

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU
TO
AZERBAIJAN



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



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A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps Invitee,

Salam aleykum and congratulations on your invitation to join Peace Corps/Azerbaijan.

By accepting this invitation to serve, you will share in a truly unique experience as one of the select Volunteers in a relatively young Peace Corps country. To date, nine groups of Volunteers have been posted in Azerbaijan, and each incoming group breaks new ground. The contributions of your group— which will forever be known as Az10s—will help define Azerbaijanis' view of what it is like to work and live with Americans. Whatever your background, we can assure you that this experience will be one of the most rewarding and challenging of your life.

Please set aside some time to carefully review the information contained in this *Welcome Book* and the pre-departure materials in My Toolkit. They will provide you with basic, up-to-date information on how to prepare for service in Azerbaijan, including an introduction to Azeri language and photographs to help you begin to visualize your life for the next 27 months. We have also included an introduction to Azerbaijani culture. This material will help prepare you for the intensive training you will receive once you arrive. You should note that we constantly update our documents to reflect changing policies, so you should expect that the *Volunteer Handbook* you received in your invitation kit may be revised, if only slightly, by the time you arrive.

Azerbaijan will be at once familiar and different from any place you have lived and worked before. From a strikingly modern (and expensive!) capital to towns and villages where water, heat, and electricity may be infrequent at best; from a technically savvy elite with access to luxurious hotels, cars, and restaurants to people living in decaying Soviet-era flats or modest farmhouses, often relying on horse-drawn carts and eking out a meager living; from glorious natural beauty to

environmental degradation—the contrasts will be a constant in your daily life. These contrasts will call upon you to exercise considerable flexibility, patience, respect toward others, and a genuine interest in people; a high tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability will be demanded of each of you. A healthy sense of humor is also encouraged. Successful and satisfied Volunteers are those who have demonstrated these characteristics and more.

During pre-service training (PST) and for many of you throughout your service, you will live with an Azerbaijani host family. Much of your training will take place in towns and villages similar to those in which you will eventually serve. This will both directly expose you to what life in Azerbaijan is truly like and immerse you in the Azerbaijani language and culture. The training staff will partner with you to help you attain the language competency, technical skills and cross-cultural abilities necessary for you to serve successfully.

If you are ready to serve, learn, and work hard for Azerbaijan, you will discover the combination of extraordinary warmth, genuine friendship, generosity, and hospitality that characterizes the Azerbaijani people. That is the magic of Peace Corps. Your experience here will transform and deeply enrich your life.

Once again, congratulations. On behalf of the entire Peace Corps staff, we look forward to having you join us in this adventure called Peace Corps/Azerbaijan.

Macie Whittington,
Country Director
PEACE CORPS/AZERBAIJAN



CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps Mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to:

1. Prepare your personal and professional life to make a commitment to serve abroad for a full term of 27 months
2. Commit to improving the quality of life of the people with whom you live and work; and, in doing so, share your skills, adapt them, and learn new skills as needed
3. Serve where the Peace Corps asks you to go, under conditions of hardship, if necessary, and with the flexibility needed for effective service
4. Recognize that your successful and sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence you build by living in, and respectfully integrating yourself into, your host community and culture
5. Recognize that you are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for your personal conduct and professional performance
6. Engage with host country partners in a spirit of cooperation, mutual learning, and respect
7. Work within the rules and regulations of the Peace Corps and the local and national laws of the country where you serve
8. Exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being and that of others
9. Recognize that you will be perceived, in your host country and community, as a representative of the people, cultures, values, and traditions of the United States of America
10. Represent responsively the people, cultures, values, and traditions of your host country and community to people in the United States both during and following your service

PEACE CORPS/AZERBAIJAN HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Azerbaijan

The government of Azerbaijan had expressed a keen interest in having a Peace Corps program since 1997. However, because of intense lobbying efforts by anti-Azerbaijani Armenian Americans, the Freedom Support Act of 1992 contained a special provision (Section 907) banning U.S. foreign assistance to Azerbaijan without presidential approval. This effectively blocked any initiative by the Peace Corps until 2002, when President George W. Bush lifted the provision.

Shortly thereafter, a detailed assessment was conducted and the Peace Corps Director approved the new country program that opened in 2003.

Based upon the expressed wishes of the government of Azerbaijan, the first program focused on teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL). Volunteers teach students at the secondary level and a few train teachers at the university level. Instruction is provided in schools, through team-teaching with Azerbaijani teachers, and through nonformal educational activities, such as after-school clubs.

In 2005, the community economic development (CED) program was launched. CED Volunteers work with intermediary organizations, as well as with communities at large, in three broad areas: business and life skills development, organizational development, and community development.

In 2007, the youth development (YD) program was initiated. YD Volunteers work in villages and towns with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), government structures, and communities. They and their Azerbaijani colleagues help Azerbaijani boys and girls to develop their

internal strengths, preparing them to be productive, healthy adults, to lead an independent economic life, and to be active members of their communities.



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: AZERBAIJAN AT A GLANCE

History

Azerbaijan is one of humanity's most ancient sites. There were inhabited settlements in Azerbaijan even at the earliest stages of human development, and people have been present throughout history.

States mainly inhabited by people of Turkic origin have existed in the territory of historical Azerbaijan since the third millennium B.C. The Roman Empire briefly established a colony in the region, naming it Albania (unrelated to the present-day Albania.) Beginning in the seventh century, Arabs dominated the area, introducing Arabic and Islam, which replaced Zoroastrianism and Christianity as the major religion. While Arabic did not replace the existing languages, its script was used for the Azerbaijani language until 1924.

Because of its geographical location at the juncture of Europe and Asia, the area was ruled by Turkey or Iran (Persia) for much of its history, as well as by Mongols and Russians. In the 1813 and 1828 treaties between Russia and Iran, northern Azerbaijan became part of Russia, while the south became part of Iran. Ever since, the divided Azerbaijanis have experienced different destinies. Present-day Iran has an Azerbaijani population of 20 million to 30 million—one-third of Iran's population. Although it was difficult for relatives to visit one another across the border during the Soviet era, people are now able to maintain much closer ties.

Azerbaijan declared its independence in 1918 and was the first established democratic Republic in the East, but was suppressed by Russia's Red Army in 1920. In 1922, Azerbaijan became a Soviet Socialist Republic, remaining so through 1991.

