

**THE PEACE CORPS  
WELCOMES YOU TO  
GEORGIA**



**A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS  
MARCH 2016**



## A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on your invitation to be part of the next group of Peace Corps Volunteers to serve in Georgia! You have chosen to embrace the exciting, challenging, and rewarding experience of working together with the people of Georgia to help them attain their development goals. Your decision to accept this invitation will mark the beginning of a two-year journey and commitment unlike any you have ever known.

During the last two decades, Georgians have had to adjust to extraordinary economic and social upheavals. Many people have had to struggle to obtain life's basic necessities. But despite the hardships they face on a daily basis, the Georgian people will show you a warmth and generosity of spirit that you may have never before experienced. It is truly an exciting time to be here and be a part of the nation's development process.

Volunteers work hand-in-hand with Georgian partners to develop ideas and approaches to meet their self-identified needs and priorities. You are not expected to identify problems but rather to help your partners identify strengths and build on individual, organizational, and community assets. In this way, each Volunteer must take an appreciative inquiry approach and seek the root causes of success in the school, organization, or community—and not the root causes of failure. You will join your partners on an exploration of the best of what is and the best of what might be. If you are ready to approach your assignment in this way, you will work on project activities that are designed to be sustainable both during service and after you finish. And you will have a truly rewarding experience.

You will foster friendships and help build bridges of understanding between the people of the United States and the people of Georgia through your integration in a Georgian community. And you will share what you learn of Georgian life, culture, and history with your family and friends back in the U.S. Your experiences in Georgia will forever be a significant part of who you are.

By now you should be well aware that the safety and security of Volunteers is our paramount concern and, although we have an experienced staff and a highly effective safety and security program, your safety and security, and that of your fellow Volunteers, will depend on your active participation and compliance with all Peace Corps policies and procedures. We expect your full cooperation on this.

This welcome book will provide you with some information on what to expect and how to prepare for serving safely and effectively as a Volunteer in Georgia. Please take the time to read through it carefully. Above all, bring flexibility, passion for service, and an open mind. The most successful Volunteers are those who possess patience, tenacity, the ability to laugh at oneself, a genuine interest in people, and tolerance for ambiguity and unpredictability.

This will indeed be “the toughest job you will ever love.” I would like to congratulate you once more for taking the first step on this momentous, life-enriching journey. We can't wait to meet you!

Sincerely,



Stephen M. Smith  
Country Director  
Peace Corps/Georgia

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## **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 do the following:

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 responsibly 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/GEORGIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS**

### **HISTORY OF THE PEACE CORPS IN GEORGIA**

As early as 1994, the government of Georgia indicated interest in hosting Peace Corps Volunteers. In late 1999, after repeated inquiries from the Georgian government and with affirmations from the U.S. embassy that the security and development situation was highly favorable for Peace Corps Volunteer activities, the potential for a program was reassessed. Following a positive review, the Peace Corps began designing the Georgia program in 2000.

In exploring various programming opportunities, Georgian government officials and Peace Corps staff determined that an education project targeting English language learning, interactive teaching methods, and the use of new technologies would meet the nation's growing demand for English language competence and have great potential for enhancing the capacities of the Georgian education system. In 2001, 21 Volunteers arrived to work in secondary English teaching assignments. In 2004, Peace Corps/Georgia initiated a nongovernmental organization (NGO) support project with 10 Volunteers, which has evolved into the Individual and Organizational Development project.

The unexpected August 2008 invasion of Georgia by Russian forces led to the evacuation of all Peace Corps/Georgia Volunteers. By mid-August all fighting had ceased, but Russian forces continued to occupy areas of Georgian territory well beyond the boundaries of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. With no immediate resolution in sight, Volunteers either transferred to other posts or closed their service. Peace Corps/Georgia welcomed the next group of Volunteers in 2009. The program gained strength with both English Education and Individual and Organizational Development Volunteers serving across the country. Then in 2010, Peace Corps/Georgia initiated the Peace Corps Response program and brought in 15 Volunteers with specialized skills in different areas such as environmental education, tourism, English teacher training, and others. Since then, a new group of Response Volunteers has served in short-term assignments each year. Since 2001, more than 500 Volunteers have served with Peace Corps/Georgia.

### **CURRENT AND FUTURE PEACE CORPS PROGRAMMING IN GEORGIA**

There are currently 110 Volunteers living and working in Georgia in the areas of English Education (EE), Individual and Organizational Development (IOD), and on specialized, short-term projects in these and other areas through the Peace Corps Response program. Volunteers are working in most regions of Georgia, though due to ongoing security concerns some areas in the county are off-limits.

Currently, approximately 68 Volunteers serve in the English Education project in public schools in towns and villages throughout Georgia. They build English language skills of students; develop skills in critical thinking, teamwork, and gender sensitivity; improve students' confidence and motivation; help teachers improve teaching practices; design and deliver lessons with a student-centered focus; introduce effective classroom management techniques; enhance teachers' professional skills; develop teaching and learning resources for classroom and extracurricular nonformal instruction; and increase access to English learning and teaching resources, including technologies. In addition to their primary project work, Volunteers are also actively involved in additional activities and projects in their communities, assisting in the identification of community needs, appropriate approaches and solutions for addressing those needs, identifying and mobilizing resources, and assisting in the implementation of projects to meet challenges faced by their communities.

There are approximately 39 Volunteers working in the Individual and Organizational Development (IOD) project, which focuses on organizational and human capacity development. This project originated in 2004 with 10 Volunteers assigned to support NGO development. In 2011, the project was refocused to provide support in the professional development of individuals in such areas as basic financial literacy

and employability skills, as well as support to various grassroots organizations, community groups, and local governments in promoting sustainable organizational and program development. Volunteers in this project conduct and facilitate various types of training activities and provide assistance in planning, fundraising, grant writing, marketing, and networking. Since its inception, more than 80 Volunteers have served in this project.

In August 2010, Peace Corps/Georgia launched its Peace Corps Response Program. Peace Corps Response Volunteers (PCRVs) work within Education and IOD project areas to provide support to governmental and nongovernmental organizations. PCRVs also work in other program areas to explore new project sectors, geographic regions, and new partner organizations. As of November 2015, 11 PCRVs were providing assistance in a variety of fields, including education, youth, environmental issues, tourism development, organizational development, and others. (PCRVs serve in short-term assignments, ranging from six to 12 months, bringing their specialized skills and experience to projects in places where they are needed the most.)

Additionally, Volunteers in Georgia integrate Peace Corps Cross-Sector Programming Priority activities into their assignments: Youth as Resources, Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, and Technology for Development.

## **COUNTRY OVERVIEW: GEORGIA AT A GLANCE**

### **HISTORY**

The roots of the Georgian people extend deep in history and their cultural heritage is rich. The dominion of the Roman Empire extended to the area in the first centuries A.D. and Christianity became the state religion in the fourth century. The Roman period was followed by domination by Persians, Arabs, and Turks. A powerful Georgian kingdom arose during the 11th–13th centuries, but this “golden age” was cut short by the Tamerlane’s Mongol invasion in 1236. Not long after establishing an alliance to throw off the domination of the Ottoman Empire, Georgia was annexed by the Russian Empire early in the 19th century. Following the Russian Revolution, an independent Georgian state existed briefly from 1918–21, when it was incorporated into the Soviet Union. In 1936, Georgia became a constituent republic of the Soviet Union. One of the most independence-minded republics, Georgia declared sovereignty in November 1989 and independence in April 1991.

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

In November 2003, attempts by the incumbent Georgian government to manipulate national legislative elections led to widespread protests and demonstrations, which came to be known as the Rose Revolution. The resignation of Eduard Shevardnadze, president since 1995, soon followed and new elections were held in early 2004. Mikheil Saakashvili, the charismatic leader of the Rose Revolution, was swept into power and won a second term in 2008. Giorgi Margvelashvili won the presidential election October 2013 and took office in November 2013; Giorgi Kvirikashvili became prime minister in December 2015.

Although significant progress was made on market reforms and democratization in the years since independence, this progress has been complicated by Russian assistance and support to the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. After a series of Russian and separatist provocations in summer 2008, Georgian military action in South Ossetia led to a Russian military response that not only occupied the breakaway areas, but large portions of Georgia proper as well. In late August 2008, Russia, and later Nicaragua, acknowledged Abkhazia and South Ossetia’s independency. In November 2014, Russia and Abkhazia signed a new partnership agreement, which includes a collective defense system and extra aid to the former Georgian region. The new agreement supersedes an older document adopted back in 2008, when Russia recognized Abkhazia as an independent state after an ill-fated attempt by Georgia to seize control of the region along with South Ossetia. The Georgian opposition blamed its government for failing to prevent the signing of the document.

Russian troops still remain in sizable numbers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and, with significant assistance from Russia, the de facto administrations continue to take actions expressing their independence from Georgia.

### **GOVERNMENT**

The Georgian political system is a semi-presidential republic. The Parliament is unicameral with 150 seats, of which 77 members are proportional representatives and 73 are elected through a single-member district plurality system. Members are elected for a four-year term. Since 2012, Parliament has convened in Kutaisi. The last parliamentary election was held on October 1, 2012. The opposition, the Georgian Dream coalition led by Bidzina Ivanishvili, won 85 out of 150 seats.

On November 2, 2013, Ivanishvili voluntarily stepped down and then-Minister for Internal Affairs Irakli Garibashvili was appointed as prime minister; he was succeeded by Giorgi Kvirikashvili in 2015. The last presidential election was held in October 2013. Giorgi Margvelashvili of the Georgian Dream coalition won the presidential election with a 62 percent majority and was inaugurated on November 17, 2013.

Joining the European Union and NATO are among the country's top foreign policy goals and popular and government support for the integration is high. In June 2014, the EU and Georgia signed an EU-Georgia Association Agreement, which includes a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (AA/DCFTA). The agreement deepens political and economic ties with the EU in the framework of the Eastern Partnership. Efforts to align with the West and ultimately join NATO continue.

## **ECONOMY**

Georgia is known for its agriculture with mainstays like fruits and nuts, mining valuable metals like copper and gold, and a robust beverages production. Energy production is a pivotal part of Georgia's economy with pipelines being built and restoring hydropower plants. Despite an economic slump in 2008, it rebounded starting in 2010 and the government plans on reducing corruption to increase revenues. There is an Economic Development Strategy for 2020 in the works in conjunction with the Georgia Co-Investment Fund, a private equity fund that will assist with investing in various economic areas such as tourism and infrastructure.

## **PEOPLE AND CULTURE**

Georgia is a land of ancient culture, with a literary tradition that dates to the fifth century A.D. The ancient culture is reflected in the large number of architectural monuments, including many monasteries and churches; indeed, Georgian architecture played a considerable role in the development of the Byzantine style.

It is likely that Georgians have always lived in this region, known to them as Sakartvelo. Ethnically, contemporary Georgia is not homogeneous, but reflects the intermixtures and successions of the Caucasus region. About 70 percent of the 4.9 million residents are Georgians; the rest are Armenian, Russian, and Azerbaijani, with a smaller number of Ossetes, Greeks, Abkhazians, and other minority groups.



Georgian dancers performing traditional Georgian dance "Mtiuluri"

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

Georgian theater, with such outstanding directors as Kote Marjanishvili, Sandro Akhmeteli, and Robert Sturua, has had a marked influence in Europe and elsewhere. Georgia boasts fine drama, music, pantomime, puppet, and marionette theaters. Cinema is another art form where Georgian artists have made their mark.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Georgia and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although the Peace Corps tries to make sure all these links are active and current, the Peace Corps 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 experiences, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and please keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

### GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT GEORGIA

[state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5253.htm](http://state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5253.htm)

The Department of State's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Georgia 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.

