

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO THE

# Eastern Caribbean



**A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS**

**September 2013**



# Eastern Caribbean Map



## A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean Invitee,

Congratulations on your invitation to the upcoming pre-service training in the Eastern Caribbean! We are pleased you have been offered this invitation to join the Peace Corps and to serve on one of the four island nations that makes up our program. Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of your life. We hope you have given serious thought to what your service will mean to you and to the people of the Eastern Caribbean. If you come with an open mind, a warm heart, patience, flexibility, and a good sense of humor, you will be well on your way to adjusting to life and work in a new culture. This welcome book will help you prepare for your journey and will hopefully answer many of the questions you may have about Peace Corps life in the Eastern Caribbean.

I am sure you have been doing research on our post and have probably already communicated with current Volunteers and returned Peace Corps Volunteers from the region. There have been a number of significant changes to our pre-service training over the last year. You will arrive in St. Lucia and then spend six weeks in an intensive training program focusing on primary literacy, youth development, cross-cultural training, language training, health and wellness, and keeping yourself safe. It is during this period when we will assign you to a site on one of our four islands where Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) serve. After the six weeks on St. Lucia, you will then fly to your island of service for three more weeks of training. As a Peace Corps trainee, you will spend the first six weeks living with a host family in the training community on St. Lucia, and then you will be with another family in your assigned community on your island of service. You will engage in an integrated, community-based, pre-service training program. You will attend group sessions with the other trainees and will also participate in community-based learning activities. Upon successful completion of pre-service training (PST), you will be sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

As a Volunteer, you will be exposed to many new experiences. During the training, staff members are there to provide information and guidance to help you determine how you will respond to the various challenges of Peace Corps service. We will do our best to prepare you to have a positive and fulfilling Peace Corps experience. You can begin the process now by reviewing the recommended readings about life in the Eastern Caribbean.

There are a few things to think about as you accept our invitation. You may have been surprised that there are Peace Corps Volunteers in this part of the world. Many people associate the Eastern Caribbean with tourist destinations and lavish surroundings. As a result, you may have special challenges as you discover life beyond that stereotype. Because you are asked to adhere to a modest lifestyle, many of the opportunities that tourists enjoy will not be available to you on a Volunteer's living allowance. You will have to make adjustments in your lifestyle to be accepted and effective in the Eastern Caribbean. You should not expect the people and culture to adjust to you. We make site assignments by matching your skills and background with the general needs of a particular organization and community, and not on the basis of personal preferences. It is not an exact match of skills; we look for a general set of skills that will help you be successful at a site. You may find that you will learn new skills that will help you to be effective.

During your two years of service you will have the opportunity to work with local leaders and organizations and contribute to the achievement of their development goals. Staff and local community members across the islands have been preparing for your arrival. We hope you are excited about this opportunity to be of service to the warm and friendly people of the Eastern Caribbean while you enjoy the many splendors that these island nations offer.

Staff and Volunteers are eagerly awaiting your arrival and look forward to accompanying you on this journey of a lifetime. Welcome to the Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean! We're happy to have you join us!

Elizabeth Neason  
Eastern Caribbean Country Director

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## CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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

# PEACE CORPS/EASTERN CARIBBEAN HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

## History of the Peace Corps in the Eastern Caribbean

The Peace Corps entered the Eastern Caribbean in 1961, when St. Lucia became one of the first three countries in the world to receive Volunteers. Since then, approximately 3,800 Peace Corps Volunteers have served on 10 island nations in the region. Volunteers were initially assigned to education, agriculture, health, youth, and community development projects. The contributions of Volunteers in these areas have provided strong and consistent technical support to the Eastern Caribbean for more than 50 years. Basic human needs programming in the 1970s encouraged health, special education, preschool education, teacher training, forestry, fishery, and livestock extension projects. The 1980s were a period that focused on four projects: education, health, agriculture, and small enterprise development. In the 1990s, education, environment, health, developing partnerships with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and youth initiatives were priorities.

## History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in the Eastern Caribbean

Programming on each island nation of Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean is guided by the development priorities of the various governments and their ministries, as expressed in official plans and budget documents. With its partners, Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean periodically reviews programming on each island nation to ensure continuing appropriate focus and direction.

In the summer of 2012, Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean assembled a project advisory committee (PAC) on each island to review the current Community Economic Development project plan, which focused on four sectors: youth development, institutional/NGO development, small business development, and prevention of HIV/AIDS. The committees are comprised of government and community stakeholders, partners, community leaders, youth, Peace Corps staff, and Peace Corps Volunteers. The PACs reviewed accomplishments achieved over the six-year life of the project, current issues facing the islands today, and Peace Corps' role. A decision was made to revise the project plan to focus on increasing primary school literacy. This new project plan, approved in September 2013, will have all of the Volunteers serving as literacy teachers in primary schools. In addition to assisting struggling readers, Volunteers will engage in secondary activities that focus on youth development. These activities can include after-school clubs, coaching sports, teaching life skills, facilitating summer camps, etc.

Peace Corps Volunteers currently serve in four island nations in the Eastern Caribbean: Dominica, Grenada & Carriacou, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

Peace Corps Volunteers in the Eastern Caribbean work within the scope of activities outlined in the Primary Literacy Project. Given your background and interest, you have been recruited to serve as a literacy teacher at the primary school level.

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW: EASTERN CARIBBEAN AT A GLANCE

### History

Although it has been claimed that Christopher Columbus discovered the Caribbean Islands, the Caribs and Arawaks were the first known inhabitants of the lands that Columbus named the “West Indies.” His diaries described the region as “a country full of precious things and unheard of wonders.” The lack of gold and resistance by the Caribs and Arawaks led the Spanish to turn their interests toward Central and South America. The islands initially served as a rendezvous for gold and pirate ships and later became bloody battlegrounds for contending European powers. St. Lucia, for example, changed colonial hands no less than 14 times, ending up as an English territory only after the conclusion of the Napoleonic Wars. The West Indian historical legacy includes social inequities, a one-crop economic base, limited opportunity for academic and vocational schooling, a rapidly growing population, and high unemployment. Widespread poverty fostered social upheaval, characterized by the emergence of labor unions and the eventual stirrings of independence movements. Most of the island countries achieved independence in the 1960s and 1970s.

### Government

The Caribbean is characterized by the Westminster system of government. Every five years, general elections are held, and after the leader of the winning party is sworn in as prime minister by the governor general; he or she then chooses cabinet ministers. The actual administration of each government ministry is the responsibility of the permanent secretary, the chief civil servant. The governments all have a strong commitment to provide social services such as free primary and secondary education and health services.

Though the island nations have not succeeded at attaining political unity, they were successful in establishing the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) 20 years ago. This nine-member group includes all of the Peace Corps island nations and oversees several areas of cooperation, promoting unity and solidarity among the member states. The headquarters is in St. Lucia. The Caribbean governments have also established the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), a successful union that governs trade in the region.

### Economy

Island-nation economies remain based on single cash crops (like bananas) or tourism, which is the leading growth industry. There is also some light manufacturing. In general, economic development in the Eastern Caribbean is hampered by small domestic markets, a scarcity of trained labor, the absence of raw materials, and, in some cases, inadequate transportation and marketing facilities. The island nations face many challenges in the rapidly changing international economic environment.

