

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# COSTA RICA



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



July 2007



# A WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to Peace Corps/Costa Rica. I know that you have dozens of questions to ask, and I am sure that this *Welcome Book* will answer some of them and may, at the same time, help you think of even more. Each country that the Peace Corps works in presents unique challenges. You have been offered an opportunity to work in Costa Rica. Many of you may have friends or family members who have visited Costa Rica, and some of you may have been here yourselves at some time. One question from those who have been here might be, "What is the Peace Corps doing in Costa Rica?" As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will get to see a part of Costa Rica tourists never get to see. You will find that there is a lot of important work you can do to help people improve their lives and their futures as you learn and grow yourself along the way.

Peace Corps/Costa Rica was established in 1963. Since that time, the program has responded to the needs of Costa Ricans through a wide range of projects. From 1998 to 2002 Peace Corps/Costa Rica worked in one project: The children, youth, and families project. In early 2003 the program expanded into a second area, rural community development. In 2005, Peace Corps/Costa Rica added a third project in micro-enterprise development. All projects focus on the poorest areas of the country, where the needs are greatest. Currently there are approximately 93 Peace Corps Volunteers serving in Costa Rica.

As Volunteers, you will live with a family in semi-rural, rural, semi-urban, or marginal urban communities and become an integral part of that family and the community. You will be working with the residents in your community on various projects. You will be constantly challenged in ways you may not be able to imagine, but the rewards are great and generally of the truly lasting kind.

The Peace Corps/Costa Rica staff is here to provide you with the support you need to have a successful two years of Volunteer service. That support begins with an intensive, community-based pre-service training program during your first 11 weeks. Although we will give you some important tools to help you succeed, the most important tools are the ones you will bring with you: openness, commitment, flexibility, and a sincere desire to be part of a Costa Rican community for the next two years of your life.

This *Welcome Book* will provide you with some additional information about your future life and work here to help you decide whether this is the right choice for you at this time. Please read it carefully, and feel free to contact the country desk at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., if you have any questions.

We look forward to meeting you and working with you.

Terry Grumley  
Country Director

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# PEACE CORPS/COSTA RICA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



## **History of the Peace Corps in Costa Rica**

Since 1963, more than 2,200 Peace Corps Volunteers have served in Costa Rica in a variety of projects in the areas of health, education, the environment, community development, agriculture, small business development, and youth development. Throughout the program's existence in Costa Rica, Volunteers have been consistently well received by the Costa Rican people and local counterpart agencies.

The children, youth, and families (CYF) project was the primary sector of the Peace Corps/Costa Rica program from 1998 through 2002. In 2003, a second project in Rural Community Development (RCD) began, which focuses on the poorest rural communities in the country. In 2005, a third project in Community Economic Development (CED) began.

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Costa Rica**

The Peace Corps' projects in Costa Rica have changed to respond and adapt to the needs and challenges of Costa Rica and its people. Early programming efforts responded to needs in the health and agriculture sectors. In the 1970s and 1980s, the education sector grew in importance, culminating in the Peace Corps' developing a national curriculum for environmental education. In the mid-1980s, the Peace Corps started small business and housing projects to help Costa Rica create employment opportunities and the construction of new housing units. In the 1990s, the Peace Corps' programming

changed to address community education, environmental issues, and the problems of youth at social risk.

The urban youth project started in 1990 responded to increased migration from rural to urban centers and the subsequent social dislocation and disintegration of youth. In this project, the Peace Corps has worked with the Patronato Nacional de la Infancia (PANI), a Costa Rican agency that is similar to Child Protective Services in the United States. The relationship between Peace Corps/Costa Rica and PANI has strengthened over the years, and the project has evolved to address the needs of all at-risk communities, not just urban ones. The project also works with children, youth, and families to allow for a more integrated, holistic approach to addressing issues that affect young people.

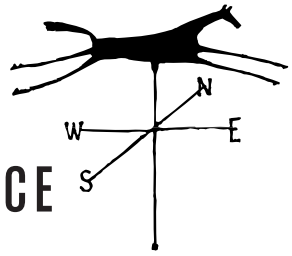
In many respects, Costa Rica has attained impressive levels of social and economic development, manifesting a material progress that, at first glance, compares with the infrastructure and commercial activity of the United States or Europe, especially in the nation's capital, San José. However, under the surface, growing social ills threaten to diminish the country's gains in education, democracy, and healthcare. The Peace Corps therefore now focuses on addressing the needs of the populations most vulnerable to poverty, crime, drug abuse, child abuse, and domestic violence. It is also working to strengthen the ability of PANI and local communities to serve these populations.

As a result of the success of the CYF project, the Peace Corps and PANI decided to expand the project in 2002. Currently, approximately 30 Volunteers are assigned to this project. The Peace Corps initiated the rural community development (RCD) project in early 2003 to focus on the poorest rural communities. The host country agency for this project is the National Community Development Agency (DINADECO).

The relationship between Peace Corps and DINADECO has evolved and continues to strengthen. Currently, about 32 Volunteers work in this project. Finally, in 2005 Peace Corps/ Costa Rica opened a new project to strengthen the country's micro-enterprise development with a focus on tourism. The project is in its early stages of development working with a variety of local counterparts; currently there are 30 Volunteers working in this project.



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: COSTA RICA AT A GLANCE



## History

While there is debate about the number of indigenous people in Costa Rica prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1502, few survived contact with Europeans. Today, the country's indigenous population makes up less than 2 percent of the total population.

For nearly three centuries, Spain administered what is now Costa Rica as part of the Captaincy General of Guatemala under a military governor. The Spanish optimistically called the country "Rich Coast." Finding little gold or other valuable minerals in Costa Rica, however, the Spanish turned to agriculture. The small landowners' relative poverty, the lack of a large indigenous labor force, the population's ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, and Costa Rica's isolation from the Spanish colonial centers in Mexico and the Andes contributed to the development of a relatively autonomous, individualistic, and egalitarian agrarian society. This tradition survived the widened class distinctions brought on by the introduction of banana and coffee cultivation in the 19th century and the subsequent accumulation of local wealth.

Costa Rica joined other Central American provinces in 1821 in a joint declaration of independence from Spain. In 1838, long after the Central American Federation ceased to function in practice, Costa Rica formally withdrew and proclaimed itself a sovereign nation. An era of peaceful democracy in Costa Rica began in 1899, and has continued through today with only two lapses: 1917-1919, when Federico Tinoco ruled as a dictator; and 1948, when Jose Figueres led an armed uprising in the

wake of a disputed presidential election. The victorious junta in this 44-day civil war drafted a constitution guaranteeing free elections with universal suffrage and the abolition of the military. Figueres became a national hero, winning the first election under the new constitution in 1953.

The Costa Rican government has been very involved in managing the economy since the 1948 revolution. The government operates many state monopolies, including banking, insurance, and telecommunications; controls the prices of a number of goods and services; and maintains protectionist trade laws. Government policy in the 1960s and 1970s focused on making Costa Rica more self-sufficient, and the nation has enjoyed a gradual upward economic trend. However, with the increase in oil prices in the 1970s and the sharp decreases in international coffee, banana, and sugar prices, Costa Rica's economy collapsed in 1980. Warfare in neighboring countries in the 1980s also affected the Costa Rican economy and society, shattering regional trade and bringing a large number of refugees and illegal aliens, particularly from Nicaragua, to the country. To quell the regional violence, President Oscar Arias Sánchez (1986–1990) promoted a successful regional peace plan that resulted in his being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987. Since 1948, Costa Rica has held 12 successive democratic presidential elections, more than any other Latin American country.

## **Government**

Costa Rica is a democratic republic with strong constitutional checks and balances. Executive responsibilities are vested in a president, who is the country's center of power. There also are two vice presidents and a 15-member cabinet, which includes one of the vice presidents. The president and the 57 Legislative Assembly senators (*diputados*) are elected for four-year terms. An independent Supreme Electoral

Tribunal supervises the electoral process. The Supreme Court of Justice exercises judicial power and a chamber of the Supreme Court reviews the constitutionality of legislation and executive decrees and all habeas corpus warrants.

The offices of the Inspector General, Attorney General, and Ombudsman exercise autonomous oversight of the government. State agencies enjoy considerable operational independence; they include the telecommunications and electrical power monopoly (ICE), the nationalized commercial banks (BNCR), the state insurance monopoly (INS), and the social security healthcare agency (CSS). Costa Rica has no military; it maintains police and security forces only for internal security.

The government of Costa Rica has emphasized the development of democracy and respect for human rights throughout its history. Until recently, the country's political system contrasted sharply with those of many of its Central American and Caribbean neighbors. Costa Rica experienced several unusual days of low-level civil disturbance in early 2000 over legislation that would have permitted private-sector participation in the state-owned telecommunications and electrical power sectors.

The elections of February 5, 2006, were historic for several reasons. First, the enduring bipartisanship of the last 50 years between the National Liberation Party (PLN) and Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) ended as 15 presidential candidates entered the primaries, all of them from different political parties. Second, a 36-year-old law stating a president could not re-run for office was overruled and former President and 1987 Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias entered the race. Third, the election results were unusually close with an extremely low voter turnout (an estimated 40 percent of the voting population did not vote due to a lack of trust for the candidates).

Oscar Arias was re-elected president with 41.1 percent of the popular vote; Oton Solis, of Civil Action Party (PAC) had 40 percent of the vote. (In Costa Rica a winning candidate must receive at least 40 percent of the vote in order to win the election. If none of them had reached 40 percent of the votes, a second round would have been necessary.) During the campaign, Solis was a firm opponent to the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), while Arias defended its approval and stated it was a priority for his administration.