[Gpo.gov/libraries/public/](http://Gpo.gov/libraries/public/)

The U.S. Government Publishing Office publishes country studies intermittently.

[lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/getoc.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/getoc.html)

The Library of Congress provides historical and sociological data on numerous countries.

[geostat.ge/index.php?action=0&lang=eng](http://geostat.ge/index.php?action=0&lang=eng)

The National Statistics Office of Georgia provides key data on the country.

[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia\\_\(country\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georgia_(country))

Search for Georgia to find encyclopedia-type information. Note: As Wikipedia content is user-generated, information may be biased and/or not verified.

[worldbank.org/en/country/georgia](http://worldbank.org/en/country/georgia)

The World Bank Group's mission is to fight poverty and improve the living standards of people in the developing world. It is a development bank that provides loans, policy advice, technical assistance, and knowledge-sharing services to reduce poverty. The site has information and resources on development.

[data.worldbank.org/country/georgia](http://data.worldbank.org/country/georgia)

Provides information on development indicators on countries, including population, gender, financial, and education, and climate change statistics.

### CONNECT WITH RETURNED VOLUNTEERS AND OTHER INVITEES

[peacecorpsconnect.org/](http://peacecorpsconnect.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.

[megobari.org/](http://megobari.org/)

The Megobari Foundation is the official group of Returned Peace Corps Volunteers and friends of Georgia. They work to improve the lives of the people of Georgia, the country in the Caucasus region of Eurasia.

[peacecorpsworldwide.org/](http://peacecorpsworldwide.org/)

Hosted by a group of returned Volunteer writers, Peace Corps Worldwide is a monthly online publication of essays and Volunteer accounts of their Peace Corps service.

### **ONLINE ARTICLES/CURRENT NEWS SITES ABOUT GEORGIA**

[georgiatoday.ge/](http://georgiatoday.ge/)

English language newspaper on contemporary Georgian news and events

[messenger.com.ge/](http://messenger.com.ge/)

The Messenger, published daily in Tbilisi, is the Georgia's one of the leading English language daily newspaper.

[civil.ge/eng/](http://civil.ge/eng/)

Online magazine about local issues in Georgia

[eurasianet.org/](http://eurasianet.org/)

Site contains articles and resources about Georgia and surrounding nations

[interpressnews.ge/](http://interpressnews.ge/)

InterPressNews provides info on politics, economics, and daily digests of Georgian press material.

### **INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT SITES ABOUT GEORGIA**

[georgia.usembassy.gov/](http://georgia.usembassy.gov/)

Official website of the U.S. Embassy in Georgia

[USAID.gov](http://USAID.gov)

Official website for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

[epfound.ge/](http://epfound.ge/)

Website of Eurasia Partnership Foundation, a Georgian NGO that supports development in Georgia

### **PEACE CORPS/GEORGIA**

<http://georgia.peacecorps.gov/>

Website of Peace Corps/Georgia

<https://www.facebook.com/Peace-Corps-Georgia-1468061153474309/>

Peace Corps/Georgia's official Facebook page. Please "like" us and find out more about current happenings.

## RECOMMENDED BOOKS

### 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, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. "The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps." Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. "Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver." Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
4. Meisler, Stanley. "When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years." Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

### Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

### Books About Georgia

1. Asmus, Ronald. "A Little War that Shook the World." Basingstoke and New York: Pallgrave MacMillan, 2010.
2. Burford, Tim. "Georgia: The Bradt Travel Guide." United Kingdom: Bradt Publications, 1999.
3. De Waal, Thomas. "The Caucasus: An Introduction." Oxford University Press, 2010.
4. Goldstein, Darra. "The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia." Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999.
5. Goltz, Thomas. "Georgia Diary." Armonk, New York: ME Sharpe, 2006.
6. Heighway, Elizabeth (editor and translator). "Contemporary Georgian Fiction." Champaign-Urbana: Dalkey Archive Press, 2012.
7. Lang, David M. "The Last Years of the Georgian Monarchy: 1658–1832." New York: Columbia University Press, 1957.
8. Nasmyth, Peter. "Georgia: In the Mountains of Poetry." New York: Curzon Press, 2001.
9. Noble, John; Systemans, Danielle and Kohn, Michael. "Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan" (Lonely Planet Travel Guides) 4th ed. Hawthorn: Lonely Planet Travel Guides, 2012.
10. Reiss, Tom. "The Orientalist: Solving the Mystery of a Strange and Dangerous Life." New York: Random House, 2005.
11. Rosen, Roger, et al. "Georgia: A Sovereign Country of the Caucasus," 2nd ed. Hong Kong: Odyssey Publications, 1999.
12. Said, Kurban. "Ali and Nino." Woodstock: Overlook Press, 1999.
13. Steavenson, Wendell. "Stories I Stole." New York: Grove Press, 2002.
14. Suny, Ronald Grigor. "The Making of the Georgian Nation," 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.

# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## COMMUNICATIONS

### Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the U.S., and Georgia is no exception. It's a good idea to have family members and friends number their letters and packages to you can tell when a something has gone astray. Advise family members and friends not to send valuable items through the mail.

Letters can be sent to the address below any time during your service. Packages may be sent to the address below only during pre-service training.

**“Your Name,” PCT  
29a Vazha Pshavela Avenue  
P.O. Box 66  
Tbilisi, 0160  
Georgia**

Mail and packages arriving for trainees at the P.O. box will be delivered to the training site at least once a week. Packages are subject to customs inspection.

Once you complete training and arrive at your permanent site, you must arrange for any packages to be delivered to your site. Please ask your family and friends to send packages directly to you at site via USPS or one of the many shipping services available ([www.usa2georgia.com](http://www.usa2georgia.com), [www.onex.ge](http://www.onex.ge), [www.get.ge](http://www.get.ge)).

### Telephones

All trainees receive cellphones during pre-service training as part of Peace Corps/Georgia's safety and security strategy. During training, and throughout your service, you will be expected to have your cellphone turned on and with you at all times. All Volunteers and staff are on the same corporate plan, so calls to anyone in Peace Corps/Georgia are free, as are all incoming calls. You will have to buy credit for any texts you want to send, as well as for calls to phones outside of the Peace Corps' corporate plan. The cost of a call to the U.S. is approximately 10 cents per minute on your Peace Corps-issued phone. Incoming calls are free. If you have an unlocked smartphone, you may be able to use that instead of your Peace Corps-issued phone and data plans are available at very affordable rates (as low as \$10 a month). In the event of an emergency, your family can call the Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit in Washington, D.C. They will immediately contact Peace Corps/Georgia and the post will ensure that word gets to you as soon as practicably possible. The 24-hour emergency telephone number is **855.855.1961 ext. 1470**.

### Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Email and Internet access throughout Georgia is growing but still can be limited due mainly to occasional power interruptions and a lack of phone and Internet cables. The vast majority of Volunteers' host families do not have the Internet. Volunteers based in schools may not have Internet at school and Volunteers based in organizations will likely have access in the office. Volunteers will also be able to gain access to the Internet in larger towns, where Internet cafes are becoming more popular, and with cellular modems. Portable modems are available from cellphone service providers. As more communication via email increases as a result of improved Internet connectivity, it is highly recommended that trainees consider bringing a laptop with them to use throughout service. The Peace

Corps office in Tbilisi has a resource room with several computers with Internet access and printers available to Volunteers.

## **HOUSING AND SITE LOCATION**

Volunteers need to be very flexible about housing expectations. During pre-service training and for at least the first three months of service, trainees/Volunteers will live with a Georgian host family.

Volunteers are strongly encouraged to live with a host family for the duration of service, as it affords a measure of safety and security and allows the Volunteer to integrate into the community and practice the language. After the first three months, some Volunteers may be able to move into separate housing if it is available. Approximately 85 percent of Volunteers prefer to reside with host families, which typically contributes to an overall rewarding experience.

In most areas of Georgia, there are no guarantees of continuous electricity or running water. Bathroom facilities will not be what most Americans are used to, and may be detached from the main house. Some villages and towns may have only a few hours of electricity a day in the winter months, and the natural gas supply is nonexistent in some places or is often cut off for periods of time. Buildings generally don't have central heating system, so in the winter, it is often colder inside buildings than outdoors. Volunteers should be prepared to tolerate cold and discomfort in the winter, especially at schools.

Volunteers are assigned to communities where their assistance is most needed and where there is great interest in, and support for, the Volunteer's work. Most Volunteers live and work in small rural communities or former industrial towns with populations ranging between 1,200–60,000 people. A few Volunteers are assigned to district centers, but there are no site placements in the capital city of Tbilisi.

## **LIVING ALLOWANCE AND MONEY MANAGEMENT**

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Georgian lari (GEL) that is sufficient to live at the level of the local people. The allowance covers food, housing, household supplies, clothing, transportation to and from work, utilities, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses. While the exchange rate varies, the lari has been reasonably stable and is has remained around 2.40 GEL / US\$1 over the last year.

As a Volunteer in Georgia, you will receive three types of allowances:

A **living allowance** is paid to cover your basic living expenses. It is disbursed on a monthly basis in GEL. The living allowance is intended to cover food, work-related transportation, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses, such as postage, reading material, stationery, occasional replacement of clothes, and toiletries. The living allowance rate is reviewed at least annually by surveying Volunteers to ensure that it is adequate.

A **settling-in allowance** is provided to newly assigned Volunteers to purchase items necessary to set up housekeeping at site.

A winter **heating allowance** of 50 GEL a month is paid from October through March, to cover the extra cost of fuel for the winter months.

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

## FOOD AND DIET

In Georgia, the cuisine is an important expression of the culture. Eating, hospitality, toasts, and the *supra* (feast) bind family and friends and snare visitors into long, table-bound interludes. Georgians are justifiably proud of their delicious and varied cuisine. Just a few of the delicious Georgian dishes you will enjoy include the following:

- *khachapuri*— a thin pastry filled with mildly salted cheese
- *lobiani*— like khachapuri, but stuffed with mashed beans similar to refried beans
- *puri*— the staple Georgian bread, baked in a circular hearth oven
- *badrijani nigvzit*— roasted eggplant strips topped with a walnut paste
- *pkhali*— a savory Georgian salad made from spinach, walnuts, and garlic
- *matsoni*— Georgian yogurt
- *lobio*— a thick bean soup often served with *mchadi*, Georgian corn bread
- *khinkali*— dumplings usually stuffed with minced meat, but also mushroom or cheese
- *khababi*— grilled minced meat sprinkled with sumac and onion slices, wrapped in a thin bread
- *mtsvadi*— roasted skewers of pork, beef, mutton, and sometimes eggplant or tomatoes
- *tkemali*— a ubiquitous sour plum sauce served with most meals

The basic Georgian diet consists of bread, meat, cheese, vegetables, fruit, and nuts. There are some amazing seasonal, fresh, and locally grown produce available throughout the year, but vegetables are generally limited to potatoes, beans, cabbage, eggplant, peppers, tomatoes, and cucumbers. Seasonal fresh fruit is also readily available, but in winter both variety and quantity become limited. During the winter months, cabbage, potatoes, pasta, carrots, beans, bread, and meat are the mainstays of the Georgian diet. However, canned or jarred fruits and vegetables are also readily available. Volunteers in smaller villages may not have access to as wide a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables as those closer to district centers. However, the fruits and vegetables that are available are delicious. In addition, many host families have extensive gardens and make their own wine, cheese, preserves, and honey.