A conflict with Armenia erupted in the late 1980s in the area of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is part of Azerbaijan, but is inhabited mostly by ethnic Armenians. It became the subject of fierce fighting as the Armenians sought self-determination rights. Between 1988 and 1994, Armenians in the region assumed control over areas between Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian border. It declared itself the Independent Republic of Mountainous Karabakh, but no other nation in the world, aside from Armenia, recognizes its legitimacy. A United Nations-brokered cease fire occurred in 1994, the effects of which ended diplomatic relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The war had displaced roughly 900,000 people and left Armenian troops with 20 percent of Azerbaijan's land.

As Soviet central authority weakened in 1990, the Azerbaijan Popular Front emerged in opposition to the local communist party. Yet it was Azerbaijani communist leaders who declared independence in 1991, a few months before the Soviet Union dissolved. Abulfaz Elchibey of the Popular Front won the country's first presidential election in 1992, but a year later, in the wake of political, economic, and military upheaval, surrendered the office to Heydar Aliyev. Aliyev, a former communist leader, was named interim president. Aliyev soon held elections and won 97 percent of the vote. His son, Ilham Aliyev, was elected president in October 2003 after his father declined to run for office due to his poor health. Heydar Aliyev passed away two months later. In October 2008, Ilham Aliyev was elected for another five-year term. Up until 2009, each president was limited to two five-year terms, but in March 2009 a referendum was passed, eliminating the two-term limit.

Government

The Azerbaijani Republic is divided into 59 districts. Legislative power is held by Milli Majlis (National Assembly). Executive power is carried out by the president, while the judicial power is held by the courts. All citizens may vote at

age 18. The major political parties are the president's New Azerbaijan Party and the Musavat (Equality) Party.

Former President Heydar Aliyev was popular for saving Azerbaijan from collapse, but was not known for being committed to democratic reform. The current president, his son, is more open to political pluralism and democratic reforms and he implemented some reforms during and after the elections to ensure greater transparency.

Economy

Azerbaijan is rich in oil, gas, and other natural resources. Economic growth has been predominantly driven by these resources, although the banking, construction, and real estate sectors have also grown. Heydar Aliyev and his son have concentrated on oil exports, working with an international consortium of oil companies. Azerbaijan today has one of the fastest growing economies in the world. However, this growth has not yet translated into benefits for many of the Azerbaijani people, especially those living outside of Baku.

In agriculture, the most important cash crops are cotton and tobacco. Azerbaijan also exports fruits, vegetables, nuts, and saffron.

People and Culture

The current population is over 8.3 million, of whom almost 90 percent is ethnic Azeri. Russian, Tatar, Talysh, Georgian, Armenian, Lezghian, and other minorities also live in Azerbaijan. Nearly all Azerbaijani Armenians live in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Azerbaijan has a rich and varied cultural heritage. In the field of music, for example, the nation can boast of accomplished composers like Uzeyir Hajibeyov (composed the first Opera of the Muslim East, *Leyli and Mejnun*), and such world-class performers as pianist Bella Davidovich and cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich. Art thrives both in traditional crafts, such as exquisite carpet weaving, and in

modern sculpture (Fazil Najafov) and painting (Javad Mirjavadov). Gary Kasparov is a world master in chess, and Rustam Ibrahimbeyov is a screenwriter whose film “Burnt by the Sun” won the 1995 Academy Award for best foreign film. Azerbaijanis have also made their mark in science: Ali Javan invented the gas laser, Lev Landau is a Nobel Prize winning-physicist, and Lotfi A. Zadeh is a well-known mathematician and computer systems theorist.

Azerbaijan has traditionally been an Islamic nation, but religious devotion weakened during the Soviet era. The country is more secular than many of its neighbors, and is generally tolerant of people of all religions.

Environment

Azerbaijan is slightly larger than the state of Maine. Mountains dominate three sides of the country, while the Caspian Sea forms Azerbaijan’s eastern border. Despite its small size, Azerbaijan contains significant ecological diversity. Out of the 11 climatic zones, nine exist in Azerbaijan.

The Absheron Peninsula, where Baku is located, and the adjacent Caspian coast, are considered to be the ecologically most devastated in the world. Exploitation of these resources without attention to environmental protection has resulted in serious onshore and offshore oil and air pollution, which the government is only beginning to address.



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

General Information About Azerbaijan

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Baku to how to convert from the dollar to the manat. Just click on Azerbaijan 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 State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Azerbaijan and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

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

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

www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm

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

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.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.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, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities.

www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.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 Azerbaijan

<http://www.today.az/>

This is the website of one of the news sources in Baku, Azerbaijan. News is available in Azerbaijani, Russian, and English.

www.president.az

Official site of the president of Azerbaijan.

www.azerbaijannews.net

A site for current news.

<http://www.heydar-aliyev-foundation.org/>

Created by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, this site is a general resource on culture, the structure of government, political districts, weather, and current affairs (In Azerbaijani, Russian and English).

www.azerb.com

A site for the —A to Z of Azerbaijan.”

<http://azerbaijan.usembassy.gov/>

U.S. Embassy in Baku, Azerbaijan.

Recommended Books

1. De Waal, Thomas. *Black Garden—Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*. New York University Press, 2003.
2. Elliott, Mark. *Azerbaijan: With Excursions to Georgia*. Trailblazer Publications, 2010.
3. Karny, Yo‘av. *The Highlanders: A Journey to the Caucasus in Quest of Memory*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000.
4. Said, Kurban. *Ali and Nino: A Love Story*. New York: Overlook Press, 1999.
5. Van der Leeuw, Charles. *Azerbaijan: A Quest for Identity*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2000.
6. Goltz, Thomas. *Azerbaijan Diary*. M.E. Sharpe. Armonk, New York, London, England, 1998

7. Farideh Heyat. *Azeri Women in Transition: Women in Soviet and Post Soviet Azerbaijan*. Routledge Curson, 2002

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 1960s*. 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.
4. Meisler, Stanley. *When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2011.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.

3. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Mail service in Azerbaijan is generally reliable. However, fees are assessed on some packages, depending on what they contain, and you might find items missing. Accordingly, we strongly recommend that you ask family and friends to number their letters consecutively so you can determine what is and what is not reaching you. We also advise you to discourage people from sending you valuable items through the mail. You will be responsible for paying any fees levied on packages.

Mailing Address

In the months leading up to your staging your country desk officer will provide you with a temporary pre-service training (PST) mailing address in Sumgayit (the location of your PST). Due to security restrictions, packages and mail **cannot** be mailed to the PC office address in Baku.

After PST, you will be responsible for informing your family and friends of your permanent mailing address, as mail can no longer be delivered to the office address.

