

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

GEORGIA



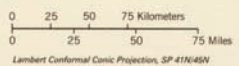
A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



October 2007

Georgia

- International boundary
- - - Autonomous republic boundary
- ★ National capital
- ⊙ Autonomous republic center
- Railroad
- Road



Lambert Conformal Conic Projection, SP 41N/45W



A WELCOME LETTER

Thank you for accepting the invitation to spend your next two years as a Volunteer in the Republic of Georgia. Come to serve and you will be richly rewarded. Peace Corps/Georgia is a relatively new addition to the Peace Corps' great history of service. Our first Volunteers arrived in 2001.

I expect you have many questions about how it will be to live and work in a country so different from our own. In Georgia, many ordinary people struggle to obtain basic necessities like heat, water, and electricity. Georgians also have had to adjust, in a decade's time, to extraordinary upheavals in their economic and social conditions. These are the people you will be living and working with over the next two years. Yet, despite the hardships they face, we can guarantee that they will show you a generosity of spirit, warmth and a welcome you may never have experienced before. The "Rose Revolution" gave hope to many Georgians, and there are many social, economic, and political changes in process. It is an exciting time to be here.

The world has dramatically changed since September 11, 2001, and you will find that special efforts have been made to ensure your safety and security in this historical nation. Safety and security procedures have been implemented for staff and Volunteers to follow, the most basic being keeping Peace Corps informed of your whereabouts at all times. Peace Corps must know your contact information 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with no exception. Violations of this policy are taken extremely seriously. You should come prepared to comply with this policy.

In addition, there are other policies you will learn about in pre-service training; a brief overview is provided in your Volunteer Handbook. You should come prepared to fully adhere to all Peace Corps policies.

This *Welcome Book*, prepared by Volunteers and staff, conveys basic information on how to prepare for Georgia. More extensive preparation—although still only a basic foundation for your future service—will occur during the 10 weeks of pre-service training immediately following your arrival. The most successful Volunteers are those who bring along great amounts of patience, flexibility, an ability to laugh at oneself, a genuine interest in people, tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability, and a willingness to take risks while suspending judgment. You will learn to work out your frustrations and perform well under often-trying times and weather conditions.

During pre-service training, you will live with a Georgian family. This is a direct way for you to understand and appreciate what it is like to live in this country. The training staff, drawing on your unique skills and experiences, will help you define and attain your individual learning objectives and reach certain levels of competency in language, technical, cross-cultural skills, and health and safety practices. This 10-week period is also the time when you will make the final assessment about your commitment to become a Volunteer and serve in Georgia for two years. It takes considerable strength to recognize this before people in a community have come to depend on you. As a Volunteer you are required to live with a Georgian family for the first six months of your Volunteer service. Many Volunteers, for cultural and safety concerns, live with a Georgian family throughout their service and for safety and security reasons, Peace Corps/Georgia strongly encourages this. Come prepared to live with a host family for your two years of service.

Congratulations. We hope that you will decide to join us for the adventure of a lifetime.

Kathleen Sifer
Country Director

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PEACE CORPS/GEORGIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Georgia

As early as 1994, the government of Georgia indicated its desire to host Peace Corps Volunteers. Although the Peace Corps sent an assessment team to Georgia in response to that request, a decision to enter Georgia was indefinitely postponed due to security concerns over civil unrest in the Abkhazia and Ossetia provinces. In 1997, the Georgian government formally reiterated its desire to host Peace Corps Volunteers, and again an assessment team was sent. Although the security situation had significantly improved by this time, budgetary constraints prevented the Peace Corps from acting upon this request, and the decision was delayed yet again. In late 1999, after repeated inquiries from the Georgian government and consistent accounts from the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi that the security situation remained conducive to the presence of Peace Corps Volunteers, the decision was made to reassess the possibility of setting up a program. The review was positive, and funds were set aside by the Peace Corps to establish a program in Georgia in 2000. The first Volunteers arrived in 2001; more than 250 Volunteers have served in Georgia since then.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Georgia

The Peace Corps' first program in Georgia began in 2001 with a secondary education/English teaching project of 21 Volunteers. Since that time, 199 Volunteers have served in the education project. The education project resulted from a request by the government of Georgia for technical and

human resource assistance from the Peace Corps, particularly in the rural areas of the country. In exploring various programming sectors, government officials and the Peace Corps concurred that education projects targeting English language learning and teaching would meet a growing demand and have the greatest potential for Georgia.

Peace Corps/Georgia works in close collaboration with the Georgian Ministry of Education, individual schools, universities, and communities that recognize English language skills can provide Georgian citizens with many advantages. These advantages include the possibilities to further education and advance careers, the ability to access information and technology (particularly through electronic means), the chance to further a closer relationship with Western democratic countries, and the opportunity to learn about new business practices. The current education Volunteers in Georgia serve in secondary schools, vocational schools, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in villages and towns throughout the country.

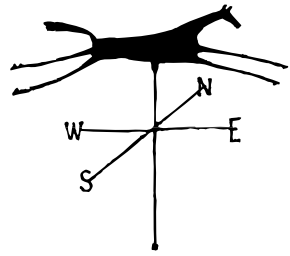
The education projects effectively address the above issues while also introducing youth to lessons and activities on critical thinking, problem solving, life skills, democratic values, civic responsibility, the identification of community development needs, and the implementation of solutions and projects to meet those needs. The education program is changing to better meet the needs of Georgia. Some Volunteers in the education project focus on information technology (IT) training, teach at vocational schools, and serve in minority areas in Georgia. These are also areas for potential expansion in the future.

Through the project, communities have the opportunity to communicate and share cultural information with native English speakers—a chance they would otherwise most likely not have. Teachers, students, and community members improve their listening and speaking skills through daily communication with Volunteers. Education Volunteers introduce new teaching methodologies and help Georgian teachers design and deliver lessons with a student-centered focus.

Peace Corps/Georgia's programming also includes a business and social entrepreneurship project that began in 2004 with 10 NGO development Volunteers. Since 2004, 56 Volunteers have served in this project. After a project review in 2007, the program refocused to include a stronger business and economic development component and a pilot was started as a response to a growing need to develop the small business sector and support and promote economic development from a grassroots level. Volunteers who work in the business and social entrepreneurship program work at NGOs and business consulting organizations to promote community and economic development by focusing on business planning, marketing, networking, and trade promotion. The project's overall purpose is to have small businesses, organizations, community groups, and NGOs engage in sustainable projects through management development and economic capacity building. There has been much interest by NGOs and business consulting organizations in bringing in Peace Corps Volunteers to assist them in their organizational development efforts.



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: GEORGIA AT A GLANCE



History

The roots of the Georgian people extend deep in history, and their cultural heritage is equally ancient and rich. During the medieval period, a powerful Georgian kingdom existed, reaching its height between the 10th and 13th centuries. After a long period of Turkish and Persian domination, Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire in the 19th century. An independent Georgian state existed from 1918 to 1921, when it was incorporated into the Soviet Union. In 1936, Georgia became a constituent (union) republic and continued as such until the collapse of the Soviet Union. One of the most independence-minded republics, Georgia declared sovereignty in November 1989, and independence in April 1991.

The 1990s marked a period of instability and civil unrest in Georgia, as the first post-independence government was overthrown and separatist movements emerged in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. By the mid-1990s, tentative ceasefires were in effect, although separatist sentiment in the two regions remains high.

At the end of 1998, about 280,000 people were internally displaced in Georgia. The majority (96 percent) were ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia. The rest (about 14,000 people) were from South Ossetia. About 10,000 of the ethnic Georgians from South Ossetia lived in government-controlled areas, while about 4,000 people remained displaced within South Ossetia. Approximately 2 percent of the displaced people were ethnic Jews, Ukrainians, Greeks, Abkhaz, Armenians, or Russians. Almost half of Georgia's displaced

population lived in the Samegrelo region adjacent to Abkhazia, followed by Tbilisi (31 percent), and the Imereti region (13 percent). Renewed fighting in the Gali district of Abkhazia displaced another 40,000 persons, most of whom fled to the Samegrelo region.

Government

In 1992, Georgia—which had been operating under a Soviet-era constitution since 1978—reinstated its 1921 pre-Soviet constitution. A constitutional commission was formed in 1992 to draft a new constitution, and after a protracted dispute over the authority of the executive branch, a new document was adopted in 1995.

The head of state is the president, who is given extensive authority. The legislature is a 235-member Parliament. The judicial system includes district and city courts and a Supreme Court.

The Communist Party of Georgia, controlled by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was the only political party until the 1980s. Since independence, however, many diverse political groups have emerged. The major political organizations now include the Citizens' Union, an alliance formed by the previous Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze; the reformist National Democratic Party; the Georgian Popular Front, formed in 1989 to promote Georgian independence; and the Georgian Social Democratic Party, which was established in 1893 but dissolved after the Soviet takeover.

Georgia became a member of the United Nations in 1992 and joined the Commonwealth of Independent States in 1993.

