized vehicle and are not allowed to drive or ride on the back of a motorcycle under any circumstance. You must always wear a life jacket (provided by the Peace Corps) on boat trips.

Eating a balanced diet and drinking a lot of fluids go a long way in maintaining your health. This takes planning and creativity. Volunteers in small villages often deal with dehydration, which makes any other health problems worse.

Dentists are available only in Paramaribo, which may be far from your site. You will need to take great care in protecting your teeth by brushing and flossing daily. And remember to watch for stones in rice!

## **Helping You Stay Healthy**

Peace Corps provides you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Suriname, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.



During PST, you have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a **three-month supply** of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here, and it may take several months for shipments to arrive. You might want to consider switching from name brand to generic drugs before you arrive, as the Peace Corps medical officer may not be able to purchase certain name-brand prescriptions. Be advised that the medical office does not carry every type of birth control pill.

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

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, you must accept a certain amount of responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions 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 Suriname is to take the following preventive measures:

*Food and Water Precautions.* Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These diseases include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery,

tapeworms, and typhoid fever. While water in Suriname's capital is safe to drink, you will probably have to treat your drinking water at your site using a filter, by boiling it, or by adding iodine or chlorine bleach. In addition, it is advisable to play it safe by not eating street foods when you first arrive, to give yourself time "to adjust" to the local bacteria. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Suriname during pre-service training.

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

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

*Prompt Reporting.* Finally, 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 or injuries.

## **Women's Health Information**

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



for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer becomes pregnant and 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.

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

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

### ***Medical Kit Contents***

Ace bandages  
Adhesive tape  
*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*  
Antacid tablets  
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)  
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)  
Aquatabs (for water purification)  
Un-Aspirin, Acetaminophen 500 mg  
Band-Aids  
Benadryl  
Butterfly closures  
Clotrimazole cream 1% (antifungal cream)  
Condoms  
Decongestant (nasal and sinus; Sudanyl; non-drowsy, sugar free)  
Dental floss  
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)  
Gloves (two- pairs)  
Ibuprofen 200mg  
Insect repellent stick

Lip balm (Chapstick)  
Maximum strength hydrocortisone anti-itch cream (1%)  
Electrolytes for oral rehydration  
Tempa Dot (Single-use Clinical Thermoter)  
Menthol eucalyptus (for coughs)  
Scissors  
Sepasoothe throat lozenges  
Sterile gauze pads  
Sterile eye wash  
Sunscreen lotion (SPF 30+)  
Tweezers  
Whistle

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

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

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or non-prescribed 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 are helpful if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

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

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

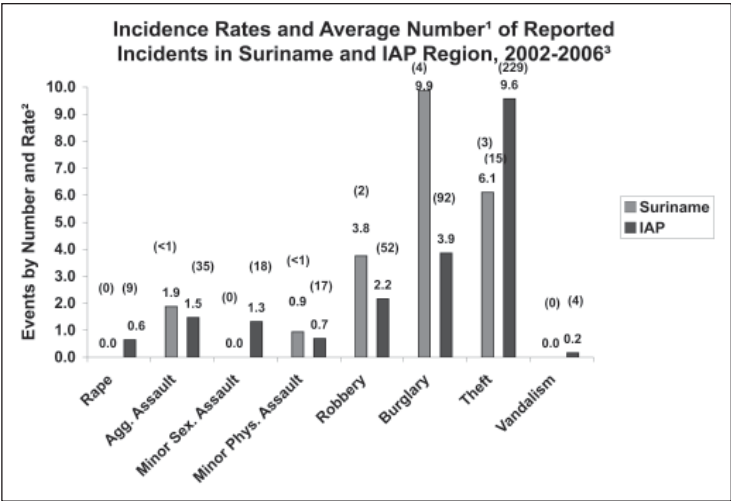
In March 2003, the Peace Corps created the Office of Safety and Security with its mission to “foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability of all Peace Corps’ safety and security efforts.” The new office is led by an Associate Director for Safety and Security who reports 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 Suriname as compared to all other Inter-America



<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 Suriname 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.



and Pacific (IAP) region programs as a whole, from 2001–2005. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust and second, contact the Country Director, the Peace Corps Medical Officer, or the Safety and Security Coordinator (SSC). 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 Office of the Inspector General (OIG) and the Regional Security Officer (RSO.) This information is protected from unauthorized further disclosure by the Privacy Act. Reporting the crime also helps prevent your further victimization and protects your fellow Volunteers.