While meat is an important component of the Georgian diet, it is possible for vegetarians to maintain a meatless diet throughout their service. This is especially true since meat is a more expensive type of food in Georgia. However, be prepared for a greater lack of variety of fresh fruits and vegetables than you are accustomed to, especially during winter when fresh produce is not as readily available as it is in the spring and summer. Georgia is a country where you “eat with the seasons.” You may find the need to prepare preserves during the summer and fall months. Cabbage, carrots, and potatoes are available throughout winter, but other produce must be preserved ahead of time or purchased in Tbilisi or regional centers. Some prior planning is needed to ensure you can maintain a healthy diet. The most difficult aspect of being a vegetarian in-country may be how to explain it to your host family. Many families will prepare meat frequently in the first few months to show your importance as a guest. It is easiest to tell your family about your diet preferences as soon as possible.

## TRANSPORTATION

Georgia has an extensive transportation system. The most common mode of transportation is bus, minivan, train, taxi, and, metro (only available in Tbilisi). The capital is connected by rail with Batumi on the Black Sea, Baku on the Caspian, and Yerevan in Armenia. Most people travel by bus or minivan between cities and fares are relatively cheap. Taxis are widely available but tend to be much more expensive. Georgia’s main international airport is in Tbilisi. Batumi and Kutaisi also have limited international flights.

Riding a bicycle is not a common practice in Georgia and, for safety reasons, Peace Corps/Georgia does not recommend them. Volunteers and trainees are prohibited from owning or operating motor vehicles

(i.e., automobiles or motorcycles) or riding on motorcycles or in motorcycle sidecars. Violation of these policies may result in the termination of your Volunteer service.

## **GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE**

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

There also are marked elevation zones. The Kolkhida Lowland, for example, has a subtropical climate up to about 600 meters (2,000 feet), with a moist, moderately warm climate lying just above. Still higher is a belt of cold, wet winters and cool summers. Above about 2,200 meters (7,200 feet), there is an alpine climatic zone, lacking any true summer, and above 3,500 meters (11,500 feet), snow and ice are present year-round. In eastern Georgia, farther inland, temperatures are lower than in the western portions at the same altitude.

In eastern Georgia, rainfall decreases with distance from the sea, reaching 400–700 millimeters (16–28 inches) in the plains and foothills, but increasing to twice this amount in the mountains. The southeastern regions are the driest areas, and winter is the driest season. The end of spring is the rainiest season. The highest lowland temperatures occur in July (35 degrees Celsius or 95 Fahrenheit), while average January temperatures over most of the region range from 0–3 C (32–37 F).

Western Georgia has heavy precipitation throughout the year, totaling 1,000–2,500 millimeters (40–100 inches). Winter in this region is mild and warm; in regions below about 2,000 feet, the average January temperature rarely falls below 0 C (32 F). Relatively warm, sunny winter weather persists in the coastal regions, where temperatures average about 5 C (41 F). Summer temperatures average about 22 C (71 F).

## **SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**

Georgians are very social and hospitable people and will welcome you into their social circle. Social activities vary depending on where you are located and may include taking part in festivals, weddings, funerals, parties, excursions, sports, local concerts and celebrations. Many regional centers have cinemas, theaters, or culture houses. The geography of Georgia is breathtaking and you will have opportunities to hike and explore the mountains and parks. The *supra* (feast) is a mainstay of Georgian culture. It is a gathering of family and friends to celebrate a special occasion and it follows a typical format that involves a lot of drinking. If you don't drink alcohol and you don't want to offend your host, it is best to let your host know that you can't drink because you have health problems or you are busy with Peace Corps-related work.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“Drinking is a big problem for many male Volunteers in Georgia. Almost all Georgian males drink and drink very heavily by American standards. Any male Volunteer who doesn't want to drink (either often or at all) will have a hard time, especially during the first few months. You will be asked to drink almost every day. This is a deceptively difficult problem. Honestly, there is no easy way out. Drinking every time a Georgian tells you to drink can lead to a lot of problems, even if you have a high tolerance. Remember, Georgians will offer things to you even if they actually don't want you to do it. They will always offer you a drink because they think it is hospitable and nice to do so. You really need to safeguard your reputation and find ways to handle this from the very beginning.”

## **PROFESSIONALISM, DRESS, AND BEHAVIOR**

Service in Peace Corps is a full-time job and Volunteers are expected to meet the core expectations and uphold a high standard of professionalism at all times. You should arrive fully prepared to comply with all Peace Corps policies and procedures. Remember you will be a representative of the United States 24/7 and are expected to be a role model of professionalism for the people you serve. This means you must uphold the expectations and be mindful of your behavior whether you are in your community, another community, or in the capital of Tbilisi. Georgia is a small country and word travels fast. Your behavior will be scrutinized even when you are outside of your community.

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is learning how to fit into the local culture while also maintaining your own cultural identity. Additionally, you are expected to be a professional and to adjust to norms within the Georgian workplace. Maintaining your personal style while also presenting a professional appearance by Georgian cultural standards may be challenging.

Use common sense and be aware that you will be judged by your appearance and what you are wearing. T-shirts, tank tops, belly tops, halter tops (or other braless tops), shorts, flip-flops, and other very casual clothing are not appropriate in the workplace or other public settings. You will be expected to wear clean, professional clothing. Few Georgian men have long hair, dreadlocks, or shaved-in patterns, and some may consider it inappropriate for the workplace. Beards are uncommon, except among the clergy and, unless short and neatly trimmed, not generally accepted. Visible body piercings (other than earrings for women) and tattoos for both men and women are not generally accepted in professional settings. Tattoos are not very common, especially in the regions, and generally indicate in Georgia that a person has been in prison or is a prostitute. Please be prepared to cover tattoos whenever possible. Wearing facial piercings may make it more difficult to integrate into your community.

Georgians like to dress well. In general, they tend to dress more formally and conservatively than Americans, and take great pride in their appearance. Professional dress for Volunteers means clean and conservative. For women this means dresses, skirts, and dress pants and for men it means pants and collared shirts. You will also want to bring at least one set of more formal wear. In Tbilisi, it is not uncommon to see fashionable young women wearing short skirts and tight pants; however, this mode of dress is not recommended for Volunteers. Foreign women are generally seen as being less conservative in their behavior and attitudes than Georgian women, and wearing tight or revealing clothing will attract more unwanted attention.

The Peace Corps expects Volunteers to conduct themselves in a way that will foster respect within their community and that reflects well on the Peace Corps. You will participate in an orientation on culturally appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. Peace Corps Volunteers serve at the invitation of the host country, and must be respectful of and sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of our hosts. Inappropriate behavior, such as public drunkenness, excessive drinking, or other actions that compromise the safety and security of you and others, is not acceptable. Culturally inappropriate behavior may lead to administrative separation and termination of your service as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

It is very common in Georgia for men to consume large quantities of alcohol at supras with a *tamada*, or toast master. Georgian women in the regions outside the capital generally do not consume alcohol and do not participate in the toasting process except on special occasions, such as a wedding, during which they might consume only small quantities of alcohol. Georgian women often do not drink at all or even attend all-male supras. Female Volunteers are strongly advised to do the same since females drinking with men at supras may send the wrong message and invite unwanted attention and harassment, in addition to compromising their reputation and ability to do effective work in the community. Volunteers will be advised of effective strategies of how to sensitively, but firmly, say no to avoid drinking too much, and to avoid compromising their personal safety. Volunteers who choose to drink alcohol are expected to do so

responsibly and in moderation. Bear in mind that staff will not tolerate public drunkenness or repeated incidents involving alcohol.

The Peace Corps places a high value on intercultural communication and community integration—encouraging Volunteers to develop their Georgian language skills and getting to know the individual members of their community and their traditions and culture. A very effective way to do this is to spend as much time as possible in your community and the Peace Corps encourages this. From experience, we know that Volunteers who frequently leave their communities lose the confidence of counterparts and community members, lose contact with the activities of the community, and minimize language learning. Trainees may not take annual leave during pre-service training and Volunteers are strongly encouraged not to take annual leave during the first three months or last three months of their service.

## **PERSONAL SAFETY**

More detailed information about the Peace Corps’ approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security section, 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 Georgia Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Georgia. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her 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. Volunteers and families are encouraged to look at safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [peacecorps.gov/safety](http://peacecorps.gov/safety).

Information on these pages gives messages on Volunteer health and 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.

## **REWARDS AND FRUSTRATIONS**

Georgians are hospitable, friendly, warm, and affectionate people. You will feel immediately embraced by their hospitality and quickly become part of your host family and community. In general, Georgian people are very interested in getting to know Americans and building a strong friendship between the two nations. For more on the Volunteer perspective on rewards, please see the Peace Corps/Georgia Facebook page and the notes section for the “Top Ten Reasons to Serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer with Peace Corps Georgia.”

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

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will ever experience. Often you will find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your counterparts with little guidance from supervisors. You may work for months without seeing any visible impact and without receiving feedback on your work from your counterparts. Development is a slow process and it may be necessary to focus on small impacts, tempering your expectations for drastic change. Positive progress is often seen only after the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, enthusiasm, self-motivation, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To approach and overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, proactivity, persistence, and resourcefulness. 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.



An English Education Volunteer and her class recently established an “English Cabinet” featuring English books and reading materials.

# **PEACE CORPS TRAINING**

## **OVERVIEW OF PRE-SERVICE TRAINING**

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Georgia to your departure. Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within this continuum of learning and ensures that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform your job. Pre-service training is conducted in Georgia by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Peace Corps training incorporates widely accepted principles of adult learning and is structured around the experiential learning cycle. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas.

Integrating into the community is one of the core competencies you will strive to achieve both in PST and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the relationships you build by respectfully integrating into the host country community and culture.

You will be prepared for this through a homestay experience, which often requires trainees to live with host families during PST. Integration into the community fosters language and cross-cultural learning and ensures your health, safety, and security.

The PST in Georgia is comprehensive, well-structured, and vigorous! You will receive 11 weeks of high-quality training designed to help you achieve competency in the areas listed below so you are prepared for service. All trainees will live with a host family during training and be placed in a village or town with four or five other trainees. The Peace Corps/Georgia training team is experienced and qualified and will ensure you have a dynamic and useful PST.

## **TECHNICAL TRAINING**

Technical training will prepare you to work in Georgia 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, Georgian 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 Georgia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Georgian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities, report your progress, and serve as a productive member of your community.

As a part of the technical training, you will attend formal sessions and engage in practical assignments, including the community projects and organizing training programs for the IOD track, and team teaching with your PST school counterparts during practice school and organizing summer camps for the English Education track. You will also have an opportunity to visit current Volunteers in their sites to learn more about real-life experiences, promising practices, and solutions to challenges that they face.

## **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, help you integrate into your community, and 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. Georgian language instructors usually teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups.

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 develop strategies to continue studying language during your service.

Volunteers are encouraged to continue developing their communication skills in Georgian and other languages common in their communities. Language proficiency is vital for both professional success and personal satisfaction during one's assignment in Georgia. Peace Corps/Georgia encourages ongoing language learning and employs a regular course of language proficiency interviews (LPIs) to design and facilitate appropriate strategies for improving Volunteer language skills. LPIs take place several points during training and service. There are mid-LPIs conducted in the fifth to sixth week of the training and final LPIs at the end of PST. Volunteers who do not reach the minimum LPI requirement by the end of PST are required to identify a tutor and develop a language improvement plan in consultation with staff and to continue tutoring until they reach the minimum LPI requirement for service. There are two mandatory LPIs during PCV service: at mid-service training after one year and at close of service.

## **CROSS-CULTURAL TRAINING**

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Georgia. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Georgia, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. Training will cover topics such as the concept of time, power and hierarchy, gender roles, communication styles, and the concept of self and relationships. Because adjusting to a new culture can be very challenging, you will participate in resiliency training which provides a framework and tools to help with adjustment issues.