In 2003, elections were held throughout Georgia, which resulted in accusations of ballot tampering by the Shevardnadze government. New elections were demanded and pressure from the opposition party, the National Democratic Party, and from the student movement of Kmara (which means “Enough!”) brought thousands of protestors to the capital, Tbilisi. The result was the hurried but peaceful downfall of the Shevardnadze government, now called the Rose or Velvet Revolution. New elections were held for both parliament and president in early 2004, placing the National Democratic Party and Mikhail Saakashvili in power. The revolution swept out nearly all the old, discredited politicians in the previous government and replaced them with young, often Western-educated officials. With most of the former opposition now in the government, and with Saakashvili's National Movement still enjoying wide popularity, opposition parties are weak and disunited, although they are free to organize and actively campaign for office.

With the Saakashvili administration, the government announced its goals of building democracy, increasing prosperity, and peacefully reincorporating Georgia's separatist regions. The political status of the Russian-supported separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia remains unresolved, however, and continues to challenge the government.

Since 2004, the government of Georgia has built an increasingly cohesive nation with maturing democratic institutions and a growing economy. Parliamentary and municipal elections have been judged to be largely free and fair, although problems exist with voter lists and balloting procedures. One of the Georgian government's primary goals is integrating into Western institutions, particularly the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and eventually

the European Union (EU). The new government took action against endemic corruption. It completely reorganized the traffic police, which was infamous for its corruption prior to the Rose Revolution. Corrupt judges were dismissed, and a fair examination system for entering universities was implemented. A great deal of progress has also been made in reforming Georgia's military, bringing it closer to the standards required for NATO membership.

Georgia's location, situated between the Black Sea, Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkey, gives it strategic importance far beyond its size. It is developing as the gateway from the Black Sea to the Caucasus and the larger Caspian region, but also serves as a buffer between Russia and Turkey. Georgia has a long relationship with Russia. Following Russian bans on imports of Georgian wine, water, and agricultural products, and the severing of transportation links in 2006, Georgia is reaching out to its other neighbors and looking to the West in search of alternatives and opportunities. It signed a partnership and cooperation agreement with the European Union and in 2006 signed an action plan under the European Union's European Neighborhood Policy for reforms aimed at building a closer relationship with the EU. Georgia also participates in NATO's Partnership for Peace program. In September 2006, Georgia was granted Intensified Dialogue status with NATO to formalize discussions on Georgia's membership aspirations. In addition, Georgia has reached out to a number of countries that have expressed interest in investing in the country. China, Russia, Switzerland, Turkey, and Ukraine, as well as a number of countries in the EU (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom) maintain embassies in Tbilisi. Georgia is a member of the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

(OSCE), the Council of Europe, and the GUAM Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (a regional organization of four Commonwealth of Independent States—Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova).

Economy

During the Soviet period, the Georgian economy was modernized and diversified. Agriculture accounted for about half of the gross domestic product and employed about one-fourth of the labor force; the industry and service sectors each employed about one-fifth of the labor force.

After independence, the economy contracted sharply, owing to political instability, which discouraged foreign investment; the loss of favorable trading relationships with the states of the former Soviet Union; and civil unrest in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, where key pipelines and transport links were sabotaged or blockaded. Georgia sought to transform its command economy into one organized on market principles: prices were liberalized, the banking system reformed, and some state enterprises and retail establishments privatized. However, after several years of increases, the overall level of employment started to fall in 1997 and this trend has continued. Furthermore, many employees in the public sector were paid only token salaries on an increasingly irregular basis. A significant percentage of the Georgian labor market has been employed in the shadow economy. With the election of the Saakashvili government, public-sector employees have begun to receive higher salaries and with greater regularity in an effort to shut down the shadow economy and prevent corruption from officials.

The new government has made strides in fulfilling its aims of economic reform. It reduced the number of taxes from 21 to 7

and introduced a flat income tax of 12 percent. It significantly reduced the number of licenses a business requires and introduced a one-window system that allows an entrepreneur to open a business relatively quickly. Strict deadlines for agency action on permits were introduced, and consent is assumed if the agency fails to act within the time limit. The government intends to completely eliminate import duties by 2008, which should reduce costs and stimulate business even more.

The World Bank recognized Georgia as the world's fastest-reforming economy in its 2007 *Doing Business*, ranking it as the world's 37th easiest place to do business, in the same league as countries such as France, Slovakia, and Spain. The World Bank's *Anti-Corruption in Transition 3* places Georgia among the countries showing the most dramatic improvement in the struggle against corruption, due to implementation of a strong program of economic and institutional reform, and reported reductions in the burden of bribes paid by firms in the course of doing business.

Economic growth has remained strong, reaching approximately 9 percent in 2005. Inflation was about 6 percent in 2005, but was forecast to increase to nearly 9 percent in 2006. Efforts to improve the efficiency of government operations since the Rose Revolution have required the government to release workers, pushing official unemployment to nearly 14 percent in 2005.

Improved collection and administration of taxes have greatly increased revenues for the government. The government has paid off wage and pension arrears and increased spending on desperately needed infrastructure such as roads and electric energy supply systems. It expects to have privatized all of the largest state-owned industries by the end of 2008, increasing revenues and removing a major temptation toward corruption from the control of state bureaucrats.

Before 2004 electricity blackouts were common throughout the country, but since late 2005, distribution has been much more reliable, approaching consistent 24-hour-a-day services. Improvements have resulted from increased metering, better billing and collection practices, reduced theft, and management reforms. Investments in infrastructure have been made as well. Hydroelectricity output increased by almost 27 percent and thermal by 28 percent from 2005 to 2006. Natural gas has traditionally been supplied to Georgia by Russia. Through conservation, new hydroelectricity sources, and the availability of new sources of natural gas in Azerbaijan, Georgia's dependence on Russia for energy supplies should decrease in the near future.

The banking sector is becoming more open to competition from foreign-owned banks. The sector is relatively stable, and is supplying more credit to domestic businesses. Foreign direct investment (FDI) is the most important source of capital for Georgia and other post-Soviet states. Such investment not only supports new plants and equipment, but also usually entails bringing in modern management methods as well. The Georgian government is eager to welcome foreign investors.

Georgia faces many challenges in attracting foreign investment and growing its economy. In 2006, more than half the population lived below the official poverty line. With only 4.7 million people, most of whom have little disposable income, it is a small market in itself. The major market to which Georgia has traditionally been linked is Russia. (For example, at one time nearly all of the Soviet Union's citrus consumption was produced in Georgia.) In 2006, trade relations were plagued by politically motivated interruptions when Russia imposed bans on all Georgian exports of wine, fruits and vegetables, and mineral water. In October 2006, Russia severed all direct

transportation links, as well as postal service and visa issuance. In addition, Russia undertook a campaign of mass deportations of Georgian nationals residing in Russia and closed the only legal land border crossing between Georgia and Russia, diverting traffic into the separatist regions outside of Georgia's control. In light of these restrictions, Georgian businesses are actively seeking new markets for their products in the EU, Eastern Europe, North America, and elsewhere.

The government faces a major challenge in controlling corruption, which is a persistent problem. Shortly after President Saakashvili took office, his administration dismissed nearly the entire police force and replaced it with better paid and trained officers. Several high officials have been prosecuted for corruption-related offenses. On the other hand, widespread lack of confidence in the Georgian courts and system of justice is a major obstacle not only to foreign investment, but also to domestic investment. The new government has promised to tackle this difficult task, which requires balancing the objective of judicial independence with honest, fair, and competent decision-making.

People and Culture

Georgia is a land of ancient culture, with a literary tradition that dates to the fifth century A.D. Kolkhida (Colchis) housed a school of higher rhetoric in which Greeks and Georgians studied. By the 12th century, academies in Ikalto and Gelati, the first medieval higher-education centers, disseminated a wide range of knowledge. The national genius was demonstrated most clearly in *Vepkhis-tqarsani* (*The Knight in the Panther's Skin*), the epic masterpiece of the 12th-century poet Shota Rustaveli. Major figures in later Georgian literary history include a famed 18th-century writer,

Sulkhan-Saba Orbeliani; and the novelist, poet, and dramatist Iliia Chavchavadze. The 19th-century playwright Giorgi Eristavi is regarded as the founder of the modern Georgian theatre. Among other prominent pre-revolutionary authors were the lyric poet Akaki Tsereteli; Alexander Qazbegi, novelist of the Caucasus; and the nature poet Vazha Pshavela.

Important individuals in other arts include the painters Niko Pirosmiani (Pirosmashvili), Irakli Toidze, Lado Gudiashvili, Elena Akhvlediani, and Sergo Kobuladze; the composers Zakaria Paliashvili and Meliton Balanchivadze (father of the choreographer George Balanchine); and the founder of Georgian ballet, Vakhtang Chabukiani. Georgian theatre, in which outstanding directors of the Soviet period were Kote Mardzhanishvili, Sandro Akhmeteli, and Robert Sturm, has had a marked influence in Europe and elsewhere. The Georgian film *Repentance*, an allegory about the repressions of the Stalin era, was directed by Tenghiz Abuladze. It won the Special Jury Prize at the 1987 Cannes Film Festival and was widely praised for its political courage.

