

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

Jamaica



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

August 2015



Jamaica Map



A WELCOME LETTER

Waagwan!

What a pleasure it is to welcome you (a little bit in advance) to Jamaica! You are embarking on a life-altering journey of both self-discovery and development work and it will truly be one of the most challenging but also one of the most memorable and rewarding experiences of your entire life.

I wanted to take a moment both to say hello and welcome and also to prepare you a little for the particulars of moving to Jamaica. My apologies in advance if some of this seems like common sense. In talking with multiple Volunteers, what has struck me most (in addition to, of course, the tremendous pride in accomplishment for the work each of them is doing) is the lack of actual mental preparation each of them felt they had prior to arriving. There are packing checklists, document checklists, and security checklists—but nothing that particularly speaks to what one can do to mentally prepare for 27 months of service in Jamaica. To that end, I have three things for each of you to consider.

First, when one considers all of the countries in the world where Peace Corps has Volunteers, you may feel—well—almost guilty about going to Jamaica. Beautiful beaches. Everyone speaks English. How hard could it be, right? Maybe you have heard (or will hear) the term “Posh Corps” applied? The reason I am writing you is to say, emphatically: Don’t feel guilty that your Peace Corps service is going to be Jamaica! You must immediately wipe all of that guilt out of your brain. If you arrive to post with the preconceived notion that it is going to be easier here because it is, well, Jamaica, than you are not arriving properly prepared for the culture shock you are going to experience. Yes, most Jamaicans will be able to converse with you in English. After that though, almost everything else is different. This is a foreign country! Jamaicans have their own customs, norms, language, community, transportation, food ... and so on. How would you be preparing yourself mentally and/or physically if you were going to Ethiopia rather than Jamaica? If you are doing anything differently, please stop. You need to begin exploring your inner self: What are my core beliefs? What is truly important to me, that I maintain within myself, and how am I going to cope if I am unable to maintain those things? Jamaica is a beautiful and amazing country—but, at times, you are going to dislike being here. But you also would have spent a moment disliking Ghana or Peru or Mongolia. Every Peace Corps Volunteer, no matter where they serve, has these pangs of frustration. You need to prepare yourself for that eventuality and consider now—while you are still relatively calm and in a familiar environment—what will your coping strategies be? How are you going to be able to discern what is truly important to you versus what is just a momentary frustration?

Secondly, please prepare yourself as best you can to be living with a host family (likely living in a private room in a house shared with a family). Remember that the Peace Corps has three equal goals—and two of those three goals refer to intercultural understanding. The Peace Corps mission is to promote world peace and friendship—which cannot be accomplished if you go to work and then hole away in your room or only hang out with other Volunteers. Peace Corps service demands community integration and your host family is the bridge between you and your community. Effort is needed because, contrary to what we would hope, people are not going to love you just because you are American: They may not even trust you. All over the world, PCVs may be eyed suspiciously because people either think you are a spy for the government or they honestly just think you are not right in the head! Why on earth would anyone in their right mind want to leave the United States to come and live in this country, where we have bad roads, bad infrastructure, no jobs, water that doesn’t run all day, and cold bucket baths when they could stay comfortably in the United States? And why would anyone leave their families? In terms of the overall Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, people in developing countries (in general) have less space in their life for considerations of service to others, as they struggle just to put food on the table for their families. But, all

of that suspicion melts away as the community gets to know the real you ... but that can only be accomplished over time and with a diligent effort of community involvement.

Lastly, I would like you to consider your physical health needs. Jamaica is chiefly rural with little formal developed infrastructure. As such, there are not many roads suitable (i.e., safe) for bike riding or jogging. If getting in a daily run is important to you, please spend this last month considering what other aerobic exercises might serve as a reasonable replacement. Many Volunteers have found doing P90X or other video-based aerobic workouts good substitutes. You will need to get creative in terms of making your own weights and dumbbells (packing a set of hand weights is probably not the best use of your allowable luggage weight given you are packing for 27 months) but, as luck would have it, you are going to be Peace Corps Volunteer and so resourcefulness is probably one of your core competencies! Most of you will have fairly regular access to electricity so bringing a few workout DVDs that you have pre-tested or pre-identifying online video workouts will be important.

And so, with those “big three” items, I return to my original message of welcome. We are all very much looking forward to meeting you and the people of Jamaica are grateful for your commitment to serve.

Most sincerely,

Jennifer White
Country Director
Peace Corps/Jamaica

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A WELCOME LETTER.....	1
CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS	5
PEACE CORPS/JAMAICA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS	6
History of the Peace Corps in Jamaica.....	6
Peace Corps Programming in Jamaica.....	6
COUNTRY OVERVIEW: JAMAICA AT A GLANCE.....	7
History	7
Government.....	7
Economy.....	7
People and Culture.....	7
Environment	7
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.....	9
General Information about Jamaica.....	9
Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees.....	10
Online Articles/Current News Sites About Jamaica.....	10
International Development Sites About Jamaica.....	10
Recommended Books	11
Books About the History of the Peace Corps	11
Books on the Volunteer Experience.....	11
Books About Jamaica	11
Recommended movies about the culture of Jamaica	11
LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE.....	12
Communications.....	12
Housing and Site Location.....	13
Living Allowance and Money Management.....	13
Food and Diet.....	13
Transportation	14
Geography and Climate.....	14
Social Activities.....	14
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior.....	14
Personal Safety.....	15
Rewards and Frustrations.....	16
PEACE CORPS TRAINING.....	17
Overview of Pre-Service Training.....	17
Technical Training	17
Language Training	18

Cross-Cultural Training	18
Health Training.....	18
Safety and Security Training.....	19
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service.....	19
Qualifying for Service	19
YOUR HEALTH CARE IN JAMAICA	21
Health Issues in Jamaica	21
Helping You Stay Healthy.....	21
Maintaining Your Health.....	21
Women’s Health Information.....	22
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	22
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist.....	23
SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH.....	25
Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk	25
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime.....	26
Support from Staff	27
Office of Victim Advocacy.....	27
Crime Data for Jamaica.....	27
Volunteer Safety Support in Jamaica.....	28
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW	29
Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site.....	29
Cross-Cultural Considerations.....	30
What Might a Volunteer Face?.....	30
Possible Gender Role Issues.....	30
Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color.....	31
Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers.....	32
Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities.....	33
Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples	34
Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers	34
Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers.....	35
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	37
WELCOME LETTERS FROM JAMAICA VOLUNTEERS	40
PACKING LIST.....	46
CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS.....	51

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/JAMAICA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Jamaica

On February 22, 1962, Premier Norman Washington Manley signed an agreement with the United States government inviting the Peace Corps to have a program in Jamaica. On June 12 of that year, a few weeks before Jamaica's independence, the first group of Volunteers arrived in Jamaica. This group of 37 Volunteers worked in many fields, including agriculture, vocational education, library development, construction, electricity, and plumbing.

By 1963 there were about 100 Volunteers serving in Jamaica. Their work mostly focused on grassroots development projects. Trainees lived with Jamaican host families, adapting to the Jamaican culture and cross-cultural differences while learning the local language and foods.

Today, Volunteer assignments are part of a uniform plan that has a significant community development core. While each project plan has specific tasks and skill requirements, Peace Corps/Jamaica assignments generally involve facilitating the growth and development of communities and their members by empowering them to make better decisions about their own lives. Most Volunteers are placed in small rural communities; however, sites also exist in small towns, and peri-urban centers. Currently no Volunteers are assigned in Kingston, Montego Bay, or Spanish Town; however, Peace Corps Volunteer leaders, third-year extension Volunteers, and Peace Corps Response Volunteers can be placed in Kingston.

Peace Corps Programming in Jamaica

Nearly 4,000 Volunteers have served in this hospitable country of loving and dynamic people. Jamaica's population faces struggles similar to people in other island nations. There are many areas where people still practice subsistence agriculture. Many youth are without jobs or lack the skills to contribute to the development of their communities. Many children cannot read. In addition, a wealth of biodiversity exists in the country, and protecting its valuable natural resources, while benefiting from tourism, is essential to Jamaica's economy.