This past election 25 PLN members won seats in Congress, while 17 are occupied by PLN and 17 by PAC. The remaining seats are divided between various minority parties. This distribution forces PLN to negotiate with the minority representatives to pass CAFTA. This division reflects greatly in the negotiations of the CAFTA at this time. Costa Rica still has not come to an agreement on the signing of CAFTA and it remains the only country in Central America that has not done so.

## **Economy**

According to the 2006 publication of the State of the Nation and The Central Bank of Costa Rica, inflation is at 9.76 percent per annum, real growth rate is currently at 3.3 percent, and unemployment is at 6.7 percent. In April of 2007 the currency exchange rate was 518 colóns to the dollar.

Costa Rica's major economic resources are its fertile land and frequent rainfall, well-educated population, and attractive ecological diversity. Its location in the Central American isthmus provides easy access to North and South American markets and direct ocean access to Europe and Asia. The economy of Costa Rica has been dependent on the production and export of bananas and coffee. While these products,



along with sugar cane and beef, are still important, tourism, manufacturing, and services have surpassed agriculture's contribution to gross domestic product and diversified the economy. Costa Rica has also successfully attracted important foreign investments in free-trade zones by large international companies. Tourism is booming and now earns more foreign exchange than bananas and coffee combined. The government still holds controlling interests in many sectors of the economy, particularly in telecommunications, electricity, and banking. Costa Rica continues to strive to widen economic and trade ties both within and outside the region.

Nearly one-quarter of Costa Ricans live below the poverty level and the gap between the rich and poor continues to widen. Therefore, while you will see visible affluence, including modern shopping malls, just-released American movies, well-developed tourist resorts, and late-model cars on the streets, you will live and work with people who do not have access to such privileges.

## **People and Culture**

Costa Ricans, commonly known as *ticos*, are predominantly of Spanish descent. There are smaller groups of people of Jamaican (3 percent), indigenous (1.7 percent), and Asian heritage. Spanish is the national language, although many people on the Caribbean coast speak English and patois (a form of Creole English). The 2000 census set the population at 3.8 million; 59 percent are urban and 41 percent are rural, with more and more people moving to urban areas. Most people belong to the Roman Catholic Church (76 percent), although the congregations of Evangelical churches are growing (14 percent). The next official census scheduled for Costa Rica will take place in 2010.

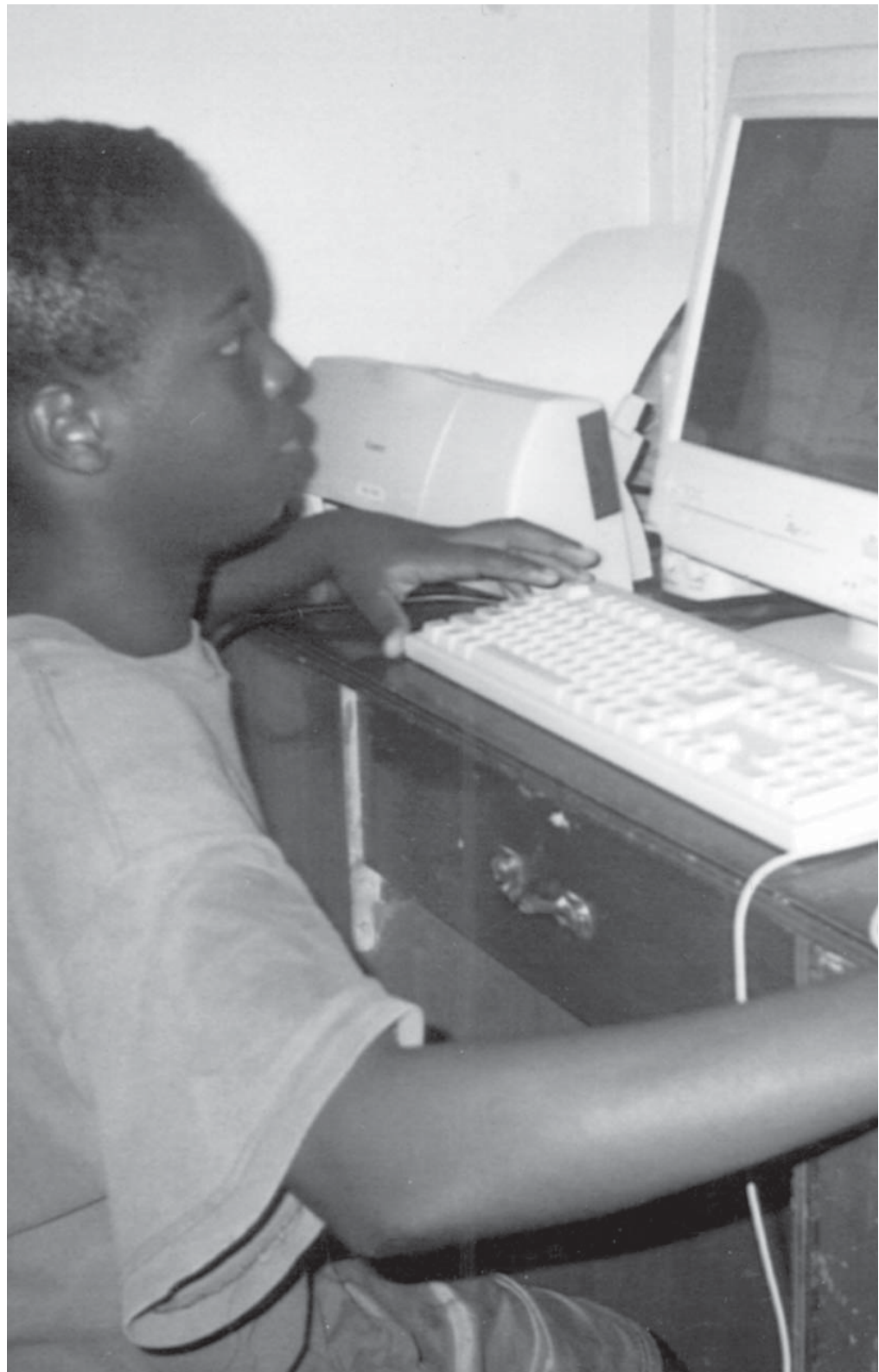
Costa Rica boasts a relatively high literacy rate (by some counts, as high as 95 percent). Attendance at elementary schools (up to sixth grade) is approximately 90 percent percent. However, attendance drops significantly (to 65 percent) at the secondary-school, and only 35 percent of the young people who begin high school graduate. Infant mortality in Costa Rica is low relative to that of its neighbors, and life expectancy is comparable to that in the United States.

## **Environment**

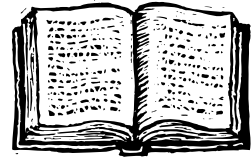
The Republic of Costa Rica is located in Central America, with Panama to the south, Nicaragua to the north, the Caribbean Sea to the east, and the Pacific Ocean to the west. It covers a land area of 19,652 square miles, about the size of West Virginia. A chain of volcanic mountains runs through the center of the country into Nicaragua, splitting Costa Rica in two. In the center of the mountain ranges is a high-altitude plain, with coastal lowlands on either side. Much of the country was once covered with dense forests and jungles, most of which have been cut down to provide farmland. There has been a concerted effort to preserve what is left by the creation of a national park system, which covers almost 12 percent of the country, and forest reserves and indigenous reservations boost the protected land area to 27 percent. Costa Rica is famous for its great diversity of tropical flora and fauna.

While strong legislation exists for these protected areas, enforcement has been a problem and illegal poaching and logging occur. Outside the protected areas, Costa Rica faces a wide range of environmental challenges, including poor solid waste management, lack of water treatment facilities, deforestation, air pollution from vehicles and industry, noise pollution, and ever-increasing development of tourist areas.

## NOTES



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



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

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

## **General Information About Costa Rica**

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

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in San José to how to convert from the dollar to the colón. Just click on Costa Rica and go from there.

### **[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 Costa Rica 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://geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm>**

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

**[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp](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 around the world.

## **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.

**[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.

**Online Articles/Current News Sites About Costa Rica**

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

Online edition of the Tico Times, an English-language weekly

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

Online edition of La Nación, a daily newspaper in Spanish

**<http://larepublica.terra.co.cr/news/>**

Online edition of La República, a daily newspaper in Spanish

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

A.M. Costa Rica, a daily English-language summary of Costa Rican news

**[www.semanario.ucr.ac.cr](http://www.semanario.ucr.ac.cr)**

El Seminario, a weekly (in Spanish) published by the University of Costa Rica

**[www.estadonacion.or.cr](http://www.estadonacion.or.cr)**

An annual analysis (in Spanish) of Costa Rica's most recent socioeconomic and environmental indicators

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

The site of Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, a social science research organization (in Spanish)

## **International Development Sites About Costa Rica**

### **www.nu.or.cr**

United Nations programs, including UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, and UNESCO, in Costa Rica

### **www.oecostarica.org**

Organization of American States in Costa Rica

### **www.iadb.org**

Inter-American Development Bank

### **www.paho-who.or.cr**

Pan American Health Organization in Costa Rica

### **www.oit.or.cr**

International Labour Organization in Costa Rica (in Spanish)

## **Recommended Books**

1. Booth, John. *Costa Rica: Quest for Democracy*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1998.
2. Daling, Tjabel. *Costa Rica in Focus: A Guide to the People, Politics, and Culture*. London: Latin America Bureau, 1998.
3. Edelman, Marc, and Joanne Kenen (eds.). *The Costa Rican Reader*. New York: Grove Press, 1989.
4. Lara, Silvia, et al. *Inside Costa Rica: The Essential Guide to Its Politics, Economy, Society, and Environment*. Silver City, N.M.: Interhemispheric Resource Center, 1995.
5. Mavis, Hiltunen Biesanz, et al. *The Ticos: Culture and Social Change in Costa Rica*. Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998.
6. Molina, Iván, and Steven Palmer. *The History of Costa Rica*. San José, Costa Rica: Editorial de la Universidad de Costa Rica, 1998.