The ancient culture of the republic is reflected in the large number of architectural monuments, including many monasteries and churches; indeed, Georgian architecture (with Armenian influences) played a considerable role in the development of the Byzantine style.

It is likely that Georgians have always lived in this region, known to them as Sakartvelo. Ethnically, contemporary Georgia is not homogeneous, but reflects the intermixtures and successions of the Caucasus region. About 70 percent of the people are Georgians—the rest are Armenian, Russian, and Azerbaijani, with a smaller number of Ossetes, Greeks, Abkhazians, and other minority groups.

Many Georgians are members of the Georgian Orthodox church, a self-governing branch of the Eastern Orthodox church. In addition, there are Muslim, Russian Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic, and Jewish communities.

Environment

Georgia has a remarkable variety of landscapes. The luxuriant vegetation of the moist, subtropical Black Sea shores is relatively close, geographically, to the eternal snows of the country's mountain peaks. Deep gorges and swift rivers give way to dry steppes, and the green of alpine meadows alternates with the darker hues of forested valleys.

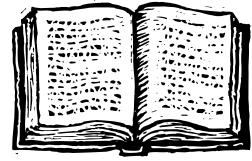
More than a third of the country is covered by forests and brush. The forests include oak, chestnut, beech, and alder, as well as Caucasian fir, ash, linden, and apple and pear trees. The western underbrush is dominated by evergreens (including rhododendrons and holly) and such deciduous shrubs as Caucasian bilberry and nut trees. Citrus groves are found throughout the country, and long rows of eucalyptus trees line the country roads. Eastern Georgia has fewer forests, and the steppes are dotted with thickets of prickly underbrush, as well as a blanket of feather and beard grass.

Tbilisi, the capital, lies in eastern Georgia, partly nestled in a scenic gorge of the Kura River. Other major population centers are Kutaisi, Rustavi, and Batumi.

NOTES



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



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

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Tbilisi to how to convert from the dollar to the lari. Just click on Georgia and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.state.gov

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

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

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

www.geography.about.com/science/geography/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/infonation3/menu/advanced.asp

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

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries around the world.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

www.clubs.yahoo.com/clubs/peacecorps

This Yahoo site hosts a bulletin board where prospective Volunteers and returned Volunteers can communicate together.

www.rpcv.org

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

www.rpcvwebring.org

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

www.peacecorpswriters.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Georgia

www.internet.ge/en/

Web directory and information about Georgia.

www.Rustavi2.com

Georgian news site and TV station with local news (in Georgian)

www.civil.ge/eng

Online magazine about local issues in Georgia

<http://georgia.usembassy.gov>

U.S. Embassy in Georgia.

www.georgiaemb.org/

Site for the Georgia embassy to the U.S., Canada, and Mexico (in English and Georgian)

www.eurasianet.org

Site contains articles and resources about Georgia and surrounding nations.

International Development Sites About Georgia

www.assistancegeorgia.org.ge

A website on humanitarian and development aid in Georgia

www.usaid.gov/locations/europe_eurasia/countries/ge/index.html

Website for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

www.horizonti.org/

Website of Horizonti, a Georgian NGO that supports development in Georgia.

Recommended Books

1. Burford, Tim. *Georgia: The Bradt Travel Guide*. United Kingdom: Bradt Publications, 1999.
2. Goldstein, Darra. *The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
3. Goltz, Thomas. *Georgia Diary*. Armonk, New York: ME Sharpe, 2006.
4. Nasmyth, Peter. *Georgia: In the Mountains of Poetry*. New York: Curzon Press, 2001.
5. Maters, Tom and Plunkett, Richard. *Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan (Lonely Planet Travel Guides)*. (2nd ed). Lonely Planet Travel Guides, 2004.
6. Reiss, Tom. *The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life*. New York: Random House, 2005.

7. Rosen, Roger, et al. *Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus* (2nd ed.). Hong Kong: Odyssey Publications, 1999.
8. Said, Kurban. *Ali and Nino*. Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 1999.
9. Suny, Ronald Grigor. *The Making of the Georgian Nation* (2nd ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

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).

NOTES



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

Mail

The following information concerning mail service to Georgia should be left with your family and friends for sending mail and packages to you in a timely and secure manner. During pre-service training, your mail should be sent to the Peace Corps' P.O. Box in Tbilisi at the following address:

"Your Name," PCT
110 B Burdzgla Street
P.O. Box 66
Tbilisi, 0194
Georgia

Mail arriving for you at the P.O. Box will be delivered to the training site at least once a week. Once your permanent site has been identified, you will be responsible for informing your family and friends of your mailing address.

Packages from home are subject to customs inspection and may be assessed heavy taxes, depending on the items sent. You will be responsible for paying any taxes levied.

Residents and Volunteers alike in Georgia report varying success with the postal service. Some have had letters disappear, while others report mail arriving only after a lengthy delay. Few have experienced the level of reliability in mail service that one might expect in the United States. Packages tend to be a particular problem due to pilferage or theft along the way, and the Peace Corps does not recommend having items shipped to Georgia.

Telephones

All trainees receive cellphones during pre-service training as part of Peace Corps/Georgia's safety and security strategy. Trainees and Volunteers may choose to purchase phone cards to make personal calls, including international calls to the U.S. on these phones. The cost of a call to the U.S. is approximately 50 cents per minute. Other international telephone calls from land lines can be made in the larger cities, but it can be expensive—as much \$1 a minute for a call to the U.S. However, in the event of an emergency during training or your service, your family can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services in Washington, D.C. Peace Corps staff will immediately contact Peace Corps/Georgia. The 24-hour emergency telephone number is 800.424.8580, extension 1470.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

E-mail and Internet access throughout Georgia, while growing in popularity, is still limited due mainly to occasional power interruptions. Most Volunteers will not have e-mail access at their sites. You may be able to gain access to the Internet in Tbilisi or in other larger towns.

Housing and Site Location

Volunteers need to be very flexible about their housing expectations. For the first six months of your service, you are required to live with a Georgian host family. After the first six months, alternative housing arrangements may be considered in consultation with the safety and security coordinator and host family coordinator. However, private housing options are limited in Georgia. Volunteers living in small villages have difficulty finding apartments while Volunteers in larger cities often find apartments cost prohibitive. For safety and quality-of-life reasons (especially during the winter months), most

Volunteers opt to remain living with host families throughout their two years of service. *You should come prepared to live in a host family for your two years of service.* In most areas of Georgia there are no guarantees of continuous electricity, running water, or phone service. Some villages and towns have only a few hours of electricity a day (or even none at all) in the winter months, and the natural gas supply is often cut off for periods of time. Georgian families wear "house shoes" or slippers inside; as Volunteers and trainees do the same, you may want to bring a pair with you. Without a central heating system, the inside of buildings is often colder in the winter than the outdoors. You should be prepared to tolerate cold and discomfort, especially at schools. The Peace Corps staff will do its best to help Volunteers adjust and succeed in this environment. Peace Corps/Georgia provides all Volunteers with sleeping bags for the winter. These sleeping bags have a synthetic filling and are rated at 0°F for warmth.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer in Georgia, you will receive four types of allowances.

A living allowance is paid to cover your basic living expenses. The living allowance is reviewed at least once a year through a market survey to ensure that it is adequate. This allowance is disbursed on a monthly basis in the local currency, the Georgian lari (abbreviated as GEL). One U.S. dollar is approximately 1.65 GEL. The living allowance is meant to cover food, work-related transportation, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses such as postage, film, reading material, stationery, occasional replacement of clothes, and toiletries. The current monthly living allowance for Georgia is 484 GEL, which includes 208 GEL per month to be paid to your host family.

A leave allowance, equivalent to \$24 per month of Volunteer service, is paid monthly with the living allowance. The leave allowance is paid using the Bank of Georgia official rate of exchange. Conversion to U.S. dollars is available at any bank or exchange bureau.

A settling-in allowance of 300 GEL is also provided to newly assigned Volunteers for the purchase of items necessary to set up housekeeping at site.

A quarterly travel allowance is also provided to help defray the costs of pre-approved, program-related travel. This travel allowance is paid every three months and is deposited into your bank account along with the monthly living allowance.

A separate winter heating allowance 240 GEL and is paid as one payment in addition to the August living allowance.

Most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in Georgia with these four allowances. All Volunteers are strongly discouraged from supplementing their income with money brought from home. The living allowance is adequate, and Volunteers should be living at the economic level of their neighbors and colleagues.

