

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

Kazakhstan



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

July 2010

A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on your invitation to become a part of Peace Corps/Kazakhstan. If you accept this invitation to serve, you will soon begin a personal journey to an ancient culture in profound transition. We can guarantee that if you come with an open mind, flexibility, energy, determination, and dedication to your community, your Peace Corps service will prove to be one of the most rewarding and memorable experiences of your life.

This *Welcome Book* is designed to acquaint you with some of the key aspects of Peace Corps/Kazakhstan. Peace Corps service is not without frustration and you may have your first experience with this while reading this booklet since there is no single set of recommendations for preparation or packing. Kazakhstan has a complex, rich, and diverse culture, and Volunteer experiences here are as varied as the country itself.

As you pack for Kazakhstan, please carefully review the suggested packing list, which has been carefully reviewed by current Volunteers. It is important to keep in mind that most PCVs in Kazakhstan work in professional environments, which requires professional dress. "Dressing down" is not culturally acceptable in the Kazakhstani workplace.

If you are willing to look at the world from a different perspective and accept the challenges and responsibilities of being a Peace Corps Volunteer, the wonderful people of the Silk Road will welcome you warmly. Welcome to Peace Corps/Kazakhstan. We look forward to meeting you in Almaty soon.

PEACE CORPS /KAZAKHSTAN STAFF

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CORE EXPECTATIONS

FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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/KAZAKHSTAN HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Kazakhstan

Since the first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in Kazakhstan in 1993, almost 1,000 Volunteers have served here. The first group consisted of 50 English language and economic development Volunteers.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Kazakhstan

Peace Corps/Kazakhstan's objective is to increase the knowledge and improve the skills of Kazakhstani citizens, strengthening their ability to compete in the global marketplace. Volunteers meet this objective by participating with Kazakhstanis in community work and life, focusing on two program areas—education and youth development.

Education

In Kazakhstan, English is viewed increasingly as a tool to help students get access to information and technology, achieve broader academic goals, and pursue more diverse

professional opportunities. Peace Corps/Kazakhstan is assisting the Kazakhstani Ministry of Education by improving English language education throughout the country. Education Volunteers are placed in village schools where students have had little chance to tap into the kinds of learning to move them up the economic ladder.

During pre-service training, education trainees receive intensive instruction and hands-on practice in student-centered, highly participatory methods of teaching English as a foreign language in primary, secondary, or postsecondary schools. Emphasis is shifting from conversational English to multi-skill coursework, where students can practice decision-making, problem-solving and critical thinking. Volunteers also help Kazakhstani English teachers improve their own language facility and instructional skills. Volunteers work with teachers to develop professional networks, gain access to information, and develop teaching materials and resources through formal means (e.g., university teacher training programs) and informal means (e.g., English teacher associations, language conferences, etc.).

Outside the classroom, Volunteers become involved in a range of activities, depending on their interests and skills as well as their community's needs. Volunteers have worked with their local counterparts to organize summer camps, environmental clubs, student-run companies, and HIV/AIDS trainings to name a few.

Youth Development

Youth development is a growing sector in Kazakhstan. Youth development Volunteers work with youth nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), schools, extracurricular educational institutions, and local

government officials. The program has three pillars, including Healthy Lifestyles, World of Work, and Leadership. Youth development Volunteers focus their efforts in the three pillars on three levels of beneficiaries. Volunteers work directly with youth, with front line youth workers, and with organizational managers to improve youth development program delivery. To accomplish their goals, Volunteers use tools for participatory analysis for community action (PACA), project design and management, lesson planning techniques, interactive extracurricular activities, appropriate approaches to working with orphans and special needs youth, as well as effective organizational management, grant writing and fundraising, and facilitation techniques. As it is with all Volunteers, building community relationships is especially important for youth development Volunteers. It is important that Volunteers proactively search for opportunities and methods to build relationships with their beneficiaries (especially the youth themselves). To do so, Volunteers must participate in events during many evenings and weekends, when youth have more free time. They must also find ways to gain the trust and confidence of youth. This is often done through English teaching, spending time at schools, visiting parents and families, etc.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: KAZAKHSTAN AT A GLANCE

History

For more than 2,000 years, Kazakhstan and Central Asia have been a meeting ground between Europe and Asia. The area was the place for ancient east-west trade routes (known collectively as the Silk Road) and, at various points in history, a cradle of scholarship, culture, and power. Kazakhstan lies at the heart of the great Eurasian steppe, the band of grasslands stretching from Mongolia to Hungary

that has served for 1,000 years as the highway and grazing ground of nomadic horseback people. The Kazakhs remained largely nomadic until well into the 20th century and, as a result, have left no ancient cities or ruins. The name Kazakh is said to mean “free warrior” or “steppe roamer.”

The early history of Kazakhstan is a shadowy procession of nomad empires. Around 200 B.C., eastern Kazakhstan was briefly under the control of the Hsiung-nu, a great nomad confederacy from China’s northern borders. Mongol and Turkic peoples began moving into Kazakhstan in the first century B.C. Islam came to the region in the seventh to ninth centuries as members of the Turkish Khaganate settled in the area. Mongols ruled the region from 1219 to 1447, and in the 15th century, the Kazakhs emerged as a distinct people.

The Kazakhs were the first of the Central Asian people to feel the impact of Russia’s push to the south at the turn of the 19th century. Their agreements in the mid-18th century to accept Russian protection turned into annexation a few decades later. Tatars and Cossacks were sent to settle and farm what had been the grasslands of the Kazakhs. In the late 1800s, Europeans began to flood Kazakhstan. The immigrants were mostly freed Russian and Ukrainian serfs, and they brought with them straight streets, gas lights, telephones, parks, and hotels—all strange to the nomadic Kazakhs.

Government

In 1989, as part of the new processes of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, Russian President Mikhail Gorbachev appointed a Kazakh, Nursultan Nazarbayev, to replace an ethnic Russian as the head of the Kazakh Communist Party. In

December 1991, Kazakhstan declared its independence from the Soviet Union, and in early 1992, Nazarbayev was elected president of the country by popular vote.

Nazarbayev insisted that he and other Central Asian leaders be considered “founding members” of the new Commonwealth of Independent States. Nazarbayev still serves as president and advocates a secular Western-oriented regime, like that in Turkey, under centralized leadership.

With independence, there has been a rise in Kazakh nationalism. The government adopted Kazakh as the official language of the country and required that civil servants eventually master the language. However, Russian is still the working language of Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian republics. While the government continues to promote Kazakh nationalism, it also seeks to assure the Slavic and other ethnic communities that they have a place in the nation.

Kazakhstan’s government is a parliamentary democracy, headquartered in the newly founded capital of Astana. It has three branches: presidential, legislative, and judicial, as well as a constitutional court. The majority of political power is concentrated in the presidential branch of the government, headed by President Nazarbayev. On the regional level, Kazakhstan is broken up into 14 provinces, or *oblasts*, each with a mayor, or *akim*. All *oblast akims* are appointed by the president. Provinces are further divided into *rayons* (like a county in the U.S.) and cities, each with presidentially appointed leaders.

Economy

Throughout the years of Soviet domination, Kazakhstan,

like its Central Asian neighbors, was completely dependent on the Soviet Union for energy resources, educational materials, banking, postal services, and all major planning and administrative activities. Since declaring its independence in December 1991, the Republic of Kazakhstan has been working to establish institutional and economic stability, particularly through the development of its vast mineral resources, including oil and gas reserves.

Kazakhstan is transitioning to a market economy and is working on institutional reform of its enterprises, social services, and educational system. Prices have been freed, a policy of privatization is being pursued, and the government is actively encouraging investment and development assistance from the West.