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

## **Security Issues in Suriname**

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

## **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 Suriname, 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 Suriname may require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of 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. Always walk with a companion at night.

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

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

The Peace Corps/Suriname office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be offered in newsletters and in memoranda from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. You will also participate in an annual emergency action plan (EAP) drill.

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

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 services such as medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Suriname'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 Suriname 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 their SSC. Peace Corps has **established protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

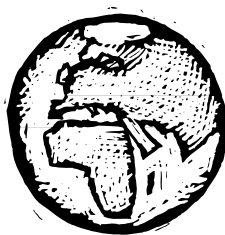
## NOTES







# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Suriname, 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 Suriname.

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

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

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

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

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

Women in Suriname generally have traditional roles. Especially in rural areas, they do most of the work in the fields, run the household, prepare meals, clean, and rear the children. Men are dominant, which means they are expected to smoke, drink, pursue women, be strong, and discipline their

wives and children. In Maroon cultures, it is acceptable for men to have more than one wife. Gender roles, particularly those for women, will be quite apparent in the day-to-day life of your village.

In Paramaribo, it is not uncommon for women to receive stares, comments, and offers of dates or sex on the street and in other situations. Caucasian women are obvious targets because they are so visible and have a reputation for being liberal in male-female relationships. The Peace Corps recognizes the challenges these situations present for female Volunteers in Suriname and will suggest ways to handle the situations during pre-service training.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“One of the most difficult things to adjust to here is the inequality of chores for men and women. Women are expected to do all the household chores, care for children, and work on farms, while men tend to do limited farming, hunting, and fishing. Often, women who receive help from their husbands are considered lazy or bad wives.”

“Most new Volunteers have a hard time with the way women are objectified. Catcalls, kissing sounds, and the like are everyday occurrences on the streets of Paramaribo. Although you never quite get used to it, you learn not to let it get to you.”

“Single women will have to work against the cultural norm: If you are single, you should be seeking a man. Women tend to ‘take a man’ earlier here than in America, and ‘work’ is not really a legitimate reason not to have a man. In some communities, it is not uncommon to have multiple partners. ‘No’ needs to be firm and repeated.”

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

As the country's population consists of several different ethnic groups, the Surinamese have a high tolerance and acceptance of other cultures. This does not mean that people will not be curious about your background and any visual differences.

Most Volunteers in the Peace Corps/Suriname program have been Caucasian. Because of the variety of ethnic groups represented in Suriname, African Americans, Asian Americans, or Hispanic Americans may be seen as Surinamese. In some cases, this can be a benefit, but it can also be a source of cultural misunderstandings. Volunteers of color, for example, may be expected to interact socially with more ease, even though they face the same challenges in learning new cultural norms and languages.

### ***Volunteer Comment***

“One of Suriname's strengths is the variety of ethnicities represented. While relations among the various groups are generally good, each is heavily stereotyped. People will assume that you are a member of one of the groups represented here in Suriname if you are not white. The assumption is that most Americans are white. People have no qualms about pointing out differences in skin color and applying the local stereotype.”

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

Peace Corps/Suriname has been fortunate to have both younger and older Peace Corps Volunteers serving in the country since 1995. Age has not been a hindrance to being successful. Older Peace Corps Volunteers are normally treated with more respect, a common practice in Suriname's culture.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“Age is something to be respected in Suriname, more so than in America. Elders are not expected to do much physical labor, which may be frustrating for Americans who are used to being active. It is also tough adjusting to live in the way a villager might.”