Traveler's checks are not commonly used in Georgia, but a few banks in the larger cities will cash them. Currently, American Express and Visa/MasterCard traveler's checks are the easiest to cash. ATM machines are available in Tbilisi and some accept cards from U.S. banks. Credit card use is discouraged as few establishments accept them and the possibility for theft is very high. Changing U.S. dollars to GEL is very easy and can be done at any official currency exchange or bank.

Food and Diet

The basic Georgian diet consists of meat, vegetables, and fruits. Vegetables are mostly limited to potatoes, cabbage, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Fresh vegetables and fruits are available in the summer and, sometimes, in winter. During the long winter months, cabbage, potatoes, and meat are the mainstays. Volunteers placed in smaller villages may not have access to as wide a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as those closer to district centers. However, the fruits and vegetables that are available are delicious. In addition, many host families have extensive gardens and make their own wine, cheese, honey, and more.

While meat is an important element of the Georgian diet, it is possible for vegetarians to maintain a meatless diet throughout their service. However, be prepared for a lack of variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, especially during winter. During pre-service training, you will stay with a host family. While it may seem strange to your host family that you would refuse to eat meat on a daily basis, in time they will respect that decision and accommodate your needs accordingly. During the winter, fresh produce is not as readily available as it is in the spring and summer. For this reason, you may find the need to prepare preserves during the summer and fall months. Cabbage, carrots, and potatoes are available throughout winter, but other produce must be preserved ahead of time or purchased in the capital city. Some prior planning will need to be done in order to ensure that a healthy alternative diet can be maintained.

Transportation

Georgia has a dense transportation system. Most freight is carried by truck, but railways are also an important means of transportation. Tbilisi is connected by rail with both Sukhumi and Batumi on the Black Sea, Baku on the Caspian, as well as Yerevan in Armenia. Most people travel by bus or vans between cities, and fares are relatively cheap. Taxis are widely available but tend to be much more expensive. Georgia's international airport is in Tbilisi.

Riding a bicycle is not a common practice in Georgia, and for safety and security reasons, Peace Corps/Georgia does not recommend that you purchase or use one. Volunteers and trainees are prohibited from owning or operating motor vehicles (i.e., automobiles, motorcycles, or three-wheeled cycles) or riding on motorcycles or in motorcycle sidecars as a passenger. Violation of these policies may result in the termination of your Volunteer service.

Geography and Climate

The northern Caucasian mountains protect Georgia from cold air intrusions from the north, while the country is open to the constant influence of warm, moist air from the Black Sea. Western Georgia has a humid, subtropical, maritime climate, while eastern Georgia's climate ranges from moderately humid to dry, subtropical conditions.

There also are marked elevation zones. The Kolkhida Lowland, for example, has a subtropical climate up to about 2,000 feet, with a moist, moderately warm climate lying just above. Still higher is a belt of cold, wet winters and cool summers. Above about 7,200 feet, there is an alpine climatic

zone, lacking any true summer, and above 11,500 feet, snow and ice are present year-round. In eastern Georgia, farther inland, temperatures are lower than in the western portions at the same altitude.

Western Georgia has heavy precipitation throughout the year, totaling 40 to 100 inches. Winter in this region is mild and warm; in regions below about 2,000 feet, the average January temperature never falls below 32°F (0°C). Relatively warm, sunny winter weather persists in the coastal regions, where temperatures average about 41°F (5°C). Summer temperatures average about 71°F (22°C).

In eastern Georgia, rainfall decreases with distance from the sea, reaching 16 to 28 inches in the plains and foothills but increasing to double this amount in the mountains. The southeastern regions are the driest areas, and winter is the driest season. The end of spring is the rainiest season. The highest lowland temperatures occur in July (about 77°F or 25°C), while average January temperatures over most of the region range from 32° to 37°F (0° to 3°C).

Social Activities

Social activities vary depending on where you are located and may include taking part in festivals, weddings, funerals, parties, and local dances. Some Volunteers visit nearby Volunteers during the weekends although we encourage Volunteers to remain at their sites to better integrate into their community and to participate in cultural exchange. Most regional capitals have cinemas or theaters, and movie videos are often available for a small fee.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity and acting like a professional all at the same time. Maintaining your personal style while presenting a professional appearance according to Georgian cultural standards may be challenging. T-shirts, tank tops, belly tops, halter tops (or other bra-less tops), shorts, jeans, flip-flops, and other very casual clothing is NOT appropriate at the workplace or during any Peace Corps training, official event, or office visit. Hair styles such as dreadlocks, shaved-in patterns, Mohawks, etc are not common and are inappropriate. For men, braided hair is unacceptable in the workplace and may cause physical confrontation. Professional dress means clean and conservative. For business Volunteers, this means dress shirts and slacks for men; and dresses, dress slacks, and blouses and suits for women. For education Volunteers, this means casual dressy clothes (dresses and dress slacks for women; and slacks and button-down shirts for men). In general, there may be occasions for more professional clothes such as a suit or jacket and tie for men. Many male Georgian teachers wear dress shirts and ties. In general, Georgians tend to dress more formally and conservatively than Americans, and they take great pride in their appearance. In Tbilisi, it is not uncommon to see fashionable young women wearing short skirts and tight pants. However, this mode of dress is not recommended for Volunteers. Foreign women are generally seen as less conservative in behavior, so inappropriate displays of dress (such as anything too short or revealing) will attract unwanted attention. Use common sense and be aware that you may be judged by what you are wearing. For men, earrings or other piercings are unacceptable in the workplace

and may cause physical confrontations. Piercings on women in any place other than the ear lobe is not common; other visible piercings should be removed. Tattoos are not common in Georgia and generally indicate that the person has been in prison or is a prostitute. Volunteers should wear long sleeves or pants to cover any visible tattoos.

Georgians, like many of their European counterparts, like to dress well. Many Georgians have very little in terms of clothing, but they take great effort to care for what they have. The Peace Corps expects Volunteers to behave in a way that will foster respect within your community and reflect well on the Peace Corps and the United States. You will receive an orientation about appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest, and you should be sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of your hosts. Certain behavior may jeopardize the Peace Corps' mission in Georgia and your personal safety. It cannot be tolerated by the Peace Corps and may lead to administrative separation—a decision on the part of the Peace Corps to terminate your service. Please refer to your *Volunteer Handbook* for more information about grounds for administrative separation.

In pre-service training, you will receive detailed information about Peace Corps policies that all trainees and Volunteers must abide by. (Please note that the policies are updated and may be changed or updated prior to your arrival.) You should come prepared to fully comply with Peace Corps policies.

There are policies requiring Volunteers to keep the post apprised of their whereabouts at all times, including when they are out of their site; and conduct and ethics policies, which include zero-tolerance for drug use and the requirement that Volunteers use alcohol responsibly and in moderation.

It is very common in Georgia for men to consume large quantities of alcohol at *supras* (traditional Georgian meals with a *Tamada*/toast master). Georgian women in the regions generally do not consume alcohol and do not participate in the toasting process except on special occasions such as a wedding, during which they may consume small quantities of alcohol. Female Volunteers are advised to follow these guidelines of minimal drinking; all Volunteers will be taught strategies of how to say no and avoid drinking too much and remain culturally sensitive.

Volunteers are also not allowed to become involved in the political affairs of their host country or proselytize about their religious beliefs. Additionally, Volunteers and trainees who create their own websites or blogs or post material to websites created by others are responsible for discussing the content in advance with the country director to ensure that the material is culturally sensitive, apolitical, and complies with this general guidance as well as any country-specific guidance.

The Peace Corps places a high value on community integration and encourages Volunteers to remain at site as much as possible. Trainees are not allowed to take vacation during pre-service training and Volunteers are not allowed to take annual leave the first three months or last three months of service.

Personal Safety

More 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 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 many Volunteers complete their two years of service without personal safety problems. 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 Georgia. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Rewards and Frustrations

Although the potential for job satisfaction is quite high, like all Volunteers you will encounter numerous frustrations. Due to financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support promised, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and many people are hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys that occur while you adapt to a new culture and environment.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will ever experience. Often you will find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your counterparts with little guidance from supervisors. You may work for months without seeing any visible impact and without receiving feedback on your work.

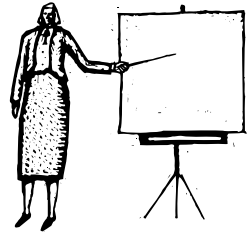
Development is a slow process. Positive progress is often seen only after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To approach and overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. However, Georgians are hospitable, friendly, and warm people. The Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenges as well as in moments of success. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful Volunteer.

NOTES



PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Following a pre-departure orientation (staging) in the United States, you will participate in a 10-week, intensive pre-service training in Georgia. Peace Corps/Georgia uses a community-based training model that is designed around real life experiences and emphasizes community involvement. Trainees live with host families in one of several training villages around a central training facility outside the capital. The goals of community-based training are:

1. To provide in-depth, experiential learning in settings similar to those at Volunteer sites;
2. To give trainees the best possible opportunity to gain competence in technical, cross-cultural, language, and health and safety areas in a culturally and linguistically appropriate context;
3. To allow trainees to acquire experience and skills in self-directing their own learning so they can continue independent learning at site.