People and Culture

The Kazakhs first emerged as an identifiable ethnic group in the 15th century. They are a mix of Mongol and Turkic peoples whose language is derived from Turkish. During the Mongol invasions, the Kazakhs acquired a nomadic lifestyle centered around livestock herding, largely as a survival strategy. From 1850 through nearly to the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, large numbers of Russians and Eastern Europeans were given financial incentives to migrate to Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan's population is between 15 million and 16 million, which makes it one of the world's least densely populated places. Most people are concentrated in the south and north. With a population of more than 1 million, the former capital of Almaty is the largest city; Astana, the new capital, has a population of 500,000 and is growing. The cities of Karaganda, Shymkent, Ust-Kamenogorsk, Taraz,

and Pavlodar are the next largest, with more than 300,000 inhabitants each. Kazakhstan has the least homogeneous population of the former Soviet republics: About 53 percent of the population is Kazakh and 30 percent Russian. Large numbers of Ukrainians, Uzbeks, Tatars, Germans, Belorussians, Koreans, Greeks, Chechens, Poles, Uighurs, and Jews can also be found throughout the country.

Environment

The environment of Kazakhstan is extremely diverse, ranging from the forests of the north to the central steppe, the Caspian and Aral seas in the west, and the mountain ranges of the south. Climatic conditions are also highly variable, with mild summers and extremely cold winters in the north and very hot summers and mild winters in the south. Kazakhstan contains large numbers of endangered species in the mountainous regions and is home to the famous snow leopard.

In terms of natural resources, Kazakhstan is one of the richest per-capita countries on Earth. The task at hand is to exploit these resources and distribute this wealth throughout the population. The country contains approximately 60 percent of the former Soviet Union's mineral resources—iron, coal, oil, gas, lead, aluminum, copper, zinc, nickel, uranium, silver, and gold, among others. It also produces up to one-third of the wheat of the former Soviet Union.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

General Information About Kazakhstan

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the capital Astana to how to convert from the dollar to the Kazakhstan currency. Just click on Kazakhstan and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.state.gov

The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Kazakhstan and learn more about its social and political history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

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

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

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

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

www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp

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

www.worldinformation.com

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

www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/

This site provides updated political, economic, and environmental information.

**Connect With Returned Volunteers
and Other Invitees**

www.rpcv.org

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

<http://www.rpcvwebring.org>

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

www.peacecorpswriters.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Kazakhstan

1. *The Economist*:
www.economist.com/countries/kazakhstan/
2. *The Times of Central Asia*: www.timesca.com

International Development Sites About Kazakhstan

1. The United Nations Development Programme:
www.undp.org
2. Asian Development Bank:
www.adb.org/Kazakhstan/default.asp
3. The United States Agency for International Development:
www.usaid.gov/regions/europe_eurasia/car/kzpage.html
4. World Bank Group: <http://www.worldbank.org/>

Recommended Books

1. Robbins, Christopher, *Apples are from Kazakhstan*. New York: Atlas & Company, 2008
2. Hopkirk, Peter. *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*. New York: Kodansha Globe, 1994. An account of the race between Britain and Russia to learn about and acquire the territory of

Central Asia.

3. Hopkirk, Peter. *Setting the East Ablaze: Lenin's Dream of an Empire in Asia*. New York: Kodansha Globe; Reprint edition, 1995.
4. Olcott, Martha Brill (ed.). *Kazakhstan: Unfulfilled Promise*. Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002.
5. Remnick, David. *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of the Soviet Empire*. New York: Vintage, Reprint edition, 1994. A journalist's account of the final days of the Soviet Empire. Provides insight into the history of the Soviet Union, the mentality of the people, and the role of the republics in the development and fall of the Soviet Union.
6. Thubron, Colin. *The Lost Heart of Asia*. New York: Harper Perennial, 1995.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.

2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

While most Volunteers will have access to the Internet, it can be very slow, irregular, or simply unavailable at times. Do not expect to have email access in your home or at your site; many Volunteers must travel to larger cities to access email accounts. (Note that many Volunteers have difficulty receiving emails consistently when using Hotmail accounts. If you use Hotmail, please consider setting up an alternate email address for use during your time in Kazakhstan.) You may consider bringing your own laptop computer, modem, and email software. Volunteers with computers are often able to connect to the Internet over their home phone line (assuming that they have a telephone in their home or pay for an Internet direct access, which is available in most communities), though this is an additional expense and option. There are several computer outlets in Almaty and other cities, but U.S. computer warranties are not accepted in Kazakhstan. Some Volunteers also bring a small printer; if you bring one make sure to bring extra ink cartridges since they may not be available locally. Some hotels in Kazakhstan provide fax services in their business centers for a fee. Telegrams can be easily sent and received from most post offices. Volunteers pay for their own telegrams, faxes, cellphones and Internet access; however, each Volunteer receives a communication allowance monthly and can determine how to spend their funds.

Mail

Some letters from the United States may take two to six weeks to reach a Volunteer, while others may take three

months or more. Some mail may simply not arrive. Current Volunteers have estimated that they receive approximately 90 percent of the mail that is sent from the United States. Some letters may arrive with clipped edges because postal workers have tried to see if any money was inside. Be aware: it is illegal to send money in an envelope and it will be removed. Boxes and packages take about one to two months. You may have to pay a special handling charge to get your packages from a local post office. All items may be opened and inspected by government officials. Occasionally, items have been missing from packages sent to Volunteers. Your friends and family should not mail expensive items to you. As a general rule, the smaller the package, the better. If you have a package sent overnight or sent by a company other than the USPS, it may have to go through customs and you may have to pay a fee to get the package. Fees vary but can be up to \$100 (U.S.). Generally, a letter takes three to four weeks to get back to the United States. However, the mail system here is not that efficient and it is not unheard of for a letter to take three months. To mail a letter to the United States through the Kazakh system, you can buy pre-stamped envelopes at the post office. It is advisable to bring a supply of U.S. stamps to send letters back with people traveling to the United States.

Despite the inevitable delays, we encourage you to write to your family and to number your letters. Family members will typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so please advise your parents, friends, and relatives that mail and email access may be sporadic and not to worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. If a serious problem were to occur, Peace Corps/Kazakhstan would notify the Office of Special Services at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., and your family members would be contacted immediately.

Your address only during training will be:

“Your name,” PCT
Peace Corps
P.O. Box 257
050022 Almaty
Kazakhstan

Once you become a Volunteer and are at your site, you should have your mail sent directly to your new address, rather than to the Peace Corps Office. We will forward mail to your site address; however, it will take a long time for you to receive it because we only send mail out once a month.

Telephones

Long-distance communication via telephone is available but expensive. If you are calling from outside Almaty, it may take a long time to get a line; telephone calls to the United States are usually made through an international operator, and it can take anywhere from half an hour to three hours or longer to get through. Long-distance calls within the country can be made either by dialing a special code or through an inter-city operator. You can order a call to the United States from a home telephone or from an international post office. In some sites it is very difficult, if not impossible, to call the United States. You often must go to the international post office to place the call. In Kazakhstan “smart cards” are extensively used for pay telephones. Cards must be purchased in Kazakhstan; cards purchased in the U.S. or Europe will not work. American

telephone calling cards (such as AT&T) can be used in Kazakhstan by calling an access number. Often the connection is not good and it is very difficult to hear.

Many Volunteers choose to purchase cellphones at their own expense once in-country. Due to the cost of calls, text messaging is extensively used among Volunteers. A communications stipend is included in Volunteers' monthly living allowances. Another suggestion is to obtain a Skype computer account, or any computer communication system, and use that for international calls. It is the least expensive and works well if you are able to have an Internet connection.

Housing and Site Location

Volunteer sites are selected by the Peace Corps staff in Kazakhstan, with the approval of the country director. Volunteers are posted in sites upon the request of a Kazakhstani agency and where the need for Volunteer services has been established. It is impossible to say where Volunteers will be posted before they arrive in Kazakhstan. The staff matches Volunteer skills with the needs of the site. You should remain flexible about your job, type of housing, and where you will be placed during your service.

Housing

You will live with a host family for at least the first four months of your service, in addition to staying with a host family during pre-service training. Depending on your site placement, you may continue to live with a host family or move to an apartment. There are many sites in smaller communities where independent living is not an option. In

those cases, Volunteers will stay with families for the duration of their service. If you feel you cannot live with a host family for this period of time, you should consider carefully whether you wish to accept an assignment in Kazakhstan.