At present, more than 50 Peace Corps Volunteers work in the Education and Environment sectors under the literacy and green initiative projects, respectively. Literacy Volunteers lend their skills to improve the literacy issues that exist among young people while the green initiative Volunteers focus on environmental education, sustainable agriculture/agroforestry, and organizational capacity building.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: JAMAICA AT A GLANCE

History

The indigenous Taino people inhabited Jamaica prior to Christopher Columbus' arrival in 1494. The island was then colonized by the Spanish until they were displaced by the British in 1655. After a long period of direct British colonial rule, Jamaica gained a degree of local political control in the late 1930s. The island held its first election under full universal adult suffrage in 1944. Jamaica joined nine other British territories in the West Indies Federation in 1958, but withdrew in 1961 after Jamaican voters rejected membership. Jamaica gained its independence from Britain in 1962 and remains a member of the Commonwealth of British affiliates and former colonies.

Government

The government of Jamaica is a parliamentary democracy with political and legal traditions adapted from the United Kingdom. Jamaica's official head of state is the queen of England, who appoints and is represented in the country by the governor general. The head of government is the prime minister, who is also the leader of the political party that wins the electoral majority in the House of Representatives. Members of the Senate are appointed by the governor general with recommendations from the prime minister, and are from the two major parties: the People's National Party and the Jamaica Labor Party. The prime minister is appointed by the governor general.

Economy

Jamaica is striving to strengthen its economy and escape its debt burden. The government's debt is seen as a crippling factor in the country's development. Nearly 70 percent of each tax dollar collected by the government goes to repaying debt. Jamaica, therefore, lags behind other countries in the region on numerous governance and economic indicators. Many Jamaicans are significantly under-employed; the government, therefore, is struggling to provide the services and education that Jamaicans need to improve their standard of living and to promote productive enterprise in the country. In 2009, Jamaica's poverty rate was 16.5 percent.

People and Culture

Jamaica is a small island with a population of approximately 2.8 million people. It has a rich, diverse culture mixed with other equally interesting cultures from around the world, the majority of whom are of African origin. Other ethnic groups include East Indians, Chinese, Lebanese, and Europeans. The country's ethnic diversity is reflected in the national motto, "Out of Many, One People."

What makes Jamaica's culture most interesting is the people. Hospitable, warm, friendly, and gracious are just among the many ways to describe Jamaicans. These qualities alone attract tourists to Jamaica.

Religion is an important part of the culture, and school days begin with a devotional exercise, while most meetings open with a prayer. Christianity is the predominant religion. Members of the Rastafarian sect are a small but visible group, constituting approximately 12–15 percent of the population.

As a former British colony, Jamaica is an English-speaking country; however, most Jamaicans speak Patois, a Jamaican dialect derived from several languages, including English and West African languages. Music is a significant aspect of the culture, and the rhythms of reggae, calypso, and soca commonly emanate from dance halls and the streets.

Environment

Jamaica is the third largest Caribbean island, located approximately 90 miles south of Cuba. It is 146 miles long and 45 miles wide at its widest, and boasts 635 miles of coastline. The waters of its north coast

are home to striking coral reefs, white sand beaches, and more than 700 species of fish. The terrain is quite diverse, with swamps and wetlands in the south, rough terrain in the interior, and the Blue Mountains, whose highest peak exceeds 7,000 feet and is a watershed for record-breaking rainfall in the country and region.

Residents enjoy a tropical climate, with temperatures generally between 80–90 degrees Fahrenheit throughout the year. During hurricane season, June to November, the island receives rain and sometimes experiences windy storms; however, most hurricanes pass by without hitting Jamaica directly. Heavy rains do affect the island even outside of hurricane season, starting as early as April in some areas.

Gilbert in 1988 was one major hurricane to directly hit Jamaica, and Peace Corps Volunteers played an important role in relief and mitigation efforts in its aftermath. In September 2004, Hurricane Ivan, with wind gusts of more than 140 mph and torrential rain, hit Jamaica, damaging homes and infrastructure and causing disruptions in water, telephone, and electrical services. Fortunately, the eye of Hurricane Ivan veered slightly south, and Jamaica was spared from total devastation.

In the 2007 hurricane season, the country responded to Hurricane Dean and then Tropical Storm Gustav in 2008. Most recently, in September 2010, Tropical Storm Nicole caused severe rains leading to flooding and landslides followed by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, which caused millions of dollars in damage and immense dislocation in the eastern parishes of St. Mary, Portland, and St. Thomas.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

State.gov

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

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

lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html

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

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

Data.un.org

United Nations site with links to data from U.N. member countries

Wikipedia.org

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

Worldbank.org

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 developing countries to reduce poverty. This site contains a lot of information and resources regarding development.

Data.worldbank.org/country

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

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

RPCV.org

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the Web pages of the “Friends of” groups for most countries of service, comprised of former Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Jamaica site: www.servejamaica.org

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Jamaica

UN.org/News/

The United Nations news service provides coverage of its member states and information about the international peacekeeping organization’s actions and positions.

VOAnews.com

Voice of America, the U.S. government’s multimedia broadcaster, features coverage of news around the world.

www.jamaica-gleaner.com

Site of the Jamaica Gleaner, a local newspaper

www.jamaicaobserver.com

Site of the Jamaica Observer, a local newspaper

http://kingston.usembassy.gov/u.s.peace_corps.html

U.S. Embassy in Jamaica

www.televisionjamaica.com

Sites of Jamaica’s two local television stations

www.jis.gov.jm

The information service of the government of Jamaica

www.nlj.gov.jm

Site of the National Library of Jamaica

International Development Sites About Jamaica

www.paho.org

Pan American Health Organization

<http://www.jm.undp.org/content/jamaica/en/home.html>

United Nations Development Programme

www.unicef.org

United Nations Children’s Educational Fund

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 Jamaica

1. Bolt, Usain. "My Story: 9.58" HarperSport, 2010.
2. Clarke, Edith. "My Mother Who Fathered Me: A Study of the Families in Three Selected Communities of Jamaica." The Press University of the West Indies, third revised edition, 2002.
3. Crawford-Brown, Claudette. "Children in the Line of Fire." Arawak Publications, 2010.
4. Gunst, Laurie. "Born fi Dead." Canongate Books Ltd., 2003.
5. Hope, Donna P. "Man Vibes: Masculinities in Jamaican Dancehall." Ian Randle Publishers, 2010.
6. Monteith, Kathleen ed. "Jamaica in Slavery and Freedom: History, Heritage and Culture." University of the West Indies Press, 2002.
7. Read, Michael. "Lonely Planet Jamaica." Lonely Planet Publications, 2006.
8. Sherlock, Philip, and Hazel Bennett. "The Story of the Jamaican People." Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener Publishers, 1998.
9. Winkler, Anthony C. "Going Home to Teach." LMH Publishing, 1995.
10. Sistren, and Honor Ford-Smith. "Lionheart Gal: Life Stories of Jamaican Women." University of the West Indies Press, 2005.
11. Thompson, Ian. "The Dead Yard." Nation Books, 2011.
12. Tortello, Rebecca. "Pieces of the Past." Ian Randle Publishers, 2006.

Recommended movies about the culture of Jamaica

1. "Better Mus Come," directed by Storm Saulter, 2010.
2. "Dancehall Queen," directed by Rick Elgood and Don Letts, 1997.
3. "Ghett'a Life," directed by Chris Browne, 2011.
4. "Life and Debt," documentary, directed by Stephanie Black, 2001.
5. "Rockers," directed by Ted Bafaloukos, 1978.
6. "Smile Orange," directed by Trevor D. Rhone, 1976.
7. "The Harder They Come," directed by Perry Henzell, 1972.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Mail from the United States usually takes one to three weeks to arrive, although occasionally it could take several months and, in rare instances, not arrive at all. Despite the delays, you are encouraged to write to your family as well as to have them send you mail regularly by this or other available means. Family members often become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail service is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. Fortunately, there are readily available alternatives, including email and cellular phones to which you will have cost-effective access.

During pre-service training (PST), trainees are not allowed to receive mail or packages. Once you become a Volunteer and are at your site, you will have your letters and packages sent directly to your new local/community address. Large packages sent to any other address, or sent through services like UPS, DHL, and FedEx, may attract customs duties and would, therefore, be held at the airport until you make the trip to claim them and pay duty. This will require a trip into the city center at your own expense to collect.