7. Ras, Barbara, and Oscar Arias (eds.). *Costa Rica: A Traveler's Literary Companion*. St. Paul, Minn.: Consortium Book Sales, 1994. Translations of 26 short stories by 20 of Costa Rica's best authors.
8. Van Rheen, Erin. *Living Abroad in Costa Rica*. Emeryville, Ca: Avalon Publishing Group, Inc. 2004.

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

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

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

1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
4. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
5. Herrera, Susana. *Mango Elephants in the Sun: How Life in an African Village Let Me Be in My Skin*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999

6. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
7. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
8. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

### **Books About the Peace Corps**

1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go*. Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000 (paperback).
2. Carter, Jason. *Power Lines*. National Geographic, 2002 (hardcover and paperback)
3. Herrera, Susana. *Mango Elephants in the Sun: How Life in an African Village Let Me Be in My Skin*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001.
5. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need Is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000 (paperback).
6. Lucas, C. Payne and Kevin Lowther. *Keeping Kennedy's Promise: The Peace Corps' Moment of Truth (2nd ed.)*. Peace Corps Online, 2002.
7. Redmon, Coates. *Come as You Are: The Peace Corps Story*. Orlando, Fla.: Harcourt, 1986.
8. Thomsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969, 1997 (paperback).
9. Tidwell, Mike. *The Ponds of Kalambayi: An African Sojourn*. Guilford, Conn.: The Lyons Press, 1990, 1996 (paperback).

## NOTES



# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

Airmail to and from Costa Rica takes one to two weeks. Volunteers in more remote areas of the country have additional delays. You can receive mail at the Peace Corps office during training and as a Volunteer.

The mailing address of the Peace Corps office is:

“Your Name,” PCT  
Cuerpo de Paz  
Apartado Postal 1266  
1000 San José  
Costa Rica

Once you have completed training, you will be responsible for sending the address of your new site to friends and family. Most sites are near post offices, and Volunteers can rent a post office box or have mail delivered directly to their home. You may also choose to maintain the Peace Corps office as your mailing address. You will define that once you are here in-country and assigned to your new site.

Do not have people send you money, airline tickets, or other valuable items through the mail. Items mailed in padded manila envelopes have a better chance of arriving at your site without being delayed by customs. Larger packages have to go through customs and sometimes mysteriously disappear in transit. Retrieving packages from customs is time-consuming and most often requires payment of duty fees that are sometimes more than the value of what is in your package.

DHL, Federal Express, and other couriers have offices in Costa Rica. If your friends or relatives want to send you something by courier, they should send it to the Peace Corps office, for which a phone number and directions to a street address are usually required. The Peace Corps/Costa Rica office phone number is 011.506.231.4122; the fax number is 011.506.220.3275. The Peace Corps/Costa Rica office address and directions are:

“Your Name,” PCT

Cuerpo de Paz

Del Banco Interfin en Sabana Norte, dos cuerdas al oeste y una cuadra al sur. Diagonal a la residencia del embajador de España, frente al Parque Perú.

San José, Costa Rica

### ***Telephones***

International phone service to and from Costa Rica is good. Direct calls to the United States can be made at Internet cafes for a small charge and most public phones will allow you to make international calls using a calling card (e.g., MCI, AT&T, Sprint, or the Costa Rican telephone company) or by calling collect. Most, not all, houses have land lines through which Volunteers can receive calls from the States.

During training, most of the host families that Volunteers live with have telephones; if they do not, there is likely to be a neighbor with a phone or a public phone nearby. Telephone service is more limited at a few rural sites. The Peace Corps issues a beeper to Volunteers who live with families that do not have phones. Many Volunteers choose to purchase their own mobile phones, but Peace Corps/Costa Rica does **NOT** provide you with mobile phones. You do not need a cellular phone to carry out your work in Costa Rica. Most U.S. cellphones are not compatible with the cellular technology

in Costa Rica, due to the fact that the telephone service is a monopoly governed by the state. Although there are plans to try and change this in the near future through CAFTA, nothing is currently available.

Fax service is also available in most cities, usually at the local post office. The post office charges a fee for both sending and receiving faxes. Once you are at your assigned site, you can send a fax number to your friends and relatives for easier communication.

To reach you in an emergency, your family can call the Office of Special Services at Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., at 800.424.8580, extension 1470. The Office of Special Services will contact Peace Corps/Costa Rica as soon as possible to relay the information.

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

You will have access to computers and the Internet at the Volunteer resource center at the Peace Corps office in San José once you are sworn in a Peace Corps Volunteer. You will not have access to them as a trainee. Because these computers are shared among all Volunteers in-country, access depends on demand. The Volunteers in the CYF project have limited access to computers at the local child welfare office (their counterpart agency). The majority of CYF Volunteers as well as CED Volunteers have daily, if not weekly, access to Internet. RCD Volunteers are much more limited in their communication options and access. Bringing a personal computer to Costa Rica increases your risk of being a victim of theft. Nevertheless, some Volunteers bring laptop computers with them, which they find useful for work purposes, but access to the Internet may be limited. Volunteers who have personal computers cannot connect wirelessly at the Peace Corps office.

## Housing and Site Location

Currently, there are Volunteers in all parts of the country: the Central Valley, Limón on the Caribbean coast, Puntarenas on the Pacific coast, as far north as Los Chiles near the Nicaraguan border, and as far south as Paso Canoas on the Panama border. While sites vary in size, climate, and distance to downtown San José (from 20 minutes to 10 hours by bus), each has been pre-selected by the Peace Corps in consultation with relevant host country agencies as being a community where a Volunteer will find plenty of work opportunities, need, and community support.

The profile of the living conditions varies greatly for the Volunteers in the different projects. Volunteers in the CYF project live in urban, semi-urban, and, very rarely, rural communities. Some CYF sites are converted squatter settlements composed of a combination of tin and wood shacks, but most sites have recently built two- or three-room cement block buildings with corrugated steel roofs. Volunteers in semi/urban sites have access via a short bus ride to services such as banks, post offices, and hospitals.

Community profiles for the CED project are more likely to be semi-urban to semi-rural (more than 500 inhabitants) towns. Again, Volunteers in these sites have access via a short bus ride to services such as banks, post offices, and hospitals.

RCD Volunteers will live in extremely rural communities (500 or fewer inhabitants). Volunteers in more rural areas have to take a longer bus ride to the nearest large town to mail letters, cash checks, access the Internet, and buy goods not available in their site.

All Volunteer houses have cold running water and electricity, and most have phones. In all communities, you will find a church, a school, and general stores (*pulperías*) that sell



staples such as rice, black beans, tuna, soap, soft drinks, and snack food.

During training, you will live with a family selected by the training staff in one of several training communities. Your living conditions in training will likely be of a higher standard than that of your house in your site.

During your first year of service, you are also **required** to live with a family in your assigned community. This promotes your integration into the community, allows you to live as the majority of Costa Ricans do, increases your language skills, and helps ensure your safety and security. The families to which you are assigned are recommended by community leaders or by your counterpart agency. These families are provided with an orientation by your program manager and a currently serving Volunteer. Requests to live independently during the second year are approved on a case-by-case basis. Living on your own is not automatically approved as each situation has to be analyzed and approved.

The family with whom you stay is likely to include children, and their home will be modest in size and comfort. While the Peace Corps requests that Volunteers be given their own room, you may find that its walls do not reach the ceiling or are very thin. The concept of individual space in Costa Rica is different from that in the United States. While some Volunteers find living with a family frustrating at times, they also concede that it is an enriching way to experience a new culture and develop an awareness of its values.

While you will find most Costa Rican people to be kind and good, communities also have members with a variety of problems, including substance abuse and alcoholism, low income, single parenthood, child abuse, high unemployment, delinquency, lack of organization, etc. Therefore your safety

is of major concern, and you will have to adjust and conform to different norms of behavior and take continual precautions to maximize your safety. The Health Care and Safety chapter provides more information on this important issue.

## **Living Allowance and Money Management**

During pre-service training, the Peace Corps will open an electronic debit account (in colóns) for you at Banco Nacional, to which you can gain access from any of the bank's automated teller machines throughout the country. (Most ATM cards from U.S. banks can also be used at local banks—with a service fee charged.) The debit card can also be used at most larger businesses. The Peace Corps pays host families a set amount to cover your food, lodging, and laundry during training and deposits a small walking-around allowance in your account for other expenses.

When you become a Volunteer, the Peace Corps will begin depositing a living allowance in your account every month, along with a one-time settling-in allowance to purchase items to set up your home. The amount of the living allowance is based on an annual cost-of-living survey of current Volunteers and is intended to cover all of your essential expenses, including rent, local travel, food, and entertainment. You will negotiate the rent you pay your host family using guidelines provided by the Peace Corps.

It is important to maintain a lifestyle similar to that of the people with whom you live and work, so you do not need to bring additional money. Nevertheless, many Volunteers bring at least one major credit card in case they need to make a major personal purchase or for out-of-country travel. If you choose to bring extra money, we recommend that you bring traveler's checks or open a local bank account in dollars to minimize the risk of loss or theft. There is also a safe at the

Peace Corps office in which Volunteers can store cash, credit cards, traveler's checks, and important documents.

You will also accrue \$24 per month of Volunteer service for a vacation allowance, deposited monthly in your account in local currency. Some Volunteers regularly transfer their leave allowance into a dollar account to prevent losses resulting from devaluation of the local currency.