Pre-service training contains five main components: technical, language, cross-cultural, health, and safety.

Technical Training

Technical training prepares you to work in Georgia by building on the skills you already have and by helping you to develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Georgian experts, and current Volunteers conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

The technical component of training includes formal sessions designed to provide you with theory, methodologies, and activities appropriate for teaching or working at an NGO. There is also a practicum where you will be teaching in schools or working with NGOs to apply the skills you gained in sessions. Business trainees will participate in some of the educational training since teaching is a common secondary project. You will review your technical sector's goals and meet with the Georgian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them.

You will be supported and evaluated by the training staff throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you will need to become a productive member of your community.

Language Training

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

Language training incorporates a community-based approach. There are classroom sessions, as well as assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. Your goal is to get to a point of basic social communication skills so that you can practice and develop language skills more thoroughly once you are at your site. Prior to swearing in as

a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your two years of service.

Cross-Cultural Training

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

Cross-cultural and community development will be covered to help improve your skills of perception, communication, and facilitation. Community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, and traditional and political structures are examples of topics that are addressed.

Health Training

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

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces risks in your home, at work, and during your travels. While Georgia offers many travel opportunities, some areas are restricted: Abkhazia

Autonomous Republic, South Ossetia, Pankisi Gorge, and Svaneti, Restrictions also apply to the areas within eight miles of the border between Abkhazia and Samagrela, and within eight miles of the periphery of the Enguri reservoir. In addition, high risk activities are not allowed, including mountain and rock climbing and white-water rafting. While hiking is permitted, Volunteers are not allowed to hike alone. During safety training you will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

During your first three months of service, it is important to become familiar with your site, to meet neighbors, and begin to make friends. This essential period helps lay a firm foundation for your safety and security, community entry, and your own comfort level. This transitional time will be challenging, but in the months to come you will find it has helped you secure a place in your community. It is also a time to seek out a language tutor and concentrate on building your language skills.

We strongly recommend that friends and family delay visiting you until later in your service. By then you will have acquired more leave time and be better acquainted with travel in Georgia, language, and cultural norms.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

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

During your service, there are multiple training events. Some examples of those trainings are as follows:

- *In-service training*: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after serving at site for approximately six months.
- *Safety and security all Volunteer conference*: Reinforces safety and security issues, involves practicing the emergency action plan, and strengthens collaboration between Volunteers in different groups and projects.
- *Mid-term conference*: Helps Volunteers review their first year, reassess their personal and project objectives, and plan for their second year of service.
- *Close-of-service conference*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews Volunteers' respective projects and personal experiences.

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



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN GEORGIA



The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative approach to disease. Peace Corps/Georgia maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Georgia at local, American-standard clinics. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported to either an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in Georgia

The most common diseases in Georgia are similar to those found in other temperate climates. Respiratory infections including influenza, colds, and asthma are common and, as in most of the developing world. Diarrheal illnesses due to stress, changes in diet, food preparation and inadequate cold-storage techniques, and intestinal parasites are the most frequent health issues for Volunteers. Isolation from family, friends, and other Volunteers and from living in a different culture can be very unsettling and stressful. Alcohol abuse is a widespread concern throughout the region. HIV/AIDS is not yet widespread in the local population. Plasmodium Vivax is a type of Malaria spread in Georgia. The areas of risk include the Southeastern part of the country in the districts of Lagodekhi, Sighnaghi, Dedoplistskaro, Sagarejo, Gardabani, and Marneuli in Kakheti and Kvemo Kartli regions. Malaria season starts in June and ends in late October.

Helping You Stay Healthy

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

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

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

Maintaining Your Health

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

taking preventive measures for the following: alcohol use and abuse, personal and pedestrian safety, water and food preparation and anti-malaria prophylaxis in malaria-prone areas.

Many diseases that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation for Georgia during pre-service training.

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

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

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

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. Since medical facilities in Georgia cannot provide the U.S. standard of prenatal care

and delivery, a pregnant Volunteer or trainee who wants to continue pregnancy to term and does not wish to resign, shall be medically separated.

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Georgia will provide them. If you require a specific feminine hygiene product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

Adhesive tape

First Aid & Safety Handbook

Ace bandages

Antacid tablets (Tums)

Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)

Band-Aids

Cepacol lozenges

Condoms

Dental floss

Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)

Insect repellent

Ibuprofen 200 mg tab

Water purification tablets

Lip balm (Chapstick)

Oral rehydration salts

Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)

Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)

Coughdrops
Scissors
Sterile gauze pads
Tetrahydrozaline eyedrops (Visine)
Non-aspirin (Acetaminophen)
Antifungal cream
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records.

If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, obtain a copy of your immunization record, and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for their cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Georgia.

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth-control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, we will order refills during your service.

While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for nor provide herbal or non-prescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, Selenium, or anti-oxidant supplements.

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace it, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. To reduce the risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease, we discourage you from using contact lenses during your Peace Corps service. 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 Office of Medical Services has given approval.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary

healthcare from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health-care benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age and/or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling 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 Georgia as compared to all other Europe,

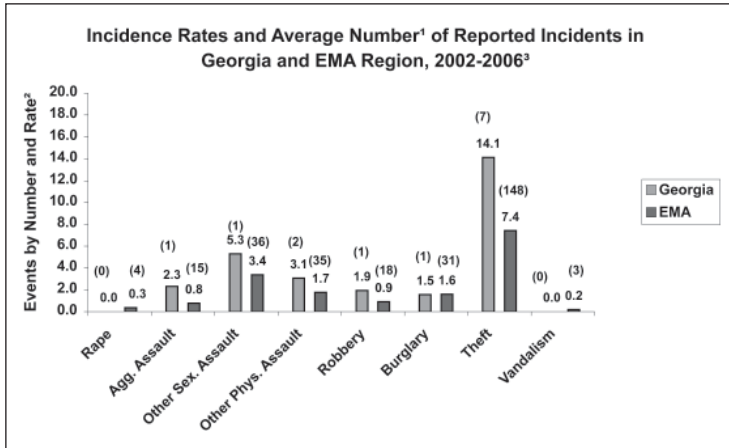
Mediterranean, and Asia (EMA) region programs as a whole, from 2002–2006. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

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, 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.



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

²Incident 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.

³Data collection for Georgia began as of 2002; due to the small number of V/T years, incidence rates should be interpreted with caution.

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

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 08/15/07.

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 violentcrimehotline@peacecorps.gov.

Security Issues in Georgia

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 Georgia. You can reduce your risk of becoming a target for crime by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking advance precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities—people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions, especially in large towns, are the favorite work sites for pickpockets. Theft while traveling, sexual and non-sexual harassment, and robbery are examples of safety concerns in Georgia. The number of physical assaults of foreigners in Tbilisi has increased.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large responsibility for your own safety. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your belongings are secure, and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Georgia, do what you would do if you moved to a large city in the United States: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood,

know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps' policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Georgia may require that you accept some restrictions to your current lifestyle.

Volunteers attract a lot of attention in large cities and at their sites, but receive far more negative attention in highly populated centers where they are anonymous. In smaller towns, “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 such negative and unwanted attention. Other methods have helped Volunteers avoid becoming targets of unwanted attention and crime. Keep your money out of sight—use an undergarment money pouch, such as 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 at night with a companion.

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

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

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

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

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

You will also learn about the country'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 in Georgia will gather at pre-determined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

Finally, in order to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers **immediately report** any security incident to the Peace Corps medical officer. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner.

In addition to responding to the needs of the Volunteer, the Peace Corps collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



In fulfilling 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 welcome 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 Georgia, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyles, background, and beliefs will be judged in a cultural context very different from our own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in some host countries.

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

To ease the transition and adapt to the ways of your host country, 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 will 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 Georgia

The Peace Corps staff in Georgia 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 cultures, backgrounds, religions, ethnic groups, and ages and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who will take pride in supporting each other and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

The comments below come from Volunteers who have served in Georgia. It is important to recognize that these issues may or may not have an impact on your own Volunteer experience. Rather, they are here to make all Peace Corps Volunteers aware of issues that one particular group or another may have to face. As you read them, you might ask yourself,

“How would I feel if that happened to me?” and, “How could I help a fellow Volunteer if it happened to him or her?” Some sections conclude with personal comments from individual Volunteers about their experience in Georgia.

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Georgia is a traditional, patriarchal culture. Although several women have achieved high rank within the government, people at the community level have not had much experience with women who have professional roles or who live independently of their families. Current Volunteers report that service is more difficult for female than for male Volunteers. It is a challenge for Volunteers in Georgia to cope effectively and constructively with the different status of women and men and the different standards of behavior to which they are held.

