

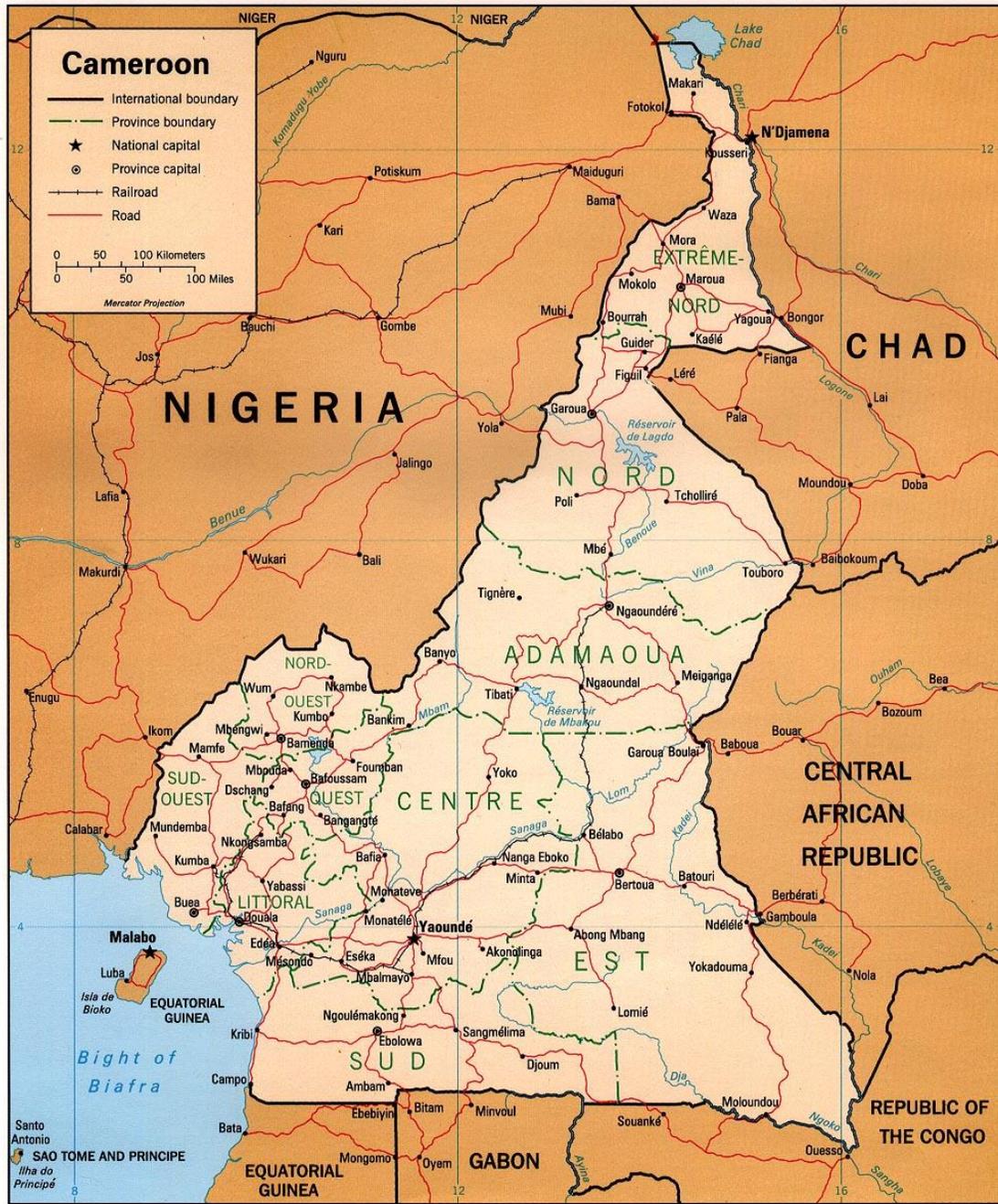
THE PEACE CORPS

WELCOMES YOU TO CAMEROON



**A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS
June 2015**

MAP OF CAMEROON



A WELCOME LETTER

Greetings from Yaounde!

On behalf of our Peace Corps family, I welcome you to Peace Corps/Cameroon. You will join a group of more than 3,500 former Volunteers who have responded to the call to serve here since 1962. Like all Volunteers who served in Cameroon, you will find your service challenging, rewarding, and life-changing. Your time with the Peace Corps will be an immeasurable investment in your professional and personal life.

Cameroon is a wonderful and complex country. It is referred to as “Africa in miniature” due to the variety of ethnic groups, religions, and its geographic diversity. It is also a country in which two of 10 regions have English as their official language, and the other eight have French.

This welcome book offers you information and much to think about with regard to Volunteer service and the commitment you are making. It includes sections on what it means to be a Volunteer, suggestions for what to pack, medical information, a description of the Peace Corps program in Cameroon, and background information on the history, culture, and government of Cameroon.

Before your departure, I ask you to reflect honestly on your motivation and commitment to work in Cameroon, because it will truly be “the toughest job you will ever love.” We ask you to come with an open mind, patience, and willingness to share in the hardships and simple joys of your new community. Serving in the Peace Corps requires us to leave behind much of what we are accustomed to as Americans. This includes the comforts of our standard of living as well as some of our cherished social and political beliefs, civil liberties, and standards of safety—things that we often take for granted.

You are now about to live and work in a developing country where the level of danger is different from the U.S., and recently Cameroon has had more than its share of problems. Be assured that we are committed to support you with the medical, administrative, and programmatic resources that you will need to be safe, healthy, and successful. In turn, we expect you to exercise good judgment and personal responsibility. By joining Peace Corps/Cameroon, you will be carrying on a long and strong tradition of excellence in service that we are well known for here. Use this guide to get oriented to this fascinating country, our expectations of you, and what it will be like to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon!

Mark Orlic
Country Director
RPCV DR Congo (formerly Zaire), 1975–78

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CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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

PEACE CORPS/CAMEROON HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Cameroon

The Peace Corps entered Cameroon in 1962 with 20 Volunteers who served as math and science teachers. Peace Corps/Cameroon's program grew and diversified to include inland fisheries, credit union and cooperatives education, English, community forestry, health and sanitation, and community development. Since then, more than 3,500 Volunteers have served in Cameroon. Currently, there are four robust projects in Cameroon: agribusiness, community health, education, and youth development. The common themes that run through all Peace Corps/Cameroon projects are impact, focus, counterpart involvement, Volunteer competence, and organizational professionalism. Through collaboration and good teamwork, the Peace Corps has made a difference in many aspects of life in Cameroon, one community at a time.