Packages can take from two weeks to six weeks to arrive. They must be lighter than 22 pounds and are cheaper to mail if they are less than 11 pounds. Note that books and documents that weigh a minimum of 11 pounds can be sent to you in an “M-Bag” through the U.S. Postal Service at a relatively economical rate. Further information is available at U.S. post offices and at www.usps.com. Please note, however, that trainees should not have packages sent to them until after swearing in. Because PST occurs throughout Jamaica, it is difficult for post to store and account for these packages.

Telephones

Peace Corps/Jamaica’s mobile telephone service provider is Digicel Jamaica. You will be assigned a mobile prepaid phone upon arrival. Check with PCVs already on the island for the best deals on local calling cards/plans for international calls.

Computer, Camera, Internet, and Email Access

If you bring a laptop (highly recommended), make certain it is insured, and bring a power surge protector. On your arrival you will be issued an account that will allow you to log on to the Peace Corps/Jamaica network and use the Internet and a few other computer applications, including Microsoft Office. While away from the Peace Corps office, this account will also allow you to log on to the Peace Corps/Jamaica intranet to access several useful resources, if the computer you are using has Internet access.

Broadband Internet service is available in Jamaica and you will have the option of choosing from several Internet service providers based on your site location. It may be your responsibility to obtain Internet service independently as Peace Corps/Jamaica may not have an established agreement with the provider to simplify the subscription and payment processes for Volunteers. You may also connect your laptop to the Volunteers’ Wi-Fi Internet service at the Peace Corps office. Please also be mindful that based on your site location you may not have Internet at home or your work site. Consequently, you may have to access the Internet from the nearest Internet café.

Volunteers who create their own websites or post material to websites created by others are responsible for discussing the content with the country director in advance. Volunteers are required to provide the

country director with the Internet web address (URL) and to discuss in advance the general nature and content or substance of the blog or website. Volunteers' websites must meet the following criteria:

- Represent the U.S. and the Peace Corps positively
- Be culturally sensitive
- Exercise discretion
- Not divulge any personal identifying or safety and security information
- Not post photos of Peace Corps staff or counterparts without written permission
- Not use the Peace Corps logo
- Must have a disclaimer stating that it doesn't represent the U.S. government

You are required to have a personal email account as the Peace Corps does not currently issue email accounts to Volunteers. This is essential to facilitate frequent and vital email communication between Peace Corps/Jamaica and Volunteers.

Housing and Site Location

Being placed at a site involves a lengthy, systematic process. Your living conditions in Jamaica may not be as rugged as those in many Peace Corps posts. Most Volunteers have indoor plumbing and running water. However, the water is usually not heated, so be prepared for the adjustment to cold showers as you gradually become immersed in the Jamaican way of life and work. Although washing machines are widely available, laundry is often washed by hand in a sink, washtub, or even in a river.

Electricity exists islandwide, except in very remote areas. Very few Volunteers go without a refrigerator or other electrical appliances, and many Volunteers may even have amenities such as cable television.

Volunteers must live in a host family setting for the two years duration of their service, as this provides added security and stability. Living conditions will vary, however, depending on whether your site is rural, peri-urban, or urban. For the last few years, Peace Corps/Jamaica has been placing most of its Volunteers at rural sites because this is highest need for Volunteers exists, as well as to increase Volunteers' safety.

Because of this trend toward rural placement, please note that the most common housing arrangement is a **room in a home with a Jamaican family with access to a shared bathroom and kitchen**. Please come prepared to live in this kind of housing arrangement.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Jamaican currency 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. Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to live at a level that is comparable with that of their host country counterparts. The Peace Corps discourages Volunteers from supplementing their living allowance with funds from home.

The local currency is the Jamaican dollar, and the exchange rate continually changes. The Peace Corps will open a savings account for you in local currency at a branch of the National Commercial Bank, which will issue you an ATM card. This card can also be used as a debit card for making payments for goods and services at most stores. Your living allowance and leave allowances will be deposited monthly into that account.

Food and Diet

Your diet may not need to change drastically while you are in Jamaica. The main source of meat is chicken; however, beef, goat, and fish are also readily available. Vegetarians need not be concerned.

Although there may be a slightly smaller variety of foods than you are used to, Jamaicans are now more health conscious, therefore a wide selection of vegetarian fare is readily available, especially in the larger supermarkets. Additionally, fresh fruits and vegetables, as well as dried beans and rice, are plentiful.

Jamaicans are known for their love of hot and spicy foods. For those who crave a taste of home, Burger King, KFC, Subway, Wendy's, T.G.I. Friday's, Domino's, and Pizza Hut can be found in many urban and peri-urban areas. Also, a wide assortment of imported food items are available in the larger supermarkets found mostly in the urban and peri-urban areas. These food items tend to be expensive; however, once you move to your site, you will learn to utilize what is available locally. A little creativity goes a long way.

Transportation

Buses are crowded and often do not operate on regular schedules. The government is making progress in improving the urban transportation system, introducing more buses, especially during peak hours, and getting them to operate in a timely manner. Rural travel options range from large buses, minibuses, and route taxis to pickup trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. It may be necessary for you to walk or bike some distances in hot, mildly humid, or rainy weather. Improved stamina, weight reduction, and overall improvement in general well-being are beneficial side effects reported by Volunteers in Jamaica. The Peace Corps provides Volunteers with a bicycle on a case-by-case basis for work-related purposes. Volunteers are required to wear a helmet at all times while riding bicycles. These helmets are issued by Peace Corps/Jamaica.

Geography and Climate

Jamaica has a tropical climate. Temperatures vary from 80–90 degrees Fahrenheit, and are about 10 degrees lower at higher elevations. Both days and nights generally are hot and a bit more humid during the summer, while evenings are noticeably cooler during the winter. At higher elevations, especially between November and March, evenings can be quite chilly, and a light wrap, long-sleeved shirt, or sweatshirt may be necessary. Rain can occur any time throughout the year, though most likely from May through June and from September through October.

Social Activities

Activities available for entertainment will depend on where you are assigned and how creative you are. Among the possibilities are reading, walking, writing letters, riding a bicycle, swimming, socializing with friends, taking classes, doing arts and crafts, going to movies or plays, watching videos or television, watching or participating in sports (such as dominoes, netball, swimming, football, and cricket), listening to music or a shortwave radio, snorkeling, playing indoor games (e.g., cards or dominoes—the national pastime), and playing musical instruments. The majority of Volunteers state that they have change their socializing habits once they arrive in Jamaica. This is especially true when it comes to going to bars; it is culturally unacceptable to spend time in bars in Volunteers' communities, which can be a big change for some individuals.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you are expected to dress and behave professionally. Most professional Jamaicans dress well and follow a conservative dress code. While tourists may wear short-shorts and see-through clothing, such attire is not appropriate for Volunteers.

Volunteers should dress appropriately, both on and off the job. The safest rule is to carefully observe what co-workers and other Jamaican professionals wear and dress accordingly.

- **WOMEN:** Wearing shorts much shorter than knee-length, tank tops, or skimpy attire in public is inappropriate and can lead to harassment. Short-sleeved shirts or blouses, slacks or skirts (knee-length or longer), and dresses (knee-length or longer) are appropriate attire for work.
- **MEN:** Please keep beards neat and trimmed. Earrings on men are not generally accepted in professional settings. Collared shirts and slacks such as khakis or jeans that are clean and ironed (no rips or tears) are acceptable for work.

Flip-flops should not be worn during pre-service training or for work. Visible body piercings (other than earrings for women) and tattoos for both men and women are not generally accepted in professional settings. Please be prepared to cover tattoos whenever possible. Wearing facial piercings may make it more difficult to integrate into your community.

The Peace Corps office also maintains a strict dress code during official working hours to which Volunteers are expected to adhere. Volunteers who are inappropriately attired will not be allowed in the office.

NB: More information on dress will be mailed to you later in order for you to adequately prepare for your 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 Jamaica 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 Jamaica. 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.

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.

Although Jamaica has a critical crime rating according to the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Diplomatic Security, foreigners are not typically targeted for violent crimes. Your personal safety is impacted by your choices; you will choose to enhance and maintain your safety in Jamaica. As with all Peace Corps programs, the cornerstone of safety is integration. A Volunteer is safest when their host families and the people they befriend show respect, look out for them, and keep them safe. You will receive necessary information to thoroughly prepare you for making safe choices. Rural assignments with host families set the stage for a safe service in Peace Corps/Jamaica.