Female Volunteers may find that a single woman living alone goes against the cultural norm. They may receive more unwanted and inappropriate attention from Georgian men than in the United States or have to work harder than male Volunteers to gain the respect of Georgian colleagues in the workplace. Female Volunteers may experience resentment from Georgian women for their “male-like” positions of authority in the community and they may need to keep a low social profile and practice discretion in public (e.g., no smoking in public or drinking in bars) to avoid developing an undesirable reputation in the community.

Volunteer Comments

“Georgian women tend to be a little more reserved with men. Because American women tend to be less reserved, it sometimes comes across as ‘loose’ behavior. I’ve had to learn to be a lot more guarded, and not worry too much about being seen as unfriendly.”

“The gender roles in Georgia are incredibly traditional, and as a young American living here, I found it difficult to appreciate and understand how women fit into the society. I have had some issues with harassment from men in my town, and sometimes it’s hard to keep perspective and know how to react to unwanted attention in a foreign culture when language is still an issue. It’s also hard on the men whose roles have changed a lot due to unemployment. For example, alcohol is a large part of their culture, and it is much more difficult for men to avoid drinking with meals than for women. Georgia has a rich culture of drinking wine and this makes it hard for some of the Volunteers who do not drink.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Volunteers from any minority group may be the only minority trainees or Volunteers within a particular program. They may work and live with individuals with no experience with, or understanding of, their culture. They may not receive the necessary personal support from other Volunteers or find minority role models within Peace Corps country staff.

African-American Volunteers may be evaluated as less professionally competent than non-black Volunteers. They may be called “Negroes,” which may not be necessarily used as a derogatory term, but as the local word to describe black people. African-American Volunteers may find themselves the focus of constant staring, pointing, and comments.

Hispanics may have various reactions from host country nationals. Due to physical appearance, they may blend in their communities easier than other minority groups. Additionally, Georgians may embrace Latin Americans as old friends based on the historic speculation that Iberians once cohabited the country. However, Latin American Volunteers may also be

subject to stereotypes. Many of these perceptions will come from entertainment media. To combat potentially culturally insensitive comments, it's best to take these uncomfortable situations and turn them into opportunities for cultural exchange..

Likewise, Asian-American Volunteers may be the subject of stereotyped perceptions of behavior observed in films: the “Kung Fu Syndrome.” They may not be accepted as Americans and they may be identified by their cultural heritage, not by their American citizenship. Asian-American Volunteers experience a large amount of negative attention in Georgia. In general, host families and counterparts are very accepting of diversity among Volunteers, and these close relationships are forged without any regard to ethnicity. In general, unknown members of the host community and other strangers may harass Asian-American Volunteers, both verbally and physically. Some Georgians may believe Asian-American females to be prostitutes; therefore, Asian-American females are discouraged from traveling or being outside alone at night.

A number of *maghazias*, or shops, owned by Asians are opening around Georgia and have contributed to a countrywide rumor that the Chinese government is paying its citizens to move to Georgia and open businesses, “stealing” jobs from other Georgians. Asian-American Volunteers of any background may be mistaken for Chinese citizens living in-country, and some more nationalist Georgians may harass Volunteers because of this perceived trend. Staring and verbal provocations are common while traveling and also in Tbilisi (especially in the metro). The safety risks for Asians, particularly females, are very high. Asian-Americans should be especially aware of their and others’ conduct.

Volunteer Comment

“Be prepared to explain who you are and why you look a little different from what they know of Americans from TV and movies. Georgians will ask. Don’t take offense to it. Don’t feel you have to explain who you are to everyone who asks. Try to make it an educational opportunity for those who matter to you.”

“Being black in this country elevates you to celebrity status. People will ask for your autograph, ask to take their picture with you, even let you cut in line. Most Georgians have never laid eyes on a black person before and, to them, you are an idea, rather than something that actually exists. When Georgians meet a black person it’s exciting for them. This attention can become a taxing part of your day, not unlike in the lives of celebrities. If only it were as easy as putting on a big hat and sunglasses (like the celebrities), but it’s not. Be prepared to have a great deal of attention, but from my experience, it’s been positive.”

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Respect comes with age in Georgia. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. On the other hand, older Volunteers may feel isolated within the Peace Corps overseas because the majority of Volunteers are in their 20s.

In training, seniors may encounter frustration in not having their needs met for an effective learning environment in areas such as timing, presentation, and style. They will need to be assertive in developing an effective, individual approach to language learning.

During their service, seniors may work and live with individuals who have little understanding of, or respect for, lives and experiences of senior Americans. They may not receive the necessary personal support from younger Volunteers or find that younger Volunteers may look to them for advice and support (some seniors find this a very enjoyable part of their Volunteer experience; others choose not to fill this role).

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Volunteers find that Georgians may not understand or accept open homosexuality. For Volunteers, acceptable American styles for hair, earrings on men, certain mannerisms, or clothes may be highly suspect in Georgia.

Most Georgian homosexuals will probably have migrated to larger cities, and many Peace Corps Volunteers are posted in rural sites. While relationships with homosexual host country nationals can happen, as with all cross-cultural relationships, they may not be easy.

Lesbians/gays will have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends/girlfriends, marriage, and sex (as do all Volunteers). Wearing an “engagement ring” may help. Gay men must deal with machismo: talk of conquest(s), girl watching, and dirty jokes.

In Georgia, basic civil liberties may be ignored; homosexuals may be hassled in bars or in the streets.

Volunteer Comment

“Establishing yourself as openly gay is always your own decision. Here in Georgia, I felt that coming out would limit my ability to integrate into my community and create a personal safety issue. You have to decide what is best

for you. I'm not prescribing that anyone should be less than his or her authentic self. We all have to decide what compromises we can live with and at what price. Worth mentioning is that I've experienced an extremely supportive Peace Corps community here in Georgia."

"While the topic of homosexuality is taboo in Georgian culture, in the Volunteer community it is openly discussed. My fellow Volunteers have been a source of great support and I have yet to meet a Volunteer who was not sympathetic to my situation."

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community church. Volunteers not in the practice of attending church may be challenged to explain their reasons for not wanting to go, but it is possible to politely decline if the church or religious practice is not of your choice. Most Volunteers facing these issues have found effective ways to cope and have come to feel quite at home in Georgia.

Volunteer Comment

"Georgians are very proud of their beautiful churches and religious past. I've never seen their pride in the Georgian orthodox church manifest itself in the oppression of other religions. As a Jew in Georgia, the only issue I personally faced was having to find a way to explain that I wasn't comfortable attending church during services. It's a sensitive issue, and it's difficult not to be perceived as insensitive, but it can definitely be done. The Georgians are open, warm-hearted people who want to give you every benefit of the doubt."

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

As a disabled Volunteer in Georgia, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Georgia, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. There is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

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 Georgia without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps/Georgia 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.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Georgia?

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 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

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

What is the electric current in Georgia?

Georgian electrical outlets accept two round prong plugs and operate on 220/240 volts/50 cycles. Adapters are readily available and inexpensive. Be aware that you will have a weak, sporadic, and/or irregular electricity supply, particularly in the winter months.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. If you choose to bring extra money, plan on bringing the amount that suits your own personal travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

Each Volunteer accrues two vacation days per month of service (excluding training). Leave may not be taken during training, the first three months of service, or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after 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 or travel assistance.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects. However, such insurance can be purchased before you leave. Ultimately, Volunteers are responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Additional information about insurance should be obtained by calling the company directly.

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 Georgia do not need to get an international driver's license. Operation of any motorized vehicle is prohibited. 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 Georgia 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 midway through their pre-service training. This gives the Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with ministry counterparts. In considering site placement, Peace Corps programming staff try to best match the needs of the host agency and community with the background, skills, and interests of the trainee. Keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you might ideally like to be. Most Volunteers will live in small towns or in rural villages, but will usually be within one or two hours from the nearest Volunteer. Some sites require an eight-hour drive from the capital.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, you should instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the 24-hour telephone 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 2423.

Can I call home from Georgia?

International telephone communication is available in most cities, but it can be expensive—as much as two GEL (approximately \$1) a minute for a call to the United States.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

Georgia has two cellular phone systems, and all Peace Corps staff members are equipped with cellphones to attend to emergency calls. Peace Corps/Georgia issues cellphones during pre-service training to all trainees that they will keep for their two years of service. These phones are for safety and security and Volunteers are responsible for their personal use of the phone. Each trainee/Volunteer receives a monthly phone allowance for official calls and text messaging.

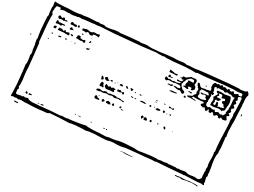
Will there be e-mail and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?