The host family experience provides a unique and essential context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families are carefully selected and go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Georgia. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

You will participate in sessions about different topics that will be useful for your cultural adjustment and community integration. You will also understand more about Georgia's history and Georgian mentality. Through discussions with Peace Corps staff, your host family, and new Georgian friends, you will gain insight into the things Georgians feel nostalgic about and try to retain versus the things they would like to change. Also you will be given opportunity to participate in some wonderful cultural events such as visits to historical and cultural places and Georgian cooking and dance lessons.

## HEALTH TRAINING

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and treatment of medical illnesses found in Georgia. You will be expected to practice preventive health and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. Health education topics will cover nutrition, food and water preparation, emotional health, dealing with alcohol, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and common illnesses in Georgia.

During PST our Peace Corps Medical Officers will ensure you understand the common health challenges that Volunteers in Georgia face. They will share with you our extensive health program in country and will ensure you get immunizations according to the country specific diseases required by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY TRAINING

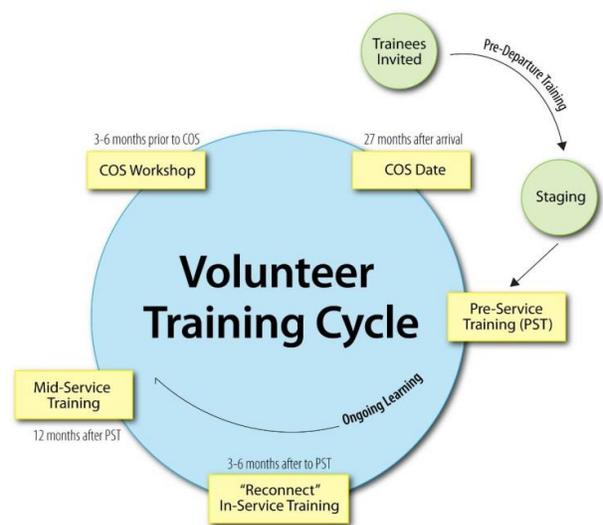
During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace Corps' emergency response and support systems.

The safety and security manager is responsible for the safety and security program and for helping Volunteers learn the skills you need to keep yourself safe. She conducts standard sessions as well as sessions that are shaped according to the Georgian context. Topics include overview of safety program, introduction to your site police officers, incident reporting options and support systems, incident statistics, emergency action plans, personal security and risk reductions, safe transportation, bystander intervention, alcohol pressure, sexual assault awareness, coping with unwanted attention, sexual assault reporting and response, and the legal system in Georgia. Your well-being and safety is a central concern for all Peace Corps staff in Georgia.

## ADDITIONAL TRAINING DURING VOLUNTEER SERVICE

The Peace Corps' training system 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 types of training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers and their counterparts 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. These in-service trainings in Georgia will include two technical courses, one language enhancement program, and safety and security related topics.
- **Mid-service training** (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.

- **Completion-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

All training programs in Peace Corps/Georgia build upon each other and are 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 IN GEORGIA**

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 Georgia maintains a health unit with a full-time medical officer(s) and medical assistant who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in Georgia at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill you will be transported to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility or to the capital. If the Office of Health Services (OHS) determines that the care is not optimal for your condition at the regional facility, you will be transported to the United States.

Peace Corps medical officers are full-time employees of the Peace Corps, whose primary focus is to keep you as healthy and medically fit as possible. Peace Corps/Georgia has two full-time medical doctors and a medical assistant, also a degreed medical doctor. Throughout your Peace Corps service, they will provide you with guidance, training, and materials related to enabling your good health, both physical and emotional/mental. They will also ensure that you are up-to-date on all of your inoculations. The health unit is located in the Peace Corps office in Tbilisi and provides medical services to all Volunteers in Georgia. The medical officers are available to answer your questions, and you may always feel free to contact them by phone, text message, email, or in person if you feel you have a physical, emotional, or other problem that relates to your health or well-being.

### **HELPING YOU STAY HEALTHY**

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

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

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

### **MAINTAINING YOUR HEALTH**

As a Volunteer, you must accept considerable responsibility for your own health. Proper precautions will significantly reduce your risk of serious illness or injury. The adage "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Georgia is to take the following preventive measures: always consider water and food safety, cook food thoroughly, maintain personal hygiene, drink water from the water filter provided by the Peace Corps, use condoms, and strictly adhere to the medical officers' recommendations.

## **HEALTH ISSUES IN GEORGIA**

The most common diseases in Georgia are similar to those found in other temperate climates. Respiratory infections, including colds, and asthma, are common. Diarrheal illnesses due to stress, changes in diet, food preparation and/or inadequate cold-storage techniques, and intestinal parasites are the most frequent health issues for Volunteers. Isolation from family, friends, and other Volunteers and from living in a different culture can be very unsettling and stressful. Alcohol abuse is a widespread concern throughout the region. HIV/AIDS is becoming more widespread in the local population, especially among intravenous-drug users.

*Plasmodium vivax* was a type of malaria that occurred in Georgia, although the number of reported cases has declined significantly over the past several years and it is almost eradicated now. Currently Volunteers and trainees do not receive malaria prophylaxis medicines according to the recommendations of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Department of State, and the Peace Corps.

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

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

Feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase on the local market and so the Peace Corps medical officer in Georgia will not provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you. Many female Volunteers take menstrual cups (The Diva Cup, The Keeper, The Moon Cup, etc.) to avoid potential problems with availability or disposal of feminine hygiene products. Peace Corps does not provide refill of those items.

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

The Peace Corps follows the 2012 U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines for screening PAP smears, which recommend women aged 21–29 receive screening PAPs every three years and women aged 30–65 receive screening PAPs every five years.

## **YOUR PEACE CORPS MEDICAL KIT**

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

### **Medical Kit Contents**

First Aid Handbook	Decongestant
Ace bandages	Dental floss
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Gloves
Adhesive tape	Hydrocortisone cream
Antacid tablets	Ibuprofen
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Insect repellent
Antibiotic ointment	Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Antifungal cream	Lip balm
Antihistamine	Oral rehydration salts
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner	Scissors
Band-Aids	Sore throat lozenges
Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)	Sterile eye drops
Butterfly closures	Sterile gauze pads
Calagel anti-itch gel	Sunscreen
Condoms	Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Cough lozenges	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 Health Services (OHS). 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 OHS 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 Health 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 (other than yellow fever vaccination as directed by OHS) 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, during your first six months in Georgia. Volunteers must be willing to get all required vaccinations unless there is a documented medical contraindication. Failure to accept required vaccination is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

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

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 (of the current prescription) with you. 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 Office of Health Services strongly discourages Volunteers from wearing contact lenses while overseas unless there is a true medical indication documented by your ophthalmologist. Contact lenses, particularly extended use soft contacts, are associated with a variety of eye infections and other inflammatory problems. One of the most serious of these problems is infectious keratitis which can lead to severe cornea damage which could result in permanent blindness requiring corneal transplantation. These risks of permanent eye damage are exacerbated in the Peace Corps environment where the Volunteer's ability to properly clean the lenses is compromised due to limited access to sterile water as well as decreased effectiveness of cleaning solutions due to prolonged storage in unsatisfactory conditions. In addition, when bacterial eye infections occur, assessment and treatment within hours by a competent ophthalmologist is indicated. This is virtually impossible in the Peace Corps setting. If you feel that you simply must be able to use your contacts occasionally, please consider using single use, daily disposable lenses which do not require cleaning.

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 IN DEPTH**

Ensuring the safety and security of Volunteers is Peace Corps' highest priority. 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 most Volunteers complete their two years of service without a serious safety and security incident. Together, the Peace Corps and Volunteers can reduce risk, but cannot truly eliminate all risk.

Beyond knowing that the Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you, it might be helpful to see how this partnership works. The Peace Corps has policies, procedures, and training in place to promote your safety. The Peace Corps depends 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 and impact of burglary—follows:

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment of your site where you will live and work prior of your arrival in country.
- Peace Corps inspects the host family where you will live prior to your arrival in-country to make sure it meets established security criteria (locks on the doors and windows, outlets and switches are in good working condition, housing is located in a safe neighborhood, etc.).
- Peace Corps submits host family information to the Ministry of Interior Affairs for a background check.
- Peace Corps conducts orientations for host families, supervisors, and counterparts to ensure they are aware in how to best support Volunteers during your service.
- The Volunteer adopts a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live and is sure to always lock windows and doors.
- The Volunteer decides whether or not to purchase personal article insurance.

This welcome book contains sections on Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle, Peace Corps Training, Your Health Care, and Safety and Security, all of which include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the training and tools they need to function in the safest way possible and prepare for the unexpected, teaching 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, bars and restaurants or public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Georgia there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the United States, particularly those that are irreplaceable or have sentimental value
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the States
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Georgia, 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 Georgia learn to do the following:

- 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 and does not attract attention
- Avoid high-crime areas and follow PC Georgia guidance on restricted places
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Be careful and conscientious about using electronics (phones, cameras, laptops, iPods, etc.) in public or leaving them unattended
- Limit alcohol consumption and being out at night

As you can see from this list, 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 occurs in Georgia as well. You can reduce the risks 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 large 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 Georgia of which you should be aware:

- Availability and wide consumption of alcohol, dealing with alcohol pressure from the locals, and having compromised judgment after drinking
- Daily low-level verbal harassment, including, but not limited to, yelling profanities in English, non-sexual touching, calling or texting your cellphone, and asking personal questions such as why are not you married
- Risk factors associated with sexual assaults such as smiling at males and making eye contact (for females), wearing revealing clothing, accepting drinks or food from strangers at restaurants, being isolated at night in dark areas
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.
- Two existing conflict zones, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, which are absolutely off-limits for Volunteer travel

### **STAYING SAFE: DON'T BE A TARGET FOR CRIME**

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Georgia 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 Georgia will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Your safety and security manager will introduce you to specific safety and security policies that are in place in Georgia to help you serve safely. Policies include Volunteers are prohibited from traveling after dark on public transportation; Volunteers cannot travel on a night train alone; hitchhiking is prohibited for Volunteers; and they should avoid in high-risk recreation activities, and many others.

### **SUPPORT FROM STAFF**

If a trainee or a Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security 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 support and assist Volunteers who choose to make a formal complaint with local law enforcement. It is very important that a Volunteer reports an incident when it occurs. The reasons for this include obtaining medical care and emotional support, enabling Peace Corps staff to assess the situation to determine if there is an ongoing safety and security concern, protecting peer Volunteers and preserving the right to file a complaint. Should a Volunteer decide later in the process to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not preserved at the time of the incident.

Peace Corps Georgia runs a Safety and Security Council with six Volunteers and the safety and security manager. The council's job is to help develop safety and security related materials and resources such as videos, handbooks, and brochures and to participate in S&S trainings. They also bridge between the Volunteer community and the safety and security manager to discuss Volunteer safety and security-related issues.

Peace Corps/Georgia's country director and safety and security manager conduct annual trainings and police introductions with Volunteers. Peace Corps/Georgia has had a great relationship with the Ministry of Internal Affairs who has been helping Volunteers remain safe in their communities. We also conduct emergency communication and drills with all Volunteers and share lessons learned from the exercise to help stay prepared for possible emergencies.

### **OFFICE OF VICTIM ADVOCACY**

The Office of Victim Advocacy (OVA) is a resource to Volunteers who are victims of crime, including sexual assault and stalking. Victim advocates are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to help Volunteers understand their emotional, medical, and legal options so they may make informed decisions to meet their specific needs. The OVA provides a compassionate, coordinated, and supportive response to Volunteers who wish to access Peace Corps support services.