Peace Corps Programming in Cameroon

Peace Corps programs directly respond to development priorities of the Cameroonian government. For example, the Community Health Project was recently redesigned to focus on maternal and child health and HIV/AIDS prevention and mitigation areas in order to assist Cameroon in its achievement of Millennium Development Goals.

Although Volunteers are placed throughout eight regions of Cameroon, not every project is represented in every region. Each project concentrates on a few of the regions to maximize Volunteer impact and effectiveness.

Regardless of program area, all PCVs in Cameroon are involved in HIV/AIDS education. As a Volunteer, you will confront the effects of HIV on a very personal level. Some Volunteers will regularly meet with HIV-positive people and work with individuals living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength so you can continue to be of service to your community.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: CAMEROON AT A GLANCE

History

Since the journey of Hannon the Carthaginian in the fifth century B.C. to Mount Cameroon, which he named the “Chariot of the Gods,” the country’s fortunes have been subject to many fluctuations. In 1472, sailors from Portugal entered the Wouri River estuary and were amazed by the abundance of shrimp; they named it Rio dos Camarões, from which Cameroon got its name.

Portuguese settlers were followed by the Dutch and later by the Germans. The local inhabitants put up a stiff resistance to German penetration. At the beginning of World War I, Allied troops ousted the Germans and, in 1919, the French and the British partitioned the colony. The eastern part, covering 80 percent of the territory, went to the French, and the western part went to the British. Henceforth, each of the two powers made its mark on Cameroon; the French opting for a policy of assimilation and the British adopting indirect rule.

When the winds of nationalism began to blow across Africa after World War II, the two colonies expressed a desire to be reunited. Ahmadou Ahidjo proclaimed the French zone independent on January 1, 1960, and reunification of the colonies took effect in 1961. Cameroon became a united republic in 1972, the Republic of Cameroon in 1983, and it now has a presidential system of government.

The current government encourages development and a free market economy. The number of state-owned industries that have been privatized has increased significantly in the last several years. During the past decade, a fledgling free press has also been established. Cameroon’s infrastructure, though not up to a developed nation’s standards, is better than those of its neighbors.

Government

Cameroon is a republic comprised of 10 regions made up of 58 administrative divisions. The legal system is based on French civil law with a common-law influence. Cameroon has a multiparty system and has had two presidents since independence: Ahmadou Ahidjo (January 1, 1960–November 4, 1982) and Paul Biya (November 6, 1982–present). President Biya was re-elected to a fourth term in 2011.

Cameroon is part of the drive for political reform and democracy sweeping Africa. Over the past decade, the transition to democracy has been marked by intermittent civil unrest and a national debate on the country’s future. Peace Corps staff continually monitors the political situation to keep Volunteers informed.

Economy

Cameroon’s economy grew from 1960-85. In 1986, collapsing world prices for Cameroon’s major export commodities and poor management of state funds led to a shrinking economy and serious money shortages, which in turn led to a substantial increase in crime.

As in many African countries, income disparities are wide and corruption is endemic. The state is still the biggest employer. Privatization efforts underway in Cameroon are making significant improvements in services to the general population.

Agriculture is the mainstay of Cameroon’s economy with 80 percent of the population working in agriculture and accounting for one-third of gross domestic product and half of all export earnings. Cameroon is one of the few net food exporters in Africa. While Cameroon is currently self-sufficient in food production, there is concern that this trend is not sustainable.

In 2006, Cameroon was relieved of over \$300 million in debt after negotiations with the International Monetary Fund .

People and Culture

Cameroon is a crossroads where many of the human and cultural features of sub-Saharan Africa are present. Its population is a mosaic of approximately 300 ethnic groups of Bantu, Sudanese, and Arab origins. The largest ethnic groups are the Bamiléké of the west, the Béti and Bassa of the south, and the Fulbé and Massa of the north.

There are 239 languages spoken in Cameroon, including English, French, and pidgin. Both French and English are official languages. Of the total population of approximately 20 million, about 80 percent live in the French-speaking eastern part of the country and 20 percent live in the formerly British western part. Approximately 50 percent of the population is considered to be animist, 30 percent Christian, and the remainder Muslim. The largest Muslim concentration is in northern Cameroon. Despite its great tribal, linguistic, and religious diversity, Cameroon has made considerable progress toward integration and national unity.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

General Information About Cameroon

State.gov

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

Gpo.gov/libraries/public/

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

lweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html

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

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

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

Data.un.org

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

Wikipedia.org

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

Worldbank.org

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

Data.worldbank.org/country

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

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

RPCV.org

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

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Cameroon

UN.org/News/

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

VOAnews.com

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

Africa Information Center

Features fast facts on the countries in Africa.

<http://allafrica.com/cameroon>

News from Cameroon

<http://www.irinnews.org/country/cm/cameroon>

International development news on Cameroon

Recommended Books

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

Books About Cameroon

1. Ardener, Edwin. "Kingdom on Mount Cameroon: Studies in the History of the Cameroon Coast 1500–1970." New York: Berghahn Books, 1996.
2. Barley, Nigel. "The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes From a Mud Hut." Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2000.
3. Delancey, Mark. "Cameroon: Dependence and Independence." Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1989.
4. Goheen, Miriam. "Men Own the Field, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields." Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
5. Smith, Mary-Ann Tirone. "Lament for a Silver-Eyed Woman." New York: William Morrow, 1987.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. Mail takes a minimum of two to three weeks to arrive and may take up to six weeks. Some mail may simply not arrive, or may arrive with clipped edges because someone has tried to see if any money was inside. The vast majority of letters arrive in decent time. Advise your family and friends to number their letters for tracking purposes and to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes. During pre-service training (your first eight weeks in Cameroon), letters and packages should be sent to

“Your name”
Peace Corps Trainee
Corps de la Paix
B.P. 215
Yaoundé, Cameroon

Once you have finished training and are at your site, letters can continue to be sent to the address above or you may tell family and friends to send mail directly to your new address at your site.

Telephones

Cell phones are popular in Cameroon and can easily be purchased in all major cities for less than \$40. They do not function in all areas of the country, but service is spreading rapidly. Most trainees purchase a cell phone shortly after arrival in Cameroon (cell phones from the United States will not work in Cameroon unless they are GSM phones).

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Internet is widely available throughout Cameroon. However, the connection speed is quite slow and unreliable. Many Volunteers will only have intermittent access to the Internet. At the Peace Corps office in Yaoundé, Volunteers have access to computers with high-speed Internet connections.