Single-crop agricultural practices have been so pervasive that, despite favorable soil and growing conditions, food importation remains very high. With preferential access and guaranteed prices in the European market, countries had little incentive to work to diversify agricultural production. When the World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled that indirect subsidies had to be removed, the small countries of the Caribbean found they could not compete with other countries with lower costs of production. The island nations continue to struggle to find ways to diversify their economies to avoid overdependence on a single area, like bananas or tourism.

Damage to Grenada as a result of Hurricane Ivan in 2004 was extensive. Emergency recovery projects financed by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and other international donors supported the rehabilitation of the health-care and school infrastructure and the financing of critical imports. Peace Corps Volunteers successfully implemented more than \$65,000 in reconstruction projects and facilitated the access of funding for other community reconstruction projects. There was also extensive infrastructure damage in St. Lucia due to Hurricane Tomas in 2010. The effects of Tomas are still felt on St. Lucia today.

There has been a recent shift in the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region, resulting in a major developmental problem. The epidemic has begun to disproportionately affect younger populations, in particular young females. The major feature of the epidemic is the growing number of people living with HIV/AIDS and affected families requiring care and support. The changing profile of the epidemic is dramatically impacting not only the health sector, but also economic resources in the region as human potential and productivity diminish.

### **People and Culture**

People in the Caribbean are mainly of African origin (90 percent), with a sprinkling of East Indians, Caucasians, and some of mixed race. Youth dominate the population in all the island nations. About 3,000 descendants of pre-Columbian Caribs still live on the island nation of Dominica, where they live in a reserve on the east coast. There is another community of Caribs in St. Vincent.

The culture of the islands has been greatly influenced by their history, and it is often referred to as a “spicy” Creole culture. It is the mixture of the African, French, British, and Spanish cultures that came together to form this rich “potpourri.” The resulting French Creole language has disappeared in St. Vincent and Grenada, but has remained alive and strong on St. Lucia and Dominica. Other features of this spicy culture are the cultural festivals observed on the islands, such as carnivals, jazz festivals, Creole music festivals, Caribbean food festivals, and Saturday “market days.” One of the unique aspects of Caribbean culture is the music: Reggae, zouk, calypso, cadence, soca, and steel band music are true West Indian sounds.

### **Environment**

The Eastern Caribbean is part of the chain of islands that lie between the Caribbean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean. Some of the islands are volcanic in origin and are characterized by mountains, rivers, and lush valleys, as well as long stretches of beaches with clear blue waters and golden sand. Their many rain forests abound with hundreds of species of plants and animals, many unique to the Caribbean. Volunteers accustomed to four seasons soon adapt to just two: the dry season during the first half of the year and the rainy season in the second.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Eastern Caribbean and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although the Peace Corps tries to make sure all these links are active and current, it cannot be guaranteed. 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 the Eastern Caribbean

**[www.countrywatch.com/](http://www.countrywatch.com/)**

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in each capital in the Eastern Caribbean countries to how to convert from the U.S. dollar to the Eastern Caribbean dollar.

**[www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations)**

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

**[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)**

The Department of State's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find the country to which you were invited 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.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm](http://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.worldinformation.com](http://www.worldinformation.com)**

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

### Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

**[www.rpcv.org](http://www.rpcv.org)**

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

**[www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org](http://www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org)**

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

## Online Articles/Current News Sites About the Eastern Caribbean

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

## Recommended Books

### St. Lucia

1. Reynolds, Anderson. "The Struggle for Survival." 2003. A historical, political and socioeconomic perspective of St. Lucia.
2. Reynolds, Anderson. "Death by Fire." 1999. An epic novel that provides an interesting mosaic of life through its troubled characters intertwines history and culture.
3. Aubertin, Michael. "Neg Maron." 2000. A dramatized historical perspective of the struggle for emancipation.
4. Prudent, Therold. "Glory Days and Tragedy." 2004. Chronicles the life of a character growing up in Gros Islet, St. Lucia.
5. Lee, Robert & Hippolyte, Kendell. "Saint Lucian Literature and Theatre." 2006. An anthology of literary and theatre reviews.
6. Sankardayal, Clive. "The Brown Curtains." 2005. Dramatizes the experiences of Guyanese living in St. Lucia.
7. Wayne, Rick. "I'll Be Alright in the Morning." 1987. A subjective interpretation of recent and current political personalities in St. Lucia.
8. King, Owen. "Conflict." 2008. Written by a member of an established St. Lucian family, the book describes familial tensions.
9. Harmsen, Jolien. "Rum Justice." Explores the murder of a water taxi driver, and a quest to bring the suspects, a wealthy American couple, to trial.

### Eastern Caribbean

1. Compton, Jacques. "The West Indians: Portrait of a People." 2009.
2. Selvon, Sam. "The Lonely Londoners." 1956. Describes the experiences of West Indians who migrated to London in the 1960s.
3. Thomas, G.C. H. "Ruler in Hiroona." 2003. Describes a career in public service from the viewpoint of a Vincentian.
4. McCanse, Anna. "Dominica." 2011. A travel guidebook for Dominica written by a returned Peace Corps Volunteer.

### Eastern Caribbean Reference Books

1. Allsopp, Richard. Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. 2003.
2. Dyde, Brian. Caribbean Companion: The A to Z Reference. 1992.

### **Books About the History of the Peace Corps**

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. "All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. "The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps." Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. "Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver." Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.
4. Meisler, Stanley. "When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years." Boston: Beacon Press, 2011.

### **Books on the Volunteer Experience**

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

# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## COMMUNICATIONS

### Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered standard in the United States. If you expect U.S. standards for mail service, you will be disappointed. Mail takes from two to four weeks to travel in either direction. Some mail may get lost in transit. Some letters may arrive damaged or opened. Since communication with friends and family is a very sensitive issue for most Volunteers, please understand the reality of international mail service. Advise your family and friends to number their letters and to write “Air Mail” on the envelope.

Packages from family and friends are the responsibility of the individual Volunteer. Post office officials and customs officers may open packages in front of you. You may have to pay hefty customs duties, although you may get your packages duty free at the discretion of the postal official. Due to the risk of packages getting lost in transit, it is recommended that you not have valuable items sent to you.

### Telephones

Long-distance communication via telephone is available, but expensive. Most Volunteers find that they can easily make or receive calls from the United States. Please note that “1-800” numbers are not accessible from the Caribbean. All other numbers can be dialed directly. United States phone cards do not work here. You can purchase the local “smart-phone” cards to call home or to make local calls. Many Volunteers have Internet connections at home and use services like Skype, magicJack, or Microsoft Messenger to communicate.

### Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Each Peace Corps office has a computer with Internet access for use by Volunteers. Internet cafes are available in the capital, as well as in some towns and villages.

Some Volunteers have email and full Internet access in their home or work via providers in the Caribbean. Volunteers here strongly suggest bringing a laptop and a thumb drive. Power quality problems may be avoided with a good surge protector. As with all valuable personal property, bring a computer at your own risk and consider purchasing insurance. Information is included in your invitation packet about affordable personal property insurance.