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

As tolerant as the Surinamese are, generally speaking, the tolerance does not extend to people with a different sexual orientation. In the capital, you may encounter individuals who are gay or lesbian, but in the rural areas where most Volunteers live, homosexuality and bisexuality are taboo, and people do not talk about them. Openly homosexual Volunteers may encounter difficulties.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“While there is a small gay community in the capital, openly gay people tend to be verbally harassed. Alternative lifestyles of any kind are not generally acknowledged or accepted in rural villages. I have been surprised to find that even among the most liberal development organizations, social service organizations, and healthcare providers, fear of alternative lifestyles is common.”

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

As with the multi-ethnic diversity of Suriname, there are also a variety of religious beliefs and practices. Whether or not you choose to go to a church makes little difference to Surinamese. However, you will be asked about your religious beliefs, as this is an important part of life in Suriname. Attending church with friends and community members is an excellent way to learn more about the culture.

## **Volunteer Comment**

“Suriname hosts many religions: Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism, and traditional belief systems. People of differing beliefs tend to coexist peacefully. Unfortunately, many traditional medicines and cultural ceremonies have been lost as a result of the influx of Western religions to the interior of Suriname. Attending the local church, temple, or mosque can be a good way to keep up with what is going on in the village, even if you do not agree with the religious beliefs.”

## ***Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities***

As a disabled Volunteer in Suriname, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. There are few services available for people with disabilities in the capital. In the field, local support is likely to be inadequate to accommodate a physically challenged Volunteer.

That said, 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 Suriname without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. Peace Corps/Suriname staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations in training, housing, job sites, and other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

## NOTES







# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



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

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds total, with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag. Take valuable items in your carry-on to prevent theft en route. Sharp objects should be placed in your checked bags to avoid confiscation at security checkpoints. Please check the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website for a detailed list of permitted and prohibited items at [www.tsa.gov](http://www.tsa.gov).

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution. Most flights to Suriname transit through Port of Spain, Trinidad. Camouflage of any type is not permitted. Make sure that any garments, travel items, tools or other items are not in your carry-on bags. If your bags are searched by customs officials, the items will be confiscated.

Remember that you will need to take your bags to your site with you. Hard suitcases can be difficult to transport on a bus or boat.

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

Both 110 volts, 60 cycles (the U.S. standard), and 220 volts can be found in houses in Suriname. (Often the electrical outlets are very near to each other and easily confused, so you need to be aware of which outlet to use.) Some Volunteers have electricity in their houses; those in communities with generators or solar panels may have it for only a few hours a day. We recommend that you bring only small, battery-operated appliances that can also be plugged in. Small adapters are needed for U.S. plugs; these are inexpensive and easy to purchase in Suriname.

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

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly allowance, which should cover your expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards are accepted at a few hotels in the capital, but can rarely be used in other locations in Suriname. It is not uncommon for a bank fee between 1 percent and 5 percent to be added to the amount of the purchase. Traveler's checks are difficult to cash, but they are handy when traveling outside of Suriname and are easier to replace if they are stolen. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

To avoid the risk of theft, you should not bring excess cash or expensive or valuable items. You are personally responsible for safeguarding your personal cash, living and other allowances, personal property, and Peace Corps property in your possession. Peace Corps has no means of safeguarding your personal items.

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

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). To ensure that annual leave is an integral part of a Volunteer's service, annual leave is discouraged during the beginning or end of service, and should not be taken during the first or last three months of service, except when the Country Director approves leave under special circumstances, or in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Please inform your Country Director of visitors since the office may need to know their whereabouts in the event of an emergency. Extended visitor stays at your site are not encouraged and require permission from your Country Director. The Peace Corps cannot provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance. Visitors are also encouraged to report to the American Embassy for reasons of safety and security.

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

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

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

Volunteers in Suriname 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 may include riding on boats, airplanes, buses, minibuses, trucks, and walking.