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

Duty phone: 202.409.2704 (available 24/7, call or text)

Email: [victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov](mailto:victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov)

### **CRIME DATA FOR GEORGIA**

Crime data and statistics for Georgia, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:  
<http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/georgia>

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes. Crimes that do occur abroad are investigated and prosecuted by local jurisdictional authorities. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to file a complaint with law enforcement, who will then determine whether to prosecute. If you decide to file a complaint, the Peace Corps will help through the process. The Peace Corps staff will ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Further, the Peace Corps will help you exercise your rights to the fullest extent possible under the laws of your host country.

The Peace Corps will train you on how to respond if you are the victim of a serious crime, including how to get to a safe location quickly and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify the Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps staff can provide assistance.

### **VOLUNTEER SAFETY SUPPORT IN GEORGIA**

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service. The plan includes information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for addressing safety and security incidents. Georgia's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Georgia office will keep 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 to ensure that Peace Corps is 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 Georgia. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout 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/Georgia'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 Georgia 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 safety and security incidents 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 current and future Volunteers.

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW**

The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship and to improve people’s lives in the communities where Volunteers serve. Instituting policies and practices to support a diverse and inclusive work and Volunteer environment is essential to achieving this mission.

Through inclusive recruitment and retention of staff and Volunteers, the Peace Corps seeks to reflect the rich diversity of the United States and bring diverse perspectives and solutions to development issues. Additionally, ensuring diversity among staff and Volunteers enriches interpersonal relations and communications for the staff work environment, the Volunteer experience, and the communities in which Volunteers serve.

The Peace Corps defines diversity as a “collection of individual attributes that together help agencies pursue organizational objectives efficiently and effectively. These include, but are not limited to, characteristics such as national origin, language, race, color, disability, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, veteran status, and family structures. Diversity also encompasses differences among people concerning where they are from and where they have lived and their differences of thought and life experiences.”

We define inclusion as a “culture that connects each [staff member and Volunteer] to the organization; encourages collaboration, flexibility, and fairness; and leverages diversity throughout the organization so that all individuals are able to participate and contribute to their full potential.” The Peace Corps promotes inclusion throughout the lifecycle of Volunteers and staff. When staff and Volunteers are able to share their rich diversity in an inclusive work environment, the Peace Corps mission is better fulfilled. More information about diversity and inclusion can be found in the Volunteer Handbook.

An inclusive agency is one that seeks input from everyone in an effort to find the best ideas and strategies possible to execute its objectives. When input is solicited, heard, and considered from a rich multitude of individuals the best course of action usually emerges. The Peace Corps seeks to improve its operations and effectiveness by ensuring that all voices and ideas are heard and that all Volunteers and staff feel welcome and appreciated. When each person’s voice is heard, the agency is stronger and the impact of Volunteers is strengthened.

### **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT YOUR SITE**

Once Volunteers arrive at their sites, diversity and inclusion principles remain the same but take on a different shape, in which your host community may share a common culture and you—the Volunteer—are the outsider. You may be in the minority, if not the sole American like you, at your site. You will begin to notice diversity in perspectives, ethnicity, age, depth of conversation, and degree of support you may receive. For example, elders, youth, and middle-aged individuals all have unique points of views on topics you may discuss, from perspectives on work, new projects, and social engagements to the way community issues are addressed.

Peace Corps staff in your host country recognizes the additional adjustment issues that come with living and working in new environments and will provide support and guidance to Volunteers. During pre-service training, a session will be held to discuss diversity and inclusion and how you can serve as an ally for your peers, honoring diversity, seeking inclusion, challenging prejudice and exclusion, exploring your own biases, and learning mechanisms to cope with these adjustment issues. The Peace Corps looks forward to having Volunteers from varied backgrounds that include a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, sexual orientations and gender identities. The agency expects you to work collaboratively to create an inclusive environment that transcends differences and finds common ground.

## **CROSS-CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Outside of Georgia's capital, residents of rural communities might have had little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical U.S. 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 Georgia are known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community where you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

As a Volunteer and representative of the United States, you are responsible not only for sharing the diversity of U.S. culture (to include your individual culture and the culture of other Americans) with your host country national counterparts, but also for learning from the diversity of your host country. An important aspect of this cultural exchange will be to demonstrate inclusiveness within your community in a sensitive manner. Additionally, you will share the responsibility of learning about the diversity of your fellow Peace Corps Volunteers and exploring how best to respect differences while serving as supportive allies as you go through this challenging new experience.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in your host country, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental, compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence they have in the United States; male Volunteers may be expected to not perform chores or other tasks ascribed to women; 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 a diversity, inclusion, and sensitivity discussion during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support. This training covers how to adapt personal choices and behavior to be respectful of the host country culture, which can have a direct impact on how Volunteers are viewed and treated by their new communities. The Peace Corps emphasizes professional behavior and cross-cultural sensitivity among volunteers and within their communities to help integrate and be successful during service.

An ideal way to view the pursuit of cross-cultural adaptation and/or cultural integration is to recognize that everything done in your host country has both a specific reason for why it is done and an expected outcome. Trust that your host country counterparts are acting with positive intentions and work to mutually seek understanding and commonality. Language differences may add a communication barrier and lead to misunderstandings. Listen more than you speak and seek clarity. Remember that having the ability to laugh at yourself and at life's little surprises goes a long way—laughter is universal.

Georgia is a closed-group culture and relationships are highly valued. This usually affects how feedback is shared or received in social or work settings. People may avoid giving critical feedback to save relations, or they may be sensitive to critical feedback, especially if shared publicly. Georgians are openhearted but proud and they appreciate people who demonstrate curiosity in their culture and history.

It's common for Georgians to help their friends, neighbors, relatives or other people in the closed group, rather than providing help for a public cause or purpose. In this way, the notion of volunteerism as Americans understand it is quite new (but growing). Despite the collectivistic culture, Georgians tend to be very individualistic in their opinions and, sometimes actions, and sometimes find being a team player to be a challenge.

Georgia is a sharing culture and you will observe people share meals during breaks at work. There is a strong cultural expectation to offer others any food or drinks that you may be publicly consuming. One of the common practices in Georgia is to engage foreigners in toast-making and drinking culture. However, consider that Georgians value people who can control their alcohol consumption and maintain healthy and

respectful behavior. Remember that it is more important for Georgians to share the spirit of supra (feast) and toast-making, rather than to engage in actual drinking with them.

## **WHAT MIGHT A VOLUNTEER FACE?**

### **Possible Gender Role Issues**

Gender is a set of socially constructed roles, responsibilities, behaviors, and opportunities. Gender differs from sex, which refers specifically to biological and physiological characteristics of males and females. Gender roles and expectations are learned, change over time, and vary within and among cultures. Volunteers are trained in gender awareness as they approach their work in the host country. Gender roles in the United States may differ greatly from those in your country of service. It is important to absorb and to attempt to understand the cultural nuances of gender where you are. For example, in many cultures males are held in higher regard than females and females may manage the households. In some places, females are encouraged to attend school, while in other countries females are discouraged from engaging in such activities and instead work inside or outside of the home.

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them. They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

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

Female Volunteers may find that a single woman living alone goes against the cultural norm. They may receive more unwanted and inappropriate attention from Georgian men than in the United States or have to work harder than male Volunteers to gain the respect of Georgian colleagues in the workplace. Female Volunteers will also have to adapt to cultural norms of not smoking or drinking in public, which could result in unwanted attention and harassment and may lead to an undesirable reputation in the community.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“As a female Volunteer, one of the biggest challenges for me has been to navigate my way through gender role expectations, traditional values, and assumptions about foreign women. At times, trying to integrate into a more traditional culture, with very strong Orthodox values, has meant compromising certain aspects of my personality and lifestyle. The bigger challenge for me however, is seeing how those traditional values and gender roles have affected the students I teach and the paths that they expect in life. While it can be frustrating and discouraging at times, there is an amazing opportunity here to help shift those expectations and influence how individuals conceive of gender. Most of my secondary projects have allowed me the opportunity to focus on gender issues and particularly on advancing opportunities for girls in Georgia.”

“The gender roles in Georgia are incredibly traditional and, as a young American living here, I found it difficult to appreciate and understand how women fit into society. I have had some issues with harassment from men in my town, and sometimes it’s hard to keep perspective and know

how to react to unwanted attention in a foreign culture when language is still an issue. It's also hard on the men whose roles have changed a lot due to unemployment. For example, alcohol is a large part of their culture, and it is much more difficult for male Volunteers to avoid drinking with meals than for women. Georgian women do not generally drink in public though, and it is a good idea to follow their example.”

“Georgian men are seemingly part of a brotherhood. This can create a fun camaraderie, or it can make it OK to just sit around and smoke all day. Personally, I have been shocked at how acceptable it is for men to do nothing with their day, while the women in the household go to work. Men in Georgia are expected to drink—and expected to be able to drink a lot. For American men, being invited to visit prostitutes is shocking and unfortunate, but it is something male Volunteers will likely experience. Thankfully there is not the same type of peer pressure for brothels that there is for drinking.”

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

Volunteers of color sometimes, but not always, have a different Peace Corps experience than white Volunteers. Because of limited exposure, some foreign nationals will expect to see U.S. citizens who are white. Cultures of the world do not typically envision the States as a place of rich diversity with various culturally acceptable perspectives, personalities, and characteristics. Thus, a Volunteer of color may be questioned as about their U.S. citizenship.

In places where American stereotypes and/or caste system dynamics influence perception, Volunteers of color should be mindful of the reasons for these views without creating contentious environments. All too often, host country nationals are simply unaware of the diversity of the United States and require additional information and dialogue. Direct interactions with someone new or something different can take time to get used to, but those who take the time tend to be better off. Although host country nationals may assert that the United States is made up of predominately one race, we know that is not true. If a member of your community knows of compatriots living in the United States or of notable U.S. citizens of color, you can build on this knowledge as a point of reference for discussing diversity within the States.

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In African and Latin American countries, host country nationals may say “welcome home” to African Americans or Hispanic Americans. Sometimes Volunteers expect to be “welcomed home” but are disappointed when they are not. More commonly, if a Volunteer is mistaken for a host-country national citizen, he or she is expected to behave as a male or female in that culture behaves, and to speak the local language fluently. Host country nationals are sometimes frustrated when the Volunteer does not speak the local language with ease. Conversely, some in the same country may call you a “sell out” because they feel the United States has not done enough to help with social issues. These instances can be turned into teachable moments for the Volunteer and the host country national, in which the Volunteer can ask questions surrounding perception and collaborate with respect to issues and projects at hand, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. All Volunteers, to include white Volunteers and those of color, should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture in your country of service. These issues may significantly affect how Volunteers interact with fellow Volunteers and host country nationals. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience in interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

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

models within Peace Corps country staff. In general, host families and counterparts are very accepting of diversity among Volunteers, and close relationships are forged without any regard to ethnicity.

In Georgia, African-American Volunteers may be evaluated as less professionally competent than non-black Volunteers by host country counterparts. They may be called “negroes,” which may not necessarily be used as a derogatory term, but as the local word to describe black people. Rap music is also popular and Georgians may inadvertently use words from the songs inappropriately. African-American Volunteers may find themselves the focus of constant staring, pointing, and comments.

Hispanics may have various reactions from host country nationals. Due to physical appearance, they may blend in their communities easier than other minority groups. Additionally, Georgians may embrace Latin Americans as old friends based on the historic speculation that Iberians once cohabited the country. However, Latin American Volunteers may also be subject to stereotypes as a result of the very popular telenovelas shown on Georgian television, or may also be perceived to be of Asian heritage. To combat potentially culturally insensitive comments, it’s best to take these uncomfortable situations and turn them into opportunities for cultural exchange.