### Housing and Site Location

During training, you will begin to integrate and establish links with your host community. Your associate Peace Corps director (APCD) will identify proper housing following your homestay. All homes will have running water, either through a rain catchment system or delivered by pipes through WASCO, and electricity. The houses will also be fully furnished and may even include a television set. Volunteer sites can be as close as 15 minutes and as far as 2 hours from the capital and the Peace Corps office. Volunteers will receive a settling-in allowance to supplement other basic items to get started.

### Living Allowance and Money Management

The local currency is the Eastern Caribbean dollar, and the same currency is used on all islands where Volunteers live and work. The exchange rate is approximately \$2.70 (EC) to one U.S. dollar. Traveler’s checks can be cashed at any bank. Credit cards are widely accepted. Personal checks from U.S. banks can be cashed, but it may take several weeks for the check to clear and for the funds to become available to you. All the banks have ATMs, so you can access cash most of the time. Your ATM card will also work at most banks in the region, but will provide only E.C. dollars.

Your Peace Corps living allowance is paid in Eastern Caribbean dollars and is electronically deposited by the first day of every month to the account that you will open at a local bank. You will receive more information about banking facilities on your assigned island during training. The living allowance will cover all regular expenses, such as rent, food, utilities, and other essentials. The amount varies according to the cost of living on the island nation where you reside. You are strongly discouraged from subsidizing your income with money from home. Part of the Peace Corps experience is living modestly at the level of people in your community.

### **Food and Diet**

There is a wide range of food choices available in the islands. The Eastern Caribbean offers a wealth of fresh fruit and vegetables, most of which can be purchased daily from fruit stalls and grocery stores. Many Volunteers have been pleasantly surprised to find one or more fruit trees in their backyards, and many have used yard space to grow such vegetables as tomatoes, lettuce, sweet peppers, peas, and beans. Many of the vegetables available in the United States are also grown here and, while a few are seasonal, one can find several different vegetables all year-round.

Volunteers who are vegetarians or vegans can buy produce and other items from the local markets.

Fresh fish is always plentiful, as is fresh meat and locally grown chicken. Volunteers are provided information on the nutrition, preparation, and safety of local foods.

### **Transportation**

Mini buses make travel easy and inexpensive. Volunteer homes and worksites are no more than a 30-minute to two-hour drive from the capital. The buses may run until about 8 p.m., although a few areas have service until midnight. For safety reasons, Volunteers are not allowed to drive automobiles or ride motorcycles.

### **Geography and Climate**

The Eastern Caribbean, including Barbados and the Lesser Antilles, is the island chain that separates the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea. The Peace Corps places Volunteers on Dominica, Grenada & Carriacou, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

The islands are geographically divided into inner and outer chains. The inner islands are volcanic in origin and are characterized by rugged, mountainous terrain, heavy rainfall, lush fertile vegetation, and many rivers. Dominica alone has as many as 365 rivers. The inner islands include Grenada and its dependencies of Carriacou and the southern Grenadines, St. Vincent and its dependencies of the northern Grenadines, St. Lucia, and Dominica. The highest points of these islands are generally in the center, except for a few spectacular sheer slopes on some coastlines. Most roads go around, rather than over, the islands. High points of elevation vary from 1,000–5,000 feet above sea level.

The tourist brochures do not lie when they describe the islands of the Caribbean as lands of sunshine and beaches. The first thing you must realize is that you are heading to two years of summer weather. The temperatures make history if they go above 90 degrees Fahrenheit or below 70 degrees. The day–night range is usually about 10 degrees, from 80–90 degrees in the summer months and 74–84 in the winter. The sun is hot year-round, but gentle sea breezes from the northeast trade winds blow throughout the year and help cool the air. The high humidity makes it easy to work up a sweat anytime during the day or night.

The rainy season generally lasts from July to December, but the amount of rain varies widely in different locations. In addition, brief showers, sometimes downpours, are common in any month. Additionally, the Eastern Caribbean is prone to hurricanes from June through November. The region can sometimes experience a dry season from March to May. Other environmental concerns, especially in the banana-producing countries, are deforestation, siltation, river pollution, and unplanned and inappropriate land use.

## Social Activities

There are a variety of ways to enjoy social activities in the Eastern Caribbean. Since you live on islands where people are friendly and hospitable, the more friends you make and the more you join in the local activities, the more you will enjoy your two years here.

All islands have local festivals, with Carnival being the biggest. There are plenty of shows, house and street parties, and steel band concerts. Also, most islands have an annual jazz or Creole-music festival, which are big cultural treats.

Outdoor sports are also popular among Volunteers and host country nationals. The islands have good hiking trails, mountains for climbing, and dense rain forests you can visit, preferably with a certified guide. The islands also offer wonderful snorkeling and a lot of warm sandy beaches for swimming and relaxation. For sporting enthusiasts, there are several cricket, soccer, basketball, volleyball, and running clubs. Many Volunteers have initiated sporting groups or clubs in their host communities.

## Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

The way you dress in the Eastern Caribbean is an important factor for how you will be perceived and accepted. Though you may be inclined to wear shorts and tank tops, **it is imperative that you dress in a manner that is professional and representative of your role as a development worker in the community.** While living and working in your community, **you are not a tourist and should not look like one. Casual clothing is only acceptable in your home and at the beach.**

Visible body piercings and tattoos are not considered professional in Eastern Caribbean, particularly in schools. As all Volunteers are placed in schools, visible tattoos and piercings are not permitted. Visible tattoos on arms, legs, face, neck, chest, or back are not acceptable for Volunteers and Volunteers with these types of tattoos cannot serve effectively in schools. In addition, Volunteers cannot display body piercings during their service. This includes any facial piercings (including tongue piercings) and navel rings, as well as earrings for men. If you have reservations about this policy and the degree of sacrifice and flexibility required to be a successful Volunteer, please discuss this with your placement officer and carefully evaluate your decision to accept the invitation to serve in Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean.

Male Volunteers are expected to wear lightweight slacks or khakis with a button-down shirt or polo shirt. The same would be appropriate for women, in addition to modest skirts and dresses.

Please note that shorts, tank tops, half-shirts, tube tops, flip-flops, tops with spaghetti straps, T-shirts, strapless blouses and dresses, and low-cut tops are not acceptable items of professional dress, whether your community work is in an office or in an outdoor setting.

## Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Health Care and Safety section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean. 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. Volunteers and families are encouraged to look at the safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [www.peacecorps.gov/safety](http://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**

Life as a Volunteer has abundant rewards. Your projects will start to flourish, your partners will learn and grow, and you will start to feel comfortable in your new island home. You may also feel frustration when things take too long to happen or do not turn out as you expected. People may not always show the level of interest and enthusiasm you anticipate, or may not be prepared to make the changes you think are good for them. It helps to have an open mind to be willing to accept change and to be willing to maintain a level of flexibility as you figure out how to operate in this new place.

Volunteers are expected to observe the same work schedules, reporting procedures, leave-of-absence policies, and access to agency resources as their co-workers. The way to overcome this is by setting your own personal goals and remaining focused on them, even when progress seems slow and remote. Peace Corps life has its ups and downs, good times and bad. Learn to enjoy the gains and look forward to these moments rather than dwelling on the losses.