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

This is not a requirement, but if you wish to bring something, a small token of friendship will be appreciated. Some gift suggestions include knickknacks for the house; pictures, books, or calendars of American scenes; souvenirs from your area; hard candies that will not melt or spoil; or photos to give away.

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

If feasible, you will have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions.

However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually one to three hours from another Volunteer.

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

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services (OSS) provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the OSS immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The number for the OSS 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 Suriname?**

International phone service to and from Suriname is relatively good. The Surinamese phone company has offices in major cities (i.e., Paramaribo, Brokopondo, Albina, and Nieuw Nickerie), which offer direct lines to the United States. Additionally, you may be able to call the United States from some private phones in the major urban areas. The phone company recently introduced calling cards, which can be used with both regular phones and cell phones for local and international calls.

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

Peace Corps/Suriname will provide cell phones to those Volunteers whose sites have cellular network coverage. It is not recommended that you bring your own cell phone, as not all cell phones will work in Suriname. They can be purchased locally and are relatively inexpensive.

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

#### **Should I bring my computer?**

There are numerous Internet cafés in Paramaribo, Nieuw Nickerie, and other semi-urban areas. Some Volunteers are placed at sites where a computer is not necessary for their job. At some sites a computer could prove more of a hindrance than a help. That said, many Volunteers do bring laptops with them. Note that the Peace Corps cannot be responsible for any loss, damage, or theft of computers brought by Volunteers. The Peace Corps office in Paramaribo provides computers with Internet connection in the Volunteer Resource Center.

The Peace Corps has strict guidelines regarding Volunteer-created and maintained blogs and websites. These policies are outlined in the Volunteer Handbook and will be reviewed during pre-service training.

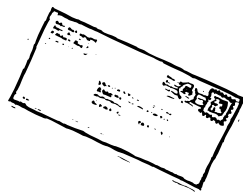
If you have any other questions contact your country desk staff at Peace Corps by calling 800-424-8580, extension 2515, 2516 or 2525.

## NOTES





# WELCOME LETTERS FROM SURINAME VOLUNTEERS



Dear Suriname Invitees,

Welcome to Suriname! Welcome to a land of incredible natural beauty with its flowing rivers, grasslands, deep green rainforest, and unique cultural diversity. Peace Corps Suriname has a relatively young staff, in terms of being new to the office here. Together with a few who have years of experience and a wealth of knowledge, the staff is diligently working to make your own experience a successful and satisfying one. Soon, you will join the Sur12s and Sur13s who are spread out around the country in the capital city of Paramaribo, in district regions within 5 hours of travel to the capital, and the interior, which is reached by local bus, truck, boat, or air transport. There are also two of us from my own group, Sur11, remaining here in Suriname. Soon, I hope that you will all see why the two of us have extended for a third year and why all of the other volunteers and staff enjoy Suriname. We look forward to meeting you!

Sincerely,

—Joe Shaffner, Peace Corps Volunteer Coordinator

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Dear Prospective Volunteers,

Suriname, a land of ever-changing faces, at least it is for us as a PC volunteer couple. After only four months in-country every day continues to be filled with new experiences. These experiences are what long-lasting memories are made of – the people, the cultures, the languages, the landscape, all coming together to form these memories. Not to be fooled however, there are also frustrations and low times – times where you question why. But isn't that found in anything that you do?

Life here in Suriname is rich in every aspect: you make it what it is. You decide! For us, it is Suriname, a place where we are making long-lasting memories and friendships.

Sincerely,

—Danny and Shirley Sherrod

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Welkom in Sranan!

My friends from Philadelphia could hardly believe that the girl who once owned \$2,000 worth of makeup was going to live in a hut in the Amazon.

Make no mistake about it; you will give up a lot of the comforts of home when you decide to join Peace Corps Suriname. You will find yourself dying for Starbucks or willing to sell your soul for a bottle of cranberry juice. However, after a recent trip to the States to attend a wedding, I realized that I missed just as many things about Suriname.