Phone and Internet calling to the U.S. is expensive from Azerbaijan. Many Volunteers have successfully called using Skype (this does depend on the speed of your connection, which will vary depending on where and how you are accessing the Internet). Most Volunteers choose to have family and friends call them in lieu of making calls. More information on various options and tips will be provided at the beginning of your service.

Cellphone Service in Azerbaijan

All trainees will receive a basic cellphone, provided by the Peace Corps, upon arrival in-country. You have the opportunity to upgrade your phone at your own cost, or use one from the

U.S. if it can be used internationally. Cellphone coverage in the country is good, although there are a few places in which you will not be able to receive a signal. Most Volunteers communicate extensively via calls and text messages.

The bonus for Azerbaijan is that receiving a call on your cellphone does not cost you anything.

Internet Access

Most PCVs have access to Internet at least once a week, although for some this may mean traveling to a nearby town (from a village). CED and YD Volunteers are likely to have Internet access at their offices. For TEFLs, not many schools have Internet access, but most Volunteers arrange a workaround (some get dial-up or even DSL at home, others make friends with local NGOs and use their office space, and others use Internet clubs in towns). Each year the options for Internet access seem to increase (while costs decrease).

Some Volunteers purchase Internet-ready phones and use this service for reading emails (they cannot look at attachments) or searching the Web.

Housing and Site Location

As a Volunteer, you will live in a town or village outside of Baku, the capital city. Peace Corps/Azerbaijan staff selects your site and host family carefully. Our principal considerations for site selection are safety and security and matching the needs of the local community with your skills and aptitudes. Your preferences in reference to location are also considered.

Your housing might be a private room in a family's dwelling, a shared house, an attached but separate building in a family compound, or a small apartment. Your housing must be comparable to that of your Azerbaijani counterparts.

You will live with a host family (you will have a private room) during training as part of your language and cultural orientation. Upon being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will again

live with a host family in your assigned community for the first four months of your service. After this period, you may move from your host family's home. In some parts of Azerbaijan, appropriate independent housing is scarce; you should prepare for the possibility of living with a host family for your entire service.

Sites vary; there is no guarantee of continuous electricity, running water, or phone service. Some villages and towns have only a few hours of electricity a day. Heat may come from a wood stove. Cooking and bathing facilities may be quite basic, with hot and/or running water being a luxury. There is likely to be a squat-style toilet. Bathroom facilities may be outside the main house in a separate building. The Peace Corps staff will do its best to help you adjust to the new environment.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer in Azerbaijan, you will receive several types of allowances, deposited into your own bank account.

The first is a monthly living and housing allowance. It is meant to cover food, housing, personal transportation (PC covers your cost when you travel for PC trainings or medical appointments), cellphone use, recreation and entertainment, and toiletries and the like.

A one-time settling-in allowance is also provided for the purchase of items necessary to set up housekeeping at your site. You will receive a leave allowance of \$24 per month of service, paid with the monthly living allowance.

Volunteers are also eligible for a tutoring allowance to pay for continued language study after pre-service training.

Volunteers in all Peace Corps countries are strongly discouraged from supplementing their income with money brought from home. It is important that Volunteers live modestly, by the standards of the people whom they serve.

Food and Diet

Azerbaijan's geographical location on the historic Silk Road is reflected in its cuisine—a mixture of Turkish, Middle Eastern, and Central Asian, with a dollop of Russian. Its fertile soils produce a huge variety of fruits and vegetables, as well as a variety of nuts, spices, and teas. You will immediately notice the delicious taste of Azerbaijani produce in fresh salads. During the winter, however, the availability and affordability of fresh fruits and vegetables decreases, so many families preserve fruits and vegetables for the winter.

The traditional diet leans toward a variety of stews or soups made with lamb, one or more vegetables, and potatoes. Also ubiquitous are *kabab*, skewers of barbecued lamb or beef. Chicken and fish are widely available along the coast, in the south, and in major towns, but less so elsewhere. One of the special treats in Azerbaijan is caviar. Bread is served at almost every meal, and —baking bread” with people is taken literally.

Although meat is central to the Azerbaijani diet, it is possible for vegetarians to maintain a meatless diet throughout their service. In addition to the fruits and vegetables mentioned above, dairy products and grains are widely available.

Typical drinks include bottled water and soft drinks, fruit juices, beer, and vodka. The traditional drink of choice is tea (chai), offered as a sign of hospitality. It is sweetened with either jam, candies, or sugar and drunk from glasses. Coffee is available, but expect to receive a packet of instant Nescafé. In rural areas, alcoholic beverages are not as widely available, and drinking them is frowned upon (in keeping with the Muslim culture).

Transportation

Azerbaijanis typically travel by train, bus, or taxi. Trains tend to be cheap but slow, and overnight trains do run in many places. Large, comfortable, modern buses travel among the larger cities. Most people, however, use public transportation

or *marshrutkas*, private eight- to 10-seat minibuses that link virtually all villages with towns and cities. Taxis are widely available, but tend to be much more expensive. Taxis leave Baku for the regions on a regular basis and can be shared among four people. For taxi rides, it is best to establish a price BEFORE you get in and keep your luggage with you and not in the trunk, if at all possible. If locals know the price of the route they are taking, they may not ask the price and just pay the exact amount upon arrival.

Riding a bicycle is not a common practice in Azerbaijan, and many roads and sidewalks are not fit for bicycle travel. For safety and security reasons, Peace Corps/Azerbaijan does not recommend that you purchase or use one. Volunteers and trainees are prohibited from owning or operating motor vehicles (e.g., automobiles, motorcycles, or three-wheeled cycles) or riding on motorcycles or in motorcycle sidecars as a passenger. Except inside their own communities, Volunteers are also prohibited from riding motorized vehicles after dark due to the bad conditions of roads. Violation of these policies may result in the termination of your Volunteer service.

Geography and Climate

The easternmost country in the Caucasus, Azerbaijan is bordered by the Greater Caucasus Mountains in the northeast, the Caspian Sea in the east, Russia (Daghestan) and Georgia in the north, Armenia in the west, and Iran in the south.

Azerbaijan's climate is generally dry and continental, but with great regional variations. Baku, for example, has approximately 300 days of sunshine but, like Chicago, is famous for the strong winds that periodically blow off the Caspian Sea. Its summer temperatures often exceed 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and wind chill can dramatically lower winter temperatures from their usual 40-degree levels. Inland, winter temperatures are much colder. Snow in the mountains is frequent, and villages can be completely cut off. Spring brings snow melt and the possibility of flooding.