Likewise, Asian-American Volunteers may be the subject of stereotyped perceptions of behavior observed in films. Asian-American Volunteers of any background may be mistaken for Chinese citizens living in-country. They may not be accepted as Americans and may be identified by their cultural heritage, not by their American citizenship. Asian-American Volunteers experience a large amount of negative attention in Georgia. Members of the host community and other strangers may harass Asian-American Volunteers, both verbally and physically.

Staring and verbal provocations are common while traveling and also in Tbilisi (especially on the metro). The safety risks for Asians, particularly females, are very high. Some Georgians may believe Asian-American females to be prostitutes; therefore, Asian-American females should take extra care when traveling or being outside alone at night.

### **Volunteer Comments**

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

“Georgians don’t seem to find it inappropriate to refer to your skin color or race in common conversation and, if you are not as dark as they expect ‘negroes’ to be, they will ask if you are mulatto. References to big beautiful lips, black people being passionate lovers, and imaginings of black people tasting like chocolate are made by men and women alike (I’ve personally heard all of these comments). You will also find that people assume you like rap music and in trying to be friendly, make whatever ‘cool hand signals they think you might appreciate. If confronted, most Georgians seem confused about why you would find any of the aforementioned comments or gestures awkward, rude, or racist.”

“Being an Asian-American in Georgia has been one of, if not the, hardest parts of my service so far. It is difficult to explain the differences amongst nationality, race, and ethnicity in Georgia, where all three are closely intertwined. As a result, we are all called ‘Chineli’ (Chinese) regardless of your actual racial or ethnic identity. At the same time, the Peace Corps’ Second Goal is ‘To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of peoples served,’ and Core Expectation 9 is ‘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.’ On bad days, I remind myself that my mere existence here as the ‘American Volunteer’ is representing the racial and ethnic diversity that comprises America.”

### **Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers**

**For LGBTQ Volunteers:** Given Georgia’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Most LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Georgia is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQA Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at [lgbprcv.org](http://lgbprcv.org). Additionally, the Peace Corps’ LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at [spectrum@peacecorps.gov](mailto:spectrum@peacecorps.gov).

**For Ally Volunteers:** Peace Corps staff intends to create open, inclusive, and accepting environments. As an agency, the Peace Corps encourages Volunteers to serve as allies to their LGBTQ colleagues in order to create a safe environment.

LGBTQ Volunteers have served successfully in Georgia and have very fond memories of their community and service. LGBTQA support groups may be available in your country of service, providing a network to support the needs of the Peace Corps LGBTQA community. Peace Corps staff will work with Volunteers to provide them with locally informed perspectives.

Georgia has very traditional gender roles for men and women and social expectations are for people to get married and have children immediately after marriage. Homosexuality in Georgia is not openly discussed or accepted. For their own cultural integration, as well as safety and security concerns, most LGBT Volunteers choose not to reveal their sexual orientation to their host family, local friends, or counterparts. While there is an underground gay community in Tbilisi, finding support may be difficult since Volunteers are placed in rural communities where very traditional gender roles are the norm.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“LGBT issues and rights remain a controversial topic in many Georgian communities. While some LGBT communities are present in Tbilisi and other large cities in the country, the topic remains a sensitive issue throughout the country. If you do not broach the subject, the topic will most likely never come up in conversation. During challenging times, look to your fellow Volunteers and Peace Corps staff. They care about your well-being and safety.”

“It is unlikely that any Georgian would ever question your sexual or gender identity to be anything other than their traditional idea of heterosexual female or male. Revealing your sexual or gender identity to your community can be a risk to your safety and security, as well as your effectiveness as a Volunteer.”

“You most likely will not encounter a great deal of intolerance toward LGBT people in Georgia, simply because the topic is rarely discussed. Homosexuality is seen as a perversion that exists only in big cities, particularly Tbilisi. In order to keep safe and to be accepted into your

community, the best course of action is to not reveal your LGBT status. In all probability, the question will never come up. Everyone will ask you if you want to bring a Georgian husband or wife home to America with you, and you will just shrug your shoulders and mumble some excuse like every other Volunteer.”

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

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Health Services determined you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without additional medical support, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Georgia without a significant risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Georgia staff will work with disabled Volunteers to support them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

As a disabled Volunteer in Georgia, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Georgia, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. There is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States. Most schools and public buildings do not support handicap access or elevators.

That being said, The Peace Corps/Georgia staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations for them in their training, housing, jobsites, or in other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

### **Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples**

Before committing to Peace Corps service, couples should consider how different degrees of enthusiasm about Peace Corps service, adaptation to the physical and cultural environment, and homesickness will affect their lives. It can be helpful to recognize that your reactions to these issues will change throughout your service, and you may not always feel the same as your partner. You and your partner will have different jobs, different schedules, and difference societal pressures. One partner may learn the language faster than the other or have a more satisfying assignment. This can create competition and put different kinds of stress on each person. Anticipating how these pressures will affect you and your partner differently throughout your service can help you remain a source of support for each other. Making friends with other Volunteers is a critical part of fitting into the larger volunteer culture and can also be a good way to expand your support network.

While couples will live together during their service, they may live in separate towns during their pre-service training. This is a stressful time for most Volunteers, and it can be helpful to discuss in advance how you will deal with this potential separation. Your partner can be an important source of stability but can also add stress to your training experience. You may feel torn between traveling to visit your partner and focusing on your training, your host family, and friends you have made at your training site.

Couples often face pressure from host country nationals to change their roles to conform better to traditional Georgian relationships. Georgian men and women alike will often not understand American relationship dynamics and may be outwardly critical of relationships that do not adhere to traditional gender roles. It is also helpful to think about how pressures to conform to Georgian culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Consider yourself lucky! Serving as a married couple in Georgia is a great advantage! Georgians love weddings and they love married couples! Georgians very much value the family,

and serving as a family unit in Georgia will really give you a leg up in integrating into your host family, community, school, or organization. Since very many Georgians are married by their late 20s, having a characteristic about your partner and yourself that is ‘normal’ to most Georgians is a real asset for integration! You will hear so many times, ‘You two are great, I’m so glad you’re really married!’ Sure, Georgians will inevitably ask why you don’t have kids yet, but you won’t receive nearly the frequency of negative attention and awkward questions as a single Volunteer might. The cultural ‘normalness’ of being married, as well as having someone there for you through the good times and the bad, definitely outweighs the occasional awkward question from a neighbor. You won’t regret it!”

“If you are volunteering as a couple, whether you are young and newly married or seniors with grandchildren, the experience of serving together will be filled with many expected and unexpected experiences. One thing for sure, you will learn many new things about your mate that will strengthen your relationship. The people you encounter during your service will also benefit from seeing marriage from a different perspective.”

“I like to tell my colleagues that because I’m married they’re actually getting two Peace Corps Volunteers. Take advantage of each other’s strengths in your respective work.”

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

In Georgia, Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community church. Volunteers not in the practice of attending church may be challenged to explain their reasons for not wanting to go, but it is possible to politely decline if the church or religious practice is not of your choice. Georgians often assume if you are not Orthodox, you must be Catholic and you may need to offer an explanation, especially if you are another Christian religion. Georgia is generally a tolerant society for religious diversity, even for non-Christians, and most Volunteers facing these issues have found effective ways to cope and have come to feel quite at home in Georgia. Atheism, however, may be less understood.

### **Volunteer Comment**

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

“I knew very little if anything about the history of Jews in Georgia and thereby, came to this country with zero expectations, either positive or negative. However, my experiences have been completely positive. There are certainly stereotypes of Jews in Georgia, however, most of them are of a positive nature. I do think that Georgians view Judaism as more of an ethnicity than actual religion, because I have had people, who know I am Jewish, ask me what religion I am. I have never been made to feel even slightly uncomfortable sharing my religion and family background with members of my community, my host family or others and if anything it has been a net positive in the way that they view our community.”

“Before actually arriving in Georgia, I thought that my agnosticism was one of the main components of my identity that I wouldn’t compromise. I would hide my political views and I would give up my personal space and privacy, but I decided that I wouldn’t lie about my lack of religion. Upon arriving, I very quickly changed my mind. Lacking a religion here, it seems, is more faux-pas than having a different religion altogether. During the Soviet Era, it was

compulsory for Georgians to give up their Christianity and become atheist, so atheism and agnosticism carry negative connotations.”

### **Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers**

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in Georgia. They will often have access to individuals and insights that are not available to younger Volunteers. On the other hand, they will be in a distinct minority within the Volunteer population and could find themselves feeling isolated, looked up to, or ignored.

Older Volunteers are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps’ program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for older trainees, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A 50+ individual may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some 50+ Volunteers may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

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

Respect comes with age in Georgia. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. During their service, 50+ Volunteers may work and live with individuals who have little understanding of, or respect for, the lives and experiences of older Americans.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Senior Volunteers often have more adjustment issues. It is difficult to refer to ‘host mom’ and ‘host dad’ when you are a generation older than they are. Also socialization with younger volunteers can be challenging. I find that engagement on their terms and interests can be an effective means of bridging the gap. You may be the age of their parents (or older), but try to share your experiences in a way that encourages conversation and interaction. Their tastes in music, sport, and after-hour activities are likely to be different. In the best of circumstances you learn from and respect each other. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

“One challenge an older Volunteer may face is learning a new language, especially Georgian, which is reputed to be one of the most difficult languages in the world! The training that Peace Corps offers is outstanding, and will really help you get off to a good start. I would recommend learning the alphabet before you come, but not spending a great deal of time on vocabulary or grammar: Whatever you learn will be eclipsed within a week in PST, so there’s no point dedicating a lot of time to it beforehand. While it’s very helpful to be able to read signs and labels, and to communicate in Georgian with your co-workers, just remember that some of the most important communication often takes place outside of language. Be patient with yourself, study hard, do your best, and you will be successful.”

“Be prepared to struggle with language learning while you watch younger Volunteers have little or no difficulty. This seems to be a normal scenario. It can be intimidating, stressful, and embarrassing if you allow it to be so. The younger Volunteers don’t try to flaunt their language success, but I think it is natural for us older Volunteers to internalize our failures in this regard. Having reached a point in our lives where most of us have probably made many achievements, it is not easy to suddenly find oneself floundering, especially during PST. Just roll with it, do your best, and know it is not the end of the world. Things will improve with time and patience.”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds per bag.

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

<http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>

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

Georgia has type C electrical outlets that accept two round-prong plugs and operate on 220/240 volts, 50 cycles. Adapters are readily available and are inexpensive. Be aware that you will have a weak, sporadic, and/or irregular electricity supply, particularly during 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 are preferable to cash. Traveler's checks are not recommended and maybe impossible to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs. There are ATMs in larger cities, and most towns so you may want to bring an ATM card to access a bank account in the U.S. An ATM card may also come in handy if you plan to travel outside the country during any vacations or after you complete your service.

### **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. You may wish to contact your own insurance company for property insurance options. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, electronics, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and, in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

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

Volunteers in Georgia do not need 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.

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

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

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until 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 frequently within one hour or two from another Volunteer. Some sites require a day's travel to reach the Peace Corps/Georgia office.

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

The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit provide assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The Counseling and Outreach Unit can be reached at 855.855.1961, select option 1, ext. 1470. After business hours, on weekends, and on holidays, the COU duty officer can be reached at the same number. For non-emergency questions, your family can contact your country desk staff through the main Peace Corps number: 855.855.1961.

**How easy is it to call home from Georgia?**

International telephone communication is available on your Peace Corps issued cellphone and costs around 10 cents per minute for a call to the United States. Skype or FaceTime is also a possibility with most Internet access or if you are using a smartphone with a data plan.