It is also important not to interpret “Volunteer” in the way some volunteer service is viewed in the United States. Your assignment will involve being on the job day in and day out, following the same schedules and protocols as your host country colleagues. You will not be able to casually take a few days off to travel to another island or go off on a trip to visit family. There are opportunities for taking annual leave and vacation, but the associated application procedures must be observed. As a school-based Volunteer, you can take annual/vacation leave only when classes are not in session: Christmas break, spring break, summer break, and on national or regional holidays. Failure to abide by these and other policies and procedures could be cause for disciplinary action. The Peace Corps has more rules and regulations than you may expect. They are in place to provide a structured and supportive environment, within which you will be safe and productive. Please note that as a school-based Volunteer, you do not have the summer “off.” You will be expected to be involved in secondary activities in your community such as summer camps, youth groups, library work, etc.

Being a Volunteer in the Eastern Caribbean involves a high degree of commitment. Projects are designed and assignments are made with the idea that Volunteers will honor their commitment and work for two years. Host agencies, sponsoring ministries, and local community members or students are counting on you to remain in your position for a full term. Do not accept this invitation to service if you are not willing to make such a commitment. These communities and organizations are counting on you.

Whatever frustrations and limitations may exist, Peace Corps Volunteers who serve in the Eastern Caribbean consistently find the experience to be uniquely rewarding. There is a special kind of satisfaction that comes from learning to live and work effectively in another culture. It soon becomes apparent that the experience effectively contributes to your own personal and professional development, and to the development of the host country.

# PEACE CORPS TRAINING

## Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within a competency-based training program that continues throughout your 26 months of service in Eastern Caribbean. PST ensures that Volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively undertake their assignments.

PST is conducted in the Eastern Caribbean and directed by the Peace Corps with participation from representatives of Eastern Caribbean organizations, former Volunteers, and/or training contractors. Training is nine weeks long, with the first six weeks conducted on St. Lucia and the following three weeks on the island of assignment. The last week of PST on St. Lucia will include a “model school” where trainees will practice literacy skills. Trainees will be evaluated to see that they have successfully achieved competencies before they are approved to swear in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

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

Peace Corps training is founded on adult learning methods and often includes experiential “hands-on” applications, such as the model school, conducting a participatory community needs assessment, and facilitating groups. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas. Integrating into the community is usually one of the core competencies Volunteers strive to achieve both in PST and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence Volunteers build by living in, and respectfully integrating into, the Eastern Caribbean community and culture. Trainees are prepared for this through a “homestay” experience, which allows trainees to live with host families during pre-service training. Integration into the community also fosters language learning, cross-cultural acceptance, and trust, which are the foundation for supporting a safe and healthy two-year stay.

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

## Qualifying for Service

The pre-service training experience provides an opportunity for the Peace Corps to assess a trainee’s competence and also for trainees to re-evaluate their commitment to serve for two years in the Eastern Caribbean. Mastering Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean’s competencies begins during PST but may continue throughout a Volunteer’s service. A trainee must show adequate progress toward achieving the competencies in order to become a Volunteer.

Eastern Caribbean’s competencies include the following:

1. Personal Safety and Security Competence

2. Personal Health Competence
3. Technical Competence in Teaching Literacy Skills
4. Community Entry/Integration Competence

Evaluation of your performance is a continual process throughout service. **Volunteers are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for personal conduct and professional performance.** Successful completion of pre-service training is characterized by achievement of a set of learning objectives related to the core competencies. Failure to meet any of the selection standards by the end of training may be grounds for disqualification from Peace Corps service.

Progress in one's own learning is a dialogue between you and the training staff. All of the training staff—including the training manager and the language, technical, medical, safety and security, and cross-cultural trainers—will work with you toward helping you achieve the highest possible competencies and will provide you with feedback throughout training. After reviewing and observing your performance, the country director is responsible for making the final decision on whether you are qualified to serve as a Volunteer in the host country.

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

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

### **Ongoing Learning**

You are expected to improve your knowledge and skills in the areas of technical, language, cross-cultural, diversity, health, and safety throughout your service as a Volunteer. Training staff provide learning objectives during the 27-month continuum to help guide Volunteers throughout service. The manner in which you do this may be formal, through tutoring or workshops organized by the host government or in-country staff, or informally, through conversations and reading. The Peace Corps will also provide in-service training opportunities, which includes a midservice training, specialized technical workshops, and a close-of-service workshop to help you evaluate your service and prepare for your return to the United States.

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the Peace Corps training system is that learning events are competency-based, designed, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the Peace Corps staff and Volunteers.

### **Technical Training**

Technical training will prepare you to work in the Eastern Caribbean 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, Eastern Caribbean experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the school and community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general educational environment in the Eastern Caribbean and strategies for working within such a framework, and teaching primary literacy. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with Eastern Caribbean Ministry of Education staff 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. If applicable, the Eastern Caribbean language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people.

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 an Eastern Caribbean host family. You will live with one family during the St. Lucia phase, and then with a second family during your island of service phase. Please note that for Volunteers assigned to St. Lucia, you may have a second family during the second phase of PST. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in the Eastern Caribbean. 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 the Eastern Caribbean. Nutrition, mental health, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) 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 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.*
- *Midservice conference (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.*
- *Close-of-service conference: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.*

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

## YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN

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 the Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the medical office or other designated facility for scheduled immunizations, and that you let your medical officer know immediately of significant illness and injuries. Many diseases that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable, but only if proper care and precautions are taken. Food and water can pose a challenge to healthy living in the Eastern Caribbean. The most common diseases affecting the Volunteers include skin infections, food poisoning, environmental allergies, conjunctivitis (or pink eye), heat rash, swimmer's ear, viral infections, diarrhea, urinary tract infections, STIs, and dengue fever. Your medical officer will provide information on preventative care during pre-service training. Other diseases prevalent in the Eastern Caribbean include STIs (especially HIV/AIDS), alcohol and drug abuse, diabetes, and hypertension.

### 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 the Eastern Caribbean, 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 section.

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

### Maintaining Your Health

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

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

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

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

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

### **Women's Health Information**

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 the Eastern Caribbean 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)
- 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 the Eastern Caribbean. 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. 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 in Depth**

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

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

- Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria
- Peace Corps provides you with 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

### **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 the Eastern Caribbean there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the U.S.
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in the Eastern Caribbean, 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 the Eastern Caribbean learn to do the following:

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

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime occurs in the Eastern Caribbean. 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.

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 the Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean 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 file a complaint. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to file a complaint, 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 the Eastern Caribbean

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

Please take the time to review this important information.

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

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

The Eastern Caribbean is a relatively peaceful region with warm and hospitable people. However, while most persons who work and visit here do not experience threats to their safety, it must be highlighted that over the last two to three years there has been a marked increase in the number of incidents of crime on the islands, including homicides, assaults, burglaries, and gang violence. In addition, certain areas such as the inner city areas have become increasingly dangerous due to gang activity. Therefore, Volunteers should take all safety precautions to minimize risks. For example, not traveling or walking alone at night, securely locking all doors and windows when away from home and at night, keeping valuables out of sight, and, perhaps most important, developing good relations with neighbors and community members.