Here in Suriname, I live in a small and isolated Amerindian village of less than 100 people. The village is home to two types of ethnicities, the Arrowak and Carib Indians.

Amerindians are stereotypically shy people, and it took a while for the kids to warm up to me, but today they spend hours in my house coloring, playing games or doing homework.

Getting to my site involves taking a thoroughly beaten up bus that runs 6 times a week. Break downs and stranding are common. The trip is anywhere from 2 to 6 hours depending on the season. I also need to take a makeshift ferry boat or canoe and I frequently have to walk the 4 kilometers from the river to my house.

My house is very plain. I have a tin roof and wood board walls. I don't have running water but there is occasional electricity. I cook on a propane stove and wash my dishes and clothes in a jungle creek (on a washboard just like in Little House on the Prairie).

In the evening when the heat of the day has dissipated, I go out jogging with some of the women in my village. It is

common to see monkeys, parrots, tarantulas, toucans and even jaguars on our evening runs.

Over the last year and a half I have learned to speak both Sranan Tongo and Dutch. I have added the skill "can build thatched roofs" to my resume. I have made my own traditional ceremonial outfit which is the envy of many of the women in my village. I have worked with my community to make casiri (a traditional homemade liquor), bake cassava bread and cleared a regulation size football field using only machetes. I have laughed, loved and cried with the women, men and children in my village.

Though this remote little corner of the world couldn't be more different from the Philadelphia I left behind, I am now happy to call it home.

—Kat Edwards SUR 12  
AKA - Jungle Kat

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Dear Future Volunteers,

When I first received the *Welcome Book*, I scoured it for the once piece of information that would render my 2 year tour a success. Was there some gadget I could buy or contact I could make? After reading the 90+ pages I realized that if I had signed up for the Peace Corps, I better already have it and it certainly couldn't be purchased at REI.

When you arrive, you will quickly adapt to this diverse and beautiful country and will fall in love with the rainforest, the rivers and the wildlife. Undoubtedly, you will be physically uncomfortable at times but truth be told, those aren't the most difficult moments. You will experience cultural and language frustrations and miss the ease and efficiency of the United States. But then, you will sit beneath the stars with your new village friends or have a language breakthrough and be able understand Dutch and you'll realize that all will be well. It's a wild ride but worth every minute.

I'm just 5 months along this crazy journey but I have already made life-long friends and have countless moments that I

will carry with me for the rest of my life, professionally and personally. We are all looking forward to your arrival in May!

Take care,

—Lauren Norris SUR 13

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Welcome Future Volunteer,

I go to work from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., return home to eat dinner, go to sleep at 10 p.m. and do it again the next day. Wash, Rinse, Repeat...that's exactly what being a Volunteer isn't (you can give a sigh of relief now). But it also isn't saving hundreds of people's lives every day. It's somewhere in that I-didn't-really-help-you-at-all middle. There is a lot of work to be done at my site in Coronie, but almost everything revolves around being a part of the community. Coronie has a very small population and you really have to get out there and be a part of it if you want the people to believe and trust in you. Then things can really happen. The honest truth is that this can be hard at first. You're the new person and you're American, so they have very interesting expectations of you. One of the first guys I met here asked me to play some "California music" for him (no idea what that is). Also, everyone keeps asking me about making pizza and telling me how rich America is (apparently playing "California music," eating pizza, and counting our money is all we do where I'm from). But it can be pretty fun dispelling their ideas about you and showing them who you really are because the people here actually are very accommodating, comfortable, and personable. The last thing I wanted to mention is that although it can be hard to get accustomed to your area, you will soon see it as your home and there is a certain sense of comfort in that. Except the mosquitoes. Those still aren't comforting.

—Prem Durairaj

## NOTES



# PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Suriname and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that every Volunteer's experience is unique and that 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. The sort of work you expect to be doing—in both your official project and your secondary projects—should be your ultimate guide. You can always have things sent to you later.