## **Food and Diet**

During training, your host family will prepare all of your meals. Once you are a Volunteer, you can arrange to have all or some of your meals with your host family or buy and prepare your own food.

The availability of fresh fruits and vegetables depends on the season and the region in which you will reside. Costa Ricans tend to eat few green vegetables, favoring root vegetables (potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassavas, etc.). Volunteers sometimes comment on the lack of diversity in the local diet, which relies heavily on rice and beans and starchy foods fried in oil or lard. Many families do not eat a lot of meat because of its high cost. Although almost any specialty food can be purchased at supermarkets in San José, these imported products are not part of the local diet and are well beyond the economic means of most host families.

It is relatively easy for vegetarians to maintain their diet in Costa Rica, since rice and beans are the staple foods. However, Costa Ricans often prepare their vegetables with meat or in meat broth, so you will have to make special arrangements to maintain a strictly vegetarian diet. In addition, Volunteers should not expect families to purchase additional foods outside of their normal purchases to compensate for your eating requirements.

## **Transportation**

Costa Rica has an extensive road system of more than 18,600 miles (30,000 km). Although much of it is in disrepair, there is access to almost any spot in Costa Rica by means of a vehicle. The main cities in the Central Valley are connected by paved, all-weather roads to the Caribbean and Pacific coasts and to the Pan American Highway, which goes to Nicaragua and Panama, Costa Rica's neighbors to the north and south. Unfortunately, the rate of traffic-related fatalities is one of the highest per capita in the world.

Volunteers travel mostly by public bus. Costa Rica has an extensive, dependable bus system that operates in most of the country. The service is inexpensive and usually runs on a set schedule several times a day. In the San José metropolitan area, however, traffic jams often extend travel times.

The Peace Corps strongly recommends taking “official” taxis at night; the red cars with yellow triangles on the front doors are easily identifiable. Most fares within the San José area are determined by using the meter (called the *María*), but longer distances are usually set at a fixed rate.

Volunteers are not allowed to drive motorized vehicles except during an official vacation. Many Volunteers request and receive bicycles from the Peace Corps to facilitate travel around their sites. Volunteers who are issued a bicycle must receive safety training and wear a bicycle helmet provided by the Peace Corps. Volunteers are not allowed to drive or ride as a passenger on motorcycles.

## **Geography and Climate**

There are two distinct seasons in Costa Rica, rainy and dry. In much of the country, the rainy season lasts from May to

November, but parts of the Caribbean coast receive rain year-round. And when it rains, it really rains, with heavy afternoon downpours resulting in flooded or muddy streets. The driest months in San José are December through April. The southwestern plains and mountain slopes receive more rain, averaging only three dry months a year. Temperatures vary little between seasons—the main influence on temperature is altitude. San José, at almost 3,800 feet (1,150 meters), has temperatures between 60 degrees and 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The coasts and lowlands are much hotter, averaging 72 degrees at night and 86 degrees during the day. Although this is a general description of weather patterns, ever-changing climate changes continue to affect Costa Rica’s “normal” seasons.

Training takes place in several communities in the Central Valley (approximately an hour to 90 minutes to the Peace Corps office in San José, so be prepared for warm days and cool nights. You will need a warm jacket or heavy sweater, especially during the rainy season, when the dampness and wind make it quite chilly. A blanket (easily purchased in Costa Rica) is necessary for sleeping even at lower altitudes.

The climate at your future work site will depend on where you are located. You should be prepared for a location that is very hot, somewhat cooler, or anything in between.

## **Social Activities**

Since your assignment will entail working with people, much of your “work” time will be spent socializing and getting to know community members by drinking a *cafecito* (coffee) with them. This time with community members is important to building the trust necessary to work effectively with them. The Peace Corps expects Volunteers to spend most evenings

and weekends working or socializing in their community, except when they work in another community on integrated programming efforts. In fact, Volunteers may spend only three nights per month from their site for non-work-related reasons, unless they have requested vacation time.

Most Volunteers celebrate birthdays, weddings, and holidays with their host families. Other activities depend on the size of the community. Smaller sites have activities at the community center, local school, soccer field, and churches. Larger communities may also have restaurants, a movie theater, a dance hall or disco, and special cultural activities. When you are in San José, you will find a variety of movie theaters, music and theater performances, art galleries, museums, and sports events. In addition, you are likely to discover places of incredible natural beauty close to your site and throughout the country.

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

As a novelty in your community, you will be noticed, and your dress and behavior will be commented upon. Therefore, to minimize any unnecessary obstacles in your work and personal relations, you must respect local cultural norms. To help ensure that you serve as a positive role model by working in a professional and ethical manner, you will be asked to sign a copy of the *Code of Ethics* that governs the Peace Corps program in Costa Rica.

Personal appearance delivers a message, whether intended or unintended. As in the United States, dressing appropriately in Costa Rica can enhance your credibility, since it reflects your respect for the customs and expectations of the people with whom you live and work. Inappropriate dress, like inappropriate behavior, is something that can set you

unnecessarily apart from your community. Until you become well-known by Costa Ricans, your dress will be an important indicator to them. From the biggest city to the remotest village, you will be judged, especially initially, on your appearance.

Costa Ricans dress very neatly and take great pride in looking good in public (e.g., clean and ironed clothes, polished shoes, and groomed hair), even on informal occasions. “Dressing down” does not occur to most people, since they are still struggling to better their lives. For example, it may be confusing and offensive to them to see a “rich” North American wear dirty gym shoes when dressier shoes are appropriate. Volunteers will gain greater acceptance of their ideas by wearing the right outfit, which generally means wearing what Costa Ricans wear in the same situation. For example, in schools, Costa Rican women tend to wear skirts, dresses, or pressed pants; men tend to wear collared shirts with pants. When visiting with neighbors, however, you can wear casual clothes. You are expected to observe these guidelines for dress during pre-service training as well. You are not coming to Costa Rica on a camping trip; you are moving here for two years of your life to live and work. Please bring with you the clothes you would like to wear on a daily basis.

In most areas of the country, shorts are acceptable for doing household projects and for recreational or sports activities. Shorts **may not** be worn at the Peace Corps office or in other professional settings such as schools, your counterpart office, etc. (long culottes are acceptable for women). In hot areas, women often wear tank tops, sundresses, and dressy sandals for work. (Note that sandals like Tevas are never appropriate for work situations.)

## **Personal Safety**

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

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

The Peace Corps is not for everyone. You will have to cope with the frustrations of working in a new culture with different norms and behaviors. You may be made fun of because of your differences from Costa Ricans. You must be willing to live with a family, even it makes you feel like a child again or makes you feel like you never leave your work. You will work with government employees who are often overworked and underappreciated. The work can be mentally and physically stressful because of Costa Rica's complex social problems. Resources may be limited and facilities inadequate.

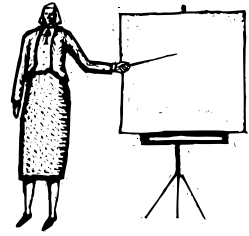


You will need to find inner reserves of strength to continue your work with enthusiasm, new ideas, and much patience. In most cases, you will structure your own time. You must possess the self-confidence and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without always seeing immediate results.

You will find that the key to satisfying work as a Peace Corps Volunteer is the ability to establish successful human relationships at all levels (with your host family, community members with whom you work, counterpart agencies and school officials, and fellow Volunteers). You can expect Costa Ricans to be friendly and, for the most part, interested in having you in their community. You will acquire a sense of accomplishment when small projects are made effective because of your efforts. In addition, acceptance into a foreign culture and acquisition of a second or even a third language are significant rewards. If you have the personal qualifications needed to meet the challenges of two years of service in Costa Rica, you will have a rewarding, enriching, and lasting experience. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you have had a positive impact on other people's lives while making much-needed contributions to the goals of Peace Corps/Costa Rica. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the rewards are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Costa Rica feeling that they gained much more than they sacrificed during their service.



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

Upon arrival, you will participate in pre-service training (PST), which consists of 11 weeks of intensive in-country preparation in five major areas: Spanish language, technical job orientation, cross-cultural adaptation, health, and safety & security. This holistic program has been designed around the competencies you will need to achieve to be a successful Volunteer. To swear in as a Volunteer, you must demonstrate you have developed the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to begin your service in all of the areas mentioned above. Training is a challenging period of your service in which you will have a great number of assignments, tasks, etc. to complete. It is during this period the Peace Corps evaluates your commitment and performance and determines your ability to be a Volunteer.

Your first PST activity is a four-day orientation retreat immediately upon arrival in country. During this retreat you will receive detailed information on: 1) How pre-service training is carried out (competencies, content, methodology, qualification criteria, etc.); and 2) What you can expect for the following 11 weeks (overview and weekly schedules). You will also receive administrative, medical, and safety and security information.

To most closely assimilate the experience of life and work as a Volunteer, Peace Corps/Costa Rica uses a community-based training (CBT) model. After the retreat, you will be divided into your language levels (as determined through a standardized language test) and assigned to different training communities where you will live with a host family for the following 11 weeks. These communities will provide you with

an introduction to Costa Rican life and culture and should be seen as a transition to more challenging sites, where you will be assigned for your service.

CBT will allow you to face realistic challenges from the beginning. Because you live, train and integrate into communities, you are able to develop relationships, work with community members, and negotiate daily life in a new culture and society. This will enable you to apply your theoretical knowledge immediately, in real rather than simulated situations. Within this context, the home stay is one of the most valuable aspects of PST. Through this experience you will learn about many aspects of Costa Rican culture and daily life in neighborhoods, including family and community life, customs, values and behavior, diet, and humor, while developing strategies to confront daily challenges.