The main crimes against Volunteers in the Eastern Caribbean have been petty theft and burglary. Stolen items include money, cameras, laptops, iPods, and other electronic devices. Peace Corps staff, homestay families, and community partners will guide you on safe areas and practices. Listen to and follow the advice of trusted host country nationals while being alert and aware at all times.

## Volunteer Safety Support in Eastern Caribbean

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. Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean. 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/Eastern Caribbean'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 the Eastern Caribbean 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 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.

Diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In the Eastern Caribbean, 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 the Eastern Caribbean.

Outside of the Eastern Caribbean capitals, 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 the Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean, 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 The Eastern Caribbean**

The Peace Corps staff in the Eastern Caribbean 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. The Peace Corps looks 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**

Dealing with the behavior of some men in the Eastern Caribbean can be challenging to an American woman of any age. There are no laws in the Eastern Caribbean against sexual harassment, so men are accustomed to making all types of remarks when a woman passes by. These remarks may vary from a simple "psst!" to "Looking good, baby!" to more sexually explicit solicitations. Even the local women whom they see every day are not spared this verbal harassment, but they may be better prepared to cope with it.

**Volunteer Comments:**

*“So you are walking down the street minding your own business when you hear ‘Pssst, pssst!’ You wonder, what is that? Where did it come from? Was it intended for me? You look around and see a man, older or younger, good-looking or not. He is blowing you kisses and saying, ‘I like to see you.’ You look at him in a variety of ways—disgusted, annoyed, or bothered. But any verbal reaction or recognition may trigger an extended response. So you decide to ignore him and walk on. This is just one of the many scenarios a woman may encounter while walking down the street, and it will happen more than once a day.”*

*“As a female Volunteer, there are things that I had to get used to. The men here yell out to women, especially American women. Ignoring them, I have found, is the best way to handle it. After a while you won’t even notice it.”*

*“As a woman in the Eastern Caribbean, you will have to deal with male harassment. There is no way of getting away from it. The harassment can be in the form of catcalls, ‘pssting,’ and the list goes on. Sometimes it will be that simple. At other times, a man may be more direct. He may sit next to you to talk, which may just mean he wants to be your friend. Anyhow, it is important to mentally prepare yourself for this type of behavior. If you don’t, then you’ll find yourself getting very angry all the time. It is also important to decide how you will deal with these situations. Will you ignore the cat-calling, or will you be direct and acknowledge men before the calling begins? The latter is a good tactic, as it most usually throws them for a loop. Your way of dealing with this situation depends upon your personality. With time, you can and will get used to this behavior, and the adjustment will be made.”*

**Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color**

Volunteers of color face unique challenges in the Eastern Caribbean. An African-American Volunteer may pass for a local in tourist areas, but be viewed primarily as an American by many West Indians. The key is to come without preconceptions or expectations of immediate acceptance. Other minority groups may be called by names that are stereotypical and not very flattering. Also, for many Caucasian Volunteers, this will be the first time they are in the minority. The challenge is to create your own identity outside the stereotype. This is usually easier to do in your own community than in areas where you are not known.

**Volunteer Comments:**

*“When I walk down the street, I am called ‘Chinese’ or ‘Bruce Lee’ (even though I am a woman) or ‘Chiny.’ Not a day goes by that this does not happen. I believe this occurs out of pure lack of knowledge. This can become frustrating, but I find that when I tell people I am not Chinese but from a Native American tribe, they become interested to learn more about me. Then comes a cultural exchange that is all part of the Peace Corps.”*

*“I remember at the beginning of my service, I felt incredibly overwhelmed as I approached schools full of kids whispering ‘Chiny,’ speaking their own version of Chinese (‘ching ching chong’), or making karate noises (‘hiyaaaah!’). Some days you are more patient than others, and you really do learn to pick your battles. Ignoring works for some people and not for others. Those who want attention will continue yelling the comments after you even as you walk past them. Generally, if I am in my own community, I make it a point to stop and explain who I am. I refuse to feel uncomfortable in my own community. I find humor helps, and most of the time it is just kids or men who want attention. The fact that you stop and give them attention makes them a little more understanding and they almost always approach me differently and more respectfully the next time.”*

*“Then there are others who are not doing it for attention, but just to make a joke and get a laugh out of their friends at your expense. I find these to be the most frustrating situations, because I know they have no interest in knowing who I am or I have no interest in knowing who they are. Cars will pass by sometimes, slow down to make a comment while I’m walking on the road, and then drive off too fast for me to even respond. I’m left feeling helpless. Or, a couple of people will be nearby and make comments loudly enough for you to hear (‘ching chong wong’), but not directly speak to you. I feel while it is part of the culture to joke and laugh, these comments are hurtful to me because I feel completely misunderstood.”*

### **Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers**

Senior Volunteers usually fare well in the Eastern Caribbean. They may not become victims of some of the harassment that younger Volunteers face, but the same safety issues exist, especially when they are viewed as tourists. Sometimes, seniors command a high level of respect from community members, especially in smaller communities. At other times, they are questioned as to why they are there.

#### **Volunteer Comments:**

*“When young Volunteers ask if you want to turtle watch, climb a mountain, or go to the woods for a weekend camp, feel free to say no, and they will understand. I have found that a quiet evening enjoying a local dinner is a better way for me to relax. However, go with a local friend or another Volunteer. I think that I am not treated any better or worse than any other Volunteer. Being an older Volunteer is a joyous experience, so come and enjoy what may be the best two years of your life.”*

*“It can be frustrating for an older Volunteer. Living with a host family, not being able to drive, and having so many restrictions takes time to get used to. I do not think I had considered all that before I joined, but I do see that Peace Corps is trying to adapt to having more and more older Volunteers coming in, so changes are occurring.”*

*“It was different once I arrived on my island. The adjustment period rears its ugly head. Each of us copes with the stress of adjusting according to our own strengths and weaknesses. The ages of the Volunteers assigned to my island fell into the low 20s for most, to four women from 45–60 years old. We all coped differently. It was a lonely time. I was forced to mine deep inner resources that I didn’t know I had. In conversations with my fellow Volunteers, I found out that they, too, went through the same process. Age has very little to do with it. Now that the stress has eased, I find I have made lots of friends of all ages, some within and some outside the Peace Corps community. Strengthening these relationships is what the Peace Corps experience is all about.”*

### **Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers**

#### **For LGBTQ Volunteers:**

Given the Eastern Caribbean’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized; legislation is in place in many Caribbean countries that may be used against those found to be engaging in sexual acts with a person of the same sex. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that the Eastern Caribbean is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer.

Many Caribbean people are intolerant of persons with different sexual orientations. Gay and lesbian Volunteers will have a hard time if they are open about their sexual orientation. Homosexuals can become subjects of continued harassment and violence. Some West Indians have religious objections to gays and lesbians and may shun or mock those who engage what they consider to be abnormal practices. Volunteers who wish to be openly gay in their communities should discuss possible implications of this with staff and other gay Volunteers before doing so. Your safety and effectiveness in your community could be jeopardized if you decide to be out.