Central Azerbaijan, by comparison, is dry and semi-desert-like. The forested south experiences an atypical autumn, with October rains, while the orchards near Quba in the northeast get occasionally heavy rainfall in the spring. March, April, May, October, and November, on the whole, tend to be wonderful times for parents and friends to visit.

Social Activities

Social activities vary depending on where you are located and may include taking part in local festivals, parties, family events, and dances. Many of the larger towns have outdoor cafés, small museums, and movie theaters (though the movies tend to be foreign and dubbed). Baku has a wide array of entertainment possibilities, including theater, opera, ballet, art galleries, museums, restaurants, beaches, and sports facilities. Baku's Ichari Shahar, or Old City, is a medieval district of narrow alleys and winding cobblestone passages, featuring antiques and carpet shops, restaurants, mosques, caravansaries (which are traditional lodging places along the Silk Road), and mausoleums. Outside of Baku, Quba is especially beautiful in the spring, when its apple orchards are in full bloom. It is also well-known for its carpet weaving. Lahij, to the west of Baku, is an attractive ancient village famous for its copperware, and Sheki, nestled on the edge of the Caucasus range, has both spectacular scenery and numerous ruins. Hikers are rewarded with views of waterfalls, snow-covered mountains, and fields of wildflowers. Horseback riding is also a possibility.

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 Azerbaijani cultural standards may be challenging. In general, Azerbaijanis dress more formally than Americans do and take great pride in their appearance. Professional dress means clean and

conservative clothing, not necessarily dressy suits or coats and ties, though many male teachers wear ties and occasionally coats to class. Female teachers often wear skirts (skirts should cover at least the knees) to class. Appropriate dress can vary depending on which region you work in, but it is always better to start out dressing more conservatively. Dress for organizations varies from professional to business casual.

The Peace Corps expects you to behave in a way that not only fosters respect toward you, but also reflects well on both the Peace Corps and the United States. You will receive an orientation to appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training (PST).

Ninety-three percent of the population of Azerbaijan is Muslim and Islam forbids the consumption of alcohol. Although many Azerbaijanis do not observe this ban, some do refrain from drinking, especially during Ramadan (the Muslim fast) and Ashura (the religious mourning period of the Shiites).

Teachers, especially, need to be models to their students; this profession commands tremendous respect in Azerbaijan. Teacher Volunteers should always look neat and tidy and should never be seen drinking (if a female) or intoxicated (if a male). Some Volunteers choose to never drink while at their sites in order to maintain a good reputation and may only drink in the capital or discreetly at home.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a

Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Azerbaijan Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Azerbaijan. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. We encourage Volunteers and families to look at our safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at www.peacecorps.gov/safety.

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and Volunteer safety. There is a section titled —Safety and Security in Depth.” Among topics addressed are the risks of serving as a Volunteer, posts’ safety support systems, and emergency planning and communications.

Among the more important set of policies and procedures is your responsibility to obtain the permission of your local supervisor and/or Peace Corps program manager when you wish to leave your site. Volunteers must also provide advance notification of their departure and return to their sites. Volunteers traveling within the country for more than a day trip must notify the Peace Corps of their whereabouts. Although this policy is grounded in your program responsibilities to your community, it is also necessary so the Peace Corps can reach you at a moment’s notice in the event of family or other emergencies. These policies are taken so seriously that lack of compliance can, and usually will, lead to administrative separation from the Peace Corps.

Rewards and Frustrations

The conditions of life affect each Volunteer differently. Nearly all Volunteers, at some point, find the conditions under which they live and work to be difficult or challenging. Most experience feelings of discouragement and futility—usually during the first year of service. 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 have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance from supervisors. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from, or without receiving feedback on, your work.

Development is a slow process. Positive progress most often comes 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, knowing that the frustration of “not getting anything done” usually derives from the realities of the situation rather than from your own inadequacies.

To overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Azerbaijanis are warm, friendly, and hospitable, and the Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge, 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.



PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

Following a brief pre-departure orientation (staging) in the United States, you will participate in an intensive 10 1/2-week pre-service training program in Azerbaijan. Peace Corps/Azerbaijan 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 experiential learning in settings similar to those at Volunteer sites; (2) to give trainees the best possible opportunity to gain competence in their work sectors; and (3) to guide trainees in self-directed learning so they can continue independent learning at their sites.

Pre-service training contains six main training components: work preparation training, Azerbaijani language, cross-cultural, health, safety, and the opportunity to visit your potential site. The majority of pre-service training time is spent on the first three of these components.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Azerbaijan by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Azerbaijani experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer. Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Azerbaijan and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Azerbaijani agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you

need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Azerbaijani language instructors teach formal language classes six days a week in small groups of four to five people. Your language instructor will also serve as your cultural facilitator, answering questions and providing information about cultural norms.

Your language training will incorporate a community-based approach. In addition to classroom time, you will be given assignments to work on outside of the classroom and with your host family. The goal is to get you to a point of basic social communication skills so you can practice and develop language skills further once you are at your site. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

Cross-Cultural Training

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

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution,

gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

Health Training

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

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service. Some of you may be asked to assume the role of wardens (i.e., points of contact for small groups of geographically clustered Volunteers).

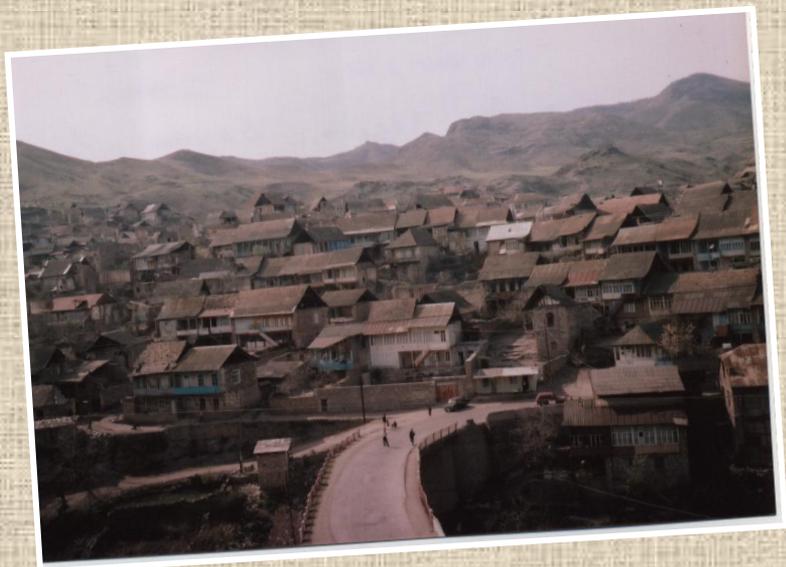
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

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

- **In-service training:** *Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.*

- **Midterm conference** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): *Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.*
- **Close-of-service conference:** *Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.*

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



YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN AZERBAIJAN

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Azerbaijan 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 Azerbaijan at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in Azerbaijan

Health conditions in Azerbaijan are generally good. Common problems include influenza, colds, diarrhea, sinus and skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Among Volunteers, the most common problems are respiratory or diarrheal illnesses due to stress, changes in diet, inadequate food preparation or storage techniques, and intestinal parasites. Being isolated from family, friends, and other Volunteers and living in a different culture can be unsettling and stressful. Malaria exists in some regions of the country, but it can be controlled by taking prophylactic medicine (which will be provided by the Peace Corps, if necessary).