During PST, we use and model a participatory, experiential approach to learning, known as nonformal education (NFE), which you are expected to use with community members. While at first this approach may seem new to you, you will soon discover how suited it is to help people build on their own strengths, take charge of their lives, and address their expressed needs. In this way, NFE contributes to achieve Peace Corps' goal of sustainable development.

Training activities will be a combination of small group work with peers from your training town, self-directed learning activities, group lectures, workshops, field visits and practicum. For technical, cross-cultural, health and safety and security training, the complete group meets at a larger community location. The content of the different areas is organized around weekly themes and you can expect to carry out several integrated activities, where you will be working simultaneously in language, technical, cross-cultural, health and safety & security goals.

Although the majority of PST activities take place in the training communities, there are three field activities. The first one is a five-day field trip to visit Volunteers from your specific program in their respective sites to observe and experience the life and work of Volunteers and Costa Ricans. During this trip you will be traveling with a group of your fellow trainees. (Please note that married couples may be traveling to different communities during this field activity.) The second field trip is an opportunity to visit a current Volunteer on your own and learn more about a Volunteer's lifestyle while in service. Finally, the third field trip is an independent trip to your future site.

### ***Technical Training***

Regardless of your prior professional experience, all trainees will follow the same technical training curriculum. The goal of the training program is not to turn you into an expert in the field, but to assist you in understanding the conditions under which you will work and the resources you will have in Costa Rica. You can expect your technical training to be participatory, dynamic, and to require a great deal of self-guided study.

### ***Language Training***

Spanish classes take place in each training community, both in small groups and on a one-to-one basis as needed. Language is not only learned in the classroom, but also by living with a family, integrating in a community, and carrying out one's technical tasks. The importance of language ability in your future role as a Volunteer cannot be emphasized enough. Your ability to transfer information, to serve as a community resource and a grassroots development facilitator, as well as your integration into Costa Rican culture are all directly related to your ability to communicate in the local language.

Although language training is provided in-country, you are strongly urged to initiate Spanish language studies before your departure. This will help you meet the criteria to qualify in the language area. Language learning requires dedication and hard work, but the good news is that the vast majority of trainees are able to reach the proficiency level that is required to swear in as a Volunteer.

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

Your cross-cultural learning will be incorporated into every aspect of your life during PST and throughout your service. The requirement to live with a family during training and your first year of service will prepare you to better understand the culture in all areas of your life, including your safety and security, health and technical areas. In addition to the homestay experience, you will have the opportunity to discuss various questions, challenges, and situations you may be faced with while in pre-service training with your cross-cultural trainer in formal classroom settings.

### ***Health Training***

The health component of pre-service training consists of preparing you to deal with the stresses of everyday life as a Volunteer. The health component stresses your own responsibility of taking care of yourself to be a healthy, safe, and effective trainee/Volunteer. If you are not healthy you cannot be an effective trainee or Volunteer, which means physical, emotional and mental health are all carefully considered. The health staff will cover topics that are most common here in Costa Rica that may affect your health and well-being. The staff will also provide you with the appropriate information so that you can take direct responsibility for your health by preventing certain situations to arise. The medical officer has provided an orientation to your host

families in terms of the Peace Corps policies for cleaning food, hygiene, etc. In addition, the staff will carry out a few formal workshops/lectures on the various health topics. You will be provided with all of the necessary inoculations during training and if a health issue arises you will be able to contact a member of the medical staff.

### ***Safety Training***

A Volunteer's safety and security is of the utmost concern for the Peace Corps. Our training structure integrates safety and security training into every component of your pre-service training. You will be constantly learning about ways to mitigate safety incidents while in Spanish classes, while taking the public transportation system, in your homestay, in your communities, with your host country counterparts and beneficiaries. Peace Corps has on staff a safety and security coordinator who will be responsible for carrying out some formal sessions with you in terms of what to look out for here in Costa Rica to keep you safe, how to avoid certain situations from happening, what to do when certain situations may occur, what to do in the case of an emergency, etc. It is extremely important to note that safety and security is an integral part of everyday life while learning to live in a new country and culture.

Throughout PST, you are encouraged to continue examining your personal motivation for having joined the Peace Corps, as well as your level of dedication and commitment. In this way, when you swear in as a Peace Corps Volunteer, you are making an informed and serious commitment, which will sustain you through two years of service. Pre-service training can be a stressful and challenging time, but you will find a great deal of support from an experienced training staff. It should be noted that to best prepare you for service in all areas, training is an intensive period of time (24 hours a day,

7 days a week). Your weekends are considered an essential part of the community integration experience. Therefore, you will only be permitted three nights out of your training community during PST. These nights are to be taken separately, beginning after the first month of training. Vacation is not permitted during PST, nor during your first three months of service.

Note to married couples: In order to take full advantage of pre-service training, couples may be separated during specific training events (e.g., Spanish classes, field trips, etc.). To the degree we are able to treat the couple as two individuals, respecting their individual learning styles, personalities, interests, strengths, challenges, motivation, and expectations, then we are best able to meet the optimal training and service goals for each. In terms of living accommodations, it is not guaranteed that you will live together if you are each from a different program. In this case, each will live in a different community and you will be allowed to spend weekends together. If both are in the same program, but with different language levels, chances are that you will be able to live together in the same community and one of you will travel daily to another community for the appropriate Spanish class. Maturity, flexibility and a true commitment to the training process is critical to a couple's success during this time.

### **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to evaluate their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their knowledge, skills and attitudes in the technical, language, cross-cultural, health and safety and security areas . During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:



- *In-service training (IST)*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their knowledge, skills and attitudes in technical, language, cross cultural, health, safety/security and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after serving between three and four months
- *Mid-service training (MST)*: Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service, while continually assessing one's knowledge, attitudes and skills in all other areas (health, safety/security, cross culture adaptation/integration). This training occurs at, approximately, the one year mark of service.
- *Close-of-service conference (COS)*: Helps to prepare Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences. This conference takes place with approximately three months of service remaining.

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



# YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN COSTA RICA



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. Peace Corps/Costa Rica maintains a health unit with basic supplies/medications and is staffed with one full-time medical officer (PCMO), a part-time PCMO, and a medical office assistant. This team takes care of Volunteers' primary healthcare needs, but it is you who must work to maintain your health. Medical services may include hospitalization at authorized facilities that are located in the capital city, if deemed necessary for any medical treatment beyond what Peace Corps services have in the office. If you become seriously ill or the resources in-country are insufficient, the Office of Medical Services (OMS) at Peace Corps headquarters may decide to medically evacuate you to the United States for further care or treatment.

## **Health Issues in Costa Rica**

Health conditions in Costa Rica are typical of those found in tropical countries. Most illnesses can be avoided by using common sense and following basic preventive measures. Because you will be serving in areas where malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, is prevalent, you will be provided with and required to take an approved anti-malarial drug during the entire 27 months of service, including during trips out of the country. Failure to comply with Peace Corps' regulations regarding malaria medication is grounds for separation from the Peace Corps.

Humidity and heat promote the growth of skin infections, which you can help prevent by keeping your body clean and dry as much as possible. Environmental pollution, mold, and pollen found throughout the country year-round can aggravate existing environmental allergies. Due to the reason mentioned, Peace Corps does not provide allergy testing. Other illnesses that exist in Costa Rica are dengue fever, rabies, tuberculosis, intestinal parasites, hepatitis A and B, and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, among others.

## **Helping You Stay Healthy**

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

During training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as we will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have a health review a year after you swear in, which is at your mid-service mark and a physical examination for clearance at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officers in Costa Rica will consult with the Office of medical Services in Washington, D.C., to determine if your health condition can or cannot be treated in Costa Rica. If you have a condition

in which the medical officer in-country with the consultation with medical staff at headquarters feel cannot be treated in-country, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

As a Volunteer, *you must accept considerable responsibility* for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The old 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. Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper precautions are taken. The most important of your responsibilities in Costa Rica is to take preventive measures for the following:

- boiling drinking water
- washing fruits and vegetables with soap and water
- receiving and taking the necessary prophylaxis

By following these preventive measures you will minimize your chances of contracting food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Costa Rica during pre-service training.

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

If Volunteers are sexually active, you 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. Certain (but not all) contraceptive methods are available without charge from the medical office.

A male Peace Corps Volunteer who fathers a child out of wedlock may be administratively separated if the country director determines that the Volunteer's action has impaired his ability to perform his assignment or has violated local laws or customs. Absent from administrative action, the Peace Corps will pay the prenatal, delivery, and postpartum costs for a non-Volunteer spouse or unmarried partner only if the Volunteer has taken action to acknowledge paternity of the child and only for costs incurred while the trainee or Volunteer is in service. Paternity legislation in Costa Rica states that DNA testing is mandatory when a woman claims a man is the father of her child. If the test establishes paternity, the father automatically must pay child support; if he does not comply, he can be jailed.

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

## **Women's Health Information**

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

medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met. If a Volunteer does become pregnant the Peace Corps will pay for all prenatal, delivery, and immediate postpartum costs.

Feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase on the local market. If you require a specific feminine hygiene product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

The Peace Corps medical officers will provide you with a medical kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat minor illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

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

- Ace bandages
- Adhesive tape
- American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*
- Antacid tablets (Tums)
- Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)
- Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)
- Band-Aids
- Butterfly closures
- Cepacol lozenges
- Condoms
- Dental floss
- Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
- Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)
- Iodine tablets (for water purification)
- Lip balm (Chap stick)
- Oral rehydration salts
- Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
- Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)
- Scissors

Sterile gauze pads  
Tetrahydrozaline eye drops (Visine)  
Tinactin (antifungal cream)  
Tweezers

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

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

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

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, shortly after you arrive in Costa Rica. 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 supply, we will refill these during your service. Please consider that you may receive a generic brand of the prescription due to the availability in-country. This is also the case for birth control pills; the Peace Corps may need to change them for a generic brand.