More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at [lgbrpcv.org](http://lgbrpcv.org). Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at [spectrum@peacecorps.gov](mailto:spectrum@peacecorps.gov).

### **For Ally Volunteers:**

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

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

### **Volunteer Comments:**

*"It is quite an experience to be out visiting friends and family at home in the United States and then, upon returning to the Eastern Caribbean, having to go back into the closet. I expected the old-fashioned morality among the local people, but imagine my surprise when I found that I was the only homosexual among 50 or so trainees. Over time, I have fostered close friendships with fellow Volunteers on my island. This has provided me with the opportunity to finally have people with whom I can vent my frustrations. I have also made friends with local people, but such friendships are always tricky. I know, without a doubt, that if I were ever to reveal who I really am, I would surely be ostracized by them and the community at large. I work in the schools with children, and I must always be super-careful never to reveal any hint of my 'abnormality.' Despite the adversities of my assignment, I am glad I came here. I enjoy working and living in the Caribbean. There are the daily ups and downs, but I find the positives most often outweigh the negatives."*

*"I realized that compromises would have to occur, but I do not think I understood to what extent. Peace Corps staff has tried to establish support systems, but I realize that it is a very personal issue."*

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

People in the Eastern Caribbean are mostly devout Christians and take religion very seriously. They go to church, pray, read the Bible, and generally engage in a variety of religious activities. Many American evangelists travel to the Caribbean to hold crusades and are well-received. It is often expected that people coming to live and work in the Eastern Caribbean will be active Christians. Volunteers of Jewish, Muslim, and other faiths may be questioned about their religious beliefs and perhaps be subjected to discrimination.

### **Volunteer Comments:**

*"There is religion in every school, at meetings, even, at times, on the buses when you ride home in the evening. This can make you feel uncomfortable when you don't believe in God or when your religion is one that does not exist on the island. Remember flexibility, patience, and tolerance."*

*“An avowed atheist, I eschewed any and all religious activities at home in the States. Yet, suddenly, in response to a nation in which Christianity informs every aspect of daily life, my Jewish heritage and upbringing have become a significant part of what I define as ‘home’—where I come from. And at the same time, as this new understanding of home began to open up to me, my host family and neighbors traded anti-Semitic comments, mimicking the sounds of the language that belongs to my family. The people who were supposed to cushion my transition into West Indian culture were instead (albeit unknowingly) arousing my anger and frustration at what I perceived as a lack of courtesy and sensitivity.”*

### **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 the Eastern Caribbean without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean 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 the Eastern Caribbean, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In the Eastern Caribbean, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against you. Very little of the infrastructure is available to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

### **Possible Issues for Married Volunteers**

Married couples serving in the Eastern Caribbean generally have very positive Volunteer experiences. They support each other in integrating into the community, in evaluating progress in their assignments, and in putting their challenges and frustrations in perspective.

Couples live together throughout their service and can opt to live apart or together during pre-service training. In addition to their individual projects, couples usually can find opportunities for collaborative work as well. However, given the small communities in the Eastern Caribbean, some couples may find the continuous presence of a spouse leaves each with little privacy.

Married Volunteers may not want to participate in the same kinds of activities in which their single peers are involved, and can find that they are left out of the social “loop.”

The female partner may be subjected to the same sexual harassment as a single female Volunteer. Generally, most local men will refrain from such behavior when it is established that the Volunteer is married.

### **Volunteer Comments:**

*“After 22 years of marriage, the most challenging aspect of our experience has been learning to live and work together 24 hours a day. Being married has its advantages: You have a built-in support system, a person to share the duties, a sounding board for your frustrations, a security blanket, and a friend to share your experiences.”*

*“Our primary assignments, health and community development, allow us to work independently, and this gives us some welcome separation, although we do partner for many of our additional activities. For example, together we conduct a parenting class for adults and an environmental club for young children.”*

*“Serving in the Peace Corps is an amazing experience, and sharing that with someone has been tremendously rewarding. We applied for the Peace Corps while engaged, and left for the Eastern Caribbean five months*

*after we married. Together, we set out on an adventure, which allowed us the opportunity to grow, learn, and understand a new culture, new people, new environment, and, ultimately, more about ourselves and each other. Although we come from different fields (special education and small business development), we work more closely together than ever imagined because of the community development approach to our service we have adopted.”*

*“Our days are now filled with schoolchildren, neighbors, friends, community development projects, lessons, meetings, swimming, laughing, sweating, and loving life. Our town on the island of St. Vincent is a part of our lives that we will forever carry with us. It is something that we will share and treasure for the rest of our lives. That is one of the greatest benefits of serving in the Peace Corps as a married person: There is someone with you, experiencing everything you experience, sharing everything you do, and who will never let you forget your time in the Peace Corps once you return home.”*

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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

### **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to the Eastern Caribbean**

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

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their overseas assignments. Do not pack flammable materials or liquids such as lighter fluid, cleaning solvents, hair spray, or aerosol containers. This is an important safety precaution.

### **What is the electric current in the Eastern Caribbean?**

It is 220 volts, although some of the newer homes have both 220- and 110-volt outlets. If you have items that operate on 110 volts only in a 220-volt house, then you must use a step-down converter. The islands experience power surges and occasional power cuts, so bring along a good surge protector. The surge protector is especially important if you are bringing a laptop.

### **How much money should I bring?**

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

### **When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

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

**Will my belongings be covered by insurance?**

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave. If you wish, you may contact your own insurance company; additionally, insurance application forms will be provided, and we encourage you to consider them carefully. Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

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

Volunteers in the Eastern Caribbean do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

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

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

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

Peace Corps trainees will be assigned to individual sites approximately two weeks after they have started 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 supervisors and counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within 30 minutes to one hour from another Volunteer. From the capital, some sites require a one- to two-hour bus ride.

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

The Peace Corps' Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. During normal business hours, the number for the Counseling and Outreach Unit is 855.855.1961, then select option 2, ext. 1470; or directly at 202.692.1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the COU 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 855.855.1961.

**Can I call home from the Eastern Caribbean?**

It is very easy to call to and from the Eastern Caribbean. Connections for the most part are good. Most PCVs (if not all) buy cellphones during their training and can receive incoming calls with no charge to their minutes. Calls to the States are expensive, costing around \$2 per minute. Many Volunteers make calls to the U.S. through programs like Skype or magicJack, which can be free.

**Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

You may bring your cellphone as long as it is compatible with the Eastern Caribbean system. This means it must be either GSM or TDMA. It may be easier to buy the phone and service together in-country once you are assigned to an island in the Eastern Caribbean. You are encouraged to purchase a cellphone plan that services your island of assignment. On a number of islands, all the Volunteers are on the same calling plan, making intra-Volunteer calls free on that network. Please note that if you bring your own cellphone, you still may have to pay up to US\$75 or more to get it unlocked so you can use it in the Eastern Caribbean. If possible, bring it unlocked from the States.

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

The Eastern Caribbean is modernized and computer technology is common. Each Peace Corps office is equipped with a computer for use by Volunteers, which offers Internet access. If you currently use email, be sure to bring along all important addresses with you. Internet and email access may be difficult during training. Internet access is available at some homes and is fairly inexpensive on some islands.