There are many benefits to staying with a host family, including companionship upon arrival at your site, a better grasp of the local language, and improved integration into the local community. Aspects of host-family living that Volunteers may find challenging include the lack of privacy and independence and the ability to adjust to the local cuisine. Volunteers are not allowed to supplement their living allowance to live in an accommodation above the level acceptable for a Volunteer (as determined by Peace Corps staff)

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer in Kazakhstan, you will receive four types of allowances: living, vacation, settling-in, and monthly travel.

The living allowance covers basic living expenses. The allowance is for food, rent, utilities, household supplies, clothing, recreation and entertainment, transportation, local reading materials, communication, and other incidentals. The amount is reviewed once a year through a market survey to ensure that it is adequate. Presently, the living allowance in Kazakhstan is paid in the local currency, tenge, not U.S. dollars. The current exchange rate is approximately one U.S. dollar to 150 tenge. The living allowance is paid every month directly to Volunteers via electronic funds transfer to each Volunteer's Kazakhstani bank account, which can be accessed throughout the country by using the ATM cards they are issued.

Regarding Banking: Please keep a U.S. bank account with ATM access for future U.S. dollar payments when you leave country. It is more difficult to open a U.S. bank account when you are out of the country.

A vacation allowance, equivalent to \$24 per month, is added to your living allowance each month. A one-time settling-in allowance of 24,000 tenge (approximately \$160) is provided to buy basic household items when you move to your site. Volunteers also receive a monthly travel allowance, which is intended to cover business travel during your time in-country.

Most Volunteers find that they can live comfortably in Kazakhstan with these four allowances, although many Volunteers bring money (in cash or traveler's checks) for out-of-country travel. All Volunteers are strongly discouraged from supplementing their income for daily living with money brought from home. The living allowance is adequate, and Volunteers should be living at the economic equivalent of their neighbors and colleagues. If you bring cash, the bills should be new and void of any written marks, creases, or tears. Only dollars in very good condition will be exchanged in Kazakhstan, as banks only want bills in good condition.

Credit cards can be used in several establishments in Almaty and in a few stores in the larger cities, but they are most useful during vacations and travel out of the country. Traveler's checks can be cashed for a 2 percent to 3 percent fee at most large banks. There are a few retail places in Kazakhstan where they can be used. American bank debit cards can be used in a growing number of cities in Kazakhstan.

Food and Diet

A variety of food is available in Kazakhstan during the summer, although there are fewer choices available in the winter. Each town has a green bazaar (similar to a farmer's market in the United States) and small food stores. At the green bazaar in Almaty, when in season, you can find fresh tomatoes, potatoes, beets, carrots, squash, radishes, pumpkin, cucumbers, onions, cabbage, melons, oranges, grapes, bananas, pears, pomegranates, and apples. Garlic, fresh dill, and basil are generally available; however, spices tend to be somewhat sporadic from site to site. Pack your favorite spices!

Markets usually have chicken, beef, sheep, goat, pork, and horse meat. Horse meat is the Kazakh national favorite. Pork is forbidden by Islam, but is popular with Russians and other non-Kazakh ethnic groups (and to Kazakhs who do not adhere to these Islamic tenants). Dairy products include milk (from cows, horses, or camels), butter, cheese, cottage cheese, and sour cream. Stores usually carry such staples as rice, barley, buckwheat, millet, spaghetti, pasta, vermicelli, flour, sugar, salt, juice, sausage, butter, cheese, yogurt, eggs, meat, and chicken, though supplies may be sporadic. The bakeries carry a variety of breads. Bread is a part of every meal. There tends to be a lack of green vegetables, however.

To Americans, mealtime should be a time of relaxation, but in a strange country mealtime may be a perpetually unsettling challenge. The available food may not only be strange in type and appearance, but it may be unpalatable and even unhealthy from an American perspective. Meals in Kazakhstan are meat-based and fairly normal according to American standards, although without as much diversity as American meals. Eating is a significant social function and

is a way to develop your working relationships and friendships. There are very few vegetarians in Kazakhstan. There may be issues for vegetarian Volunteers, whether strict or not, in most parts of the country. Kazakhstan is a meat-eating culture, and school cafeterias, business lunches, and special dinners will all feature meat. Vegetarian Volunteers will have to overcome these obstacles and face limited food choices at times.

Transportation

Transportation within Kazakhstan is primarily by trains, buses, micro-vans, or private taxis. When traveling long distances, it is usually necessary to book tickets on the national railway service. This can be done either at the local train station or at specialized kiosks that provide train tickets and information. Train transport is available in three classes: luxury-kupee, kupee, and platzcart. When on the train, it is common for the police to ask for your passport and other documents.

Short distances between adjacent cities and within cities can be traveled by public bus. Private taxis may also be hired when traveling within a city. Prices for taxis vary widely.

Geography and Climate

Covering about 2.7 million square kilometers (1.7 million miles), Kazakhstan is the ninth largest country in the world, about half the size of the United States. Its border with Russia in the north and west is one of the world's longest, at about 5,000 km (3,100 miles). It has a lengthy shoreline (almost 1,000 km, or 620 miles) on the Caspian Sea and a

shrinking one on the Aral Sea. The country is mainly flat, except for its alpine southeast and eastern fringes. Southeast Kazakhstan lies along the northern edge of the Tian Shan. Mount Khan Tengri, at 6,995 meters (22,944 feet), stands on the border with the Kyrgyz Republic. Kazakhstan's eastern border with China is a series of alternating mountain ranges and gaps through which roads or railways pass. The only serious elevations in the rest of the country are the Karatau hills, really a spur of the Tian Shan northwest of Zhambyl and Shymkent, and a band of upland that stretches west from the Tarbagatay hills, occasionally topping 1,000 meters (3,280 feet) south of Semipalatinsk. The north of the country is flat, mainly treeless steppe. Much of it is original grassland now turned over to wheat or other agriculture. Farther south, the steppe is increasingly arid, turning into desert or semi-desert, often with some scrub vegetation, across much of the southern third of the country. The climate varies significantly with the topography, but generally Kazakhstan has four seasons, with very cold winters and hot, dry summers. The duration of the season depends on the region of the country. Be prepared for temperatures down to -40 degrees Fahrenheit in winter and over 100 F during the summer.

Social Activities

In some cities in Kazakhstan, you may go to a concert, theater performance, bowling alley, circus performance, movie, museums, saunas, or local cafés. There may be a few interesting restaurants. English movies are dubbed into Russian. Chess is a national pastime. Ice-skating and snow skiing are available outside of Almaty; you can rent skates and skis there. Soccer is extremely popular, and in the rural districts, horse riding and hunting are also very popular.

You will have to create much of your own entertainment, especially during winter or in villages.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity and acting like a professional—all at the same time. You will be working as a professional and are expected to dress and behave accordingly.

While some of your counterparts may dress in seemingly worn clothes, this is usually due to economics, rather than choice. The likelihood is that they are wearing their “best.” A foreigner in Kazakhstan wearing ragged, unmended clothing is more likely to be considered an affront than someone trying to “get closer to the people.” In Kazakhstan, people take pride in dressing well. Kazakhstani women are very fashion conscious, although the clothing available in Kazakhstan may be of lower quality and is often expensive.

Professional dress, especially in a business setting, is more formal than in Silicon Valley in the United States. For men, it is appropriate to wear a shirt, tie, and slacks to work, or perhaps a suit—definitely not jeans. Women usually wear skirts with shirts/blouses or sweaters or dresses. Both men and women should bring one or two sport jackets or blazers. Women can and do wear high-heeled shoes. Keep in mind, though, that you will be doing a lot of walking. Generally, Kazakhstani women wear dress boots to work in the winter and pumps and open-toed dress shoes in summer. Hiking boots at work are not acceptable. You may want to bring one suit or dressy outfit, but dry cleaning is not available in many places. Nice jeans and shorts are appropriate for casual wear and shorts are becoming more common among

adults in major cities. The “grunge” look is never appropriate.

Overall, your clothing and shoes should be comfortable and warm. Many schools and offices are not adequately heated in the winter. Bring warm professional clothes! You should dress conservatively. Although local women wear miniskirts in the summer, you will get additional unwanted attention wearing this type of attire.