Rewards and Frustrations

The real sacrifices you will make in the Peace Corps are in the form of the tremendous daily, even hourly, efforts you will make to operate and be effective in another culture and the constant struggle to be self-aware and sensitive. A Volunteer explains:

“Most of us agree that although we knew the Peace Corps was going to be hard, it is often hard in a different way than we expected. We all worried about adjusting to the bugs and the heat, but that’s the easy part. It’s more of a challenge to get used to dealing with perplexing bureaucracy, the lack of motivation on the part of some host country counterparts, the lack of technology and education, and cultural barriers.”

As with most developing countries, there will be challenges, such as irregular transportation, disruptions in electrical and water supplies, and inordinate delays in getting things done. Your maturity, flexibility, patience, openness to change, and commitment to the Peace Corps will greatly enhance your ability to adapt to living and working in Jamaica. Judging by the experience of returned Volunteers, the rewards are well worth the difficulties, and most Volunteers leave Jamaica feeling they have gained much more than they gave during their service. It is very important that you make this experience your own experience; learn from others as they share their experience, but remember you are ultimately responsible for your service. What you put in is what you will get out.

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 Jamaica 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 Jamaica 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 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 Peace Corps has the overall responsibility for directing training with the operational aspect being executed by a training team comprised of Peace Corps staff, language and cross-culture facilitators assisted by currently serving Volunteers, and resource individuals from the Peace Corps' targeted sectors. The length of pre-service training varies, usually ranging from nine to 12 weeks, depending on the competencies required for the assignment.

Throughout service, Volunteers strive to achieve performance competencies. Initially, pre-service training affords the opportunity for trainees to develop and test their own resources. As a trainee, you will play an active role in self-education. You will be asked to decide how best to set and meet objectives and to find alternative solutions. You will be asked to prepare for an experience in which you will often have to take the initiative and accept responsibility for decisions. Your success will be enhanced by your own effort to take responsibility for your learning and through sharing experiences with others.

The ability to communicate in the host country language is critical to being an effective Peace Corps Volunteer. These skills are interwoven throughout the training competencies. So basic is this precept that it is spelled out in the Peace Corps Act: No person shall be assigned to duty as a Volunteer under this act in any foreign country or area unless at the time of such assignment he (or she) possesses such reasonable proficiency as his (or her) assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he (or she) is assigned.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Jamaica 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, Jamaican 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 Jamaica and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Jamaican 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.

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. Jamaican 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. The Patois language, which is the unofficial language of Jamaica, is very colorful and easy to learn. Although spoken differently in different parts of the island, the basic structure remains the same. A very interactive program exists to ensure that you are properly immersed in Jamaican Patois. Trainees will work with their host families, agencies, and community partners to gain additional exposure to the language. A workbook and specific assignments will be given to be completed outside of training sessions.

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 Jamaica. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Jamaica, 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 context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Jamaica. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and basic treatment of medical illnesses found in Jamaica. 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, alcohol awareness, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), common illnesses, domestic and intimate partner violence, emergencies, and medical policies in Jamaica.

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.

Additional Trainings 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 training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months. In addition to learning, the conference is convened at a location that gives the Volunteers a chance to relax and reconnect. In Jamaica, this conference is also referred to as early service conference.
- **Midservice 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. A small component of the midservice training focuses on preliminary thoughts on "after your service," with a set of concurrent sessions focusing on tips for entering grad school and documenting your experience for building your résumé, as well as extending your service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** Prepares Volunteers for their future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences. The conference covers aspects such as how to successfully close out your project(s), saying goodbye to your community, and readjusting to life in the U.S. Volunteers are also given tips on how to execute Third Goal activities.

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

Other training interventions that Volunteers will participate in are regional workshops, technical training seminars relating to specific sectors, and HIV-related training, etc.

Qualifying for Service

The pre-service training experience provides an opportunity not only for the Peace Corps to assess a trainee's competence, but for trainees to re-evaluate their commitment to serve for 27 months to improve the quality of life of the people with whom Volunteers live and work and, in doing so, develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes while adapting existing ones.

Peace Corps/Jamaica's competencies are designed to be accomplished throughout the Volunteer's 27 months of learning. A trainee may not be able to complete all learning objectives for a competency during pre-service training; however, he or she must show adequate progress toward achieving the competencies in order to become a Volunteer.

Peace Corps/Jamaica's competencies include the following:

1. Maintain personal safety, security, and well-being
2. Commit to the Peace Corps and professional service
3. Adapt to the cross-cultural context
4. Speak and understand Jamaican Patois

5. Facilitate participatory community development
6. Execute sector-related projects

Evaluation of your performance throughout service is a continuous process, as Volunteers are responsible 24 hours a day, seven days a week for personal conduct and professional performance. Successful completion of pre-service training is characterized by achievement of a set of learning objectives to determine competence. By the completion of training, failure to meet any of the selection standards stipulated by Peace Corps may prevent you from qualifying for Peace Corps service.

Progress in one’s own learning is a dialogue between you and the training staff. All of the training staff—including the training director and the language, technical, medical, safety and security, and cross-cultural trainers—will work with you toward achieving the highest possible competencies by providing you with continuous feedback on your performance throughout training. **Please note, swearing in as a Volunteer is not automatic.** After reviewing and observing your performance (which covers the areas of knowledge, skills, and attitude), the country director will make the final decision on whether you have qualified to serve as a Volunteer in the host country.

Upon successful completion of training, trainees who qualify for Peace Corps service are required by law to swear or affirm an oath of loyalty to the United States; it cannot be waived under any circumstances. The text of the oath is provided below. If you have any questions about the wording or meaning of the oath, consult a staff member during training.

I, (your name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, domestic or foreign, that I take this obligation freely, and without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge my duties in the Peace Corps (so help me God).



YOUR HEALTH CARE IN JAMAICA

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 Jamaica maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in Jamaica at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Jamaica, you will be transported to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility. 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.

Health Issues in Jamaica

Some communicable diseases endemic in Jamaica are typhoid, various arbo-viruses including dengue fever, parasitic infections including helminthes, HIV, syphilis, resistant strains of gonorrhea, various bacterial and viral food-borne diarrheal illnesses, and tuberculosis.

Helping You Stay Healthy

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in Jamaica, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this 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 here and it may take several months for shipments to arrive.

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Jamaica 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 Jamaica, 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 Jamaica is to take the following preventive measures:

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

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Jamaica will 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.

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. As such, most Volunteers will not receive a PAP during their service, but can use Peace Corps supplied health insurance after service to have an exam.

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 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, bring a copy of your immunization record to your pre-departure orientation. If you purchase any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service that are not listed as requirement in your Medical Applicant Portal, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment. 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 nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, or antioxidant supplements. Medications supplied may be generic or equivalent to your current medications.

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:

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work.
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria.
- The Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country counterparts or other community leaders in your new community.
- The Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise.
- You lock your doors and windows.
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live.
- You get to know your neighbors.
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you.
- You don't change residences before being authorized by the Peace Corps.
- You communicate your concerns to Peace Corps staff.

Peace Corps/Jamaica believes that being integrated into your community minimizes the risk of being a target for criminals. One such strategy used to help Volunteers/trainees integrate into their communities is to have them live with host families during training and for their 24 months of service. The type of host family arrangement will change when you move from a trainee status to that of a full-fledged Volunteer.

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 or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

Before you depart for Jamaica 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 Jamaica, 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 Jamaica 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
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Be careful and conscientious about using electronics (phones, cameras, laptops, iPods, etc.) in public or leaving them unattended
- Limit alcohol consumption

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 Jamaica. 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 Jamaica of which you should be aware:

- Volunteers tend to attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are more likely to receive negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network—friends and colleagues—who look out for them.
- 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.

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 Jamaica 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 Jamaica will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Going out at night is generally unacceptable for many Volunteers who work at schools (both projects). An example of how different measures need to be taken in the United States versus Jamaica would be going out at night to a club. For example, going to a club or party at night poses many risks and some Jamaicans opt not to. However, if you want to go to parties at night, make sure to do the following:

- Go with trusted persons, not just other PCVs, but also Jamaicans
- Dress appropriately while giving thought to where to keep your money, phone, etc.