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 in order to more effectively aid you in maintaining your health care needs. In addition, although not a requirement, they might come in handy if you are questioned in transit about carrying a three-month supply of prescription drugs.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will re pair it; when they are beyond repair, they are replaced using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. If PC is to replace your glasses there are certain price restrictions/budgets we are to adhere to (i.e. if your frames are \$400.00 in the US this does not mean we will replace them with the same exact frame). We discourage you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye diseases. 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 health care 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 85 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2006 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 2006, 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).
- 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 11:00 p.m.
- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 73 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 48 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Fourteen (14) percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers. Twenty-six (26) percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by 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

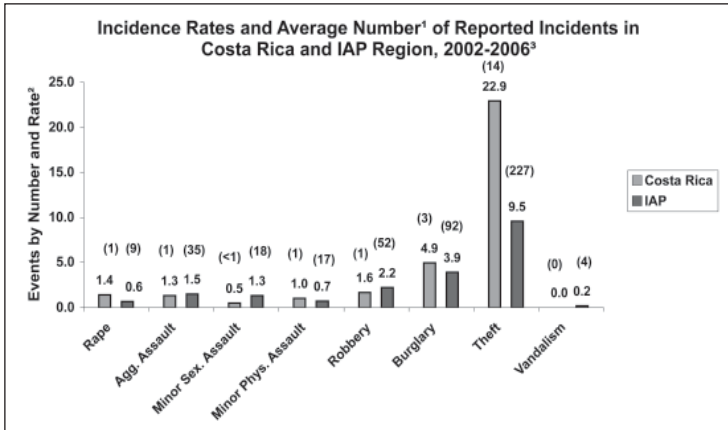
only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of 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 Costa Rica as compared to all other Inter-America and Pacific (IAP) region programs as a whole, from 2002–2006. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

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

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

The chart is separated into eight crime categories. These include vandalism (malicious defacement or damage of property); theft (taking without force or illegal entry); burglary (forcible entry of a residence); robbery (taking something by force); other physical assault (attacking without a weapon with minor injuries); other sexual assault (fondling,



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

<sup>3</sup>Data collection for Costa Rica began as of 2002

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

groping, etc.); aggravated assault (attacking with a weapon, and/or without a weapon when serious injury results); and rape (sexual intercourse without consent).

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

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

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

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

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust and second, contact the country director or the Peace Corps medical officer or the safety and security coordinator. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect. Country directors,



medical officers, and safety and security coordinator are required to report all violent crimes to the Inspector General and the RSO. This information is protected from unauthorized further disclosure by the Privacy Act. Reporting the crime also helps prevent your further victimization and protects your fellow Volunteers.

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

## **Security Issues in Costa Rica**

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 Costa Rica. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns, for instance, are favorite work sites for pickpockets.

The U.S. Department of State currently considers the crime rate in Costa Rica as high. While common criminal activity is similar to what is found in any large U.S. city, there are criminal activities that are particular to Costa Rica. Criminals frequently prey on tourists through street scams, ATM thefts,

and robbery on public buses. Credit card fraud or numbers skimming is common. Numbers skimming is the theft of the information contained in the magnetic strip on the backside of the credit card. The theft of the information occurs when a criminal swipes the card through a machine that stores all the information. With this information the criminal can charge items to the unsuspecting victim's credit card. Only when the monthly invoice arrives does the victim realize that he or she has been swindled. Volunteers who choose to use their credit cards should carefully monitor their records and frequently check their credit card accounts. Volunteers should avoid use of debit cards for point-of-sale purchases.

### ***Political Violence***

Costa Rica is the Central American country with the longest history of democracy. Indigenous terrorist organizations are nonexistent. There is no known organization targeting U.S. citizens or U.S.-affiliated interests in Costa Rica. Labor strikes and protests are common in Costa Rica. While normally peaceful, all protests and demonstrations should be avoided.

### ***Natural Disasters***

Costa Rica lies within an active earthquake zone, and periodically experiences significant tremors. The last earthquake to cause significant damage to Costa Rica's infrastructure occurred in 1993, but an earthquake measured at 6.2 on the Richter scale occurred in late 2004. In December 2005, another earthquake registered 5.1. Costa Rica is also a micro-climate, and Volunteers who wish to travel should check the projected rainfall amounts for the area in Costa Rica they intend to visit. Flooding may occur around the port city of Limon or other lower-elevation areas of Costa Rica at any time, regardless of time of year and projected rainfall amount in a particular region.

### ***Transportation Safety***

Costa Rica has one of the highest vehicle accident rates in the world. Poor road conditions and erratic driving are daily hazards in Costa Rica. Roads outside of San Jose are generally in poor condition. The roads are often overcrowded and narrow; drivers should be on the lookout for large potholes, road washouts, and mudslides during the rainy season (May through November). Speed limits and red lights are often ignored. It is very common for vehicles to cross multiple lanes of traffic without regard to other drivers. Pedestrians are not given the right of way, and extreme caution should be used whenever walking on the streets. Motorcycles are prevalent on the road and weave through traffic in any type of traffic situation.

### ***Passport Theft***

Costa Rica's immigration service conducts random inspections throughout the country. Travelers should be prepared to present their passports upon entry into Costa Rica. Due to a recent change in Costa Rican immigration regulations, photocopies of passports depicting the biographical and entry stamp pages can be carried while in Costa Rica.

Criminals looking to illegally enter the United States may target U.S. passports for theft. The U.S. embassy received 1,628 reports of lost or stolen U.S. passports during 2006. Passports have been reported stolen from inside the airport as well as other locations throughout Costa Rica.

### **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 relations in your community that will make you an unlikely

victim of crime. In coming to Costa Rica, 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, don't trust strangers too fast, 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 Costa Rica may require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive far 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. Keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs. You should always walk with a companion at night, or avoid doing it altogether and take a registered taxi instead.

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

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. Costa Rica's in-country safety program is outlined below.

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

**Volunteer training** will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Costa Rica. 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.

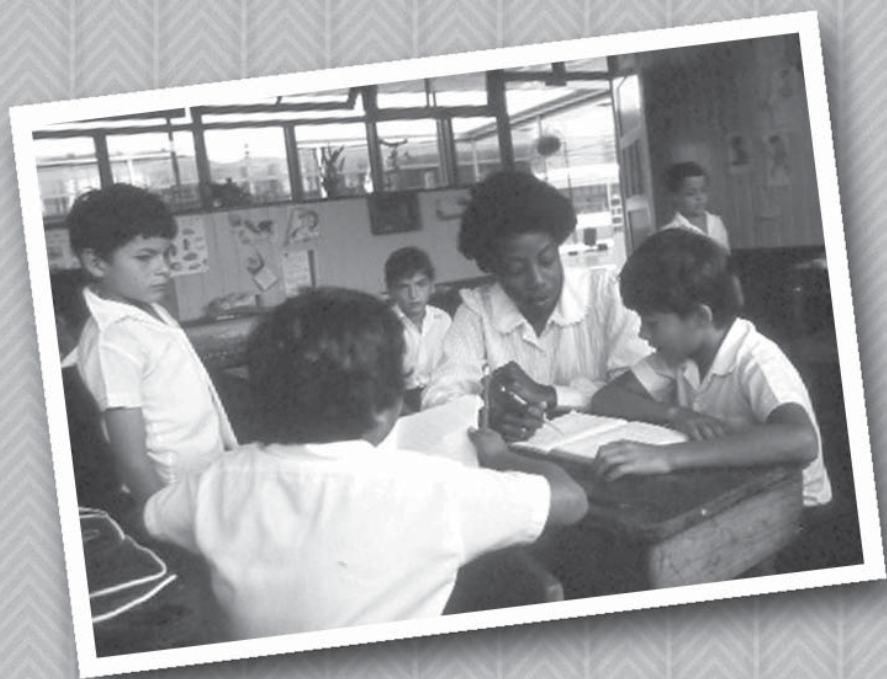
Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting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

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Costa Rica'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, Volunteers will receive instructions from the Peace Corps about the appropriate action to take. This might include gathering with other Volunteers at a predetermined location until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any security incident to the Peace Corps duty officer or safety and security coordinator. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.

## NOTES





# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, our diversity poses challenges. In Costa Rica, 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 Costa Rica.

Outside of Costa Rica's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American behavior or norms may be a misconception, such as the belief that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Costa Rica 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 Costa Rica, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during your pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

### **Overview of Diversity in Costa Rica**

The Peace Corps staff in Costa Rica recognizes 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.

In response to the increasing number of diverse Volunteers arriving to post, a diversity committee has been formed to help support Volunteers and to access resources that may aid in their service.

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

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

Costa Rican society can be considered very macho and Volunteers, especially women, are often bothered by the machismo aspect of Costa Rican culture. Some men hiss or make inappropriate comments to any woman (foreigner or local) who walks by, which can be frustrating. Many women deal with this issue by completely ignoring the comments; others continue to be bothered by them for their entire two years. In the workplace, it can be difficult to know when a comment is culturally acceptable and when it constitutes harassment. It is safe to say that most women never accept the catcalls and sexual harassment; rather, they develop a degree of tolerance with which they can function effectively.

Other issues relate to the gender roles that exist in host families. Female Volunteers may experience discomfort at seeing females in the family having the primary responsibility for household chores (i.e., child care, cleaning, and cooking). In addition, many female Volunteers find it difficult to maintain friendships with Costa Rican males because of the assumption that there is always a sexual undertone in any male-female relationship. Some female Volunteers have had a difficult time developing close friendships with Costa Rican women because many local women are already married with children by their 20s.