Toasting and drinking alcoholic beverages (primarily vodka) is part of the local culture in Kazakhstan and many Volunteers experience pressure to drink more than they desire or are accustomed to. Unfortunately, excessive drinking on the part of Volunteers has resulted in a number of alcohol-related incidents impacting both Peace Corps’ reputation and the safety of Volunteers in Kazakhstan. As a result, Peace Corps/Kazakhstan has implemented an alcohol use policy. It has been included below so you have an opportunity to review this information in advance of making a decision to serve in Kazakhstan.

Volunteers/trainees serve 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and at all times are representing the Peace Corps and the United States. Kazakhstani culture can encourage use of alcohol in social situations; however, it discourages drunkenness and losing control of oneself.

Drinking excessively can result in behavior that is inappropriate and damages the reputation of all hard-working, committed Peace Corps Volunteers who have served and will serve in Kazakhstan. In addition, Volunteers/trainees compromise their personal safety when under the influence of alcohol. All allegations of alcohol misconduct will be investigated, beginning with a discussion with the Volunteer/trainee concerned.

Drunkenness and lewd, offensive behavior resulting from alcohol consumption are not allowed and will result in one of the following disciplinary actions:

- **Alcohol Contract.** An official alcohol contract that will either prohibit or limit a Volunteer/trainee's alcohol consumption may be instituted for the duration of service. The Volunteer/trainee, country director, and Peace Corps medical officer will sign the alcohol contract and a violation of the contract may result in the initiation of administrative separation procedures.
- **Administrative Separation.** Violations of this policy that diminish a Volunteer's effectiveness or adversely impact the Peace Corps' program in Kazakhstan will result in the initiation of administrative separation procedures.

Additional Note: Volunteer candidates accepting a nomination or invitation to serve in Kazakhstan MUST also accept to serve under conditions in which their social behavior, dress, and professionalism will be scrutinized to an extent much greater than they are accustomed to and/or may experience in other Peace Corps countries. Consequently, candidates must be willing to act extremely conservatively and maintain the highest professional standards at all times, even when not "at work" or not "in site." The use of even moderate amounts of alcohol can lead to situations that are dangerous for the Volunteer and embarrassing to the Volunteer and Peace Corps, and Volunteers must accept that such behavior is inappropriate and understand that it will adversely affect their service and will not be tolerated by Peace Corps/Kazakhstan.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in

the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Kazakhstan Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Kazakhstan. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

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

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

Rewards and Frustrations

Although the potential for job satisfaction is quite high, like all Volunteers you will encounter numerous frustrations. Due to financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support promised. The pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and many people are hesitant to change

deeply rooted practices and traditions. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys that occur throughout your service. You will need to demonstrate self-motivation, resourcefulness, and initiative in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will ever experience. Often you will find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your counterparts with little guidance from supervisors. You may work for months without seeing a visible impact and without receiving feedback on your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress is often seen only after the combined efforts of several Volunteers and over the course of many years. ***You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.***

In many aspects of daily life, you may feel pulled in opposite directions between your accustomed life and that of your hosts. At times, life may seem a series of minor nagging frustrations. Such frustrations can accumulate, and you may come through a long struggling day feeling exhilarated and happy with your achievements and yet become angry because you have to wipe your mouth on your hand for want of a paper napkin.

To approach and overcome these difficulties, ***you will need maturity, flexibility, and open-mindedness.*** Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Kazakhstan feeling that they have gained much more than they have sacrificed during their service. If you work hard and make the commitment to integrate into your community you will be a successful Volunteer. Community integration is achieved through flexibility, open-mindedness, persistence, and simply spending as much time as possible in your community.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

Your Peace Corps training begins in the United States during pre-departure orientation, when you come together as a group to prepare for your flight to Kazakhstan. When you arrive in Almaty, you will be met at the airport and transported by bus to your orientation site. Pre-service training lasts 10 to 11 weeks and consists of Kazakh and Russian language instruction, cross-cultural awareness, health and personal safety, and technical skills—depending on your assignment. Pre-service training emphasizes experiential learning in which you take responsibility for your own learning. Training is an immersion model—that is, being immersed in the local living and work conditions. During your first week in-country, you will move in with a host family. Expect to deal with the frustrations of language barriers and cultural differences from the start. Expect to deal with frustrations due to lack of email, telephones, copy machines, and computers. Training will prepare you for your first three to six months at site. Successful Peace Corps Volunteers must rely on continued individual learning once their group training has been completed. It is also the time for you to make an informed two-year commitment to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Kazakhstan.

Technical Training

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

Language Training

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

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

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Kazakhstani host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

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

Health Training

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

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three to four

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

- *In-service training: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.*
- *Midterm conference (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.*
- *Close of service conference: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.*
- *Language Training: Volunteers have access to a small amount of funds to continue their language training at their sites through self-identified tutors. All Volunteers are encouraged to take advantage of this resource.*

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

YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN KAZAKHSTAN

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 Kazakhstan maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer, who takes care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Kazakhstan at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in Kazakhstan

In the past, the American press has given environmental problems in Kazakhstan a great deal of coverage. However, some of these reports are factually weak and sensationalized. The Peace Corps is aware of Kazakhstan's environmental problems and shares the concerns of the Volunteers and trainees. The purpose of this discussion is to give you an idea of current environmental problems and what Peace Corps/Kazakhstan is doing to reduce the risk to you for your term of service.

For more than 70 years, the Soviets placed industrial development above other concerns, especially the environment. With little or no thought given to the effects on the environment, factories were constructed, nuclear tests were conducted, and endangered animals were poached. As a result of this blind development, Kazakhstan now has some serious environmental problems. The most pressing problem is the shrinking and destruction of the Aral Sea, which has resulted in increased respiratory problems for local inhabitants, regional climate changes,

and decreased agricultural production.

More likely to affect Volunteers is industrial pollution in large cities. Many residents place water pollution of rivers, groundwater reserves, and freshwater reservoirs as the primary environmental problem. Finally, in the former nuclear testing site in the region of Semipalatinsk, approximately 500 bombs were exploded above and below ground between 1949 and 1991.

Because water pollution is the primary citizen concern, all Volunteers receive water treatment units to ensure they are drinking safe water.

Unfortunately, the problem of exposure to low levels of radiation is difficult to assess in any country, including Kazakhstan. At the end of 1994, the Peace Corps contracted two American radiation specialists from an environmental health firm to do firsthand tests at various Volunteer sites. Their reports, available at the Peace Corps/Kazakhstan office, indicate that Volunteers at the sites tested are not exposed to unusual external radiation levels in their apartments or in the immediate area of their apartments. Analysis of data gathered by local environmental specialists and reviewed by U.S. specialists indicates that the airborne particles from these tests do not pose a health risk given the short amount of time the Volunteers live in the region. In 1995 all Volunteers were given individual radiation badges to help determine the amount of radiation Volunteers receive. Results from the badges showed no elevated levels of radiation. Personal radiation badges worn by Volunteers in two separate areas of Kazakhstan in the fall of 2000 and winter of 2001 were evaluated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Results from these radiation badges were all read as having “nondetectable” exposures of radiation.

Earthquakes pose another environmental risk. Much of the southern part of the republic, including the cities of Almaty, Taraz, and Shymkent, lies on a geological fault.

Earthquakes occurred along this fault line during the last century, resulting in destruction. Historical patterns indicate there may be a threat of another event within the next 20 years. All trainees receive a briefing on earthquake preparedness. Additionally, Peace Corps/Kazakhstan maintains an emergency evacuation plan.

In spite of the efforts of the local environmental specialists and several agencies of the U.S. government, including the Peace Corps, there is still much that is unknown about the environmental conditions in Kazakhstan and in the other countries of the former Soviet Union. If, after reading this, you are uncomfortable with living and working in this environment, do as much research as possible before making a commitment to serve.