If you decide to bring your own computer, the Peace Corps recommends you insure it. Volunteers sometimes find it helpful to have a computer for work.

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM EASTERN CARIBBEAN VOLUNTEERS

Dear future Volunteer,

Congratulations on your acceptance to Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean! Welcome to the family of PC/EC Volunteers. I hope you enjoy it to the fullest and have a positive experience preparing for your service.

You may be taking time now tying up loose ends and getting ready for your two years in the Eastern Caribbean. Peace Corps has told you already the importance of being flexible and coming into your service with no expectations. This theoretical advice may be hard to put into practice totally, but is quite important.

I have to say that upon coming to Grenada, the expectations I had of my Peace Corps experience were vastly different than the reality of life here. Everything in my environment was more luxurious than I ever imagined I was signing up for, including my living space, the food available, the nice clothes locals wear, and the beaches. Even the fact that English was being spoken was something I did not expect. At first, I was a little disappointed that life seemed easier and more Westernized than I wanted. But, after going deeper, the subtleties of Grenadian culture, challenges of being a Volunteer, and the richness of life became more apparent.

Both the challenges and rewards I expected from my Peace Corps service have been far exceeded in the last two years. It took persistence and consistency to gain the trust of locals, and the fruits of the relationships are what have made work life successful and social life meaningful.

That being said, my advice to you for now is this:

- Know your boundaries. Be assertive.
- Be open; stay positive.
- Bring nice work clothes! People in the EC look very professional.
- Take your time. There are many layers to people and culture in the EC, and it takes time to see past the first layers. Your patience will pay off in work and in relationships you develop.
- Build upon what Peace Corps Volunteers have done before you (even if it is just reputation) and build for Volunteers who will come after you.

Congratulations again! I hope your experience affords you all that you are hoping for and more!

Best regards,

Stephanie Rouch

Grenada

Dear EC PCV,

Congratulations on officially completing the application portion of your Peace Corps experience! It is a long and tough road, but knowing that your future travels through the route of service provides well-deserved relief.

As you begin to contemplate the reality of service in the Eastern Caribbean you will find yourself coming up with more questions than answers. Or perhaps you are the kind of person that likes to jump right in, ready for all of the surprises? Whilst preparing for my Peace Corps adventure, I most certainly fell into the first category. I wanted to know everything and anything about the Eastern Caribbean that would provide me with any inclination about what to expect when I arrived.

Over the last year and half I have developed a small appreciation for this brand of uncertainty: Every day has the potential to expunge any expectations. That is the beauty of life as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Each day provides me with the opportunity to become a part of something so uniquely foreign that I have found myself completely enthralled by the Caribbean life.

My words of wisdom for packing: good shoes that are ready to take you on the journey of your life and comfortable airy clothes that are easy to hand wash (jersey knits and jeans get very heavy). It is a daunting task to prepare for the unknown, but the most important thing is to stay true to yourself. Pack with your hobbies in mind. It may seem like a waste of space to pack the football or yoga mat, but those things are invaluable when it comes to integration and de-stressing.

Best of luck! I know you are going to do great things.

Shruti Patel

Grenada

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Future Eastern Caribbean Volunteers,

I wanted to let you know how excited I am for you! You did it! All of the hard work you put into your application has paid off, and you have officially been invited to serve in the Peace Corps. As you embark on this journey of a lifetime you will be exposed to many new experiences that will help you grow into a stronger person.

Some of the best advice I can offer is to have an open mind and a positive attitude. Although you will face many challenges along the way, being flexible with your job, with the people with whom you interact, and even sometimes with running water and electricity, will serve you well. Finding joy in the small victories you achieve will give you great confidence and perseverance to succeed in all that you do.

Also try not to put too much pressure on yourself by constantly planning for the future. I know that a lot of us are always thinking about that "next step" in life (whether it be graduate school or finding a job back in the U.S.), but be sure to take time to live in the moment and truly enjoy your experience. As a Peace Corps Volunteer you are in an extremely unique situation. You are able to live with and learn from many people of a different culture. So definitely take advantage of your well-deserved opportunity.

Again congratulations on your acceptance into the Peace Corps/Eastern Caribbean, and I wish you all the best in your service.

Denver Sicay

Dominica

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Welcome to the Eastern Caribbean! It is beautiful, peaceful, and very welcoming.

We are a retired couple serving in Grenada. We have been in the Caribbean for about six months, and have not once regretted our decision to be here. Initially it was physically challenging for us with different terrain and new environment, but with Peace Corps' support we are well adjusted. Looking back, we are amazed at how our bodies have adjusted and acclimated to the new environment.

In the U.S.A., we were working as volunteers for Ronald McDonald and Literacy Volunteers of America. But we wanted to go abroad and experience a new way of life and serve globally. This idea was promoted by our daughter, who is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer. Now that we are here in Grenada our desires are fulfilled. Here we live among local people. We are experiencing a different culture, dialect, food, and environment. We wanted to live simply. We are experiencing such life here. It gives us time to appreciate what we have in our country. The weather is always hot here, the terrain is difficult, but it gives us a chance to adjust our life to these difficulties. We swim here, we walk up and down; all these activities provide us a chance to exercise and stay in shape after all. The slow pace of life is a change from what we were used to.

We miss our friends and family but we have means to contact them. The teaching assignment that Miqdad has is wonderful. He has gained confidence, knowledge, and experience in teaching. He has expressed his desire to teach as a volunteer once we go back to U.S.A.

You will probably hear it often, but folks in the Caribbean really dress up, so pack versatile clothing that can be mixed and matched, keeping in mind that it gets hot here, so lightweight, light colors (deterrent for mosquitos) and permanent press will work. Good walking shoes and sandals are a must. Also a positive attitude will go a long way, so welcome to this lifelong experience.

Sincerely,

Shagufta and Miqdad Husen

Grenada

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Dear soon-to-be Peace Corps Volunteer,

It is a true pleasure to offer my congratulations and welcome you to the Eastern Caribbean! You have likely been working toward this point for quite some time, and let me reassure you that it was worth the effort and the wait. Prepare to embark on a journey unlike any you have experienced thus far: one of learning, opportunity, and adventure. You will soon begin months of rigorous training and eventually receive your community placement and begin your assignment. You will make new friends and even family, and find yourself growing in ways you never anticipated.

The Peace Corps experience offers unparalleled immersion into the realities of other countries, peoples, and cultures. In the Eastern Caribbean this includes everything from adapting to the year-round heat to taking the time to get to know your community and its customs, norms, and way of life. In the end, however, it all boils down to the people. You have the once-in-a-lifetime chance to become intimately familiar with another culture, while simultaneously sharing your own: an exchange of ideas and values that works to the benefit of everyone involved. Do not enter your Peace Corps service with illusions about “helping people,” for becoming a member of your community and being an effective Volunteer is far more complex than that. A good way to frame your service can be summed up by Lilla Watson, who said, “If you’ve come here to help me, you’re wasting your time. But if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

So go ahead, embrace the challenge. Prepare yourself to commit your heart and soul to another place and another way of doing things, a different way of living, and of looking at the world. Despite challenges that will inevitably come along the way, the rewards will counter and exceed them tenfold. The Eastern Caribbean has warm, generous people, a rich and complicated culture and history, and exquisite natural beauty. The experience, however, is what you make of it. Get out into your community and get to know those who live in it, take a few risks and challenge what you accept to be “normal.” I am sure that if you do, you will fall in love with your new country and consider it a second home, as I now do St. Lucia.