Many businesses and individuals have Internet access in the capital and in some larger cities, and there is a growing number of cafes or businesses with Internet access. Because of weaker telephone and electrical infrastructure in outlying

areas, Volunteers in rural sites might be limited to writing and receiving e-mail on their occasional visits to the capital or regional centers. Before departing the States, many Volunteers sign up for free e-mail accounts, such as Yahoo or Hotmail, which they can access worldwide. Some Volunteers bring their laptop computers, though they are responsible for insuring and maintaining the computers. The Peace Corps will not replace stolen computers and strongly encourages those who bring them to purchase personal property insurance. Because of the high value of laptops, owners significantly increase their risk of becoming a victim of crime. You probably will not find the same level of technical assistance and service here as you would at home, and replacement parts could take months to arrive. Also note that gaining access to the Internet via your laptop is difficult because very few Volunteers have adequate lines in their community or at their place of work. Electrical lapses and surges are not uncommon.



WELCOME LETTERS FROM GEORGIA VOLUNTEERS



At 63, I am by far the oldest Peace Corps Volunteer now serving in Georgia. When I arrived, a wonderful 70-year-old Volunteer was finishing up his third year here. He is now living and working in Tbilisi. He told us that every day in Georgia was good for him. His outstanding personal qualities certainly helped him, but I think he also gained from being stationed with several other Volunteers at a central location. All of these factors surely made a difference.

Despite his glowing example, there are pluses and minuses to being an older Volunteer in Georgia. My community has been wonderful, and I think my age has been more help than hindrance in my acceptance by Georgians. It certainly has not affected my success in my work here. But it has been harder for me than for most of my fellow Volunteers to build a support system, as most Volunteers are just out of college. Everyone is friendly and supportive, but that is different from a support system. Since the cultural adjustment to Georgia creates rough periods for most of us, a support system is very important. The staff has been wonderful and I get a lot of support from home, but I think this is a real consideration for older Volunteers. An older Volunteer should evaluate his/her own internal and external resources.

Age also means increased difficulty in learning the language. In my case this isn't just my age as I was never good at languages, but age has certainly made it harder. However, I am slowly learning Georgian, and in practical matters I have done fine from the beginning. I think age is a plus in practical matters (daily needs, banking, shopping, and traveling) because of life experience in coping with different situations. Being unable to have meaningful conversations with most of the people around me has been hard. But it will happen and is, in fact, starting to happen.

So when it comes right down to it, being older in the Peace Corps in Georgia might be affecting my social life and my resources for coping with the isolation that comes from being the only American in my community, but it is not keeping me from being an effective Volunteer, enjoying an amazing experience, or being basically healthy. Being a Peace Corps Volunteer is not an easy experience for most people, especially in the first year. I feel that being older has made some parts of it easier and some parts of it harder, but probably the sum game is about the same.

— Jane Wooley

.....

Congratulations, you're coming to Georgia! You'll find enthusiastic people and a rich cultural heritage to explore. It has taken quite a while for me to begin to understand the culture here, but I've always felt that my commitment to being a Volunteer was more about the "work" and the connection that I wished to establish within my community and less about being openly gay.

Making any sort of impact comes after establishing yourself by getting to know people and letting them get to know you. This includes where you're from, family ties, religious affiliation, and education. This line of inquiry is immediately followed by your current marital status and, regardless of age, why you don't have a wife (or husband). If you don't have a spouse, one will be suggested for you time and time again. Everyone is a matchmaker. The announcement of your impending wedding will be the primary concern of everyone around you, just as soon as they introduce you to the right person. I became so exhausted by this chaotic distraction that I established a "relationship" with another Volunteer to staunch the flow of inquiries. It worked. I no longer have to deal with the issue, as I am perceived as practically married. (Also having a "fiancée" in the States awaiting your return would work, but be prepared to show photos and share stories.)

Best of luck to you!

— Kevin McCarroll

I picked up an interesting habit beginning on the flight from Washington, D.C., to Tbilisi: keeping a diary. Every day for the past two years, I've documented the experiences of my life while living and working in Georgia as a Peace Corps Volunteer. From the mundane to the extraordinary, I have a record of what I've done and gone through. Now, as I near the end of my two-year commitment, I'm able to look back at what I've written and I'm amazed at the number of things that have happened in such a relatively short amount of time.

While I was sitting on the plane writing my first entry, I had many questions about what lay ahead: Will I survive pre-service training? Will I get along with my host family? Will I accomplish many things at my site? Is it worth it? Looking back now, my fears and worries from the beginning have all been answered with a resounding "yes!"

When I left America, little did I realize how much of an impact Georgia and Georgians would have on my life. I converted to Georgian Orthodox and, as a result, I also have a Georgian name. I have a wonderful Georgian wife whom I met and married during my service. I have friends and family all across the country that welcome me and lavish me with warmth and hospitality any time I visit. I've become so immersed in the culture, history, and traditions that I now feel like I'm part-Georgian myself. My love of the country has prompted me to continue living and working in Georgia after I finish my service.

Frustrating or fascinating, your experience here will be what you want it to be. Bring an open mind and lots of patience, and I'm sure what you give to this country during your stay here will be returned to you many times over.

— Lee Allen

A married couple in Peace Corps/Georgia answer some common questions this way:

1. Will we live together? Even during training?

Yes. Even though our recruiter and placement officer both said we may not get to live together during training, we did, and we live together at site.

2. Will we live with a host family?

Yes. Same rules for host families apply to married and single Volunteers.

3. What about privacy?

Both our training host family and permanent site host family are fantastic and give us enough privacy. We are welcome to be as much a part of the family as we want to be, and also allowed as much "us" time as we want. There are three other married couples we know in Peace Corps/Georgia. They moved out on their own after six months.

4. Will we be treated like children?

Somewhat. We think we may be treated a little more like adults as married PCVs than singles are. This may partly be because we are married, and partly because we aren't much younger than our host "mother." To everyone in the entire country, whether you are single, married, 65 years old, or fresh out of college, you're a child to them because you speak like a child and don't know how to take care of yourself within the cultural framework.

5. How will we get along with the single PCVs?

This will vary greatly by couple, but for us it was odd to be known at first as "the married couple" rather than

our individual identities. Our friends at home mostly knew us independently of each other. In Peace Corps, we were suddenly in a group that only knew us as a unit. It took a little time for folks to get used to us as individuals. We are both very independent people, and so we worked hard at developing our own identities within the group. At the moment of writing we are four months into service and six months in-country, and we both very much have our own identities within the group.

6. How will we be perceived by the community?

Our marriage has a very different dynamic than a typical Georgian marriage. We share household tasks, spend time together for fun, and have close friendships with single PCVs of the opposite gender. As a female, I (Amy) have more independence than Georgians are used to, like I go out with my friends without Tom and travel and work by myself.

In general Georgians love babies. Personally, we don't plan to have children. It's scandalous that we have been married for two years and don't have children. We were unprepared for the level of inquiry about children; we get a lot of very personal questions and haven't found an answer that deflects this attention yet.

— Tom Schreiber and Amy Moniot

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Dear Future Volunteers,

You have made a momentous decision to come to Peace Corps/Georgia. I am sure you are excited, anxious, nervous, scared, etc. I would like to tell you to not be nervous, not to be scared, and that you have made a good decision to join the Peace Corps. However, I know from personal experience no matter how much people tell you not to worry about joining the Peace Corps or leaving your comfort zone in the United

States for a country you know little about and may have never heard of before, these conflicting emotions will not dissipate.

Having said this, I want to give you some general reassurances to help in the transition period and with the many conflicting emotions you are probably feeling. The first and most important is Georgians are very friendly and enjoy having guests. Georgians are always excited to meet foreigners, especially Americans, and will often go out of their way to make you feel comfortable in their country. The second is Peace Corps/Georgia has a very supportive and experienced staff that will do their best to help you during your time here in Georgia. Never hesitate to talk to the staff about any problems or concerns you are having, even from the first day you arrive in Georgia. The last assurance I will give (but definitely not the last assurance there is) is the Volunteers who are here and the Volunteers who will come with you will become your new family. If it wasn't for the group of Volunteers I served with, both from my group and the group before, I would not have been able to make it this far or enjoy the successes I have made and we have made as a group.

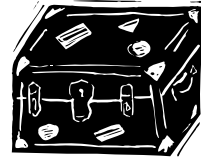
Life here will not always be easy. There are many challenges that you will face every day. You will have many amazing and rewarding experiences in Georgia, but you will also have difficult times. Your decision to join Peace Corps and to come to Georgia is only the beginning.

— Andy Swiesz

NOTES



PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled with the assistance of Volunteers serving in Georgia.

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. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100 pound weight restriction on baggage. And remember, you can get many things you need in Georgia.

General Clothing

Traditionally, Georgians have favored black and other dark colors, and this is still reflected in the dress of the older generations, especially in rural areas. In larger cities and towns, there is all the variety of dress found in any modern European country. Living in the regions will generally require you to dress professionally and fairly modestly. Professional dress at your site means clean and conservative—not necessarily dress suits or coats and ties — think “business casual.” Bear in mind that dry cleaners are only in the largest cities, so clothes should be wash-and-wear. Winters are quite cold and classrooms and offices are often not heated. Think warm clothes for the cold winters and cool clothing for the hot summers.