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

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

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

With its low humidity, Kazakhstan does not have many of the problems of warmer climates, like malaria. You will be immunized against local ailments that are a problem, such as tick-borne encephalitis and hepatitis. You will have distillers to purify your water. Kazakhstan, in general, is a relatively healthy country when compared to our southerly neighbors, and this greatly reduces your risk of various illnesses.

Kazakhstan is vast, so it is critical that you let your medical officer know immediately of any significant illness or injury and promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations. Many diseases that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These diseases include food poisoning, giardia, hepatitis A, dysentery, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation for Kazakhstan during pre-service training.

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

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

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 statement “An ounce of prevention ...” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States.

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

Women’s Health Information

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

Ace bandages

Adhesive tape

American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook

Antacid tablets (Tums)

Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)

Band-Aids

Butterfly closures

Calamine lotion

Cepacol lozenges

Condoms

Dental floss

Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)

Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)

Iodine tablets (for water purification)

Lip balm (Chapstick)

Oral rehydration salts

Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)

Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)

Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)

Scissors

Sterile gauze pads

Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)

Tinactin (antifungal cream)

Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health care benefits described in the Peace Corps *Volunteer Handbook*. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

Keeping Volunteers safe requires a partnership; an effort between staff and Volunteers. When it comes to your safety in the Peace Corps, you have to be willing to adapt your personal behavior and lifestyle to minimize your potential for being a victim of crime. Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property thefts and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

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

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria
- Peace Corp provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks
- Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country authorities in your new community
- Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise
- You lock your doors and windows
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live

- You get to know neighbors
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you
- You don't change residences before being authorized by Peace Corps
- You communicate concerns that you have to Peace Corps staff

This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety that all include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

There are several factors that can heighten a Volunteer's risk, many of which are within the Volunteer's control. By far the most common crime that Volunteers experience is theft. Thefts often occur when Volunteers are away from their sites, in crowded locations (such as markets or on public transportation), and when leaving items unattended.

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

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

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

After you arrive in Kazakhstan, 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 Kazakhstan learn to:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Limit alcohol consumption

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 does exist in Kazakhstan. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the 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 Kazakhstan of which you should be aware:

- Location: A majority of physical assaults occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings).
- Time of day: Assaults were reported to have occurred most frequently during the evening hours of 6 p.m. to midnight.
- Absence of others: In 53 percent of the reported physical assaults, the Volunteer was accompanied by others when the incident occurred. In 75 percent of the reported sexual assaults, the Volunteer was not accompanied by others at the time of the incident.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: 22 percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and 36 percent involved alcohol consumption by assailants.

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

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Kazakhstan 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 Kazakhstan will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Support from Staff

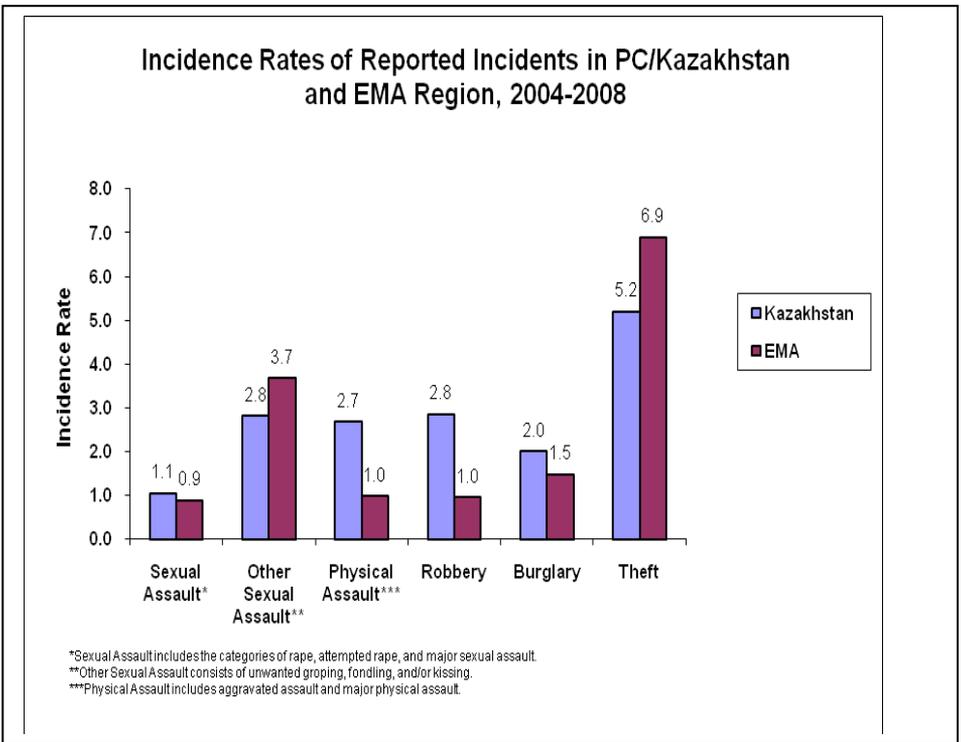
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

Crime Data for Kazakhstan

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Kazakhstan as compared to all other Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia (EMA) region programs as a whole, from 2004–2008. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to

allow for a statistically valid way to compare crime data across countries.



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

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of violent crimes. The Peace Corps will give you information and training in how to be safe. But, just as in the U.S., serious crime can happen in Kazakhstan. If you become a victim of a violent crime, the decision to prosecute or not to prosecute is entirely yours, and in addition to the support provided by the Peace Corps staff, the Office of Safety and Security will make sure that you are fully informed of your options and help you through the process and procedures involved in going forward with prosecution should you wish to do so. If you decide to prosecute, we are here to assist you in every way we can.

Crimes that occur overseas, of course, are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities in local courts. The role of the Office of Safety and Security is to coordinate with the RSO at the U.S. Embassy, local police, and local prosecutors and others to ensure that your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country. We also may, in certain limited circumstances, arrange for the retention of a local lawyer to assist the local public prosecutor in making the case against the individual who perpetrated the violent crime.

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust, and second, contact the country director or the Peace Corps

medical officer or the safety and security coordinator. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect.

Volunteer Safety Support in Kazakhstan

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

The Peace Corps/Kazakhstan office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Kazakhstan. 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/**Kazakhstan'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 Kazakhstan at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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

DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to assure that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent history. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among

our Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps' mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

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

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

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Kazakhstan, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Kazakhstan

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Kazakhstan is a traditional, patriarchal society. Among the challenges of living and working in Kazakhstan is the ability to cope effectively and constructively with the differing status of women and men and the different standards of behavior to which they are held. To promote greater understanding, many Volunteers participate in Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD).

Female Volunteers may

- find that being a single woman living alone is not the cultural norm;
- receive more unwanted and inappropriate attention from men than in the United States; and
- have to work harder than male Volunteers to gain the respect of host-country colleagues.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Volunteers of color may work and live with individuals who have had no experience with, or understanding of, the African American, Hispanic American or Asian American

culture. Volunteers of color may be evaluated as less professionally competent than white Volunteers and they may be treated suspiciously, especially in rural areas of Kazakhstan. They may be the only minority trainee or Volunteer. The Russian word for a black or dark-skinned person sounds like the English word “Negro.” As such, its use is not meant as a racial slur. Asian-American Volunteers may not be accepted as Americans. They may be identified by their cultural heritage, not by their American citizenship. They may have to deal with people’s higher expectations of their language learning ability or cross-cultural adaptability.

Volunteer Comment

“The Peace Corps is a challenging job, and for me it is a double challenge. I am not only dealing with the common cultural and language differences, but also racial differences. In my site, where I have been living for a year and half now, people are still staring at me from different angles on the street, in the bus, in taxis, and at work. Sometimes they make me feel like I am from a different planet. I have had kids follow me (still follow me) and ask me to sign an autograph. I have had people talk to me nicely and suddenly ask if I am a “Negro.” Most of the time I try to tell them to use a different word, knowing that it is out of ignorance and lack of knowledge, but not intended as an insult. There were only a couple of times the term was used as an insult. I believe my presence here is a good way of teaching Kazakhstan about diversity in America. People have good and bad experiences; don’t let somebody’s bad experience discourage you or scare you. You are an individual and you will tackle the problem differently and successfully!”