- Watch your belongings; an open bag is an easy target for being pilfered in a crowded environment
- Plan for transportation (e.g., arrange for a taxi to and from the party)
- Limit your intake of alcohol; staying sober means that you are more likely to think clearly
- Do not dance with only one person, which could be interpreted as, “I would like to get to know you more, maybe even go home with you tonight”
- Be friendly, but not too friendly
- Do not give out your telephone number to anyone you just met, especially someone of the opposite sex
- Do not give out any personal information, such as where you live or work, to a stranger
- Do not go off by yourself or with a stranger; let your friends know your movements
- Watch your drink; drink from a bottle that was just opened in front of you. Leave it if you had left while it was open
- Look after yourself and look out for others; a buddy system is always a good plan

Support from Staff

If a trainee or 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.

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

Crime Data for Jamaica

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

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 Jamaica

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

The Peace Corps/ Jamaica 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 staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Jamaica. 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/ Jamaica'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 Jamaica 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 recognize 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 Jamaica'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 Jamaica 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.

Jamaica is a country of many contradictions and you will learn them as you go along. First impressions last and it is very important that you demonstrate good manners wherever you go. Residents of rural communities tend to be friendlier, expect to be greeted at all times, and may be more curious about your presence in the community than the city residents. You should pay keen attention to your cultural integration during training. Your host families are also there to support your cultural integration; just ask.

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.

Jamaicans generally have very strong opinions regarding the roles and behaviors of men and women. Female Volunteers find that women's equality and independence are defined differently in Jamaica than in the United States, with different expectations of women's roles. In Jamaica, both male and female Volunteers may be expected to have a spouse, children, a girlfriend or boyfriend, or some combination of these. Female Volunteers may be propositioned on a daily basis or be subjected to sexual advances or uninvited touching. Male Volunteers may also experience these sexual advances but to a much lesser degree and usually in a less public way. Verbal harassment of women can be extremely crude. Female Volunteers may also find that in a technical discussion with Jamaican colleagues, the opinions of a female, especially a young female, may be ignored while a male saying the exact same thing may be listened to. Volunteers who do not conform to expected gender behaviors may have their sexual orientation questioned or challenged (see more on LGBTQA issues below).

A note from Volunteers

"It's not easy to go into a country where gender roles are so rigidly defined and monitored. At home, I never worried if I was acting feminine enough, but here, I've thought about it a lot. I try to question and challenge members of my community, especially young people who seem to think their futures are limited by their gender. But, because it can be a sensitive issue, I don't push too much. I do my best to conform when necessary and carefully choose the best time and place to express my differing opinion. It can be frustrating at times, but I've also learned about myself and my cultural biases."

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.

A person of color may be the only minority trainee or Volunteer within a particular project, and may work and live with individuals with no experience or understanding of his or her culture. They may not receive necessary personal support from white Volunteers or may be questioned about socializing exclusively with other minority Volunteers. Assumed to be Jamaicans, non-white Volunteers may be accepted more readily into the culture than other Volunteers and treated according to local social norms. They may also be categorized according to local stereotypes concerning skin pigmentation and hair texture, such as the view that those with lighter skin are smarter or more dependable. Another stereotype is that because you are a non-white foreigner your ideas or suggestions may often not be accepted readily. It requires you to prove yourself as a competent individual.

A note from Volunteers

“Being a person of color serving in Jamaica has been rewarding yet challenging. Blending in like a host national is beneficial especially when it comes to flying under the radar but on the flip side you don't always stand out. It is very important to be who you are! When you are true to yourself, you allow your individuality and uniqueness to shine through regardless of what color you are!”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Jamaica's traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In most cases, the LGBTQ community is stigmatized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many 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 Jamaica 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 LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbrcv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at 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.

Although Volunteers who identified themselves as gay, lesbian, or bisexual have served in Jamaica successfully, Jamaica is a homophobic society. Local law prohibits sodomy (regardless of the gender or sexual orientation of the participants) and arrests of Jamaican men for this offense have occurred. Some Jamaicans who have been labeled as homosexuals have been killed or experienced life-threatening physical assaults and destruction of homes and property. At a workshop with Jamaican project partners, many participants expressed strongly their opposition to diversity in sexual orientation. As a result, all Volunteers in Jamaica are encouraged to exercise extreme caution and discretion in expressing any opinions or behaviors that oppose local sentiments regarding sexual orientation or gender norms. This discretion will necessitate non-disclosure of sexual orientation and/or gender identity in most settings. If you are uncomfortable with substantial non-disclosure then you should consider seriously if serving in Jamaica makes sense for you. LGBTQ individuals are encouraged to discuss their concerns with Peace Corps placement officers or Peace Corps/Jamaica staff prior to accepting an invitation. Please also refer to the State.gov information on human rights issues for Jamaica: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2010/wha/154511.htm>.

A note from Volunteers

“I think this is one of the most sensitive issues in Jamaica these days and one where local values are very opposed to my own. I never felt ‘in the closet’ at home but here I’m cautious about everything I say and do. I don’t want to put myself or others at risk for verbal abuse, or worse. It took awhile, but eventually I found a few sympathetic and like-minded community members. Despite the media hype, not all Jamaicans are homophobic and many will try to understand the issue even if they don’t agree with it.”

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 Jamaica without a significant risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/ Jamaica staff will work with disabled Volunteers to support them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

A note from Volunteers

“Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer with a disability in Jamaica has its challenges. One of the differences between America and Jamaica that one who has a disability may find is that Americans tend to skirt around what the prominent disability is. The person’s disability is never mentioned in conversation until the person with the disability has addressed the issue. Only then is the topic of the disability allowed to be discussed freely within the appropriate conversation. However, in the country of Jamaica, the subject of disability is dealt with in a very different manner. The person’s disability is asked about directly by anyone at any time.”

“During pre-service training, I learned in our culture lessons that in Jamaica, nicknames are even given to people because of their disabilities. One should not interpret these nicknames or any other as a form of malice or one of condescending meaning, but should interpret them as a name of recognition and address from how the person is viewed on the outside. For example, a person with one arm may be nicknamed ‘One-eye,’ or someone with an amputated leg may be called “Stumpy.”

“Having a disability while serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer has its challenges, but it has its perks too. I am known around my community, my school, and the local town by many people because I am recognized by my disability. This has allowed me to meet many Jamaicans because they want know who I am and why I walk or talk differently than them. This opens up a conversation about my disability or anything else for that matter, thus acquainting me with someone new.”

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 with traditional Jamaican relationships. Jamaican 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 Jamaican 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.

A note from Volunteers

“As a Peace Corps couple in Jamaica, we have experienced many joys and benefits in our communities. The network of Volunteers in Jamaica is a strong support system for all of us, but we do have each other to come home to each night, and we often ‘decompress’ with stories about our students’ achievements and tribulations. We are lucky enough to live in our own apartment (on the lower level of our host mother’s house) in a large rural home with our own entrance and kitchen: We have the benefits of a family upstairs to help us integrate into the community, but we do have a good deal of privacy. For example, we cooked a “Jamerican” Thanksgiving dinner in our host’s home for 10 Jamaicans, aged 10–84.”

“During training, we made it clear to our colleagues that we were two individuals: We chose not to always sit together in the classroom, and we worked with separate small groups on assignments. After all, we could always compare notes later, but we wanted to experience the training in our own ways. We have many single PCVs as good friends on the island, and we enjoy their friendship, counsel, and occasional outings to the beaches together. We have collaborated on some projects and won a small grant together, but we work in two separate schools (our sites), and sometimes it is inevitable that we compete and compare. I helped with computer systems in my spouse’s school, and she has painted beautiful murals in the Literacy Room at my school. Living and working so closely together can be a challenge—especially if you have had separate careers and probably larger living space. We have enjoyed the adjustments and love our lives as PCVs.”

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Volunteers in Jamaica, a predominantly Christian nation, can expect many meetings and other events to begin with a prayer. They should also be prepared to be questioned by community members for not attending church. Of note, however, is the fact that in rural communities, attending church is one of the

quickest and easiest ways to become integrated into a community, as many social interventions are organized and executed by the church.

A note from Volunteers

“There is no escaping the strong Christian religion/faith in Jamaica. The oft-stated statistic that Jamaica has the most churches per square capita in the world may very well be possible; there are a lot of churches, with each type of denomination for every rural town! Christianity isn’t just retained to the (extremely long) church services either. They pray before meetings, in the mornings at school, before they leave school, and whenever the time calls for it. Gospel music is played everywhere at any time: taxis, blasted in squares, coming from the churches, or someone walking with their music blasting through their phone.”