Many Volunteers bring laptop computers to Cameroon. If you do, you may spend a lot of time worrying about your equipment in transport and at home (not to mention the hassle of lugging it around), and parts may not be available. Note: Peace Corps/Cameroon cannot provide technical support and will not reimburse you for any needed repairs.

Computers and other high-value items also heighten your exposure to opportunistic theft. Be sure to insure any high-value items as the Peace Corps will not reimburse for loss or theft.

Housing and Site Location

During training, you will live with a Cameroonian family. After training, you are likely to have your own house in the community where you are posted. Volunteers are assigned to sites throughout Cameroon that range in size from large cities to small villages. Your assignment will depend on the project, host country needs, housing availability, and your preferences. Cameroon’s development needs are the first priority in posting Volunteers.

Arrangements for housing are made by the Peace Corps and depend on resources available in the community. You will have to be flexible in your housing expectations. The Peace Corps tries to ensure that Volunteers have lodging that allows for independence and privacy. Your house may have walls made

of concrete or mud bricks and most likely a tin roof. A typical Volunteer house has a sitting room, a bedroom, and a cooking area. Some houses have inside toilets/shower areas, while others have nearby pit latrines. Nearly half of all Volunteers have electricity, but running water is not common: Both electricity and running water are unreliable everywhere in Cameroon. Peace Corps/Cameroon provides a helmet, a mosquito net, and a water filter. Upon your swearing in as a Volunteer, the Peace Corps will give you a modest settling-in allowance to purchase household necessities and furniture.

Some sites are very isolated (over 50 kilometers from the next Volunteer), and travel can be difficult due to the poor quality of roads and infrequent public transportation (50 kilometers can take anywhere from three to eight hours, depending on road conditions). Other posts are short distances from one another and are near paved roads.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Cameroonian francs that is sufficient to live at the level of the local people. The allowance covers food, housing, household supplies, clothing, transportation to and from work, utilities, recreation and entertainment, and incidental expenses. Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to live at a level that is comparable with that of their host country counterparts. The Peace Corps discourages Volunteers from supplementing their living allowance with funds from home.

The local currency is the CFA franc (XAF). Volunteers receive a monthly living allowance of 160,000 CFA to cover their cost of living simply, but adequately, while serving in Cameroon. The living allowance covers the cost of utilities, domestic help, household supplies, clothing, food, work-related transport and supplies, and modest entertainment and recreation expenditures. Housing is taken care of by the Peace Corps with a contribution from the host country. In addition to a living allowance, you will receive \$24 each month as a vacation allowance. If you are requested by the Peace Corps to travel, you will be given additional money for transportation and lodging.

Volunteers will open a bank account that is easily accessible from their site, and the living allowance will be deposited monthly into the account. Although credit cards can be used in large hotels in Yaoundé and Douala, they can rarely be used elsewhere in Cameroon. ATMs that use the Plus network exist in nearly all regional capitals and large towns. Identity theft, however, can be a problem in Cameroon, and an additional reason to use caution when using credit, debit, or ATM cards in the country. For vacation travel outside of Cameroon, a credit card may be useful. Many Volunteers bring extra cash, which can be exchanged for a fee at banks, for emergencies and vacation travel.

Food and Diet

If there is one country on the African continent that can be described as a land of plenty, Cameroon certainly deserves the title. Cameroon is the breadbasket for this region, and local foods such as millet, plantains, beans, cassava, coco yams, sweet potatoes, and okra, together with meats, fish, poultry, and seasonal fruits and vegetables, provide the bulk of the diet.

However, food availability varies significantly by region: in the south and west of the country, a wide range of vegetables and fruits are always available. In the more arid north, variety is far more limited. Meats, fish, and poultry are generally available everywhere. Some of the villages in which Volunteers are posted have a weekly market, and others must depend on a neighboring market for various items. Some canned and imported Western foods and products will be available in towns where you live or in the larger regional capitals, but they are expensive.

Being a vegetarian should not pose a problem. However, the stricter your diet is, the more challenging it will be. Cameroon's climate is generally favorable for vegetable gardening, and many Volunteers

supplement what is available at the market with their own harvest. Spices are among the few items not available in Cameroon, so you may want to bring some with you.

Transportation

Volunteers use trains, buses, bush taxis, motorcycle taxis, bikes, and occasionally planes. Public transportation in Cameroon is relatively reliable. A train runs to the Grand North each day. Bus routes run between Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, Bamenda, and other major towns. Planes however, are often late, have limited routes, and are frequently canceled. Taxis are available and inexpensive in most major towns. Motorcycle taxis are common in the Grand North regions and are becoming more common elsewhere in the country. Finally, minivans or “bush taxis” traverse both paved and unpaved roads, bringing passengers and their belongings (including bunches of bananas, goats, pigs, etc.) to all but the tiniest villages.

Although available, travel is not always easy. Due to a lack of road maintenance and the fact that some major routes have yet to be paved, transportation can be difficult and time-consuming—especially in the rainy season. Since the transport infrastructure is limited, every means is used to its fullest capacity. This can mean squeezing six or more people into a city taxi or bush taxi or sharing seats on the train.

You may have to rely on public transport to travel to major towns to do banking, mail letters, use the Internet, etc. In doing this, you must take an active role in choosing the safest, most reliable transport. This means refusing to enter vehicles that are poorly maintained or driven by irresponsible chauffeurs and waiting for the next car.

Geography and Climate

Cameroon is an elongated, triangular country situated at the juncture of West and Equatorial Africa. It extends from the Gulf of Guinea to Lake Chad and is a land of physical, climatic, and cultural contrasts. Cameroon has been called an “Africa in miniature” because of all the variations—from desert to rain forest to grassland plateau to mountains to ancient, active volcanoes to tropical beaches—in its geography. Dense forest and heavy rainfall cover the south, including the capital of Yaoundé. The western provinces feature a mountain range with steep slopes and a prolonged rainy season. A vast grassland plateau covers the north.

The climate ranges from extremely hot and dry in the north, to cool in the central plateau, to humid and hot in the south.

It is best to bring clothing that will work in all of these regions, as you will not know in advance where you will be posted. Clothing—new, used, and custom-made—is widely available in Cameroon, the latter at very inexpensive prices, so you can have many of your clothes made locally.

Social Activities

Forming relationships with members of your community will be challenging and gratifying. Cameroonians are hospitable and generous, and their extended family structure makes for an open-door policy and a welcoming attitude to visitors. Demonstrating an interest in the local culture will greatly increase the integration process and help you establish credibility as a member of the community. You will find that your acceptance into the community will depend a great deal on your willingness to experience the Cameroonian lifestyle. The most satisfied Volunteers integrate into their communities while maintaining a good sense of who they are. They eat local food, speak the local language, and attend important village ceremonies such as baptisms, funerals, and marriages.