Suriname has a tropical climate with high humidity and rainfall. Temperatures range from 60 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit and tend to be cooler in the rain forest interior than along the coast. The climate in Suriname can ruin some items, so do not bring things you would be heartbroken to lose. Although Volunteers are expected to project a professional image at all times, dress in the capital of Paramaribo is more formal than in the interior communities. In the capital, Volunteers work in office settings where “smart casual” attire is appropriate (trousers and collared shirts for men; slacks or skirts and blouses for women). In the interior, clothing varies depending on the culture and the location of the community. Men tend to wear pants or shorts with T-shirts or other casual shirts and sandals or flip-flops, while women wear skirts with T-shirts or other tops and sandals or flip-flops.

Remember that Suriname is a relatively poor country. Volunteers with a lot of possessions will appear rich to many Surinamese. Keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight limit on baggage, and that you can get almost everything you need in Suriname.

## **General Clothing**

Clothing should be sturdy, easily washable, permanent press, quick-drying, and modest. Volunteers recommend that you try washing clothing and wringing it out by hand before packing to determine if the clothing is suitable. Do not bring military-style clothing or camouflage garments.

### ***For Men***

- Two pairs of work slacks; cotton and khaki are preferable
- Two pairs of casual slacks
- Two pairs of fairly long, quick-drying walking shorts
- Five short-sleeved T-shirts
- One long-sleeved T-shirt (for jungle hiking)
- Three tank tops (not low-cut)
- Two casual shirts, minimum (preferably short-sleeved cotton)
- Two button-down, short-sleeve dress shirts
- Appropriate cool socks (thin polypropylene socks work well with rubber boots)
- A generous supply of easy-to-wash underwear
- Poncho or raincoat (ponchos are better than raincoats as they provide coverage for gear and afford greater ventilation)
- Cap or hat for sun protection
- Light jacket (optional; Suriname's climate is very warm, but on rare nights or higher elevations it can get chilly)
- Bandanas (available in Suriname)
- Belts or suspenders (Your weight may fluctuate during service)
- One necktie



## ***For Women***

- One casual cotton sundress (minimum)
- One dress suitable for a business meeting or Peace Corps swearing-in ceremony
- Several casual, comfortable skirts
- Two pairs of shorts (not too short, modesty is important in interior communities)
- Two blouses
- Pajamas (lightweight long pants or capris are nice in the evenings)
- Five T- shirts or tanktops (not low cut)
- Poncho or rain jacket (ponchos are better than raincoats as they provide coverage for gear and afford greater ventilation)
- Cap or hat for sun protection
- Bandanas (available in Suriname)
- A generous supply of easy-to-wash underwear, including bras (cotton recommended). Sturdy underwear is hard to find in Suriname and the quality and selection is not as varied as in the U.S. Cotton blends are better than synthetics. Sports bras are highly recommended. In some communities, Volunteers can wear halter tops or sports bras for bathing and other informal activities.
- One or two swimsuits and two or three pairs of swim shorts (e.g., Umbros). In many communities in the interior, bathing is done publicly in the river, so suits should be modest. At some sites, women may be expected to wear lightweight shorts or sarongs (called *pangi*) over their suits to cover their thighs.

## Shoes

- One pair of sturdy walking or hiking boots
- One pair of running or tennis shoes (if you plan to run or play sports)
- One pair of casual shoes for work
- Two pair of flip-flops or other informal “slippers” (available in Suriname)
- One pair of sturdy, waterproof sandals with straps
- For women: One pair of dress sandals or shoes for special occasions

**Note about shoes:** Good, sturdy shoes are expensive on a Peace Corps budget. If you wear odd sizes (9 or above, wide, or narrow) you will have trouble finding a good fit. Inexpensive “fashion” sandals are abundant, but usually wear out quickly or may blister your feet.

## Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- For women, tampons (a limited selection is available in the capital, but they are expensive)
- Start-up supply of soap, shampoo, deodorant, etc.
- Nail- and foot-care supplies, bath scrubbers, and a moderate amount of beauty supplies may help you feel more comfortable.