“As much as it can be ‘in your face,’ it’s really not that overbearing, and can easily be sidestepped if church or Christianity isn’t your thing. You may come into situations where you are forwardly asked, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ?”, “Are you Christian?,” or you may be subjected to listening to a community member, host family member, or neighbor ramble on about the Bible, Jesus, Church, etc. While those situations can be uncomfortable and awkward for us (sorry, it’s a part of daily life as a PCV), there are some big pluses in all of that. Here are some things PCVs can use to their advantage while being in a country that is heavily faith based: you will meet community members you wouldn’t normally see on the road, make announcements about projects or needed participation for projects/events, have the local church organizations work with you to implement community development projects, create learning moments about other religions and break stereotypes of those religions, and I’m sure you will discover more. My advice to you is to go to every church’s Saturday or Sunday service at least once in your community. Show your face, meet the community; put yourself in those uncomfortable situations and you will be rewarded!”

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in Jamaica. 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 50+ Volunteers, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. An older Volunteer 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.

A note from Volunteers

“Being an older than average Peace Corps Volunteer in Jamaica is challenging and fun, and offers several unique challenges to those of us with decades in the culture and pace of the American work world. I am assigned to an established community-based organization and together we are working to try and launch several agro-tourism projects. I also serve people and groups within the rural community I live in, a deeply rural area in the heart of the Blue Mountains. It took a while for me to adjust to the much slower pace of life and work in the tropics (and the heat!). Very little starts on time. Work and home life—the

good and bad parts—are inseparable. Planning ahead and risks management are not common. All of this was frustrating for a while, as was the government bureaucracy, low-level corruption, and a philosophy about money and wealth I'd never really considered. To be honest, some days those things still frustrate me.”

“The cliché of ‘it’s the small things’ is really what being a Volunteer in Jamaica is all about. Your influence will be a lot less than accustomed to. Professional knowledge and new ideas are welcome, but despite your résumé and accomplishments at times people will forget that you are not fresh out of the egg. People take great pride in being able to show you how to do something new, or something different. It has been helpful for me to let those exchanges happen, even if it’s nothing new. Whether in an environment or education assignment, rural community development is about relationships, communication, and building trusts. Finding access to resources, creating opportunities, and discovering new ways of thinking about a problem are absolutely the most valuable skills you can share.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Jamaica?

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.

What is the electric current in Jamaica?

The electrical system in the U.S. is 60 hertz. Jamaica is 50 hertz. While most electronics will work on both systems, digital clocks will run slow in Jamaica unless they are specifically designed for 50 hertz. Also, some electronics seem to generate more heat operating on 50 hertz.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. You will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover your expenses. Volunteers often wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and you are encouraged to consider them carefully. 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 Jamaica do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the

country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

What should I bring as gifts for Jamaican 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 from another Volunteer. Some sites require a three to five hour drive to the capital.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit provides 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 Jamaica?

You will be able to use the Peace Corps/Jamaica-issued cellphone to call your friends and family back home. Check with Volunteers already on the island for the best deals on phone cards/plans that can be used to make international calls.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

Peace Corps/Jamaica's mobile telephone service provider is Digicel Jamaica. You will be assigned a mobile prepaid phone upon arrival. This phone will be automatically enrolled in Peace Corps/Jamaica's closed user group, which will enable you to make free unlimited calls and send unlimited SMS text messages to other Volunteers and staff. You can also make phone calls to the Peace Corps/Jamaica office free of cost by calling 618-0587 or 618-0588 from your assigned mobile phone. Calls outside of the closed user group (domestic or international) are at your cost. Note that most U.S. toll-free numbers are not free or accessible from Jamaica. Check with PCVs already on the island for the best deals on local calling cards/plans that can be used to make international calls. Many Volunteers have brought smartphones to Jamaica. They use wireless Internet when possible. If the phone is "unlocked," it can be used as a PCV's regular phone. Please note that having a "flashy" phone and using it in public can attract the attention of individuals who may want to steal it.

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

If you bring a laptop, make certain it is insured and bring a power surge protector.

On your arrival you will be issued an account that will allow you to log on to the Peace Corps/Jamaica computer network and use the Internet and a few other applications, including Microsoft Office. While

away from the Peace Corps office, this account will also allow you to log on to the Peace Corps/Jamaica intranet to access several useful resources, provided the computer you are using has Internet access.

Broadband Internet service is available in Jamaica and you will have the option of choosing from several Internet service providers (ISP) based on your site location. It will be your responsibility to approach these ISPs independently, as Peace Corps/Jamaica may not have an established agreement with any of them to further simplify the subscription and payment processes for Volunteers. You may also connect your laptop to the Volunteers' Wi-Fi Internet service at the Peace Corps office.

You are required to have a personal email account since the Peace Corps does not issue email accounts to Volunteers. This is essential to facilitate frequent and vital email communication between Peace Corps/Jamaica and Volunteers.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM JAMAICA VOLUNTEERS

Dear Invitee,

Soon, you will all pack two duffel bags and maybe a backpack with whatever you can, and bring them with you to meet about 30 strangers in a hotel somewhere in the U.S. The Peace Corps excels at putting you outside of your comfort zone, and your trip to staging is just the beginning.

Geographically, politically, and economically, Jamaica is similar to many other countries in the world. But culturally, Jamaica is a giant far larger than a tiny island in the Caribbean could ever expect to be. Reggae music and Bob Marley are played in dancehalls and discos around the world. Rastafarianism holds an ethos and attitude that appeals to people anywhere and everywhere. Jerk cuisine, with its scotch bonnet peppers and pimento leaves, is uniquely Jamaican, and supremely delicious.

As Peace Corps Volunteers, we have Three Goals.

1. To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women
2. To promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served
3. To promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans

Note carefully, two-thirds of the goals we strive toward have little to do with the trees you will plant or spelling tests you will grade. There is no mention of how much grant money you are expected to raise. Two-thirds of the goals are cultural integration and cultural exchange.

This will be easy and hard, challenging and rewarding, frustrating and natural. I can't quite explain it. Know that Jamaica, no matter what you may know of her beaches and resorts, rasta men and music scene, is a very foreign country with customs and traditions entirely her own. Integrating is not easy and it does not happen overnight. Nor will it turn on like a light switch one morning. The three goals need to be worked at 24/7.

To that end, Peace Corps staff and the current Volunteers are here to help and support you. The adventure you will soon begin is not easy. If it were, everyone would do it. I look forward to seeing you all on di island.

Cheers,

Pete Tomczik
Group 85
Volunteer Advisory Committee Coordinator

Dear Invitee,

I was asked to write a bit of a welcome on the theme "As an older Volunteer in Jamaica" (described as over 50) but the problem is that in many ways I am just a PCV who happens to be older, and I have experienced the same joys and struggles as my younger colleagues.

We love our lives and our work here! We live in a very rural community near Montego Bay. This is an agricultural area and we work in separate primary schools teaching English literacy. We live simply but

comfortably. The work is very rewarding and Peace Corps/Jamaica is well organized and managed. There is great opportunity to bring your own skills and experience to make your project successful.

So, a few topics to talk about: host families, health, physical activity, parties and drinking, community relationships, expectations ... and our ages.

As a Peace Corps couple, my wife and I lived with two families during PST. We had a room in the house; one of our host moms was older and one about our age. Our site housing for at least the next two years is an apartment in a large rural home with our own entrance and kitchen. Our host mom is younger; she calls us her friends, not her “kids.” We follow the same rules as younger PCVs but feel very comfortable. As example, we cooked a “Jamerican” Thanksgiving dinner in our host’s home for 10 Jamaicans, aged 10–84.

Peace Corps/Jamaica health care has been wonderful. The medical officers are available 24 hours a day and provide all regular prescription meds. The doctors/dentists in our site community (Montego Bay) are very good. During PST, I discovered a skin growth on my head-top (might was well start a bit of Patois) after I got my first really short trimmin (haircut). I actually had outpatient plastic surgery without missing more than a half day of training. I was impressed with how Peace Corps treated this so seriously.

We are a physically active couple and, without a car, we walk a lot, including up a steep path (past the goats and chickens) from the road to our home. We’ve both lost weight just through normal activity and home cooking; we have our own garden and have lots of fresh vegies.