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 Azerbaijan, you will receive a medical handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

During pre-service training, you will have access to basic medical supplies through the medical officer. However, you will be responsible for your own supply of prescription drugs and any other specific medical supplies you require, as the

Peace Corps will not order these items during training. Please bring a three-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You 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 Azerbaijan will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Azerbaijan, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

Maintaining Your Health

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

If you are assigned to an area where malaria is endemic, you must take the prescribed antimalarial medicine. In addition, you are expected to be responsible in your use of alcohol and to adhere to the Peace Corps’ guidelines for ensuring personal safety.

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

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. 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 the medical officer about this important issue.

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

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

Women's Health Information

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

Ace bandages

Adhesive tape
American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook
Antacid tablets (Tums)
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)
Band-Aids
Butterfly closures
Calamine lotion
Cepacol lozenges
Condoms
Dental floss
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
Insect repellent stick (Cutter’s)
Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Lip balm (Chapstick)
Oral rehydration salts
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)
Scissors
Sterile gauze pads
Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)
Tinactin (antifungal cream)
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

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

Bring a three-month supply of any prescription or over-the-counter medication you use on a regular basis, including birth control pills. Although the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for this three-month supply, it will order refills during your service. While awaiting shipment—which can take several months—you will be dependent on your own medication supply. The Peace Corps will not pay for herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements.

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

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

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service 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 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 theft 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.

Beyond knowing that Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. We depend on you to follow those policies and to put into practice what you have learned. An example of how this works in practice—in this case to help manage the risk of burglary—is:

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria
- Peace Corps provides you with the resources to take measures such as installing new locks

- Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country authorities in your new community
- Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise
- You lock your doors and windows
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live
- You get to know the neighbors
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you
- You don't change residences before being authorized by Peace Corps
- You communicate concerns that you have to Peace Corps staff

This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety that all include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest 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, reduce, 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. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended. Before you depart for Azerbaijan there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the U.S.
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.

- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Azerbaijan, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Azerbaijan learn to:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Limit alcohol consumption
- Live with a local family or on a family compound
- Put strong locks on doors and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk
- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors

As you can see from this list, when it comes to safety and security, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Azerbaijan. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the larger cities; people know each other and generally are less likely to steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets.

The following are other security concerns in Azerbaijan of which you should be aware:

Azerbaijan has very low rates of theft and burglary. However, physical assaults of foreigners in Baku, which are often associated with alcohol abuse in bars, have increased. Since the

cease-fire agreement with Armenia in 1994, border incidents have been rare. Volunteers are placed well away from the border areas, which may have mines and are considered dangerous. Travel to these areas is also prohibited and may be grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. Although homosexuality is not illegal, most homosexual Volunteers choose to keep their sexual preference discreet while in-country.

While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Azerbaijan may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: 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 Azerbaijan will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Support from Staff

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 the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps' staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite 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.

Crime Data for Azerbaijan

Crime data and statistics for Azerbaijan which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/azerbaijan>

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes and crimes that do occur overseas are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities through the local courts system. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to pursue prosecution. If you decide to prosecute, Peace Corps will be there to assist you. One of our tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country.

If you are the victim of a serious crime, you will learn how to get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps can provide you with the help you need.

Volunteer Safety Support in Azerbaijan

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your 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.

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

The Peace Corps/Azerbaijan office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership

concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Azerbaijan. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

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

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

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers

immediately report any security incident to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to assure 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 history. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

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

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

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Azerbaijan, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain

undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Azerbaijan

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Although Azerbaijan's culture is more secular than that of most Muslim countries, it remains largely patriarchal. Men are accorded more leeway than women in most supervisory and leadership roles. In schools, however, most language teachers are women. Volunteers find that, while on the surface Azerbaijani culture seems to give women more freedom (in dress and some careers), women are carefully —protected” in that they don't go out alone and don't go to many places in town (e.g., teahouses, cafes, and certain parts of the bazaar). This often appears restrictive to Americans entering the culture.

Female Volunteers may find that Azerbaijanis think it is strange for a single woman to live alone. They will receive more unwanted and inappropriate attention from men than they do in the United States. Female Volunteers may not be able to have male visitors in their homestay rooms or apartments in villages. Women will also need to keep a low social profile and practice discretion (e.g., not smoke or drink in public) to avoid

developing an undesirable reputation in the community.

Volunteer Comment:

—When I first arrived in my village, I think the women found me strange, dimwitted, and perhaps even worthless. I couldn't bake bread, I couldn't cook Azeri foods, I couldn't milk cows and buffalos, I wasn't married, and I didn't have any kids. In their opinion, based on the only women's lives they'd ever seen, I wasn't a woman. Eventually, when they came to understand the work I do and the way I live, they supported me wholeheartedly. Some of them have even expressed the desire to see lifestyle changes among the village women.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Azerbaijan has an ethnically diverse population and a long history of interaction with peoples of Central Asia. Still, a person of color may be the only minority trainee or Volunteer in a particular program. You may work and live with individuals with no experience or understanding of your culture. You may not receive the necessary personal support from other Volunteers or you may not find minority role models among the local Peace Corps staff.

African-American Volunteers are likely to be called —Negroes,” not necessarily in a derogatory sense, but because it is the local word to describe black people. They also may be the focus of staring, pointing, or comments. In the past, some Volunteers have faced initial harassment and derogatory statements, but with time they've won over the hearts of their communities. Hispanic-American Volunteers may not be perceived as being American or may be the subject of stereotyped perceptions of Hispanic cultures other than their own. Asian-American Volunteers may be the subject of stereotyped perceptions based on behavior observed in films. Like all Volunteers of color, they may be identified more by their cultural heritage than by their American citizenship.