The Costa Rican culture generally does not allow women to exercise the freedoms to which North American women are accustomed. Female Volunteers may therefore find it frustrating to live in a country that on some levels is very egalitarian, yet on other levels is very limiting. While some Costa Rican women occupy top government positions, traditional roles for women prevail outside of the capital

city and its surroundings. Costa Rican men, in contrast, are expected to be strong and to smoke, drink, and pursue women regardless of their marital status. Volunteers, especially women, are often bothered by the machismo aspect of Costa Rican culture. There have been incidents in which female Volunteers have been touched or groped on the street or on buses. American women are obvious targets because they are so visible and have a reputation of being sexually liberal.

### ***Possible Issues for Male Volunteers***

Male Volunteers also must deal with the macho nature of the society. Men are expected to show their machismo by making sexual comments or by having numerous girlfriends. They also are expected to drink with other men and to treat women roughly at times. Many Costa Rican mothers consider an American to be a great catch for their daughters. Although male Volunteers may not be bothered by these perceptions, in reality, they can interfere with relationships and work in the community. Male Volunteers need to learn to walk the fine line between machismo and their own feelings.

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

The majority of the tourists who visit Costa Rica are white. Consequently, host country nationals tend to think that all North Americans are white, and they sometimes mistake non-Caucasian Volunteers for being something other than Americans. For instance, African Americans or Hispanic Americans may be thought to be from Costa Rica or other Latin American countries. Similarly, Volunteers of Asian decent are often considered Chinese regardless of their true origin.

Volunteers of color have different reactions to this situation, depending on their level of sensitivity and their geographical location in the country. For example, a light-skinned African

American blended into Costa Rican culture without any problems and found this to be helpful when buying goods at the market. People assumed that she was a local, not an American, so she was not charged inflated prices. However, another Volunteer with much darker skin was frustrated by the prejudice against people with darker skin in some areas of the country.

African-American Volunteers may be assumed to be from the Caribbean area of the country and ascribed attributes of that subculture. They may be called *negro* (black), the local word commonly used to describe black people, whether used in a derogatory way or as a term of endearment. They may be evaluated as less professionally competent than white Volunteers. They may be one of the few minority members within the program and thus work and live with individuals who have no understanding of African-American cultures and cannot provide adequate support.

Hispanic-American Volunteers may not be perceived as being North American. They may be expected to speak Spanish fluently because of a Hispanic surname. They may be considered Cubans or Mexicans and ascribed stereotypical attributes of those cultures. Costa Ricans may assume that Hispanic Americans understand the culture and language and thus expect them to interact socially with more ease.

Asian-American Volunteers may be identified by their ethnic heritage, not by their American citizenship. They may be assumed to be experts in kung fu. They may be perceived in a certain way based on Costa Rica's current or historical involvement with Asian countries or the increased presence of Asian businessmen in the community as bar, restaurant, and shop owners.

**Volunteer Comment:**

“Little by little, you have to start educating people and be prepared to face racist comments, which are always popping up. You need to be tolerant and take initiative to educate others.”

***Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers***

More than younger Volunteers, older Volunteers may have challenges in maintaining lifelong friendships and dealing with financial matters from afar. They may want to consider assigning power of attorney to someone.

A senior may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Seniors may not be inclined to participate fully in certain activities to “give the young folks their turn.” They may be reluctant to share personal, sexual, or health concerns with Peace Corps staff or other Volunteers. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some seniors find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some seniors may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

Some senior trainees find the intensity of training quite tiring. Others experience a lack of attention to their particular language learning needs and may need to be assertive in developing an effective individual approach.

**Volunteer Comment:**

“Because of the level of development in Costa Rica, I didn’t find that my age impeded or made my service more difficult. In fact, people in Costa Rica are very open to and respectful of older people.”

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

Homosexuality is generally considered immoral in Costa Rican society, so few gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteers choose to be open about their sexual orientation during service. Because of local views about homosexuality, it is wise to be discreet and to know your community well before disclosing your sexual orientation.

The presence of homosexuals and bisexuals is certainly recognized in Costa Rica, but hardly with the same level of acceptance as in the United States. Styles of hair and clothes, earrings on men, and certain mannerisms that are accepted in the United States may be viewed with disdain or suspicion in your community. It is likely that most Costa Rican homosexuals have migrated to larger cities. Relationships with local people can happen, but as with all cross-cultural relationships, they may not be easy. Civil liberties are sometimes ignored, and you may be hassled in bars or on the street. Lesbians have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex (as do all women). Wearing an “engagement ring” may help. Gay men must deal with machismo: talk of conquests, girl watching, and dirty jokes.

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

Costa Rica is a largely Roman Catholic country, and the church plays an important role in the political debate of the country and in the society’s moral beliefs. There is not the separation of church and state that exists in the United States. Some Costa Ricans you meet may not know much about or may have misconceptions about other religions. However, there are congregations of other religions in Costa Rica (e.g., Baptist, Methodist, Jewish, and Jehovah’s Witnesses).

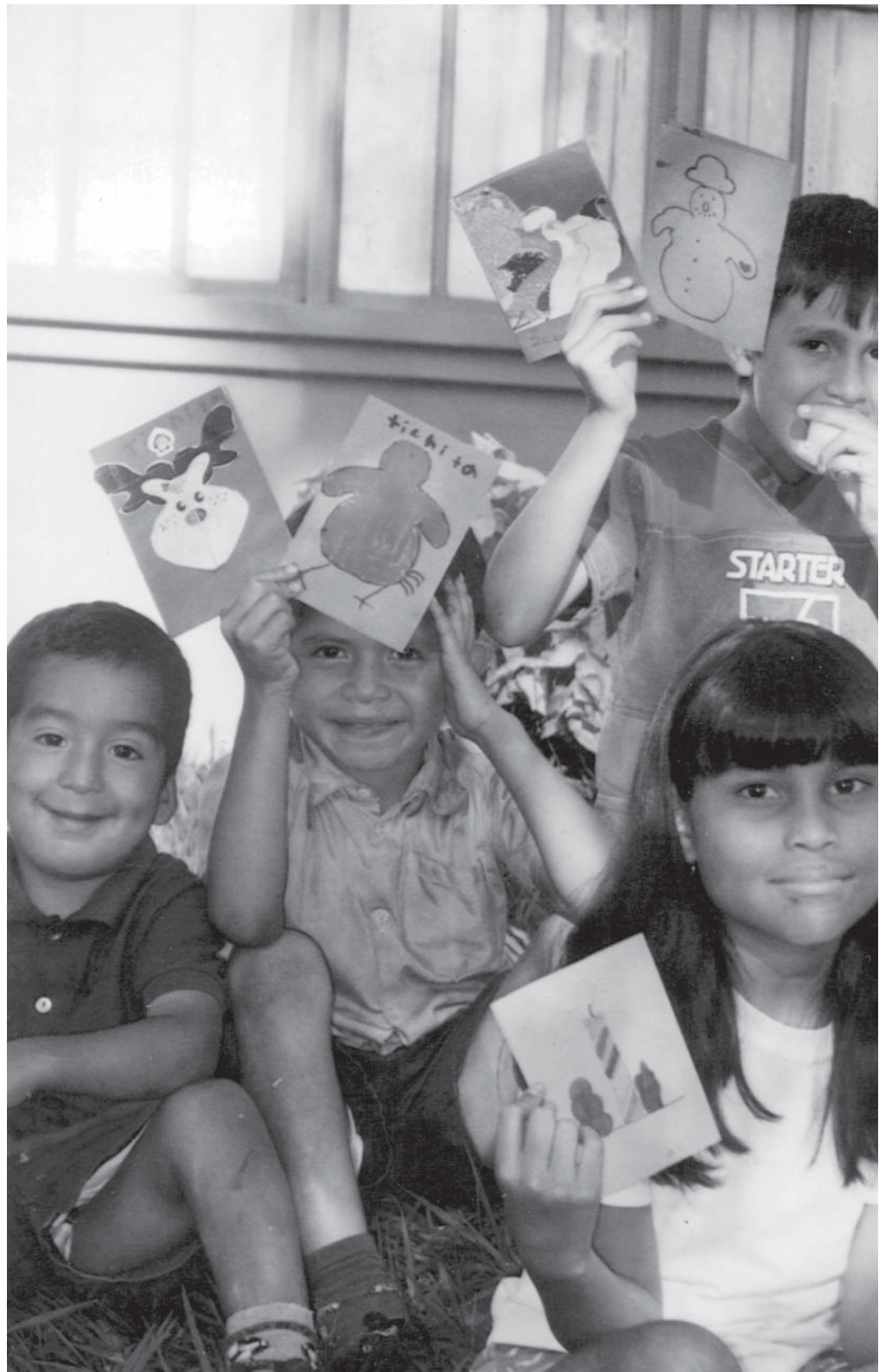
### ***Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities***

The infrastructure in Costa Rica does not make many accommodations for people with physical disabilities. Most communities do not even have sidewalks, and very few have ramps. In addition, Costa Ricans sometimes give nicknames to people based on their physical characteristics, including disabilities, and you may experience prejudice or jokes about your disability. Depending on your disability, there may be few local resources to turn to for support.

That being 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 accommodation, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Costa Rica without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps/Costa Rica staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in their training, housing, job sites, or in other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.



## NOTES



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



## **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Costa Rica?**

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. Keep in mind that you will be responsible for carrying all your baggage during training and when you travel to your future site on public buses.