Drinking alcohol is often a part of the social fabric in many regions of Cameroon, which sometimes can create a more aggressive living or working environment. Although Volunteers are encouraged to socialize with Cameroonians and participate in ceremonies and festivities as a means of learning about the culture, it is advisable that drinking in public be limited to special occasions and after work hours. Volunteers need to be aware of the messages they send during their daily interactions in the community.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity and acting like a professional—all at the same time. It is not an easy thing to resolve. You will be working as a representative of a government ministry or a professional organization and, as such, you will be expected to dress and behave accordingly. Professional dress standards are high in Cameroon. Being neat and cleanly dressed is a sign of respect and pride.

A foreigner who wears dirty, unkempt, or old clothes is likely to be considered an affront. Trousers (for men and women in some regions), blouses/shirts, skirts (below the knee), and dresses are appropriate wear for work. If you dress inappropriately (i.e., shorts, halter tops, short skirts, form-fitting or low-cut blouses, dirty or torn clothing) then you may not be accepted by Cameroonians. For women, inappropriate dress and behavior will attract unwanted attention. Cameroonians are not likely to directly comment on your dress, but they are likely to think that you either do not know what is culturally acceptable or do not care.

The Peace Corps expects Volunteers to behave in a way that will foster respect within their community and reflect well on both the Peace Corps and the United States. You will receive an orientation to appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest, and you should be sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of your hosts.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Cameroon Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Cameroon. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

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

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

Rewards and Frustrations

You will certainly experience ups and downs during your time in Cameroon. One week, cultural and language differences will seem exotic, exciting, and inviting; the next week, you may see them as barriers to everything you want to experience and accomplish in Cameroon. You will need serious coping skills—humor, humility, and the ability to forge strong social connections—to help you through the difficult times. You should expect hardship and difficulty to be part of your weekly routine and be aware that the Peace Corps staff will not always be there to help you through every cycle of ups and downs. Particularly during the first year of service, many Volunteers feel very alone in their work because they lack the support one gets from working with people who share a common background. You may feel isolated by language and cultural barriers. Paradoxically, you also may feel that you are never alone, but are always on parade or under scrutiny. Even the few people who find this exhilarating at first eventually find it irritating and burdensome.

It is not an exaggeration to state that every successful Peace Corps project begins by identifying a particular host country national who is competent, reliable, understanding, and dedicated. This can be a long, slow, arduous task requiring many months of frequently frustrated efforts. A deep conviction that you share a common humanity with your host that transcends the cultural differences will be a big help. In the end, these relationships are the ones that will add tremendous meaning to your time here.

While it is possible that you will sail through every stressful situation without encountering any discomfort, that would be unusual. There are times for all Volunteers when the difficult conditions under which they live and work prove upsetting. Having said all that, the rewards of Peace Corps service are immense. The very tangible rewards are the acquisition of language, technical, and cross-cultural skills that improve your ability to make your way anywhere in the world. However, it is the intangible rewards that are most gratifying to Volunteers: the cross-cultural understanding you gain from integration into a community for a long period of time and the deep relationships that come from that. You cannot help leaving the Peace Corps with a broader world view and a deeper understanding of the realities experienced by others around the globe.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

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

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

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

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

Pre-service training lasts from eight to nine weeks, depending on the project, and follows a community-based training methodology. This means you will live in a Cameroonian village or town with a small group of other trainees and periodically come together in a common location for sessions with the members of your training class. While in training, you will conduct individual research and have formal language classes. Although pre-service training can be stressful as you try to learn new skills in a different and often confusing environment, a highly experienced training staff is available to help you.

Technical Training

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

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

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, help you integrate into your community, and can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language

requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Cameroon language instructors usually teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups.

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

Cross-Cultural Training

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

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

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Cameroonian host family. 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 Cameroon. The host family experience provides a unique context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Health Training

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

Safety and Security Training

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

The safety and security curriculum is integrated into major PST components such as language, cross culture and personal health sessions. However, there are pre-designed sessions that will help you acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitude useful to live safely in Cameroon.

Additional Trainings during Volunteer Service

The Peace Corps' training system provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- **In-service training or Reconnect:** 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 training** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference (COS):** Prepares Volunteers for their 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 IN CAMEROON

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

Health Issues in Cameroon

The most common health problems in Cameroon are minor ones that are also found in the United States. These include colds, diarrhea, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, sexually transmitted infections, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Cameroon because certain environmental factors raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illness and injuries.

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 Cameroon during pre-service training.

The most common major health concerns in Cameroon are malaria, amoebic dysentery, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, schistosomiasis, and filariasis. Because malaria is endemic in Cameroon, taking anti-malarial medication is mandatory. You will be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, meningitis A and C, tetanus/diphtheria, typhoid, and rabies. Thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables and boiling your drinking water can prevent amoebic dysentery. You will be tested for schistosomiasis, a parasitic disease, at the end of service.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the Peace Corps health unit for scheduled immunizations and that you let your medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

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 Cameroon, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

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

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Cameroon will consult with the Office of Health Services in Washington, D.C., or a regional medical officer. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Cameroon, 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 Cameroon is to take the following preventive measures:

Malaria. You will be serving in an area where malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, is prevalent. To suppress malaria, you must take an approved anti-malarial drug. You must continue taking prophylaxis throughout your service and for four weeks after you leave a malarial area. Keep in mind that no single or combined malaria prophylactic regimen is 100 percent effective. Avoidance of mosquito bites is imperative! By using bed nets, wearing appropriate clothing, and applying insect repellent to exposed skin, you will greatly reduce your risk of exposure to mosquito bites. Malaria can be effectively treated when prompt medical attention is sought but may be rapidly fatal if left untreated. Unfortunately, Volunteers who do not fully comply with Peace Corps recommendations occasionally contract malaria. You will be administratively separated if you refuse to take malaria prophylaxis.

Rabies. Rabies is present in Cameroon and in most other Peace Corps countries. Any possible exposure to a rabid animal must be reported immediately to the health unit. Rabies exposure can occur through animal bites, scratches from animals’ teeth, and contact with animal saliva. Rabies, if contracted, can be fatal. Peace Corps medical officers will provide all necessary rabies immunizations.