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Respect comes with age in Azerbaijan. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. Older Volunteers may feel isolated within the Peace Corps community in Azerbaijan 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 may 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, the lives and experiences of senior Americans. Older Volunteers may find that younger Volunteers look to them for advice and support. While some seniors find this to be very enjoyable, others choose not to fill this role.

Volunteer Comment:

—Respect for the ‘older’ generation has been a lot of fun for me. I have always been a very independent person and I never think of myself as old so it is strange to have someone get up and offer me a seat on a bus. I am expected to sit at the head of the table and take the first helping of food. Gradually, here at my site, I have shown the people my capabilities and preferences and fewer people treat me like I am needing help.”

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

In Azerbaijan, homosexuality is generally considered immoral for religious and cultural reasons. There are certainly homosexuals in Azerbaijan, but their level of acceptance is very low. While there is some evidence of gay culture in Baku, it is discreet and underground. However, in the regions where you will be placed, homosexuality is definitely not accepted. Common beliefs are that gays are criminals and that being gay is an illness. Even certain styles of hair and clothes, earrings on men, and certain mannerisms that are accepted in the United States may be viewed with suspicion or disdain in your

community. Your basic civil liberties may be ignored, or you may be hassled in bars or on the street.

You may not find the support you desire within the Peace Corps community in Azerbaijan. Homosexual or bisexual Volunteers may serve for two years without meeting another homosexual or bisexual Volunteer. Relationships with homosexual host country nationals can happen, but as with all cross-cultural relationships, they are not likely to be easy.

Lesbians, like all women, may have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex. Wearing an “engagement ring” may help. Gay men, like all men, may have to deal with machismo: talk of conquests, girl watching, and dirty jokes.

In the past, Volunteers who have served in Azerbaijan have carefully chosen when and to whom to come out, to a very limited number of people (predominantly to fellow Volunteers and a few local staff members).

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Azerbaijanis frequently ask Volunteers about their religious affiliation, but this is more out of curiosity than out of any challenge. Ninety-three percent of Azerbaijanis are Muslim, and mosque attendance and other religious observances are generally greater in rural areas. If you wish to visit a mosque, ask your host family or counterpart first, and be guided by their response. Azerbaijan has a long tradition of tolerance toward, and coexistence with, other faiths, with the exception of Armenian Orthodoxy, an outgrowth of the ongoing tensions between Azerbaijan and its western neighbor. Proselytizing of any kind by Volunteers is prohibited.

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in

Azerbaijan without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Azerbaijan staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

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

Possible Issues for Married Volunteers

Azerbaijanis welcome married couples, so being married should not cause any problems. Difficulties for married Volunteers do sometimes arise, however, in the areas of language training, living with a host family, and placement. If one spouse has superior language learning skills, the other may come to rely on his or her partner's language skills. However, it is essential that both partners learn Azerbaijani in order to successfully integrate into the host community.

Couples may find that the privacy with which they have become accustomed to be in short supply when living with an Azerbaijani family. You will be expected to participate in the family's life, especially during and after dinners. Arranging for private time and space in a culturally acceptable manner may require some sensitivity and flexibility on your part.

Volunteer Comments:

—As a married couple serving in Azerbaijan, we've learned to work together and to complement each other's attributions and faults. We do almost everything together, including cooking, washing clothes, shopping for food at the bazaar, and developing community projects. We have shown the people in our community that we like to be treated as equals,

and that in America, our society values the contribution of women in all aspects of life. In turn, we have learned to adjust in a patriarchal society, and enjoy every new challenge and triumph it brings.”

—Think being married at our age (mid 20s) is actually more culturally appropriate than being single, at least in the regions. Married couples generally live with their parents so it will be quite normal for couples to live with a host family. So it can be awkward for us, but Azerbaijanis find it normal.”



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Azerbaijan?

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.

What is the electric current in Azerbaijan?

Azerbaijani electrical outlets accept plugs with two round prongs and operate on 220 to 240 volts and 50 cycles. Inexpensive adapters for U.S. equipment are readily available at places such as Radio Shack and travel supply stores. Be aware that the supply of electricity may be weak or sporadic, 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. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra

money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. 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. 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 Azerbaijan do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

What should I bring as gifts for Azerbaijan 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 after they have completed pre-service training. This gives 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 their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital. There is at least one Volunteer based in each of the regional capitals and about five to eight Volunteers in the capital city. For the first four months as a Volunteer, you will live with a host family, although some Volunteers choose to live with their host family far longer.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from

your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

Can I call home from Azerbaijan?

International telephone service is available in most cities, but it can be expensive. Having friends and family call you is considerably more cost-effective. Using Skype is the most cost effective. Volunteers can also send relatively inexpensive text messages internationally.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

It is not necessary to bring your own phone as you will be provided with a new (basic) phone upon your arrival in Azerbaijan. If you do choose to bring your own phone, please be aware that most American cellular phones are wired to operate exclusively in the United States. Cellular systems in Azerbaijan, which cover virtually the entire country, are GSM compatible and work on different frequencies than American phones. Regardless of the phone you use, you will be responsible for paying for the costs of your calls from your living allowance.

Will there be email and Internet access?

Should I bring my computer?

A growing number of Internet cafés or other businesses in the capital and in some of the larger cities offer Internet access. Because of the weak telephone and electrical infrastructure in outlying areas, Volunteers in rural sites may be limited to sending and receiving email on occasional visits to the capital or regional hubs.

Almost all Volunteers bring laptop computers and find them useful for work and relaxation. If you bring a laptop computer, you will be responsible for insuring and maintaining it. The Peace Corps will not replace stolen computers and strongly encourages those who bring them to get personal property insurance. Because of the high value of laptops, owners

significantly increase their risk of becoming a victim of crime.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM AZERBAIJAN VOLUNTEERS

Greetings and salutations!

What a joy it is to welcome you to Azerbaijan and an honor to welcome you to our Peace Corps family. No matter where you are in your life's path, this will be a great milestone. You are courageous to come, to give up your stateside life and say goodbye to loved ones as you cross the world to come here. Such a sacrifice isn't a loss, but a gain.

Azerbaijan is a beautiful country undergoing many changes, breaking away from its post-Soviet ideology to a more western one. This can be seen through many aspects of the culture here and you will get to be a part of the change on a daily basis, whether you are teaching in a village school, running after-school programs with youth, or meeting with local officials about grant projects. There is always something to do and you will never be without the support of the Peace Corps community.

The people of Azerbaijan are loyal and steadfast to their family and friends; they are loving to those they welcome into their homes and their lives. My host family was just that when I first came to my site, making sure I felt as at home as I possibly could. My host mom told me that though they don't have much money or many things, they have big hearts.