Our younger PCV colleagues have accepted us as peers: We support and love each other, regardless of age. We will meet PCV friends occasionally for lunch and a beer, but (and this is a difference) we typically don’t join in big PCV parties.

Being older (and gray) comes with some built in respect. Jamaica is a place of pet names or nicknames, so people on the street or in shops will often call me “daddy.” We are the only white people in our community, and have been easily integrated into our community development committee and churches. Race has never been an issue for us. Also, with age comes some trust—kind of like a grandpa—so I even occasionally get a chance to hold babies.

Having come from professional careers, my wife and I have experience “running things.” Here we have to be careful not to be perceived as “in charge” or taking responsibility for community projects. We are members of a team, we are facilitators, but we are very aware of how Jamaicans do things—sometimes on a different schedule—and coming from a U.S. business background, we have to be careful not to be frustrated or too pushy.

I will be 70 years old next year; my wife will be 60 in a few more years. We are already thinking about what we might do after our current assignment is over in mid-2016—maybe extend here in Jamaica or even apply for another Peace Corps assignment somewhere in the world.

As Jamaicans say, “Bless up and respect!”

Steve and Irene

Greetings!

I know you are all ready and very excited to become Peace Corps Volunteers in Jamaica! I'm sure you also have tons of questions such as, What will I be doing? What will my service be like? All I can say is that with time your questions will be answered and your time here will be invaluable. I can tell you that being a Peace Corps Volunteer will be one of the most challenging things you will ever do.

From personal experience, I have had periods of boredom, loneliness, and sometimes even confusion. This is common among Volunteers but you will have support of staff, other Volunteers, and the new family and friends you will make on the island. But please don't be fooled! I have had many awesome days here as well, some unforgettable!

Jamaica is a beautiful country filled with very helpful and welcoming people. Jamaicans are interested in getting to know you and willing to help you. Just don't be afraid to step outside of your comfort zone.

Here are a few tips to get you started: don't come with really high expectations, be adventurous, have a good sense of humor, be flexible, have a heap full of patience, and keep realistic expectations.

I look forward to meeting you all! I hope you are ready to make a difference and have an experience of a lifetime!

Bianna Fisher
Education Sector
Group 85

Welcome!

Congratulations on your invitation to serve in Jamaica. This is a beautiful country full of fascinating people. Being a Peace Corps Volunteer in Jamaica is challenging and fun—every day.

I am assigned to an established community-based organization and together we are working to try and launch several agro-tourism projects. I also serve people and groups within the rural community I live in, a deeply rural area in the heart of the Blue Mountains. Four or five days in a typical week, I travel on rural public transportation from home to another town to work in a small office or go a meeting of some sort. I spend a day each week at a local primary school, trying to impart gardening skills and environmental education to the students. Most of the time though we're just reading, or playing, or talking about what's on their minds. Several evenings each week there's a meeting of one (or more) of the local community groups to attend. Even though there's only about a thousand people in the area, there are close to 10 active groups! Weekends are usually full too, as it is my self-designated time to go to where the community members are—visiting farmers on their farms, heading to the little tuck shop that sells ice cream, and going to one of the many churches in the area. Once every few months I get out of town for a couple of days and visit with other Volunteers.

The heat and the sun help dictate the slow pace of life in the tropics. I've been to exactly one community meeting that started on time: It was the very first one I went to and that's why it was on time. This was frustrating for a while, as was the government bureaucracy, low-level corruption, and a philosophy about money and wealth I'd never considered. To be honest, some days those things still frustrate me. The best

days always coincide with an open attitude, ready for anything, one of, I'm not here to help, I'm here to serve.

The cliché of “it’s the small things” is really what being a Volunteer in Jamaica is all about. Your influence will be a lot less than you are likely assuming it will be. Farmers have a deep knowledge of the land and in many ways are already very good stewards. One of the biggest trials is convincing persons the long-term benefit of a making a change may be worth the short-term risk. Rural community development is what we do. Whether that’s through an environment or education assignment, development is about relationships, communication, and building trust. Finding access to resources, creating opportunities and discovering new ways of thinking about a problem are subtle talents and will be the most valuable skills you can share here. Focus on making connections with people and the technical part of the assignment will soon come.

You won’t spend the majority of your time and energy on acquiring the basics of food, water, and shelter. You might even have regular access to the Internet—painfully slow but still available. You’ll be welcomed and you’ll be talked about. Your every action and interaction feeds into your reputation, for better and for worse. And you’ll soon realize if you are open to your community, they will be open to you. You’ll be living in a host family arrangement—also part of the daily challenge. It is a worthwhile set up because you will be safer and you’ll get to know the community better. Jamaica has a relatively unique set of challenges to navigate. There are times it will seem so much like home, you’ll forget Jamaica is truly the developing nation it is. It’s tempting to let those similarities and the common language of English lead to expecting the same behaviors and outcomes as you would in the States. Don’t let it.

I’m midway through this adventure and I still feel like I won the Peace Corps best-posting-in-the-country lottery! Welcome to one of the most beautiful small islands on the planet. Wishing you all the best.

Mandy Alvino
Environment sector, group 85

Wagwan!

We are thrilled to have you over here on our little island that we call home. Sit back, relax, and enjoy the smooth island reggae vibes of Jamaica. This country offers some of the most beautiful beaches in the world, not to mention breathtaking sceneries scattered all over the island. Sometimes I am still in awe that I am subject to so much beauty just outside my doorstep. Jamaicans are such warm people, that I am sure that you will fit right in in no time!

Although the people are friendly and the weather is nice, there are some challenges you may face while over here in Jamaica. One of the challenges that I deal with in my life is that I have mild cerebral palsy, which makes me walk and talk a bit different than most people. In the United States, people who are around those with certain challenges, or around those who may stand out from others, usually try to ignore what is wrong with the person, unless it is mentioned in conversation by the person with the challenge.

However, things are a bit different in Jamaica. Jamaicans will ask you straight up what is wrong with you, if you have something that sets you out from the crowd. But you just have to roll with the punches. Tell them your deal, and then the hard part is over. Sometimes it is rather refreshing to have everything out in the open before you engage in conversation. In the words of Jamaica’s famous icon, “Baby, don’t worry

about a ting, cuz every likkle ting gonna be alright.” Just remember to take everything with a likkle grain of salt, and not let it get to you.

Big up yuhselfes! You’re coming to Jamaica!

Alice Butcher
Peace Corps/Jamaica
Group 85

Wahgwaan!

I’m sitting at school writing this letter and still can’t quite believe unoo will be pon di rock in less than a year! The time really has flown by. I’ll start off by introducing myself. My name is Sam Holmes. I’m 24 years old from Concord, Mass., and in the Education sector. I graduated from Gettysburg College in spring 2013 with a degree in history. I spent that winter after college teaching skiing in Colorado before coming to Jamaica in March 2014.

Everyone has their own reasons for volunteering for Peace Corps. It’s a big decision to take two years (maybe more) to go live and work with people you might know nothing about in a foreign country. But it’s a journey that will change you and that you will carry with you for the rest of your life. You will grow and be challenged in ways that you never imagined.

For those of you in the Education sector, do not worry if you don’t have formal teaching experience. (The majority of us here don’t.) Sue and Lequi (the Education program staff), who you will meet and become close friends with, are absolutely fantastic and will help you through every step of the training process as well as when you’re at your site. I’m going to be very Jamaican and tell it straight. I’m not trying to scare anyone but I also don’t want to sugarcoat anything.

Every Volunteer in Jamaica has a different experience so I just want to tell you generally about my experiences and give you some advice so you’ll be better off from day one. There’s a saying in Jamaica that you will hear frequently: “tek time.” Everything here is on island time. Things just happen slower and always take longer than we, as Americans, think they should. It can be highly frustrating if you’re used to a faster pace of life, as I was. It also makes the two years seem so much shorter. I’ll give you an example: PTA meetings at my school are supposed to start at 3 p.m. one Wednesday each month; if the meeting starts by 3:30, its good day.

I’ve learned to always carry a good book with me and sometimes my iPod because I have a lot of down time, whether it’s waiting for a meeting to start or for a bus going to Kingston to fill up. At school, I have had the pleasure and opportunity of working alongside the Rock House Foundation and a group of Canadians who run a summer camp each July for all the kids in my community. Even with them, it doesn’t matter: Everything is still on island time. You will probably have a whole bunch of great ideas for what you want to do, which is great, but be ready to slow it down and tek time.