Injectable medications and immunizations. Injectable medications should be avoided unless given at the Peace Corps health unit or at a facility approved by your Peace Corps medical officer. There are risks of contacting HIV, hepatitis C, and other diseases if the equipment is not new and disposable. All immunizations are given at the Peace Corps health unit or at another Peace Corps-designated facility. If you sustain a wound, a local facility might want to give you an immunization against tetanus. You will be fully immunized against tetanus at the start of your service for a period of at least five years, so immunization at an in-country clinic is unnecessary and potentially dangerous (some tetanus immunizations can cause serious allergic reactions). If in doubt about your need for a tetanus booster, contact your medical officer.

HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. HIV is prevalent in Cameroon and increasing. Other STIs, such as herpes, gonorrhea, and syphilis, are also common. Abstinence is the only certain choice for prevention of HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To reduce 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 should not assume that any sexual partner (fellow Volunteer, Cameroonian, or anyone else) has been practicing safe sex in Cameroon; even longer-term relationships in Cameroon require adequate protection and constant vigilance in terms of safe sex. Volunteers are highly encouraged to use condoms throughout Peace Corps service, even after testing and even in a long-term relationship. You will receive more information from your medical officer about this important issue.

Diarrheal illnesses. Diarrhea affects most Volunteers at some time during their service. Most cases are due to amoebas, giardia, or bacteria. These organisms are spread by consumption of contaminated food and water and are therefore preventable. A simple stool test helps the medical officer determine the cause of a case of diarrhea. You will be offered appropriate treatment following guidelines set by the Office of Health Services.

Viral hepatitis. Hepatitis A and B are both endemic in Cameroon. Hepatitis A is highly infectious and spreads through the fecal-oral route. Hepatitis B is transmitted by exposure to blood and bodily fluids, primarily through sexual contact. All Volunteers are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B while in Cameroon.

Dust. Dust is a problem during the dry season in Cameroon. It can produce chronic nasal congestion or watery nasal discharge. It can also lead to difficulty in breathing (wheezing) and watery, itchy eyes. If you have asthma, even if it is inactive, the dust, pollen, and molds in the atmosphere in Cameroon may exacerbate your symptoms. Breathing difficulties caused by allergies to dust or pollen may show up as wheezing or a dry, nonproductive cough during the night or after exercise. Volunteers with no history of asthma have developed wheezing in Cameroon. Allergies developed in-country will probably be resolved when you return to the United States, but it is still necessary to find out if there is an infectious cause for the difficulties and to treat any wheezing before the problem becomes severe.

Tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a highly contagious, chronic bacterial disease that is widespread in Cameroon, and is spread by the sputum particles of individuals with open lung tuberculosis. Although your chances of contracting tuberculosis in Cameroon are small, you will have screening tests for tuberculosis during midservice and close-of-service exams.

Birth control. 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.

Your medical officer will present other appropriate preventive measures. Volunteers are expected to comply with and therapies recommended by the Peace Corps health unit or referral facility.

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

Women's Health Information

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

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

The Peace Corps follows the 2012 U.S. Preventive Services Task Force guidelines for screening PAP smears, which recommend women aged 21–29 receive screening PAPs every three years and women aged 30–65 receive screening PAPs every five years. As such, most Volunteers will not receive a PAP during their service, but can use Peace Corps supplied health insurance after service to have an exam.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| First Aid Handbook | Decongestant |
| Ace bandages | Dental floss |
| Acetaminophen (Tylenol) | Gloves |
| Adhesive tape | Hydrocortisone cream |
| Antacid tablets | Ibuprofen |
| Anti-diarrheal (Imodium) | Insect repellent |
| Antibiotic ointment | Iodine tablets (for water purification) |
| Antifungal cream | Lip balm |
| Antihistamine | Oral rehydration salts |
| Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner | Scissors |
| Band-Aids | Sore throat lozenges |
| Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol) | Sterile eye drops |
| Butterfly closures | Sterile gauze pads |
| Calagel anti-itch gel | Sunscreen |
| Condoms | Thermometer (Temp-a-dots) |
| Cough lozenges | Tweezers |

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Health Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, bring a copy of your immunization record to your pre-departure orientation. If you purchase any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service that are not listed as requirements in your Medical Applicant Portal, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment. Volunteers must be willing to get all required vaccinations unless there is a documented medical contraindication. Failure to accept required vaccination is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure.

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

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs (of the current prescription) with you. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps Office of Health Services strongly

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

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

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

Ensuring the safety and security of Volunteers is Peace Corps' highest priority. Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Volunteers complete their two years of service without a serious safety and security incident. Together, the Peace Corps and Volunteers can reduce risk, but cannot truly eliminate all risk.

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

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

This welcome book contains sections on Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle, Peace Corps Training, Your Health Care, and Safety and Security, all of which include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the training and tools they need to function in the safest way possible and prepare for the unexpected, teaching you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

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

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

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

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Be careful and conscientious about using electronics (phones, cameras, laptops, iPods, etc.) in public or leaving them unattended
- Limit alcohol consumption

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

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

- Vehicle accidents are the single greatest risk to your safety in Cameroon. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to wear seat belts whenever available and to avoid riding in overcrowded public buses or vans. Because of the poor and dangerous conditions of roads in the interior of the country and the speed at which vehicles travel, Peace Corps/Cameroon has established a transportation policy that limits Volunteer travel to Yaoundé and the regional capitals.
- The homes of some Volunteers have been burglarized in the past, and Volunteers will need to take the same precautions they would in the United States. The Peace Corps advises on proper home safety during training, including installation of deadbolt locks and other safety features in Volunteer homes.
- In recent years, street crime has drastically increased in Cameroon, and a number of Volunteers have been victims. By far, the most common incidents are petty thefts and burglary. Many of these incidents have taken place in regional capitals. There has also been an increase in violent crime where weapons are involved (also in urban areas). Carjacking, particularly in Yaoundé and Douala, has also been reported. In rural areas, there is usually less crime; however, in some regions of the country there are incidents of road banditry.
- Volunteers are required to wear a protective helmet whenever riding a two-wheeled motorized vehicle or a bicycle. Failure to comply with this regulation will result in immediate administrative separation from the Peace Corps and you will be sent home. There is no appeal.
- Physical and sexual assault occurs in Peace Corps countries worldwide, just as it does in the United States. You can avoid some of the risk by changing your own behavior. You will receive a thorough briefing on how to minimize this risk in Cameroon. If harassment or assault occurs, the safety and security coordinator, associate Peace Corps directors, and Peace Corps medical officers are available to assist you. It is important that you report any incident(s) to the duty officers (medical or emergency) and receive appropriate care, including care for your emotional well-being. Medications are available to reduce your risk of pregnancy and infection with HIV after sexual contact, so it is important to contact the health unit immediately. The Peace Corps can also advise you about your options for prosecuting an attacker.

- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Cameroon 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 Cameroon will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle. Also, Peace Corps/ Cameroon staff maintain a list of safe taxi drivers whom Volunteers can call for rides in Yaounde. The list is frequently updated and posted at the Yaounde transit house.

Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also support and assist Volunteers who choose to make a formal complaint with local law enforcement. It is very important that a Volunteer reports an incident when it occurs. The reasons for this include obtaining medical care and emotional support, enabling Peace Corps staff to assess the situation to determine if there is an ongoing safety and security concern, protecting peer Volunteers and preserving the right to file a complaint. Should a Volunteer decide later in the process to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not preserved at the time of the incident.

Office of Victim Advocacy

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

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

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

Email: victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov

Crime Data for Cameroon

Crime data and statistics for Cameroon, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/cameroon>. Please take the time to review this important information.

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

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

Volunteer Safety Support in Cameroon

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

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

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

Finally, in order for the Peace Corps to be fully responsive to the needs of Volunteers, it is imperative that Volunteers immediately report any safety and security incidents to the Peace Corps office. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and

appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to current and future Volunteers.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

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

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

Cross-Cultural Considerations

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

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

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

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Gender Role Issues

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

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them.

They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

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

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

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

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Cameroon’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. In Cameroon, same-sex sexual activity is illegal. 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 Cameroon is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and

Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQA Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbrcpv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at spectrum@peacecorps.gov.

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

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

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

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

While there is a large population of Cameroonians with disabilities, care and accommodation for these individuals are carried out informally and within the family or community. There is very little infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples

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

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

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

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

In general, Cameroonians are familiar with most Christian and Muslim traditions but have little familiarity with Judaism, Buddhism, Unitarianism, and other world religions. Cameroon, however, is an ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse country and, as such, is tolerant of different religions. Cameroonians may not always agree with your beliefs, but it is unlikely that they will act negatively toward you because of them.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

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

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

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

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Cameroon?

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

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

What is the electric current in Cameroon?

In Cameroon, all appliances are powered with 220 volts. However, there may be large fluctuations in power, and most appliances should be protected with a voltage regulator. These can be purchased throughout Cameroon.

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 (contact your insurance company). Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, electronics, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and, in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Cameroon 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 Cameroon friends and my host family?

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

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are frequently within a few hours from another Volunteer. Some sites require a day's travel to reach the Peace Corps/Cameroon office.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

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

How easy is it to call home from Cameroon?

It is easy to dial the U.S. from a cell phone and it usually costs about \$0.25 a minute. PCVs with adequate Internet connections may also be able to Skype, but be aware that low bandwidth can make this difficult.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

You can bring a cell phone, but it will need to be a quad-band phone to work in Cameroon. Most phones in the U.S. are tri-band and won't work in Cameroon. You can buy phones in Cameroon very inexpensively (\$20–\$30) and most PCVs buy phones upon arrival. Phones go through rough conditions in Cameroon and are frequently stolen. Consequently, you may want to forego bringing a nice phone.

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

Internet access is widely available in Cameroon, but the connection tends to be slow and unreliable. You may have to travel to have access to email so be prepared to live without it on a daily basis. Like cellphones, computers suffer from the extreme conditions of humidity, heat, and dust. They are also susceptible to theft. However, the price of laptops and net books has decreased dramatically in the past few years, and you will likely find it very useful to have a computer for your work. Peace Corps regional offices often have wireless Internet and, in this situation, you will be happy to have your own computer. You may want to consider personal article insurance in case of theft or loss.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM CAMEROON VOLUNTEERS

Welcome-O! Bienvenue! And congratulations on being invited to Peace Corps/ Cameroon!

All of us here in Cameroon including staff, current Volunteers, your soon-to-be host families, and your future communities are happily anticipating your arrival. While you may be feeling nervous or anxious about this big adventure ahead, I must first of all say, “You done good.” Signing up for the Peace Corps is probably one of the best ideas you’ve ever had. I can tell already, you’re a group of sharp individuals, and you’ve made a decision that, if you’re like me, you’ll never regret!

I’ve been a Health Volunteer in Cameroon for over a year now and love life in my village. Located in the West region of Cameroon, the village is home to the Bamileke tribe, known for their rich cultural traditions and their resourcefulness. But like most of Cameroon, my village is very diverse. Walking down my dirt road, you will find a Muslim Hausa family taking care of the chicken farm of a Christian Francophone man who lives next to an animist Bamileke family, who work in their fields next to an Anglophone couple. This is just an example of the beautifully diverse country you’re stepping into. Cameroon cannot be generalized; each of you will have a completely different experience from one another, but I can tell you that each experience will somehow magically be the right fit for you.

In terms of logistics of my everyday life, I have rather consistent electricity, no running water, a wide selection of fruits and veggies but little meat, beautiful landscapes, and days that are usually always 75 degrees F. I get a lot of use out of these Tevas which are “made for walkin,” my French verbs book to check if anyone actually understood what I just said, and my sense of humor which goes hand in hand with the newly developed thick (and quite tanned) skin. I am the first Volunteer in my village so integration has been key and has been one of my favorite parts of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. My neighbors have truly become my family (after many nights of sitting around the cook fire) and my relationships here with host country nationals continue to deepen, whether it be the trust built with the moto man who takes me from town to my house, my momma next door who is responsible for adding many couscous pounds to my waistline, or my work partner who loves thinking through new projects to benefit the village. Cameroon makes for some great friends.

In other realities of life here, there is one saying I find myself repeating over and over: “Nothing works out as planned, but it always works out!” This has held true not only with travel and daily schedules, but especially with work. Here in my village, I work with all populations, groups of women, men, children at the primary school level, and high school students. I have taught heavily on HIV/AIDS and sexual health with the community’s youth. Among mothers, I instruct on proper hygiene practices and water treatment to reduce easily avoidable illnesses and I combine these lessons with income generating activities. By far, my favorite work has been introducing a program to my community called Men as Partners, which aims to transform gender norms and encourages men to be more involved in their wives and children’s health, as well as being proactive in regards to their own health. It is really about tackling a certain mentality and hoping to see behavior change in the form of a more equitable society. While there have been many failures, i.e., when not a single person shows up to a formation, there have been many successes as well, such as hearing your group of high school boys say they want to fight against gender-based violence in their own community.

Of course you’re probably coming with the noble intentions of helping a community or contributing to development, but don’t for a second discount the impact this experience will have on you! Not only will you be developing new hobbies (with all the wonderful time you have!), making new relationships, disconnecting from the world as you know it, but the amount of personal growth will be forever

immeasurable. Get ready to have the time of your life. Never will you be living more in the moment! Welcome to Cameroon!