A couple weeks ago my eldest host sister, Sarah, and I were sitting outside after gardening, drinking tea, and chatting, as we usually do. That same day, a student and friend of mine gave me some roses from his mother's garden. I showed them to Sarah and she intuitively said;

—Mary, you are like the roses in the vase and I am like the roses in our garden. We have our differences, but we are the same.”

You are just the rose we need to add to our Peace Corps family! Enjoy your last months in the States and get ready for an amazing experience! I am thoroughly looking forward to meeting you soon.

Best Regards,
—MaryEllen Earley
TEFL
2011-2013

First off, I want to congratulate and welcome you to the Peace Corps/Azerbaijan family!

You have taken a leap of faith that will prove to challenge and reward you, frustrate and delight you, and most of all, teach you. Some of the biggest attributes you’ll need in the next 27 months include patience, flexibility, and ingenuity, but let’s face it, if you’ve gotten through the application itself, you already have these skills.

By now, you have already searched Google and located your future home. I know I did. I could not have been more excited when I received my blue Peace Corps invitation packet, and I could not have been more confused upon reading, *—We invite you to serve in the Republic of Azerbaijan.*” In my wildest dreams, I never imagined myself living in a post-Soviet country, speaking a Turkic language. I didn’t know I could bake my own bread on a wood stove, come to look forward to my weekly snow-melted bucket bath, or trek through the yard to the chicken coop to collect my breakfast.

Azerbaijan is a country that straddles both time and place. While it is a young country, its roots are anything but. Historically, the country pulls influences from its once contrastingly mighty neighbors: the Persian, Russian (Soviet), Arab, Mongol, and Turkish empires. The melting together of each of these dominant cultures created a place unlike anywhere in the world, and you get to discover it. Make it your own.

When you arrive, you will be overwhelmed at just about everything. The idea of working in this foreign language will be terrifying to some of you, but there will come a day not far into your service when you will converse in Azerbaijani without batting an eye. You will be challenged in ways you didn't know possible, and you will find gratification in the small things.

Making the Peace Corps commitment is not a small or easy thing and you should be proud of yourself for stepping out of your comfort zone and embracing this challenge. You must find a balance between yourself as a Peace Corps Volunteer and you as an individual. Make sure you know how to laugh at yourself, and find room in your suitcase for a guilty pleasure. It will serve your sanity well.

Six and one-half months into service, I can honestly say that I have learned more about myself than I even knew there was to learn. I have adapted to a culture I knew nothing about. I work in a language I didn't even know existed a year ago. I have built amazing relationships halfway around the world. Some days are successful, some days are puzzling, but every day I am learning.

Enjoy your time at home with friends and family. You will have a whole community of Volunteers in-country who will know exactly what you're going through, and

will be here to lean on for support. We look forward to meeting you.

Cheers,
—Corina L. Langlois
Community Economic Development
2011-2013

What it means to be a Peace Corps Volunteer (in Azerbaijan):

When traveling (or if you live in a city and discover new people on a daily basis), you will meet people who want to know your life story. They will be charmed (or dumbfounded) when you speak their language (little known by foreigners). If you're sociable, a bus driver might ask you to be his guest and buy you lunch. You will be invited to strangers' homes and be their guest while you eat (and eat and eat). When you think you can't eat any more, you eat some more.

During class, you will laugh. You will find happiness when students discover an "ah-ha" moment. You will find sadness when a female student stops attending classes because she recently became engaged and no longer has permission to attend. You will find excitement when a student leaves for a program abroad he/she applied for and was accepted to.

You will discover moments of fear and uncertainty.

You will encounter moments of pure bliss, when after months of engaging in a conversation on a certain topic, finally, (finally!) a moment awakens an awareness in the individual you were trying to reach.

You will attempt a project and fail. You will start again and attempt a project and fail. You will attempt a project again. And fail. You will attempt a project again and fail, miserably. You will attempt a project again. And succeed. You will learn persistence.

You will be loved and you will love.

You will begin to discover your own way in your community.

You will find there are either not enough hours in the day or far too many.

You will find generosity. People will be willing to help you find a street or escort you to a place you cannot find. You will discover people who are willing to come to your home when you have a leaky pipe. You will have people who invite you to their home for dinner or lunch (repeatedly).

You will cry. Sometimes for no reason.

You will work with amazing people. People who are excited and eager to listen. Sometimes these aren't the people you expected to work with or the people you are initially assigned to.

You will learn how to do laundry by hand, to unplug anything that uses electricity before leaving your house for the day, to heat your home with the stove, and to live without dependable electricity, central heating or window fans. You will learn how (very) much you can live without.

You will be angry—at situations you have no control over, at situations which are particularly delicate and frustrating and in which you cannot express your anger.

This will make you angrier.

You will take great pleasure in having English novels in your possession. Holding that book and reading in bed will be one of the greatest experiences of your life.

You will find new members of your family. With them you will laugh and hug and share in each other's lives. If you have host siblings, and you consider them family, you will both love them and be frustrated by them. Especially if they are 17-year-old twin boys (who you adore them, but argh!).

You will discover a difference in the person you were during your first months at site and the person you will become after a year, and although I don't know it yet, most likely after two years. You will find confidence and assurance in your site or in your work and begin to feel less apprehensive or anxious. You will find changes in yourself, mostly for the better, but you constantly wonder.

You will laugh. Sometimes at silly (SILLY) things you see people do. Sometimes at yourself. Sometimes with other people. Sometimes in someone's general direction. Laughter and humor are paramount.

You will lose some of your English and you will have occasions where you speak to native English speakers in a slow English, which you typically reserve for your non-native student speakers or friends. In these moments, you will feel especially idiotic.

You will wonder about the work you're doing (or lack of work you're doing). You'll wonder if it's serving a purpose and if you're doing what you came to do. You'll start to wonder what exactly it was you came to do.

You will create incredible friendships. These may be with people in your community or with other Peace Corps Volunteers. They will provide you with incredible support and kindness.

You will discover, when you love what you're doing, the hours and moments of your work fly by and, in approaching each month of service, you will exclaim "It's _____ already?!"

You will find moments of true, unadulterated, embarrassment. Embarrassment which you feel so keenly, its effects are felt long after the moment has passed, especially if you're lucky enough to have someone around to remind you.

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer is a challenge. It is a blessing. It is opportunity and defeat. It is learning and teaching. It is happiness and anger and frustration. It is joy and love and elation. Being a Peace Corps Volunteer brings out our best selves and has the potential to reveal our worst. It challenges our patience, views, and beliefs. It gives us hope. It gives us sadness. It is humbling. It is the discovery of our world's corners and crevices; areas of light and darkness we didn't know existed

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer is a series of memories, moments and lessons which are guaranteed to last a lifetime, for both those who have touched our lives and for those whose lives we have touched.