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

## **What is the electric current in Costa Rica?**

The electric current generally is 110 volts; however, there are 220-volt outlets for some appliances (e.g., refrigerators and electric ovens).

**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 living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Often, Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until halfway through pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites. During a number of individual interviews and interactions with the program manager, you will have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including work priorities, geographical location, 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. Volunteers in the RCD project live in rural sites, those in CED work in semi-rural to semi urban site, while Volunteers working in CYF project live in sites of all kinds—urban, semi-urban, and occasionally rural. Some sites are close to San José, while others are as far away as a 10-

hour bus ride. Volunteers in all projects will meet periodically to discuss Peace Corps-related issues as well as cooperate on work-related activities.

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

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580, extension 1470.

For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580, extension 2521 or 2520.

**Can I call home from Costa Rica?**

Yes, you can call home from any public or private phone, collect or with a calling card. There are international operators for Sprint, AT&T, and MCI. In addition, you can purchase international calling cards issued by the national telephone company at many stores throughout Costa Rica.

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

We discourage you from bringing a cellular phone because it most likely will not be compatible with the technology in Costa Rica. Although there are plans to change the technology, at this time there is a long waiting list for cellular service. Public phones are readily available, and most host families have telephones.

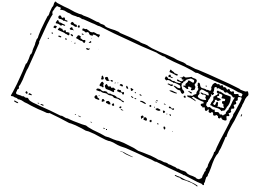
**Will there be e-mail and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?**

There are many Internet services in larger communities, which means that Volunteers in rural sites or small towns generally have to travel by bus to the nearest commercial center to access e-mail and the Internet. CYF Volunteers have limited access to computers in the local office of Patronato Nacional de la Infancia, a counterpart agency. You do not need to bring a personal computer to Costa Rica, but you may if you desire. Doing so will most likely increase your risk of being a victim of theft. Nevertheless, some Volunteers choose to bring a laptop so they can have unlimited Internet access. Should you choose to bring a laptop, it will be your responsibility to maintain and insure it; Peace Corps will not be responsible for any damage of theft.





# WELCOME LETTER FROM COSTA RICA VOLUNTEER



Dear future Peace Corps Volunteer:

When my family and friends found out that I had been invited by the Peace Corps to serve in Costa Rica, they normally had one of two reactions:

- 1.) “Lucky you, a government-sponsored vacation in paradise!” or
- 2.) “What is the Peace Corps still doing in Costa Rica?”

Personally, I remember being a little confused myself. After all, I joined Peace Corps as a wide-eyed idealist, ready to do my part and make the world a better place. I imagined Costa Rica as a nice tourist destination, but not the place to spend two years gaining experience in development work as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Nevertheless, I figured the people at the Peace Corps knew what they were doing, and I accepted the invitation as a rural community development Volunteer in Costa Rica.

Two years later, I can honestly say that I made the right decision. While Costa Rica does have its beautiful beaches and big hotels, the community where I spent my Peace Corps service seemed like a world away from all the tourist hot spots. I lived and worked in a small, rural town located in the northern province of Guanacaste with a population of approximately 500 people. The majority of the men in my community make a living with seasonal jobs in agriculture and cattle farming, and the women normally stay at home or travel to the nearest town to clean houses or perform other domestic duties. During my service, I worked on a variety of projects with different community organizations including the local development association, the sports committee, and the elementary school. My days were typically very non-structured, a common theme among Volunteers working in

rural areas. I would wake up at around 5:00 a.m. to the sound of my host mother happily cooking *gallo pinto* to the tunes of some local *ranchero* radio station. In the morning, I might stop by the elementary school to chat with the teachers and help the kids with their homework. Depending on the day, I might have soccer practice with my girls' team in the afternoon or I might plan my English classes for later in the evening. Normally, I would have an evening meeting with one of the community organizations to plan an upcoming fundraiser or to brainstorm future project ideas. As time passed, I discovered that some of these projects would fail and a couple would turn out to be amazingly successful. What really mattered the most were the relationships that I developed with the people in my town. I joined the Peace Corps with grandiose images of all the great sustainable projects that I would achieve to make a difference in the lives of others. I discovered that by living in a rural community for two years and interacting with people on a daily basis, I did help influence lives, maybe not to the scale that I initially expected, but I made a difference nonetheless.

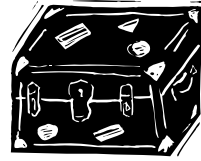
With that in mind, the best advice that I can give you is to come into this experience with an open mind and a flexible, positive attitude. You will inevitably have to slow down your pace of life and occasionally you will deal with the frustrations of bureaucracy and community development work, but these challenges allow you to grow stronger both personally and professionally. Every Peace Corps Volunteer's experience is different, but in my opinion, it really is "the toughest job you'll ever love."

—Angela Schluchter

## NOTES



# PACKING LIST



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

## General Clothing

Clothes should be conservative, sturdy, easily washable, and free of the need for ironing if possible. Given the high prices and limited selection in Costa Rica, you probably will not want to buy many clothes in-country. Women should know that although many Costa Rican women wear short skirts, doing so is likely to attract unwanted attention from men.

- At least two casual tops (e.g., T-shirts or polo shirts)
- One fleece vest/jacket, one windbreaker and one sweater or sweatshirt
- One or two swimsuits
- One lightweight rain jacket or poncho good for going over back-pack, bags
- Cap or hat for sun protection
- Running gear (if you run)
- 10 pairs of socks

- Belts
- Pajamas
- One or two dressy outfits for nightlife (on breaks or workshops)

### ***For Men***

- Three pairs of pants for work (denim, cotton, khaki; wrinkle free)
- Five to seven shirts, some button down and mostly short sleeved
- Five to seven T-shirts
- One pair of dress pants
- One pair of casual pants (for hiking, painting, etc.)
- Three pairs of shorts
- Ten pairs of boxers or briefs
- One or two ties (sport coat optional) for formal occasions/swearing-in

### ***For Women***

- Four pairs of pants for work (denim, cotton, khaki, wrinkle-free)
- Five or six tops for work (T-shirts, blouses, tank tops, etc.)
- One pair of dress pants
- Two pairs of shorts
- Three casual skirts or dresses and one or two dressy outfits
- Five to seven bras and/or sports tops
- Fifteen to 20 pairs of underwear

## **Shoes**

With the exception of flip-flops, the selection of shoes available in Costa Rica is more limited than in the United States, particularly in larger sizes (over size 9 for women or over size 10-1/2 for men). You may want to bring a two-year supply.

- One pair of sturdy walking or tennis shoes
- One pair of running shoes, if you run
- One pair of waterproof hiking boots or Vibram-soled boots (all parts of the country are wet and muddy during the rainy season; inexpensive rubber boots can be bought locally)
- Two pairs of comfortable shoes for work (can include open-toe shoes for women)
- One pair of dress shoes (can include sandals for women)
- Flip-flops or sturdy sandals (e.g., Tevas, though these type of sandals are not acceptable in professional work environments (schools, offices, etc.)

## **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Regular toiletries (soap, shampoo, shaving cream, body lotion, toothpaste, special floss, etc.) Volunteers recommend bringing economy size of these as the Peace Corps does not provide for these items, but these items are also available in-country (much more expensive) if you choose not to pack such items
- Tampons, if you use them (few brands are available locally, and they are expensive)
- Any particular brands of over-the-counter medicine you need (the Peace Corps provides some over-the-counter medicine but usually has only one brand for each type)

- Fast-drying towels—two bath, one beach, and one hand
- Sunscreen and mosquito repellent, if you prefer a certain type (The Peace Corps provides only one kind of each. Mosquito nets are provided)
- Refillable razors

### **Miscellaneous**

- Two flat sheets or a set for a twin bed
- A favorite pillow and pillowcase(s)
- Flashlight
- Sturdy (larger) backpack or duffel bag for three-to-four-day trips (Many Volunteers say this is essential)
- Day pack or small backpack
- Inexpensive water-resistant or waterproof watch
- Small travel alarm clock
- Money belt
- Leak-proof water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)
- Pocket knife
- Radio, iPod (with electrical cord); favorite tapes or CDs
- Shortwave radio (optional)
- Start-up supply of stationery, pens, etc.
- Light, stuffable (and preferably waterproof) sleeping bag
- Camera and film
- A few dollars to tide you over at your pre-departure orientation (or staging)
- Good scissors
- World map or lightweight atlas
- Small iron
- Photos of family and friends



- Inexpensive jewelry
- Backgammon and other travel games
- Journal
- Small sewing kit
- A pair or two of cheap but strong sunglasses
- Favorite resources for working with children and youth (games, art supplies, icebreakers, etc.); the Peace Corps provides some
- Cheap items to use as rewards (e.g., stickers, decorative pencils, or erasers)
- Books in English (to read and exchange; Peace Corps/Costa Rica has a library of novels and resource materials)
- Rechargeable batteries (regular batteries are available locally, but they are expensive and/or of lower quality.)

### **Items You Do Not Need to Bring**

The following items are either available in Costa Rica or provided by the Peace Corps.

- Mosquito net
- Spanish-English dictionary
- Travel books about Costa Rica or Central America (there are plenty in the Peace Corps library)



# 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 2254 or 2286; after-hours duty officer: 202.638.2574).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

## Passport/Travel

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

## Medical/Health

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

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

## **Insurance**

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have 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>
Invitation/ Placement	Inter-America and the Pacific	Ext. 1835	202.692.1835
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: <a href="mailto:costarica@peacecorps.gov">costarica@ peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2520	202.692.2520
	Desk Assistant E-mail: <a href="mailto:costarica@peacecorps.gov">costarica@ peacecorps.gov</a>	Ext. 2521	202.692.2521

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



# 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