Best of luck as you enter into the most exciting and memorable 27 months of your life.

Patrick Zimet

St. Lucia

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Dear Invited Eastern Caribbean Peace Corps Volunteer,

Let me firstly say, congratulations! You have *finally* made it past the extensive, tiresome, trying, and what may have been a (extremely) frustrating Peace Corps application process! Welcome to the Eastern Caribbean family and team of Volunteers.

When I received my welcome materials, I remember feeling a lot of disbelief, shock, and overwhelming excitement. I’m sure you have some adjectives of your own to add to that list. After you (hopefully) accept your invitation, things may get stressful. You have to say a temporary goodbye to the life you have known and prepare for an entirely different one. The best advice I can give you upon arriving in the Eastern Caribbean is to trust that everything is going to be fine and that when the time is right, you will know everything you need

to know. This was a hard pill for me to swallow when I was where you are now, as I had a million questions. It was a difficult time because I never felt like I had all the answers before leaving the States.

That is when I learned my first, and quite possibly the most important, lesson of my Peace Corps experience thus far: When the time is right, I will know everything I need to know. I learned to accept that even though you want to know everything as soon as you land, you won't. And it is OK. There is a process to acclimatizing and preparing for what is to come, so trust the process and trust that you will eventually be fully prepared: It will not happen in a day. Even after your three or so months of pre-service training, you will not be fully prepared. Once you have learned to accept this, everything gets far easier to handle.

My next piece of advice to you sounds very simple and a tad cliché, but it cannot be emphasized enough: View everything with an open mind and do not make judgments—good or bad—so quickly on certain things you observe. I remember thinking, as I was flying over turquoise waters and tiny islands with white sandy beaches, Score! I'm headed to paradise! When you arrive here, everything seems moderately developed, not the “mud hut” experience you were preparing yourself for. You may even wonder why Peace Corps is here. In moments like these, keep an *open mind*. You will soon learn why you were sent here: Do not mistake surface impressions. If you have friends who do the Peace Corps in other countries, you may hear them refer to our post as the “Beach Corps.” Easy for them to say, right? Please know that life is not all beach here. You will learn that quickly when you settle down in your village.

We are so excited to receive you here! The next two years are going to be the most memorable and rewarding experience, if you let it. My time in St. Lucia has been a roller coaster through and through, and I love it. The lessons I've learned about the Eastern Caribbean, development work, and about myself and my limits have been beyond rewarding. I've never been so challenged, and working through the challenge has been so fulfilling. So I leave you with my final piece of advice: Embrace the challenge. Everything is a lesson learned at the end of the day. I wish you the best of luck with the transition out of the States, and see you here soon!

Maria Sebastian

St. Lucia

## **PACKING LIST**

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in the Eastern Caribbean 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 100-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in the Eastern Caribbean.

### **General Clothing**

People in the Eastern Caribbean dress more on the formal side for work and social occasions. Women wear suits and heels to work in offices and Volunteers who do not bring proper work clothes may feel under-dressed when compared to their colleagues. Teachers, both men and women alike, dress in neat, professional-looking clothing at school.

#### **For Men**

- Summer suit or dress shirt and tie
- Short-sleeved, button-down shirts
- Cotton dress shirts (one or two)
- Long-sleeved shirt (one or two)
- Cotton polo-type shirts
- Light cotton sweater for air-conditioned venues (or a long-sleeved shirt can be used)
- Washable dress slacks/khakis
- Durable pants/shorts for outdoors
- Jeans—no patches or holes (one or two pairs)
- Cotton underwear and socks
- T-shirts
- Sports equipment and clothing
- Sneakers
- Durable walking shoes
- Professional black/brown shoes
- Sandals
- Swimwear

#### **For Women**

- Cotton and poly-cotton lightweight dresses (no strapless, spaghetti strap, tank-top style)
- A fancier dress with sleeves (or a shawl to cover shoulders)
- Skirts, slacks, and blouses to mix and match
- Cotton blouses or dress shirts
- Longer walking shorts

- Casual pants
- Jean skirt
- Jeans—no patches or holes (one or two pairs)
- Cotton underwear, bras, and socks (several)
- Sandals (e.g., Tevas)
- Sports equipment and clothing
- Sneakers
- Durable walking shoes
- Sandals
- T-shirts/polo shirts
- Swimwear
- Light cotton sweater (for air-conditioned venues)
- Low-heeled, closed-toe dress shoes – or flats (two pairs)

### **Photos and Overnight Bag**

Bring four passport-size photos (color or black-and-white) with you for local permits, visas for travel, etc.

You will spend your first week in St. Lucia in a training center. The Peace Corps recommends you pack an overnight bag with a change of clothes for your first night and carry it with you on the plane.

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

Unless you must use particular brands, there is no need to bring a two-year supply of any toiletries. Everything you need is probably available on the islands. Bring contact lens solution (but remember the Peace Corps strongly advises against wearing contact lenses). Women should bring a supply of tampons. There will be bug repellent and sunscreen provided in your Peace Corps-issued medical kit, but if you have a favorite brand or type, please bring it.

### **Miscellaneous**

- One set of sheets (full/queen size)
- Towels
- Travel iron (must work on 220 volts)
- Travel clock or cheap waterproof watch
- Small set of hand tools or Leatherman or Swiss Army Knife
- Flashlight (small)
- Wattage converter/plug adapters
- Digital camera
- Favorite games and playing cards
- Sturdy water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)
- Favorite recipes

- Handkerchiefs or bandannas (if you use them)
- Photos of family and friends
- Day pack or small backpack
- A small number of U.S. postage stamps (for sending letters with friends traveling to the U.S.); consider purchasing the “forever” stamp to avoid having insufficient postage due to price increases
- Books (although each Peace Corps office has a large lending library)
- Favorite CD, DVDs, and iPod
- Large and small plastic storage bags (available on most islands, but more expensive than the U.S.)
- Journals
- Items for leisure time such as sports equipment, camping gear, and art supplies
- Unlocked GSM phone

## 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 Counseling and Outreach Unit at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 855.855.1961, then press 2; or directly at 202.692.1470).
- 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 United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business, or other personal mail, such as outstanding bills.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961, ext. 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

This list of numbers will help connect you with the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters to answer various questions. You can use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the toll-free number and extensions with your family so they can contact you in the event of an emergency.

Peace Corps Headquarters toll-free number: 855.855.1961, Press 1, then ext. # (see below)

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

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff:</b>	<b>Toll-Free Ext:</b>	<b>Direct/Local Number:</b>
Question about an invitation:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Abigail Kardel Desk Officer / easterncaribbeandesk@peacecorps.gov	ext. 2509	202.692.2509
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other matters (including legal clearance):			
	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1845
	Legal Clearance	ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical clearance and forms processing:			
	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
	Dental	ext. 1562	202.692.1562
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.818.8772
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions:			
	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) electronically roughly three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours:			
	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470