—Crystal Kelley
Youth Development
2010-2012



PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Azerbaijan and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that each experience is individual. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything on the list, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Azerbaijan.

General Clothing

You can buy clothing in Azerbaijan, but much of it is made of synthetic materials and may not meet your taste. You can also have clothes made locally, but bring what you will need until you know where the best tailors are. Variety in clothing is not as important as how it looks and how sturdy it is. Following are some suggestions for what to pack.

- A good supply of underwear
- Polypropylene, wool, and cotton socks and glove liners
- Good wool hiking socks (that wick moisture and dry quickly); three to four pairs recommended
- Long underwear of two or three different weights (e.g., wool and silk)
- Polyfill outerwear/coat. Some people suggest bringing two—a full-length black wool coat and a down coat. (Informal, sport-type winter coats can be useful and warm, but draw a lot of attention, whereas black dress coats will not. Winters can be quite cold, especially in the north; you may find yourself wearing a jacket, hat, and gloves in the classroom.)
- Medium-weight jacket for spring/fall
- Woolen or ski-type hats, gloves, and scarves

- Bathing suit (for trips to the beach)

(Please feel free to contact current Volunteers to ask them about packing suggestions and tips. Dress styles and codes do vary from rural to urban areas. In addition, what is acceptable to wear seems to change quite a bit each year)

Note: Keep in mind you will likely be washing everything by hand. In general clothes with a bit of spandex (e.g., 5 percent) hold their shape much better than clothes that are 100 percent cotton.

You will still be an American/foreigner when you live here, so if you have a style of dressing, you can plan on keeping it so long as you are prepared to make the necessary cultural modifications. This means shirts should be long enough not to show your midriff when you sit or bend over; any sleeveless tops should be modest, NO short skirts, and clothes should not be too tight (how people dress in the capital of Baku differs from the regions where you will be working).

For Women

- An assortment of winter and summer clothing: skirts and blouses, dresses, knit tops, dressy and casual slacks, and jeans; skirts and dresses should be full or mid-calf length
- Two to three sweaters
- Two to three cardigans (good for layering)
- One good outfit for formal events
- Some comfortable —“hose” clothes; sweatpants, etc.
- Slips (cotton is recommended)
- Leggings, tights, and stockings (good-quality ones may be hard to find locally)
- Shorts (In most regions you will not see people wearing shorts, however over the course of two years you are likely to use them for vacations. Longer – knee length – shorts are better. Some PCVs wear them while jogging but have leggings underneath)

For Men

- An assortment of winter and summer clothing: khakis, casual dress pants, jeans, and long-sleeved button-down shirts (dark-colored clothing will look clean longer than light-colored clothing)
- At least one sport coat
- Two to three dress shirts and ties
- Shorts (In most regions you will not see people wearing shorts, however over the course of two years you are likely to use them for vacations. Longer – knee length – shorts are better. Some PCVs wear them while jogging but have leggings underneath)

Shoes

- Professional shoes that are comfortable for walking (flats and dressy sandals are recommended for women); bring good-quality shoes
- Tennis shoes or running shoes (quality shoes are very difficult to find here)
- Warm, waterproof boots for winter
- Hiking shoes (if you like to hike)
- Well-made fleece/winter slippers (although slippers are sold in every market throughout the country)

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Any favorite over-the-counter medical supplies (those provided by the Peace Corps are generic ones)
- A three-month supply of any prescription drugs you take (to give the Peace Corps ample time to order for your special needs)
- At least two pairs of eyeglasses, if you wear them, since replacements can take several months to arrive from the United States (contact lens supplies are not available in

Azerbaijan and are not supplied by the Peace Corps)

- Towels (good-quality; absorbent cotton); Volunteers also recommend “quick-dry” towels
- Jewelry and makeup, if you like to wear them (Azerbaijani women in towns wear both)
- Hair-coloring products, if you use them (U.S. brands are not available locally, but many Russian/Turkish ones are available at a good price)

Kitchen

- Good can opener
- Favorite spices (they may be difficult to find, especially in winter)
- Favorite cooking supplies (most pots and pans can be found in Azerbaijan)
- Basic cookbook (Peace Corps will also provide you with a cookbook)
- An assortment of plastic storage bags

Miscellaneous

- Reliable watch (durable, water-resistant, and inexpensive)
- Travel alarm clock (battery-operated is best)
- Sunglasses
- Sturdy work gloves, if you like to garden or work outdoors
- Poncho and folding umbrella
- Small day pack without frame (great for shopping or carrying books or work materials)
- Camera (compact ones are best, since they are inconspicuous and travel well); film and photo processing is available locally
- 110/220 transformers (if you bring 110-volt appliances)
- Flashlight and batteries; head-lamp

- MP3, iPod, CD or tape player and recorder and shortwave radio (pre-recorded CDs and tapes are available cheaply in Baku, though they are not always of good quality)
- One or two sets of sheets (because you do not know the size of your bed, double flats are most useful)
- Small, inexpensive tool kit
- Swiss Army knife (very important to many Volunteers)
- Sewing kit
- Pictures of home for yourself and to share with friends and students (some Volunteers use these in English class)
- U.S. postage stamps (people traveling home can sometimes hand-carry your mail)
- U.S. and world maps, to use as teaching aids or wall hangings
- Inexpensive gifts (especially something from your home state or town, or with a U.S. logo)
- Any equipment for hobbies
- Games (e.g., Scrabble, chess, Trivial Pursuit, Pictionary)
- Sports equipment (e.g., bat, baseball and glove, football, Frisbee, hacky sack, etc.)
- Liquid soap for washing clothes by hand (the availability of dry cleaning outside the capital city is unpredictable)
- You might want to consider bringing a down or synthetic sleeping bag, preferably compactable, rated for -10 to -20 degrees Fahrenheit, and pad (also consider a fleece liner). However, do know that Peace Corps will issue you a large, warm sleeping bag for winter.
- Journal, diary, or schedule book
- Sturdy water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)

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 and multi-vitamins) 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 pre-existing 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.)

- 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

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- 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 connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You may use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they have them in the event of an emergency overseas.

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number: 800.424.8580; press 2,
then extension

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	Ext. 1875	202.692.3042

Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer Email: azerbaijan@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2421	202.692.2421
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For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (CWT SATO Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170

Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1840	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	Ext. 1770 Operations	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 (24 hours)