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Respect comes with age in Kazakhstan. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. On the other hand, older Volunteers may face challenges solely due to their age. Throughout your service, you will be working and living with individuals in the Peace Corps community (the majority of Volunteers are in their 20s) who may have little understanding of, or respect for, the lives and experiences of senior Americans. Your interactions with Peace Corps staff may be different than that of younger Volunteers. Staff may not give you the necessary personal support, while at the same time, you may be reluctant to share your personal, sexual, or health concerns with the staff. You may find that younger Volunteers look to you for advice or support. While some seniors find this an enjoyable part of their Volunteer experience, others choose not to fill this role.

Peace Corps countries vary greatly in the physical and human resources available for in-country training. Some senior trainees have encountered inattentiveness to their needs for an effective learning environment, including timing, presentation of materials, comfort level, and health. You may need to be assertive in developing an effective individual approach to language learning.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

While homosexuality certainly exists in Kazakhstan, there may not be as much cultural acceptance as there was in a Volunteer's home community. Moreover, host country acceptance of homosexuality among nationals may be quite different from their acceptance of homosexuality among foreigners. Lesbian, gay, or bisexual Volunteers may serve for two years without meeting another gay Volunteer.

Straight Volunteers and staff may not be able to give needed support.

Most lesbian, gay, or bisexual host-country nationals will have migrated to the larger cities, while many Volunteers are posted in rural sites, where cultural difficulties may be greater. Though relationships with host-country nationals can occur, they may not be easy and could result in dangerous situations. AIDS (*SPID* in Russian) is a critical issue in many countries, including Kazakhstan. There is a backlash being felt by gay American men for supposedly bringing the disease into some areas.

Civil liberties are sometimes nonexistent or ignored. Homosexuals may be hassled in bars or on streets. Lesbians will face constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex (as do all women). Wearing an “engagement ring” may help. Gay men must deal with machismo: talk of conquests, girl watching, and dirty jokes.

Volunteer Comment

“Serving as a gay Volunteer, I have found that I have needed to make a few extra minor adjustments. Homosexuality is legal, but not widely accepted here in Kazakhstan, with the exception of a few clubs in Almaty. For the most part, I have not come out to any host-country national, finding that this may add tension to my working relationships. I have, though, found great support in my fellow Volunteers and the Peace Corps Medical Office. We have even set up a lesbian, gay, or bisexual and friends e-mail network to help eliminate that feeling of being the only gay or bisexual person in the world. I work as a public health Volunteer at an AIDS center in Karaganda. Through my work, I have also been working with a gay

men's nongovernmental organization located in Karaganda. Although it is the only one of its kind, it does show that slowly times are changing even here in Kazakhstan."

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Volunteers are free to exercise their personal religious beliefs, but you may not engage in religious proselytizing or otherwise engage in activities that could be contrary to law or would impair your effectiveness as a Volunteer.

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

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

As a disabled Volunteer in Kazakhstan, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Kazakhstan, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. There is little to no infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Kazakhstan?

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 limitations. The authorized baggage allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 100 pounds total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (short-wave 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. Please check the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website for a detailed list of permitted and prohibited items at <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

What is the electric current in Kazakhstan?

The electricity here is 220 volts, 50 Hertz with Shuco-style plugs (two round prongs). Even if your appliance says it is 220V-compatible, you will need an adapter that allows you to plug it into an outlet for two round prongs. Adapters do not convert electricity—they only allow you to plug in an appliance with an American-style plug into the Kazakhstani two-round prong electric sockets. It is possible to find converters and adapters in Almaty. There are almost no

grounded outlets in Kazakhstan.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which covers their expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Consider bringing extra money (say \$300) to buy a local coat, hat, and clothes. Credit cards and traveler's checks are not particularly useful in Kazakhstan, since only a very limited number of establishments in Almaty and a few of the larger cities accept them; however, they can be useful on vacations outside the country. If you choose to bring extra money, plan on bringing the amount that suits your own personal travel plans and needs. Only new (offset picture) dollars in very good condition can be exchanged. It is safer to bring a debit card (ATM card) to access money directly from a U.S. bank account. Most larger towns and cities in Kazakhstan now have ATM (Bancomat) locations.

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. Education Volunteers in Kazakhstan work in schools and these schools operate on an academic schedule similar to that of the United States. Therefore, vacation time is available during winter, spring, and summer breaks. Organizational and community assistance program

Volunteers may take vacation at a time that is convenient to both the Volunteer and his or her host agency. Extended stays by visitors at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps cannot 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. However, such insurance can be purchased before you leave. Ultimately, Volunteers are responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Additional information about insurance should be obtained by calling the company directly.

Volunteers should carefully consider whether to bring valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Kazakhstan do not need to get an international driver's license because operation of vehicles is prohibited during service. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses, to mini-buses, to trucks, to a lot of walking.

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

This is not a requirement. A token of friendship is sufficient. You are likely to visit local families during your pre-service

training. 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; and photos to give away. Most people would probably enjoy candy, especially chocolate, from America more than a small souvenir. Apartments and houses are small and eating candy while drinking tea and conversing is very important culturally. It is highly recommended that you bring pictures of your family, home, local area, and other points of interest to you. Sharing photos is a great ice breaker and social norm here.

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

Peace Corps trainees are assigned to their sites after completion of 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. Many factors influence the site selection process and the Peace Corps does not guarantee placement where you might ideally like to be. Approximately 70 percent of Volunteers will live in towns or rural villages while the rest live in cities. Some sites have only one Volunteer; larger cities may have up to five. Many sites are from 24 to 40 hours away from the Peace Corps office by train.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

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

Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

Kazakhstan has cellular phone service and Peace Corps staff members are equipped with cellphones to attend to emergency calls. Because of the lack of radio transmitting stations, cellular service is not widespread in some rural areas. Differences in GSM technology make many U.S. cellphones incompatible with the Kazakhstani system, so only phones and cellular plans purchased here will function in Kazakhstan. Local communication methods are reliable for Peace Corps Volunteers and many have home phones. For convenience and social purposes, most Volunteers choose to purchase cellphones at their own expense once they arrive in-country.

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

Some Volunteers have email access from their homes and can check email daily. Other Volunteers must travel up to four hours to a city to visit an Internet café and, therefore, can only check email once every couple of weeks. Many Volunteers bring laptop computers to Kazakhstan and find that having a computer makes their life easier. However, it is difficult, if not impossible, to have computers repaired at most sites and U.S. warranties are not honored in Kazakhstan. If you plan to bring a computer (and printer), consider purchasing property insurance, as theft of laptops has been a problem in the past.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM KAZAKHSTAN VOLUNTEERS

Welcome Future Volunteers!

You have a lot of reading material, you're saying goodbye to everyone and tying up a million loose ends, and you want to be ultra-prepared because you think you can be.

But how much can one really know a country and its people until you've really lived there? Every year, thousands of folks like yourself take the plunge into the incredible adventure that is Peace Corps. If you're reading this letter, you're probably looking for some sort of nugget of wisdom that will better prepare you, or to allay your fears. So here goes:

- You will get out of your service what you put into it. Your motivations and mindset for doing Peace Corps work determine how much “extra” you'll get.
- Bring a sense of humor and an open mind. Kazakhstan has norms for general behavior, and respecting those norms will, in turn, earn YOU the respect necessary to succeed. Relationships are everything. Your language and cultural missteps are easily forgiven when you show that you care.
- Have the right perspective from the beginning: If things were perfect, the Peace Corps wouldn't be here. So do not personalize the adversity inherent in the schools, nongovernmental organizations, etc. You are coming to help people and should measure your success that way, too.
- You can make a difference in Kazakhstan, regardless of your age or background. Really!

Peace Corps work will challenge you, for sure. As for packing to meet those challenges, I'm sure you have read the handbook. Email current and former Volunteers for additional advice and for personal reflections. Check the Web,

too.