Something that I was told many times and really had a hard time taking to heart is “Don’t be too hard on yourself.” Not everything is going to work out how you want it to. There will be days when you cry and want to go home. These are the days when you have to remind yourself why you’re doing Peace Corps and having a close friend to talk to will be crucial. I am by no means suggesting you don’t talk to friends

and family back home about what is going on, however, your fellow Volunteers will be able to relate to and understand what you're feeling far better than people in America.

“Big up” is a phrase that Jamaicans and Peace Corps/Jamaica use a lot. It means to recognize you and others for their accomplishments no matter how small. Celebrate the small wins. I'll give you an example from my service; I work with a grade 4 boy named Alex. He used to come up to me and demand to play snake on my phone. One day, I had a little chat with him about asking nicely and using “please” and “thank you.” Sure enough, later that day he came up to me and said “Sam, may I please have a game on your phone?” I happily let him play and he's continued that way ever since.

There will also be days when you feel like you're on top of the world. Cherish those moments. I've had those moments when I sit down to work with a student who is particularly tough to get through to and am able to watch that bulb go off in the student's head when something finally clicks. It's the best feeling in the world and makes all the stress and frustration totally worth it. Peace Corps/Jamaica is one wild ride. This is true for everyone, but especially for the Education Volunteers: You may never know the full impact you had on the kids you worked with or your community. You won't be around to watch them grow into adults. But trust me, even if it may not feel like it at times, you will make a big difference in the lives of the people in your community and they will remember you for years and decades to come.

My next piece of advice is about Patwa, the local language. It is just that: a foreign language. True, it does have a lot of English words but the different pronunciation, phrases, and accent make it a foreign language. An example is “Wahgwaan,” from the greeting of this letter, is Patwa for “What's going on?” Most Volunteers need, give or take, 12 months to really start to feel comfortable with it. Tek time! It's OK if you don't understand everything because you won't.

Jamaicans are, for the most part, very warm, friendly, and helpful if you initiate the conversation and will be happy to teach you some Patwa. I spent the first six months of school constantly asking the kids to slow down or repeat themselves. And if I don't understand a phrase (which still happens) I just ask. No worries, man! Listening is one thing but speaking it is a completely different story. You are going to sound silly, everyone does, but it's important to practice and to learn to laugh at yourself. Jamaicans may laugh but don't take it personally. They don't mean any harm by it. If you're interested, there are videos on YouTube that will teach you some basic Patwa phrases.

Don't be afraid to put yourself out there. In the end, your Peace Corps experience is whatever you make it. Certainly there will be Sunday afternoons when you want to lie in bed and read or watch a movie and there is nothing wrong with that; “me time” is important. However, the more people you meet and the more you do will add up to a more fulfilling and rich experience. Jamaicans are happy to have you participate but you have to meet them halfway across the bridge and that usually means you have to take the first step.

Some words of wisdom from a good friend and group 84 Education Volunteer is that whatever you're doing, make sure it makes you happy.

Walk gud,
Sam Holmes

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Jamaica 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 Jamaica.

General Clothing

Men

The workplace (bring enough to last two weeks without washing):

- Slacks (not jeans)
- Shirts with collars (short-sleeved, lightweight button-down, wash-and-wear are best; polo shirts are acceptable)

Field work and recreation wear:

- Jeans (dark pants are preferable, as light colors show dirt quicker)
- Long shorts
- Short-sleeved, nonbutton-down shirts and T-shirts

Special occasions (e.g., swearing-in ceremony, church, weddings, and funerals):

- Lightweight suit or sport coat
- Tie
- Dress socks

Women

The workplace (at least 10–12 coordinated outfits, including shoes and jewelry):

- Lightweight dresses
- Lightweight blazers or jackets
- Mix-and-match skirts (no miniskirts)
- Button-up blouses (no spaghetti straps or low necks)
- Slacks (dark-colored or khaki)

Field work and recreational wear:

- Lightweight pants or jeans
- Capri pants
- Short-sleeved shirts, T-shirts, or polo shirts
- Jogging/running clothes (not too fitted)

Special occasions (e.g., swearing-in ceremony, church, weddings, and funerals):

- At least one formal or casually elegant outfit (appropriate for church)
- Party outfits (optional)

Other items to bring:

- Socks
- Swimwear
- Extra underwear
- Sun hat/cap
- Belts (of any material except suede)
- Bandanas or handkerchiefs (also widely available and cheap in Jamaica)
- Small collapsible umbrella (raincoat optional)

- Iron

Shoes

Bring a few pairs of comfortable and sturdy walking or tennis shoes. It is advisable to have more than one pair to allow for a day of “drying time.” Due to the high humidity, clothing and shoes have a tendency to mildew. For work, black or brown shoes are the most versatile, lace-up leather for men or closed-toe with or without a heel for women. Also bring one or two pairs of closed-toe dress shoes (or dressy high-heeled sandals, for women). Although Birkenstock/Texas/Chacos-type sandals are nice to have for comfort, they are not suitable for most professional situations.

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Travel-size toiletries for weekend trips
- Brush, comb, hand mirror, nail clippers, tweezers, nail file, razor, and blades
- Contact lens solution, if you wear contacts (available but expensive in-country)
- Three-month supply of any prescription drugs you take
- Feminine hygiene products—tampons, sanitary napkins, and panty shields (available but expensive in-country)
- Hair dryer
- Hairpins, barrettes, etc.
- Two to four inexpensive, lightweight bath towels, hand towels, and washcloths
- One beach towel or backpacking quick-dry towel
- Insect repellent (provided by the Peace Corps, but bring it if you have a preference)
- Sunscreen (provided by the Peace Corps, but bring it if you have a preference)
- Any specialty toiletries (may be available, but will probably be expensive in-country)

Kitchen

- Basic cookbook or recipes for your favorite dishes
- Plastic containers (available but expensive in-country)
- Plastic storage bags in assorted sizes (available but expensive in-country)
- Artificial sweetener (available locally, but expensive)
- Specialty kitchen utensils (available but expensive in-country)

Electronics

- Watch (inexpensive, durable, water-resistant) with extra batteries
- Digital camera (available locally but expensive)
- World band radio (portable AM/FM radios are available in Jamaica)
- CD/DVD player, iPod, or other music player with cord and batteries (especially important if you are not into listening to reggae and dancehall music all the time)
- Laptop (optional; if you have one, you may want to bring it. Jamaica has regular electricity supply and wireless Internet hotspots are becoming more available. Many Volunteers use this for work.)
- Jump drive/flash drive/thumb drive

Miscellaneous

- Two pairs of prescription eyeglasses (if you wear them; photochromic lenses are recommended)
- Sunglasses (preferably with UV protection)
- Shoulder bag, lightweight overnight bag (Volunteers often go on short, two- to four-day trips, so bring something you can comfortably carry on a crowded bus). Backpacks are recommended for hiking only; bring a shoulder bag for everyday use.

- Portable sleeping pad (for use when visiting other Volunteers)
- Duct tape
- Plastic water bottle (e.g., Nalgene) or canteen
- Earplugs for sleeping through loud music, crowing roosters, and barking dogs
- Games (e.g., cards, scrabble, backgammon, chess)
- Musical instruments
- Snorkel, mask, fins, and swimming goggles (if you are so inclined)
- Hobby and craft supplies (available but expensive in-country)
- Resource materials (e.g., textbooks, dictionary, thesaurus) and office supplies (e.g., small stapler, rubber bands, paper clips, scissors, tape, pens, markers); some host agencies will provide these, but others will not. You may want to prepare a box to be sent to you later if you find you need them
- Leatherman tool/Swiss Army knife (for simple repairs)

What Not To Bring

- Pepper spray
- Weapons
- T-shirts with unfriendly messages
- Camouflage clothing (which is only used in the Jamaica Defense Force)
- Black Mosquito Destroyer and any other items not approved by Jamaica's health authorities
- Anything prohibited by Jamaican customs regulations, which can be found here:
www.embassyofjamaica.org/VIScustomsregulation.htm

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.
- 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. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Alissa Mayer Desk Officer	ext. 2512 jamaica@peacecorps.gov	202.692.2512
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWTSatoTravel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.818.8772
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	202.692.1865
<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