Lara Mertens

Congratulations on your invitation to join the Peace Corps Cameroon family!

I'm an agribusiness Volunteer 16 months into my time here, and I'm constantly amazed at all the opportunities that have come up, everything I've achieved and everything that I've failed and learned from, and by the emotional highs and lows that I've grown to understand. Life here has become familiar but never stops being exciting as I navigate cultural norms, meet new people, and dream up new project ideas.

Cameroon is a stunning country; they don't call it Africa in miniature for nothing! I live in the south west region, home to banana plantations, cocoa forests, the tallest mountain in West Africa, beautiful volcanic sand beaches, and Pidgin English. My town is home to 20,000 people and the legislative capital of the subdivision. It's not on a paved road, but it's a bustling hub for cocoa farmers from nearby villages.

As a Peace Corps/ Cameroon Volunteer, you'll spend the first few months in training, where you live with a host family and have sessions on everything from agriculture (focusing mostly on gardening and agriculture) to the economics of marketing farm products, malaria prevention, and security tips, and when it's over you'll move to site and settle into your community. During those first few months at site, you'll work with community members to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the town and start to brainstorm project ideas with potential work partners. The projects should fall within your project plan framework (that is agribusiness). Our work as PCVs is usually self-directed, as we design most of our own projects with host country counterparts according to the indicators of the project plan decided by the Peace Corps.

As an agribusiness Volunteer, I have several ongoing projects. The most effective have been a mushroom cultivation (as an alternative income source during cocoa's off-season), a waste management project designed with the town council, and a school garden and compost pit project. I also enjoy doing secondary projects in the Health sector; a few months ago, health workers at my local hospital and I attended a Peace Corps conference on engaging men in parenting, among other issues, and we were compelled to start a new parents' discussion group every week. At the start of the conference, the facilitator said, "No one knows everything, and no one knows nothing. Everyone has something to contribute." Those words have become something of a mantra to me during my time here. I'm certainly not an expert in all facets of farming or life in Cameroon, but by always working closely alongside others, we can leverage all our strengths and experiences.

I work on many of my projects with an incredibly inspirational man named Nkwelle, who could be anywhere but chose to stay in this village working alongside his neighbors to make the community a better place. He's only one of the scores of inspiring and hardworking people I've come to trust, respect, and—most of all—enjoy the company of.

But not all "work" here always feels like work: I also spend a good amount of my time eating with neighbors, playing soccer with schoolchildren, making small talk with the women who sell me carrots and green beans, drinking soda in town with my hodge podge of friends—tailors, moto-taxi drivers, primary school teachers. It's important that people recognize my role and trust me before I endeavor to work with them, so just being visible and open in the community goes a long way. And as they say in Pidgin

English, “Slow, slow, catch monkey.” It’s often through taking our time with projects that we achieve the best results.

Being a Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon is not always easy, but I believe it is always worth it. I joke that there’s never a dull moment and every day brings new challenges and adventures: trekking five hours to a new village to discuss composting with a women’s group, celebrating my best friend in village’s birthday with a chocolate Bundt cake I made on my stovetop using two large pots, one tucked into the other; planting rows of okra in a schoolyard with 90 grade six students; hosting a one-on-one business consultation with a youth group leader planning fundraisers within his small but vibrant community; dancing with friends old and new while celebrating the International Day of the Woman at the grand stand in town. Sometimes just the mundane becomes spectacular: the first time I made a Cameroonian friend laugh from deep within her belly, turning the soil in a compost pit I started with the blessing of my difficult landlord, waking up to a herd of cows in my front yard. I consider myself lucky to be part of a community I love, working alongside motivated work partners, and navigating the sometimes-tricky cultural norms. And soon you will, too! Good luck with your journey and make sure to live it to the fullest.

All the best,

Anna Nathanson

Dear Incoming Volunteers,

Congratulations on your invitation to Peace Corps/Cameroon! As I’m writing this, I’ve spent about a year and a half thus far in the southwest region of Cameroon. It’s hard to believe how much time has gone by; it’s approaching the end of my service and it feels as if I just got here, yet life here is now my new normal and the friends I’ve made make it seem like I’ve lived here for years. There are always plenty of things to be done once you become a sworn in PCV, whether it’s integrating, socializing, travel, or good ol’ reading a book in your hammock. The Peace Corps is an experience like no other. When else in your life will you be able to live in a community for two years, and truly understand the ins and outs of another culture? The knowledge and experience you will gain will make you highly adaptable to any situation in life. I have learned not only about Cameroonian culture, I have developed a broader worldview, and pushed myself beyond what I thought I was capable of.

Arriving in Cameroon was my first time on African soil: I had no idea what to expect and there was much anticipation. The fear of the unknown and misguided opinions of this incredible continent didn’t stop the excitement I felt to discover what the next two years had in store for me. Upon arriving, our group met some current PCVs who gave me a new perspective on what was to come. The PCVs I met seemed so confident, comfortable, and wise in this very unfamiliar environment I had set foot in. It gave me hope that one day I would be able to carry around that same feeling of confidence. I don’t know at what point I reached that level but it’s a wonderful feeling and Cameroon is now a place I call home.

You also, like I was over one year ago, are about to embark on this journey to Africa. You will go through three months of training and, in that short time alone, learn so much about a new way of life. Life without running water and electricity, life without paved roads and toilets, life with large loving families and hand-sewn dresses, life with delicious new foods and outdoor kitchens, the list goes on. Then you will move to post and be adopted by an entire community.

I live in a village of about 2,000 people in the southwest region of Cameroon. My village is in an Anglophone region, although I speak pidgin to communicate with the majority of people; grammar English is required in the school environment. As an Education Volunteer, I am predominantly working at the local government high school (GHS) teaching biology, chemistry, and computer science. I do, however, have plenty of time to do other side projects within the community and at school. It is important to combine what your community needs with what you are happy doing. I followed my other passion doing agricultural work, which worked out great because the majority of the members in my community engage in subsistence farming, as well as cocoa farming. Currently, I am teaching four days a week and maintaining the school garden with a group of students, as well as implementing a science laboratory. Some other projects I have engaged in include mushroom cultivation trainings and creating a moringa nursery. The work here is very diverse and the possibilities are endless. The great thing about the teaching program is that you have work right away. After the first few months, you'll find it easier to find who you may want to work with on projects and the needs of your community.