As for my personal feelings about Peace Corps service—it's tantamount to asking someone about their children. After all, kids can be simultaneously wonderful, unpredictable, frustrating, amusing, and dozens of other things. But, parents will say, despite all the ups and downs, they love their children and wouldn't trade them for anything. That's my Peace Corps experience.

Best of luck!

—George Wunder

The train ride from Almaty to my site was 30 hours long, and for 30 hours the Kazakhstan steppe rolled past my window. For the entire first day on the train I watched unpopulated grassland speed by, punctuated only occasionally by small, dusty towns with grazing sheep and concrete buildings. At night, I slept eight hours and awoke to see the exact same landscape still rushing past me, apparently unchanged. I had loved the emptiness of the American West, but Kazakhstan, I thought to myself, is truly enormous.

Now I can differentiate between the rocky outcrops by Lake Balkhash, the salt-dusted deserts by Kyzylorda, and the scattered pine forests of my own region, and the landscape from the train doesn't seem so homogenous anymore.

But my impression of the immensity of this country has persisted, and to its literal size I've added a breadth of lifestyles. In Kazakhstan, I've been a guest at a village mansion with big screen TVs and a washing machine, and I've been a guest at a hut in the middle of miles of empty steppe with a shed made out of cow dung. I've been at a restaurant and ordered coke, a cheeseburger, and fries (with Heinz ketchup!) in English, and on a different occasion come home to my Kazakh host family to see that dinner was cow head—again. The Almaty “McMansions” are springing up next to people who are still living in corrugated iron shacks.

And although I do have hot running water in my Kokshetau apartment, people still pasture their goats outside my window.

In a country that's this big and changing so rapidly, it's hard to tell you, a new Volunteer, what to expect at your assignment. You might have a hot shower and eat Lays potato chips, or you might have a squat toilet and eat cow innards. Of course, wherever you go, you'll be surprised, frustrated, adored by some and antagonized by others, and may experience triumphs where you least expect them. And you might surprise yourself with what you come to love. I, myself, have come to prefer squat toilets, and the smell of steamed intestines on rice makes me feel at home.

—Ryan Giordano

Welcome to Kazakhstan!

Fasten your seatbelts, and make sure your seats and tray tables are in their full and upright position—you are about to embark on the adventure of your life! It would be unfair to think anyone or anything can adequately prepare you for the next two years. The most important things you can bring with you are an open mind, a good attitude, curiosity, a willingness to try new things—and plenty of pictures from home.

One mistake I made was not having many pictures of my family or hometown. It is important to realize from the start that as many questions as you have, the people of Kazakhstan will have even more for you. In addition, because most people watch old U.S. television programs like “Dallas,” “Santa Barbara,” and “Beverly Hills 90210,” it is important to show people that life in America is not like what they see on TV. Be prepared for most people to believe you are friends with movie stars and that you led a lavish lifestyle before coming to Kazakhstan. That said, people here are quick to understand that America is a large country with a diverse population. If you are not from a

large city, you might consider bringing a U.S. map to show people where you have lived in the States (if you are an education Volunteer, colorful U.S. maps are light and easy-to-pack visual aids for your classroom!).

As married, mid-career Volunteers, my husband and I are always fielding questions about why we do not have children. Family is important in this culture. There are many extended families in Kazakhstan. It is not unusual for a woman to live with and care for her parents, grandparents, and nieces and nephews. Married or not, some people can't fathom spending two *weeks* away from their family—let alone two *years* half a world away. Every week, someone asks me if I miss my family. Of course I do, but because I love the life and the work we have here, in the end, everything balances out. Believe me, two years will be finished before you know it!

Just remember this one thing: local friendships are the best gifts you can take home for yourself! Even when you are tired and don't think you could answer another question, take the extra moment to have a conversation with a student, co-worker, or the lady at the market—you never know where a friendship will begin. My husband and I spend every weekend with our local friends.

When I came to Kazakhstan, I had very little teaching experience. The biggest mistake I made in the beginning was to try to teach as I was taught in America. Because the cultures are so different, the American style of teaching just does not work. One of our tasks, though, is to introduce new teaching methods to the local community, so I have found that the most successful lesson plans are a recipe of fun, innovation, and flexibility because, truly, you never know what will happen during a lesson. I have had active students, bored students, attentive students, and students breaking rulers over each other's heads. You have to take all of it in stride and keep reaching out to your students. Listen and try to learn from your students because they will be your best teachers. You will soon learn that children know

everything—about you, and about everything in town.

Kazakhstan has four beautiful seasons: pack a little of everything, but do not forget your long underwear. Be prepared to wear the same clothes repeatedly, and know it is perfectly acceptable to wear the same outfit for a week at a time. Besides, since you are probably washing your clothes in the bathtub, how much time do you want to spend washing five or six different outfits each week? Make sure you have clothes that can mix and match well. In general, people dress more formally here than in America, but be advised that the styles here can be extremely different. Some rural communities dress very conservatively, while in large cities (and some small communities) people dress as if they have just walked out of an American nightclub. A good rule of thumb is to bring durable, comfortable clothes. Stay away from light colors, as they get dirty easier. In general, it is better to dress more conservatively as it keeps some of the attention away from you.

Bring anything durable and of value to you (like music, photos, a camera, etc.). If you have a laptop, bring it, as the Internet is available if you are lucky enough to have a phone. If you bring a computer, also buy a good bag for it and a European surge protector (or UPS) as power surges are frequent. Bring a good English/Russian dictionary. I recommend the Kenneth Katzner *English/Russian, Russian/English Dictionary*—it's the only good dictionary based on American English. It will be one of the best things you will bring with you.

Good luck and have fun!

—Jen McFarland

Welcome to Kazakhstan!

Little did I know, when I said, “Sure, I’ll go to Kazakhstan!” I’d be able to tell you two years later that now, without batting an eye, I can give a comprehensible toast in Kazakh, eat parts from a sheep’s head, bathe in a *banya*,

and squat with the best of them. I've had a tarantula crawling in my bag, been begged for hundreds of autographs, was head-butted by a cow, and stood about 20 feet from President Nazarbayev himself. And that's just the beginning.

What to bring? Things I've been glad to have: an English/Russian dictionary (I use it all the time with teaching and writing), several pairs of quality long underwear, and hand sanitizer for trains and public toilets. Also, bring something to make you (or your room) smell good—trust me, you'll want it! Don't bring too many clothes. Everyone wears the same clothes over and over again. It's easier, and means that you don't need as many things. You will be able to buy clothes here, even if you're an unusual size. (I'm large and 6 feet tall and still managed to find a warm winter coat.) Women can wear pants and jeans, but don't plan on wearing shorts, especially if you live in the south.

What to expect? Expect the unexpected. Nothing will go as you think it will. Everything changes, everything happens at the last minute. Be flexible and go with the flow ... and keep in mind that "the flow" has absolutely nothing to do with a straight line!

It's difficult to prepare for an experience like this; that is part of the great adventure. I am a university TEFL (teaching English as a foreign language) teacher, currently in Kyzylorda. I've taught at three universities, lived in two vastly different sites, and have had a plethora of wild, challenging experiences. I've had an incredible, unforgettable, two years. If you can find in yourself patience, open-mindedness, tolerance, and a sense of humor, especially when the chips are down, you will, too.

Good luck!

—Megan Schulte

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Kazakhstan 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 an 80-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Kazakhstan.

Luggage

Your luggage should be durable, lightweight, and easy to carry. If you cannot carry it by yourself, do not bring it!

Clothing

Bring clothes that you like to wear. Family and friends can send you clothing. Weight fluctuations are common during your service. For this reason, bring basics to Kazakhstan—along with a few items that you enjoy wearing.

The clothing you bring should be durable and versatile. The weather in Kazakhstan varies quite a bit. The summers are very hot. Spring and fall are rainy and the streets get pretty muddy. The winter is cold and windy with snow and rain. Kazakhstanis dress more formally than Americans, and there will be many occasions where you can dress up.

Professional dress is required, but this does not mean expensive dress. As long as your clothing is neat, clean, and conservative it should be acceptable. Kazakhstanis may be offended by American "dress down" style, especially at work.

You may want to bring one suit or dressy outfit, but keep in mind that dry cleaning is not available in many places and you may get only occasional use out of these items.