## Kitchen and Household Items

Volunteers receive funds to purchase kitchen items and other household goods. Most household items are available in Paramaribo but if you enjoy cooking, it may be worthwhile to bring sturdy versions of your favorite cooking supplies.

- Durable can opener
- Garlic press

- Good kitchen knife
- Seasoning packets (Taco seasoning, pasta sauces, gravy, etc.)
- Spices (lots of spices are available in Suriname but you might want to bring your favorites just in case)
- Good potholders

## **Miscellaneous**

- Sunglasses
- One bath towel and washcloth (available in Suriname)
- Two flat sheets and a set of sheets for a double bed
- Pillow and pillowcase(s) (a small travel pillow may be easiest, or have a pillow shipped after you swear-in; Suriname pillows are “different”)
- Sturdy backpack or duffel bag for overnight trips or travel of several days or more (If you bring a large backpacking bag; buy a duffel bag big enough to put it in for flights and other travel. It also proves very useful when moving to site and storing items)
- Day pack or small backpack
- Small shoulder bag for daily use
- Inexpensive, water-resistant, shockproof watch
- Flashlight or headlamp for bedtime reading (bring extra batteries if the size is unusual or hard to find; standard batteries are available in Suriname)
- Multiple-utility pocketknife (i.e., Swiss Army or Leatherman-type)
- Small travel alarm clock with extra batteries
- For prescription eyeglass wearers, two pairs of eyeglasses and your prescription
- For contact lens wearers, extra pairs and cleaning solutions (Consult the Peace Corps medical officer in Suriname about wearing contacts; they are not

recommended because of the difficulty in keeping them clean.)

- Three-month supply of any prescription drugs you take
- Ziplock storage bags in a variety of sizes

### **Things You May Be Glad You Brought**

- Backgammon, cards, and other travel games
- Favorite educational books and activities (e.g., picture dictionary). The Peace Corps Resource Center contains many books and other materials related to Peace Corps projects and development in general; however, if there are reference materials you feel are essential to your job, you should bring them with you.
- Fiction books or other personal reading materials. Peace Corps has an outstanding Volunteer lending library in Paramaribo.
- Favorite recipes or cookbook (Peace Corps has a cookbook by Volunteers.)
- Digital camera (35mm film is expensive to buy and develop on a Peace Corps budget. Some Volunteers mail their film back to the United States for processing. Remember that expensive items such as photography equipment could be stolen or be difficult to repair.)
- Journal
- Photos of family and friends and favorite places in the United States (Surinamese and other Volunteers love to look at pictures)
- Portable music player (with or without speakers and adapter)
- Shortwave radio
- Odd-size replacement batteries (e.g., watch, camera, lithium)
- Rechargeable batteries and charger

- Simple tool set
- Duct tape
- Work or gardening gloves
- Small sewing kit
- Start-up supply of stationery, pens, etc.
- Small padded mailing envelopes
- U.S. stamps for mailing letters by people traveling to the United States
- Lightweight atlas and current almanac
- Musical instruments
- Stain remover



# PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



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

## Family

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

## Passport/Travel

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

## Medical/Health

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

## **Insurance**

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

## **Personal Papers**

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

## **Voting**

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

## **Personal Effects**

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



## **Financial Management**

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



# CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

## **Peace Corps Headquarters**

### **Toll-free Number:**

800.424-8580, Press 2, then  
Ext. # (see below)

### **Peace Corps' Mailing Address:**

Peace Corps  
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps

Headquarters

1111 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/ Local Number</b>
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement  Inter-America and Pacific	Ext. 1835	202.692.1835
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: <a href="mailto:suriname@peacecorps.gov">suriname@ peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2515	202.692.2515
	Desk Assistant E-mail: <a href="mailto:suriname@peacecorps.gov">suriname@ peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2516	202.692.2516
	Desk Assistant E-mail: <a href="mailto:suriname@peacecorps.gov">suriname@ peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2525	202.692.2525

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.544.1802
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) 3 to 5 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