**Should I bring a cellphone with me?**

Peace Corps/Georgia issues basic GSM cellphones during pre-service training to all trainees that they will keep for their two years of service. These phones are for safety and security and Volunteers are responsible for their personal use of the phone. All Peace Corps staff members are equipped with cellphones to attend to emergency calls.

Many Volunteers choose to bring and use their unlocked smartphones, even upgrading or buying their own local data plan for it. However, you are responsible for insuring and maintaining your phones. The Peace Corps will not replace stolen personal phones and strongly encourages those who bring them to purchase property insurance.

**Will there be email and Internet access? Should I bring my computer?**

Many businesses and individuals have Internet access in the capital, and in some larger towns and some villages. There are also a growing number of cafes or businesses with Internet access. Cellular network coverage extends to over 98 percent of the populated territory, and many Volunteers purchase wireless Internet cards to get connected. Because of weaker telephone and electrical infrastructure in outlying

areas, Volunteers in rural sites might be limited to writing and receiving email on their occasional visits to the capital or regional centers.

Most Volunteers bring their laptop computers, and just like personal cellphones, you are responsible for insuring and maintaining these devices. The Peace Corps will not replace stolen computers and also strongly encourages those who bring them to purchase personal property insurance. Because of the high value of laptops, owners significantly increase their risk of becoming a victim of crime. You probably will not find the same level of technical assistance and service here as you would at home, and replacement parts could take months to arrive. Electrical lapses and surges are not uncommon, so it's recommended that you protect your laptop (or other expensive electronic devices) with a surge protector, which is available in-country. As noted previously, the Peace Corps office in Tbilisi has a resource center for Volunteers with several computers, Internet access, and printers. Wi-Fi is also available for laptop use in the Volunteer lounge area.

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM GEORGIA VOLUNTEERS



Dear Invitee,

Wow, I can't believe it's my turn to be writing to you! I can remember prior to coming, reading through all of the letters and information I could find in an effort to prepare for my service. I felt the strange mixture of excitement, fear, uncertainty, and just trying to imagine what life here would be like.

There's so much that could be said, but I'll keep it brief. Don't worry. I know the stress and worry can be overwhelming from just thinking about this place that you may have no idea about. So put some time into researching and packing well, but don't stress about it. The Peace Corps preps you very well on language, culture, medical kits.

Bring a flexible attitude! You'll hear this over and over, but it's so true. It's nearly impossible to prepare for every situation you'll face, which is why flexibility will be more valuable than 10 pairs of clothes for every possible weather situation.

Knowing what I do now, here's a quick rundown of advice which I think will be very useful for you:

- It may be scary, but be proactive about moving out of your comfort zone from day one. For example, say hello to the Georgian staff that greets you and get to know them, maybe even in Georgian if you can!

- Reasonably forego the Internet and Facebook in order to immerse yourself in Georgian culture: songs, dance, traditions, and music. I also learned a song in Georgian which took a month to learn but has paid incredible dividends. On multiple occasions I've sung it with Georgians and made epic memories.
- Before I left America, I put some decent time into starting to learn the language; I think it put me on a good track with good momentum from the beginning so as not to fall behind in terms of language, but again, don't stress about this.
- Take advantage of the opportunity to get to know the amazing people you'll get to meet, especially among your fellow Volunteers and Peace Corps staff; take the time to sit down and talk with them.

I am excited for you and look forward to meeting you! Good luck!

*IOD Volunteer*

Congratulations, y'all! You're about to start the most amazing adventure.

You're probably feeling excited, nervous, ready, not ready, and about 12 million other emotions right now. *That's OK.* There are a few things I want to tell you.

- People never stop asking you if you're going to (or living in) Georgia, the state.
- You can, and will, learn Georgian. I promise.
- Khinkali and Adjaruli khachapuri are absolutely as delicious as they look in the pictures.
- You are going to be welcomed into the hearts of people here so quickly. As a Southerner, I can honestly say that even I was surprised by their hospitality.
- The staff here is more supportive than you can imagine.
- There is no perfect packing list.

Your adventure will start with a day or two in a hotel in America. It's going to feel exactly as awkward at first as you might think, but start to make connections. Get out there! These people are your new best friends. And they're wonderful. I mean, you all joined the Peace Corps for a reason, right? Plus you're going to be traveling for a very long time and travel is much more fun when you have people to talk to.

Next, you'll begin pre-service training. I remember the current Volunteers telling us how much they missed PST and, honestly, I thought they were crazy. It's a busy time and a lot of information is coming at you very quickly. There's a lot to learn and sometimes it feels overwhelming. But now I know what those ჯოჯობი (crazies) were talking about. You're going to miss the incredibly large and delicious lunches, the camaraderie with your fellow trainees, and your very first Georgian family. But as much as you might want to stay, this isn't really what you came for.

Finally, you'll be sworn in as Volunteers. I shouldn't say finally, since it really is just the beginning of your adventure! It will feel like so much has happened, and it has, but I promise there's much, much more. Once you get to site, your community will fall in love with you. And you'll fall in love right back. Whether it's walking hand-in-hand to school with a third grader every morning or when a counterpart arranges a birthday celebration in your honor complete with confetti, candles, and dancing, there's something to cherish every single day.

So, for now, relax. Go out with your friends. Pack, unpack, repack. Learn the Georgian alphabet. Eat all the Mexican food you can stuff in your mouth. And cherish even the small moments with your family and friends.

We're all waiting to welcome you to your new home!

*Education Volunteer*

You have no idea what to expect. If you think you've got a good idea, you're imaginative at best, delusional at worst. Still, it's part of the experience, spending your last months in the U.S. learning about Georgia and having people surprise you with their connections to the country or their complete ignorance of its existence. Little do you realize, through these conversations you're already contributing to a Peace Corps goal: to share your knowledge of Georgia's culture with others.

You have the personality and potential to be a successful Volunteer, and you will be given the insight and training to succeed. Here's what you might not realize will support you during service: a network of people to rely on, learn from, confide in, and more than likely begin to love.

It starts with fellow Volunteers, people you'll first meet virtually and, after chatting on Facebook for weeks, actually get to know for one day in the States before your long flight to Georgia. Open up to these people: You'll need each other, and you're lucky enough to have each other from the very beginning. Soon after arriving in-country, you'll meet your host family and community. These people will provide for you and protect you. I dare say you will *never* feel alone, even if you want to. So you see, you're leaving friends and family only to be introduced to friends and family.

As you prepare to depart for Georgia you need not fret, unless it's concerning your packing list. As for that, I recommend you bring solid character, a sensitive mind, and thick skin (but maybe also a pumice stone, just for the elbows).

*Education Volunteer*

Congratulations on choosing to join the Peace Corps/Georgia family! You have the privilege of serving in one of the most beautiful and welcoming nations in which the Peace Corps serves, so I hope you are excited.

You may have already started to research the country that will soon be your home for two years. You may be thinking to yourself, wait, Georgian is a language? Or perhaps, like me, you have focused all of your pre-departure efforts on learning all you can about Georgian cuisine (yes, khinkali are exactly as delicious as they sound). And though you feel like you're one Wikipedia article away from achieving Georgian expertise, you should know that you will learn more about this country's intricate language, its remarkable culture, and its bountiful and cheese-filled food within your first three days in-country than you could possibly manage in the months before your departure.

So instead of fretting about what things are like over here in Georgia, take the time now to savor every little detail of life in the U.S. Go to that restaurant you always wanted to try, or to the park down the road that you've somehow managed to pass by without noticing for the last 10 years. Do a farewell tour to all your favorite spots around town. Most importantly, enjoy time with your family and friends, preferably with an American beer in hand, and appreciate fully that, although they may be displaying a brave stoicism, they are going to miss you just as much as you'll miss them.

Upon your arrival, you will begin an intense and intensely rewarding pre-service training. You have been assigned a primary project, and this training will prepare you for that assignment's day-to-day realities, as well as give you a solid footing in the Georgian language and culture. After training you will swear in and officially become a Peace Corps Volunteer.

Upon arriving in Georgia, you will be confronted with daily challenges and opportunities and you'll be put firmly outside of your comfort zone. You, however, have already shown incredible resilience just by making it through the Peace Corps application process. The staff and your fellow Volunteers, me included, know that you will make lasting positive changes in your host community and we can't wait to meet you and start working together.

გაუმარჯობს! (Cheers!)

*Education Volunteer*

Dear Invitee,

Congratulations! I remember this time last year when I received my invitation to serve in Georgia and I began a frenzied process of filling out medical forms, making packing lists, visiting my friends and family, and eating as much Chinese food as possible (Seriously. Eat. As. Much. Chinese. As. You. Can.). I was excited, nervous, and occasionally deeply impatient to leave.

I imagine you feel the same as I did, so I will give you the advice that I would give my past self (and expect you not to be able to follow it just as I would not have been able to): Be patient. Please, be patient with yourself. Your departure date will arrive before you even realize where the days went and you will be tearfully hugging your loved ones goodbye and sitting at your gate, alone, pondering everything that is about to unfold for you.

Be patient. Intentionally cultivate patience, calmness, and flexibility because these will be some of the most important traits to have for pre-service training (which is long, tiring, and amazing). These traits will also be important for your first months at site (which can be difficult), and of course for the long haul of two years.

Be patient. Don't stress about learning all of the Georgian language now. I recommend doing all of the podcasts and practicing the alphabet of course: I found the podcasts and that practice immeasurably helpful when I got to country. But don't feel as though you have to master anything. Practice a little bit every day and it will pay off later.

Be patient. Don't try to pack too early. Stop even thinking too much about it. Start packing in the month you depart, but leave it until then. Two years sound like a long time, and you imagine that you will need so many things. But I have found that I need probably half of what I brought, for one reason or another. I received this same advice from G13s and G12s in our welcome book last year and was unable to grasp it. So I expect it will be hard for you to cull your two bags as well, but do try to bear in mind that you don't need as many pairs of pants as you think, and not nearly as many dress shirts.

Just be patient, OK? Enjoy yourself and relax, because once you get here it will be nonstop, 24/7 on, on, on and go, go, go. It is phenomenal and absolutely the best thing I have ever done, but you want to prepare yourself for it. Hope it goes well! See you in-country sooner than any of us think is possible.

*Education Volunteer*

It's common to say that you are about to embark on is the biggest adventure of your life and, of course, that's true. As a second-time-around Volunteer, I have had the distinct privilege of embarking on this adventure twice. The first time, I was like most of you reading this letter: I was in my 20s, recently graduated from college, and ready for the challenge of living on a remote island in Micronesia. And

indeed, that time was in every way what most people think of as a typical Peace Corps experience: I lived in a thatched hut, had no running water or electricity, and got letters and care packages from home every three or four months when the ship came.

Now at age 60, here in Georgia, I live in a medium-sized city and work for an NGO in an office. I have an apartment with electricity, running water, and Wi-Fi. There are ample transportation alternatives to anywhere in the country, and I can be in Tbilisi, the capital, in under an hour. Make no mistake: It's not like living in the U.S. My apartment is on the fifth floor of a crumbling, Soviet-era building, no elevator. My running water is on a pump, and the electricity frequently goes off for hours. In my office, there are no heaters in most of the rooms, and we wear multiple layers of clothing, jackets, hats, and scarves all day long in winter. Transportation is usually by marshutka, dilapidated vans with shot suspensions that carry twice the load of people they were designed for, and usually some animals and/or food, as well. There's no mail service, no garbage pick-up (I carry my trash to bins three blocks away to dispose of it), no street cleaning, no snow removal, open drains on all the streets . . . you get the idea. Yet, compared to the "typical" Peace Corps experience, it feels curiously familiar, not as strange and exotic as many of the other countries that Peace Corps serves.