Women

- Loosely tailored pants (avoid light-colored khakis, as these show stains very easily)
- Skirts and dresses for both warm and cold weather
- Long- and short-sleeved button-down shirts (light and heavy materials for climate changes)

- Wool or cotton sweaters
- Tailored jackets (one or two)
- Tights and stockings (good quality are difficult to find in Georgia)
- Solid, sturdy shoes and boots for rough terrain and mud
- Athletic shoes and sandals (available in-country, but good quality is very expensive)
- A warm winter coat, either of wool or down
- Two sets of long underwear that can be worn under dress wear
- Couple of pairs of good gloves (more if you are prone to losing them)
- Wool socks and good-quality cotton athletic socks (many pairs)
- Jeans (one or two pairs)
- Shorts and T-shirts (as beachwear, for running, or wearing around the house)
- Bathrobe

Women's clothing is available at various shops, boutiques, and markets, but good quality is expensive and styles are limited.

Volunteer Comments

"Even if you don't wear skirts in the States, be aware that in some rural villages, female teachers are not allowed to wear pants. At home and outside of work, it is generally okay for women to dress more casually. However, outside of the house—even when running errands—Georgian women generally dress up, so you will stick out if you wear shorts and T-shirts."

“You will see school-age girls through college-age women in very contemporary clothing: bare midriffs, tight pants, jeans, and sometimes shorts. Community standards vary. You will need to decide how you best fit into your own community. I found simple fitted T-shirts and tank tops to be great, either under other articles of clothing or alone. Georgians take great pride in their shoes, and women often wear seemingly impractical high heels even in most rural towns and villages. Bring your dress shoes; you will wear them. Bring things that either resist looking dirty or that are easy to wash. Don’t shy away from color, but know that the lighter the color, the more likely it is to look dirty.”

Men

- Khakis and casual-dress pants (avoid light-colored khakis, as these show stains very easily)
- Long-sleeved and short-sleeved button-down shirts (light and heavy materials for climate changes)
- Sport jackets or a suit
- Belts and dress socks (these are available in-country) and a few ties
- Sturdy shoes
- Multiple sets of long underwear
- Wool socks and good quality cotton athletic socks (many pairs)
- Couple of pairs of good gloves (more if you are prone to losing them)
- Warm coat (wool or down)
- Jeans (one or two pairs)
- Shorts and T-shirts (as beachwear, for running, or wearing around the house)
- Bathrobe

Men's clothing is readily available in Georgia at retail shops and markets, but good quality is expensive.

Volunteer Comments

“Think personal comfort before professional accessories. Pack for changeable weather, cool evenings, and warm days. Casual and dress shirts are easier to find here and are cheaper than pants. Therefore, pack two light pairs and two heavier pairs of casual dress pants. You can wear one while the other is being washed. Same for the shirts, light and heavy. Changing from casual dress in the day to ‘house’ clothes at night saves on wear and tear and odor. Many people wear the same pants and two different shirts throughout the week. Change your undershirt, underwear, and socks daily, and you’re as ‘fresh as a daisy’ around here. I brought 10 pair of underwear, undershirts, and socks, and I’m glad I did. Personal comforts go a long, long way. Bring thermal wear and a breathable outdoor shirt for sleeping or an evening walk. A pair of sweatpants is a great comfort.”

"In eastern and central Georgia, men seldom wear shorts outside of the house except when participating in sports. On the other hand, in western Georgia, particularly in the coastal communities in Ajara and Guria, 'beachwear' is very much the norm for men throughout the long, hot summer. And everywhere in Georgia it is perfectly usual for men to wear shorts around the house during the warmer months. I'd recommend bringing plenty of T-shirts that can double as undershirts once the cold weather sets in, and, minimally, a couple pairs of shorts—you'll use them when traveling or visiting the Black Sea, even if you end up in the most conservative of village sites."

Miscellaneous

Note: You will need to prioritize to meet the weight limitations.

- Luggage, such as duffel bags and hiking backpacks; should be tough and flexible (remember you will be hauling it in and out of taxis, minibuses, trains, and often carrying it around on foot; Bring luggage that is durable, lightweight, and easy to carry)
- Good-quality backpack, daypack, or messenger bag
- Prescription drugs: A three-month supply
- Eyeglasses—two pairs, since replacements take several months to arrive from the United States (Tbilisi has several high-quality eyeglass stores, but replacement lenses for people with an astigmatism can take up to 40 days; contact lens supplies are not readily available in Georgia and are not supplied by the Peace Corps)
- Eyeglass repair kit
- Sunglasses
- Rechargeable batteries and rechargers (Make sure the system you purchase is compatible with European standard 220 volt outlets – otherwise, it's better to wait and purchase in Georgia.
- Waterproof coat/raincoat and folding umbrella
- Camera (film and processing are readily available. Digital printing, however, is only available in Tbilisi and Batumi.)
- Musical instruments (with music books and spare parts as needed)
- Sewing items (iron-on mending tape, straight and safety pins, etc.)
- A good flashlight and accompanying batteries (a hands-free head lamp is a good alternative for reading when the power goes out)
- Small, battery-powered alarm clock
- Portable CD player, tape player, and/or iPod or

mp3 player (electricity can be sporadic, which can make recharging internal batteries on mp3 players problematic, so consider models with replaceable batteries; CDs and/or tapes of Russian, American, and European music are available cheaply in Tbilisi, though much is pirated and poor quality)

- Writing paper and envelopes
- Money Belt
- Good books and magazines, including an English dictionary
- Lots of pictures of home (photos, postcards, etc.) for yourself and to share with friends, students
- U.S. stamps and envelopes (for sending mail with friends who happen to make a return trip to the United States)
- Swiss Army, Leatherman or an equivalent multi-purpose knife
- Journal, diary, or organizer/date book
- Small retractable tape measure (inches/centimeters)
- Good can opener and vegetable peeler (had to find outside of major cities)
- Maps of the United States and the world (good teaching aids) and wall-hangings
- Inexpensive gifts (toys, jewelry, perfume, magazines, books, pencils, key chains, flavored coffee, etc.)
- Games (e.g., Scrabble, chess, Trivial Pursuit)
- Baseball, football, Frisbee, Hacky Sack, or other “American” sports equipment
- Basic cookbook
- French press (if you like American-style coffee; Georgians drink only Turkish or instant coffee)
- Ziploc storage bags
- Polypropylene, wool, and cotton sock and glove liners

- Warm gloves, hats, scarves, and boots
- Lightweight travel sleeping bag (if you plan on traveling; all Volunteers receive a sleeping bag from Peace Corps/Georgia, but some find it heavy for traveling)
- Spices and other baking supplies (your favorites may be difficult to find, especially in winter; things like baking powder, cinnamon, and vanilla, are also difficult to find locally)
- USB drive (128 MB)
- Lightweight portable speakers that plug into your CD/tape/mp3 player
- 110-/220-voltage adaptor (be sure to purchase a multi-outlet surge protector in-country (Atlas in Tbilisi carries these) when you arrive)
- External hard drive
- CD-Rs and/or CD-RWs (available locally, but far more expensive than in the States)
- Wet wipes/hand sanitizer (with refillable travel-size bottle)
- Index cards for making flash cards (almost impossible to find in-country)
- Earplugs
- Feminine hygiene products (tampons and sanitary napkins are available in Tbilisi and Peace Corps supplies Tampax, but if you have a preference, bring them with you)
- Sturdy water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)

Volunteer Comments

“Do not forget a flashlight. Do not buy a shortwave radio because they are cheap here and work quite well. For those of you who intend to bring laptop computers, realize that electricity is an issue, but not insurmountable. My computer,

while being useless when it comes to preparing for classes, has been invaluable with conquering homesickness.”

“Bring music and other items like lots of photos of family, friends, neighborhoods, parks, and places you go for entertainment or shopping. Bring a Leatherman or Swiss Army knife and a journal or date book. For gifts, go with sports team paraphernalia or something that describes where you are from. Picture calendars are nice for sharing Americana or points of interest. School supplies, dictionaries, and activity books are available here in Tbilisi.”

NOTES



PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



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

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* booklet 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 on traveling longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while 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. Many times if there is a lapse in supplemental health coverage it is difficult and expensive to be reinstated for insurance. This is especially true when insurance companies know you have predictable expenses and are in an upper age bracket.)
- Purchase short-term traveler's or health insurance to cover yourself while traveling to and during pre-service training events. The Peace Corps will cover any service-related injuries while you are in the United States, but will not cover further complications from such injuries or non-service-related injuries (such as while jogging).
- 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 for the time you leave your home for service overseas until the time you complete your service and return to the United States.

Financial Management

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



CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS



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

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number:

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

Peace Corps' Mailing Address:

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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia	Ext. 1875	202.692.1875
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: georgia@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2423	202.692.2423

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.818.8772
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 (24 hours)

PEACE CORPS

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