You will be walking a lot, and all of your shoes should be comfortable and, if possible, waterproof. *Good shoes are hard to find, and imported shoes are very expensive, so do not skimp on these.* Again, do not skimp on these! Your shoes will take a beating and wear out quickly, so bring shoes with sturdy soles. Be sure to bring shoes appropriate for all seasons (i.e., sandals, boots, etc.). Local women wear high heels with incredible skill on uneven surfaces and ice. Unless you possess this skill, high heels are not recommended. You will be taking your shoes off and putting them on as you enter and leave homes here, so slip-on shoes are much easier. For men, bring smooth leather hiking boots that are insulated, waterproof and durable.

It begins to get cold in Kazakhstan in October. Although you can purchase winter clothing in Kazakhstan it is highly recommended that you bring a good winter coat and boots from the U.S. Good quality clothes in Kazakhstan are more expensive than in the States. Also, make sure you bring some warm clothes with you (i.e., sweaters, jackets, gloves, and hats). If you are assigned to the northern part of the country, it may already be snowing with temperatures in the 30s when you arrive at your site in early November. While there is a bazaar where you will be able to purchase nearly everything you need, there will not be a great deal of time to make these purchases as training days are long and the quality may not be very good.

General Clothing

- Winter coat—It is recommended that you bring a winter coat (if you have one). Kazakhstan is a large country. If you are in the north, you will not need a heavy coat.
- Waterproof, lightweight jacket (black or gray recommended)
- Boots—warm non-skid soles. Snow and ice are not often removed from sidewalks or walkways.
- Three pairs of warm socks—white is impossible to keep clean and should be avoided
- Winter gloves (extremely warm and waterproof), scarf, and hat
- Underwear
- Two sets of thermal underwear (tops and bottoms—some Volunteers recommend polypropylene; others recommend silk); you will wear these under clothes for warmth and for sleeping. It is wise to purchase a heavy and lighter weight pair. The long underwear you wear in the spring and fall is different than what you will wear in the winter.
- Several good sweaters and turtlenecks
- Bathing suit
- Belts
- Sunglasses
- Baseball cap

For Men

Men here dress in suits for business meetings, weddings, and work. It is appropriate to wear a shirt, tie, and pants (not jeans) to work. Sports jackets with nice pants and dress shirts are acceptable. Most local people wear the same ties daily. You probably do not need more than two to four ties.

The acceptability of shorts will depend upon your site. Shorts are only worn here by men for sporting events or exercise. A cultural point to consider is that hair is worn short by men in Kazakhstan, and beards on younger men are rare. Varying from these norms will negatively impact your working relationships and cultural integration.

- One suit
- One or two sport coats
- Three ties
- Three dress shirts (long and short sleeves—bring short sleeves even if you do not wear them in America)
- Three pairs dress slacks
- Three pairs of shorts
- Three T-shirts/regular shirts for everyday wear
- One pair of slacks/shorts that zip off at the knees (you cannot wear shorts to training events and if you have afternoon plans these will be a life-saver; also great if you know you will be visiting a mosque in Kazakhstan or if you go on vacation to another Muslim country like Turkey or the UAE and don't want to wear pants all day.)
- Two pairs of jeans (not usually acceptable for work attire)

For Women

Kazakhstani women are very fashion conscious. In a few communities, schools do not approve of women wearing pants in the classroom. Also, blouses and upper portions of dresses should be modest. In certain cities and towns in Kazakhstan, you will see women in mini-skirts and other scant attire. However, you should be aware that for the Kazakhstanis, this sends a negative message about your character. Generally, Kazakhstani women wear dress boots to work in the winter and dress sandals in the summer.

Hair is styled in all sorts of ways, and shouldn't be a problem. Local hair-coloring products are not to U.S. standards, and we've seen some interesting interpretations of henna and even blond hair coloring. Go with your natural color, or bring what you need.

- Dress jackets
- Plenty of mid-length and long skirts and dresses
- Jeans (acceptable in larger cities, but not at work)
- Dress pants
- At least one good outfit for formal occasions
- A few pairs of shorts or skirts
- Tights and leggings
- Jewelry and makeup (both are worn here, and available)
- Slips (cotton, lightweight)
- Sturdy winter boots, which can be worn with skirts and dresses and dress pants

Shoes

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- One washcloth and one towel (these are available locally, but quality is often not that great)
- Razors or electric shaver, shaving cream
- Shampoo and conditioner (might not be your favorite brand, but many types are available here)
- Nail clipper
- Toothpaste (Crest and Colgate are available)
- Good toothbrushes
- Soap (if your skin is sensitive, you may want to bring a good supply)
- Deodorant (available here)

- Feminine hygiene products are available at all sites in Kazakhstan so there is no need to bring an extensive supply

Pert Plus, Gillette, and even Herbal Essence can easily be found at the smallest bazaars, so don't go overboard on the toiletries unless there is some aftershave, shampoo or other item that you can't live without for two years.

Work Clothes

Do not pack any work clothes that you hope to use after two years! After two years of your hand washing and sun-drying, the clothes will be rags, especially if you end up in a village. Do not, however, come like some Volunteers do, thinking that looking like a pauper in the Third World is the norm just because it is the Peace Corps. People do dress up regularly, and clean, ironed clothes are a must in this culture. People may have only two outfits (some of your students will have only one), but they will look like they were just store-bought even if they wear them every day in a given week.

Medical Supplies

The only medical supplies you should need are initial supplies of prescription medications—Peace Corps will provide the rest.

Cooking Supplies

Bringing spices you like with you is an excellent idea, both for yourself and for introducing yourself to locals. You will get requests from locals to cook things and it is a nice thing

to do for people who will, no doubt, be cooking for you repeatedly. A few other hints: ranch mix and barbecue sauce are always missed by Volunteers.

Office Supplies

Office supplies are of poor quality here. Many Volunteers say bringing Sharpies and markers were helpful. These things can also be sent to you.

Laptops

See Tech Guide or contact the Country Desk for a copy

Miscellaneous

- Flashlight: very powerful and illuminating (power outages are regular, which makes it a pain to shave or make posters for a lesson, so this will help tremendously)
- One or two sturdy water bottles (e.g., Nalgene)
- Battery charger and at least four rechargeable batteries
- Electricity converter kit (the voltage is 220 and is uniform across Asia. It should have a pair of parallel, round prongs)
- Computer (great for staying connected to friends and family). Please update your anti-virus software – viruses are a huge problem here. It is also wise to bring an external hard drive! Bringing an Ipod is encouraged.
- Leatherman or Swiss Army knife
- Two luggage locks
- Day planner/diary

- Toiletries bag and initial set of toiletries
- Flashlight for your key chain
- Digital camera (great for emailing photos home and you do not want to carry pictures around for two years)
- High-quality backpack (will need to get your stuff to Kazakhstan, as well as for vacation out-of-country and when you go camping in-country; there are lots of beautiful places to go camping in the eastern and western parts of the country)
- Hand sanitizer (important to have when eating out since many places will not have bathrooms or you wouldn't want to use the facilities if they did. Clean hands will help you avoid sickness during pre-service training. Your body will have enough things stressing it out already.)
- Pictures, pictures, pictures—People in Kazakhstan, especially your students if you are a teacher, love to see pictures of their Volunteer's life in America. From pictures of the close major cities to you and your family to things as mundane as the local supermarket and the car you drive, these will all be crowd pleasers. They will also serve as a great icebreaker with your host families, which you will be desperate for since you will have just two Russian language lessons under your belt on the day you go to live with them.
- Gifts for two host families (key chains from your city, American chocolate or scented candles)

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

- Complete any needed dental and medical work.
- If you wear glasses, bring two pairs.
- Arrange to bring a 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 overseas, 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 U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.

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

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

Peace Corps' Mailing Address:

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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Europe, Mediterranean, and Asia	Ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer	Ext. 2427	202.692.2427
	Email:	kazakhstan@peacecorps.gov	

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (SATO Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.544.1802
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial	Ext. 1770 Operations	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 24 hours a day