But in fact, nothing could be further from the truth. Outside of the relatively few cities in Georgia, small towns and villages dot the land, and living there often means no running water at all, bucket showers, outhouses, and very limited access to the Internet, markets, and transportation. On the national level, Georgia's history is ancient and complex, and the Soviet legacy and all it entails is still a heavy presence in the land. The culture is different from the U.S. in so many ways: an eagerness to discuss very personal issues such as salary, marriage, and children; profound gender role differences; the role of government and of the family in society; the rate and way change is implemented; and many other societal phenomenon. The needs are not always immediately apparent, and require time and patience to discern. The language is challenging, to say the least.

All this means is that serving in Georgia is, in some ways, more challenging, and in other ways, even more rewarding. As a Volunteer, you will have to work hard to learn the culture and language, and to serve your community. It won't necessarily jump out at you right upon arrival. It will take time and patience to feel at home here, to "fit in." And it will be worth it. The relationships and projects you create will be all the more meaningful and, for most Volunteers, as for me, an attachment to this confusing, contradictory, and glorious country will be forged that will last the rest of your life.

*IOD Volunteer*

About a year into my service, I was neck-deep in the implementation phase of a renovation project for my school. It was proving to be a slow and, at times, frustrating process: Organizing the labor, figuring out how and where to buy materials, and keeping everyone in line were no small tasks. One crisp fall day, as my director's husband and I were driving to a nearby town to buy materials, he turned to me and said, "I saw a report on the news about how jazz has become very popular in Georgia. Do you know why we Georgians love jazz so much? Because that is what life is like here; there are no themes or patterns like there are in classical or rock music. Everything is always up in the air. We are all jazzmen."

Over the course of my time as a Peace Corps Volunteer here, I can easily acknowledge the truth in what he told me that day. Georgia is spontaneous, unusual, and in many ways the antithesis of the American existence we consider "normal." But with patience and an open mind, you will discover new things about the world and about yourself. You will make at least two lifelong friends. And while you may not see it directly, your commitment to serve will positively affect more people than you can imagine. You will find that, even if you are classically inclined, you will help, and be helped by, the jazzmen.

Congratulations, and welcome to Peace Corps/Georgia.

*Education Volunteer*

Welcome to Georgia, one of the most hospitable countries in the world (if you haven't already heard).

It was such a relief to make it through the application process together and it is an even more rewarding experience once you are sworn in and officially become Peace Corps Volunteers. Throughout our service, we have had each other to generate ideas, vent our frustrations, and to meet families in our communities. Prior to departing the United States, we talked about the different types of scenarios we might come across based on the information we received at staging and orientation.

Locals in Georgia will ask you about marriage and children. It has been a nice conversation starter. After we explain that we cannot have children during our service, we let people know that we are happy to be in Georgia right now and that we may have kids in the future. We have four nieces and a nephew, which makes it easy to divert the conversation and talk about family.

Your colleagues will want to meet your spouse and invite you both over for coffee and snacks. This is a great way to develop professional relationships beyond the office environment. In the first three months on site, it has taken careful coordination of our respective schedules.

With younger Georgians, being a married couple has had a strong impact as they are able to observe the mutual respect we have for one another. You can use the fishbowl effect as a positive way to highlight how Americans value equality between men and women.

We regularly come across situations that have been mentioned in the trainings, but it is easy to forget some of those lessons when we are frustrated. It is strangely refreshing to know that we all deal with similar challenges as Volunteers. Our network extends to Volunteers throughout the country and we are grateful for their support as friends and colleagues as we work toward our personal and professional goals.

One last tip: If you can wear your wedding band on your right hand, the way Georgians do, many times it serves as a way to break the ice and start a conversation. We have had many great experiences just by being open and talking to people.

Appreciate your accomplishments as individuals and as a couple along the way. Your Peace Corps/Georgia experience will reveal your strengths as a couple in ways that you may not have anticipated.

*IOD Volunteers (married couple)*

## PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Georgia 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 Georgia (or order what you will need).

### General Clothing

Traditionally, Georgians favor black and other dark colors, and this is still reflected in the dress of the older generations, especially in rural areas. There is all the variety of dress found in any modern European country found in Georgia and Volunteers are going to stick out no matter what. If you enjoy wearing colorful clothes, bring them, but keep in mind that living in the regions will require you to dress professionally and fairly modestly. Professional dress at your site means neat, clean, and conservative; not necessarily dress suits or coats and ties, but think “business casual.” Bear in mind that dry cleaners are only in the largest cities, so clothes should be wash-and-wear. Winters are quite cold and classrooms and offices are often not heated. Bring warm, layerable clothing for the cold winters and cool clothing for the hot summers. Clothes should be breathable, durable, and be able to endure rough washing methods. Laundry is all line-dried, so consider fabrics that will dry quickly. Keep in mind that white clothes will turn a dingy off-white very quickly.

### General

- Thick sweaters
- Sweatshirt or fleece hoodie
- Winter coat (wool or down)
- Rain coat
- Gloves
- Winter hat and scarf
- Long underwear (thermal cotton, silk, spandex, or fleece-lined)
- Bathing suit
- Belts
- Slacks and casual dress pants (avoid light-colored khakis, as these show stains very easily. Consider bringing pairs that have belt loops so that if they stretch they can still be worn)
- Wool, dress, and good-quality cotton athletic socks (many pairs of differing thickness, as you will likely be layering them)

### *For Women*

- Long- and short-sleeved shirts (Light and heavy materials for seasonal temperature changes. Bring some shirts nice enough to wear to work in a school or at trainings).
- Tailored jacket or blazer
- Underwear/bras (bring more than you think you will need)
- Skirts and dresses (bring both formal and everyday styles for both warm and cold weather)
- Jeans (consider styles that can easily be stuffed into boots. Bring jeans that fit snugly or have a bit of lycra/spandex in them. You will be line drying all of your clothes, and over time they will start to stretch out)
- Shorts (for running, wearing around the house, for beachwear)
- Tights/stockings/pantyhose

### **Volunteer Comments**

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

“You will see school-age girls through college-age women in very contemporary clothing: bare midriffs, tight pants, jeans, and sometimes shorts. Community standards vary, but are always more conservative in the villages than in Tbilisi. You will need to decide how you best fit into your own community. I found simple fitted T-shirts to be great, either under other articles of clothing or alone. Georgians take great pride in their shoes, and women often wear seemingly impractical high heels even in most rural towns and villages.”

### ***For Men***

- Long- and short-sleeved button-down shirts (light and heavy materials for climate changes)
- Sport jacket
- Short-sleeved polos
- Flannel shirts
- T-shirts (can be used as undershirts)
- Shorts
- Underwear
- Jeans (nice quality, professional looking)
- Sweatpants

### **Volunteer Comments**

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

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

### **Shoes**

- Sneakers
- Winter boots
- Lightweight ice grips that can be worn over shoes or boots, when walking on packed snow and ice

- Sandals (Chacos and Tevas are popular) or flip-flops/shower shoes

#### ***For Women***

- Dress and casual shoes (flats and heels are both worn often, they should be nice enough to wear to school or the office)
- Boots (in addition to winter boots, bring at least one nicer pair, as well as a pair that can serve as rain boots)

#### ***For Men***

- Dress and casual shoes

#### **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Feminine hygiene products (tampons and sanitary napkins are available in Tbilisi and district centers, but if you have a preference, bring them with you)
- Your favorite brands of shampoo, soap, lotion, etc.
- Dry shampoo (this can be a lifesaver in the villages and during water shortages)
- Hand sanitizer
- Contact lens solution (if you wear contacts)
- Razors
- Dietary supplement (i.e., Airborne or Emergen-C)
- Lint brush
- Stain remover
- Towels (quick dry/microfiber are fantastic)
- Shoe freshener balls
- Wrinkle release spray/sheets
- Fabric refresher

#### **Electronics**

- Laptop computer (not required but very useful for personal and work purposes)
- Camera
- USB drive
- Portable iPod or MP3 player
- Lightweight portable speakers that plug into your MP3 player
- 110-/220-voltage adaptor (be sure to purchase a multioutlet surge protector in-country when you arrive)
- External hard drive

Note: There are electronics stores in the large cities, but repairs/replacement parts will be expensive. It may be more economical to bring extras from home or have them shipped in a care package as necessary.

#### **Home/Kitchen**

- Good-quality sleeping bag rated to 0 degrees Fahrenheit
- Sturdy water bottle
- Swiss Army, Leatherman, or an equivalent multipurpose knife
- French press or pour over coffee maker (if you like American-style coffee; Georgians drink only Turkish or instant coffee)
- Zip-close storage bags in a variety of sizes and heavy-duty
- Spices and other baking supplies (your favorites may be difficult to find, especially in winter; baking powder, cinnamon, and vanilla are also difficult to find locally)
- Wet wipes/hand sanitizer (with refillable travel-size bottle)

## Miscellaneous

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

- Luggage, such as duffel bags and hiking backpacks; should be tough and flexible (Remember you will be hauling it in and out of taxis, minibuses, trains, and often carrying it around on foot; bring luggage that is durable, lightweight, and easy to carry.)
- Good-quality backpack, daypack, or messenger bag
- Waterproof coat/raincoat and folding umbrella
- Eyeglass repair kit
- Sunglasses
- Earplugs
- Musical instruments (with music books and spare parts, as needed)
- Sewing items (iron-on mending tape, straight and safety pins, etc.)
- A good flashlight and accompanying batteries (a hands-free head lamp is a good alternative for reading when the power goes out and for night trips to the outhouse)
- Money belt
- Books (Any specific book that you want to read during service. If you just like to read in general, there is a huge selection of books in the volunteer lounge in the office)
- Lots of pictures of home (photos, postcards, etc.) for yourself and to share with friends, students
- U.S. stamps and envelopes (for sending mail with friends who make a return trip to the U.S.)
- Journal, diary, or organizer/date book
- Maps of the United States and the world (good teaching aids) and wall-hangings
- Games (games that can double as English teaching tools like Bananagrams, etc.) Baseball, football, Frisbee, hacky sack, or other “American” sports equipment
- Index cards for making flash cards (almost impossible to find in-country)

## What Not To Bring

Or, rather, things that are affordable/available in-country:

- Shoe polish and socks are available at most bazaars for reasonable prices. Same goes for women’s tights/hose.
- A good variety of clothing for good prices (around 5 GEL). Larger cities have better selections and you can even find nice winter coats for around 75 GEL.
- Slippers, flip-flops, rain boots, and cheap shoes for under 30 GEL.
- Gloves, hats, scarves, etc. for 10–15 GEL
- Shampoo, conditioner, soaps, and toothpaste are readily available and not very expensive.

## 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 are relevant to everyone, and the list is not comprehensive.

### Family

- Notify family that they can call the Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour phone number: 855.855.1961 ext. 1470).
- Give family and friends the “Peace Corps On the Home Front” handbook.

### Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your 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 service; if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

### Medical/Health

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

### Insurance

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

### Personal Papers

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

### Voting

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

### Personal Effects

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

### Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. Information about loan deferment is at [peacecorps.gov/loans](http://peacecorps.gov/loans).
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business. Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 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

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can 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 can contact you in the event of an emergency.

Peace Corps headquarters toll-free number: 855.855.1961, press 1, then extension number (see below):

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1265	202.692.1265
Country information	Georgia Desk Desk Officer	ext. 2434 <a href="mailto:Georgia@peacecorps.gov">Georgia@peacecorps.gov</a>	202.692.2434
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1829
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704

See you soon!



The Peace Corps Georgia team is waiting to welcome you!