Cameroon is an incredibly welcoming and hospitable country. For the most part, people are very pleased that you are there and want to be around you. In my personal experience, people are eager to help their communities despite a cultural expectation of financial "motivation" and a lack of time keeping. Compared to the fast "never stop and smell the roses" pace we have in the U.S., things in Cameroon seem to move slowly. This is just many of the things you may learn to love or continue to get frustrated by. You will have your share of ups and downs, but I've learned these are the things that give a PCV confidence and wisdom. You will learn things you'd never have considered before and see things that will make you laugh, cry, or just down right shock you. I wish you luck and all the best. Enjoy every minute in Cameroon, the good and the bad. Culture shock is an inevitable and common feeling you may have throughout your service, but again giving you wisdom and knowledge that will make you a global citizen ready to tackle anything!

Rachelle Hadley

Dear Peace Corps/Cameroon invitee,

First of all: good call. The whole "signing up for the Peace Corps" thing. I don't think you'll regret it. If you're like me, you grew up with images from National Geographic and stories from family, friends, and neighbors who have traveled, and you knew that someday, just maybe, living abroad would be "your thing." Whether you've already been around the block, tested the water with a little travel here and there, or even if this is your very first venture crossing into foreign territory, I truly believe that from the first day, you'll be glad for the opportunity the Peace Corps provides for you to discover, learn, and serve.

Get ready. And by that, I mean be mentally prepared to never feel fully ready for anything you experience for the next 27 months. But don't worry: There's a freedom in the strangeness of it all, the being away from home, the new foods, the new languages, the new climates, the new cultures, and a point will come when the weirdest feeling will be when a day goes by without a new "first." Your first meal with couscous (no, not the same thing as we have in the States). Your first bush taxi. Your first marriage proposal by a passing moto-taxi driver. Don't worry. If you aren't familiar with these terms, you will be.

A little snapshot of my life. I'm a Youth Development Volunteer posted in a rural community that has been incredibly welcoming and supportive since day one. I'm in the forested part of the east region, where the climate is a little cooler and more humid than the savannah areas just a few dozen kilometers away. My village boasts only a few thousand residents when school's in session, and my largest culture shock so far has been having the high profile of being one of two Americans and one of five "white"

people (though we're not all Caucasian) in my arrondissement (district), in stark contrast with my anonymous, blend-in-to-the-crowd city life back home in Springfield, Missouri.

The culture in this area is heavily Catholic, with a good number of Protestants and Muslims. People are generally very liberal regarding dress, and I've been outnumbered by jeans and tees on some days that I've chosen to wear Cameroonian traditional fabrics. The village has electricity about 40–60 percent of the time, depending on the season. No running water, but the deep pumps provide me with clean, safe water. My diet is heavy in eggs and beans, and I go out of my way to work in the vegetables and fruits. There's no lack of meat, depending on how you feel about eating everything from deer and hare to porcupine, hedgehog, jungle cat, pangolin, monkey, toucan, viper, lizard, and a handful of other animals that we Americans see more often as cartoon animals than as supper.

I work with a couple of host organizations: one is an association of teachers (mostly primary-school principals) that was created to identify and help the most vulnerable children (mostly orphans) in our arrondissement. I work with the teachers to go into schools to teach sexual and reproductive health, good communication skills, and self-esteem to kids aged 11–16. The other association is made of young adults in a neighboring village who decided that they wanted to plant a communal field to sell produce and use the revenue to fund the school fees and materials for the children in their village. I also coordinate a girls' club at the local technical high school.

As you can imagine, work keeps me good and busy, but the pace of life is great. Living in the calm of the countryside helps me stay balanced, and I'm proud to say that much of my free time goes into spending time with my Cameroonian friends in village, having coffee or cooking with my post mate, and the occasional moto-taxi ride into the regional capital, 40 km away, where I can stock up on fresh veggies, dairy products, and manufactured goods that aren't always available in my village. I stay active, whether it's bike riding through the forest and fields, playing soccer or handball with the local health club, or just indulging in a little yoga on my veranda, looking out over the expanse of vegetation that grows behind my house for miles. I've also somehow evolved into quite a diligent housekeeper, thanks to my flexible schedule and the equal diligence of the critters of various shapes and sizes that wander into my territory (though I'm glad to say that nothing dangerous has scuttled in yet!).

Nowhere is perfect—I do get sick of having to explain why I'm not interested in eating monkey or marrying so-and-so's brother—but I am in love with my community, and the good outweighs the bad multifold. Soon, you'll be here to see firsthand, and my best advice is that you shouldn't let the little stuff freak you out. You'll get a few weeks in and already feel proud of how much you've learned, and the process doesn't slow down, but only deepens as you move from training into post.

I genuinely wish you the best as you make your preparations to join the Peace Corps/Cameroon family, which, at over 150 people, is almost as large as the typical Cameroonian family. Almost. Speaking of which, don't forget to bring pictures! Hard-copy pictures from home—places you've lived, people you love, scenery, everything. You'll make friends fast by telling Cameroonians about where you come from, and the photos last a lot longer than a Nature Valley bar, anyway.

Laura Pearson

PACKING LIST

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

General Clothing

- Professional clothes, slacks, button-up shirts, including blouses and skirts for women (business casual)
- Casual clothes for informal and after-work occasions
- Pictures of clothes you might want to have made (clothing patterns or photos from catalogs or magazines)
- Good-quality cotton shirts in dark colors (the dust in the air during the dry season and the sediment in the water year-round quickly discolor light-colored clothing)
- One dressy outfit for ceremonial occasions
- Plenty of good-quality underwear, boxers, socks, and bras
- Sweater
- Rain jacket
- Two more formal outfits (female teachers, especially, should bring several nice-looking dresses they can wear in the classroom until they can have some clothes made in-country)
- Durable jacket (i.e., jean jacket or fleece)
- Shorts
- Bathing suit or swimming trunks
- Hats or baseball caps

Shoes

- One pair of comfortable dress shoes
- One pair of sandals for general use (e.g., Tevas or Chacos) and another pair for work
- One pair of running/athletic shoes
- One good-quality pair of work or hiking boots (especially Agriculture Volunteers)
- Waterproofing lotion for leather boots (if you bring boots)

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Antibacterial wipes or hand sanitizers (useful when traveling)
- Any vitamin supplements or herbal remedies you take other than multivitamins, which may be provided by the Peace Corps
- Items that smell good, like lotions, incense, soaps, and sachets
- A three-month supply of all prescription drugs you are currently taking
- Two pairs of prescription eyeglasses (if you wear them) and repair kit
- Sunglasses
- Hair clips and ties
- Initial supply of toiletries (if you have favorite brands, bring enough to last two years)
- Sanitary pads (the Peace Corps usually supplies tampons, but they may not always be the size you want)
- Hair-cutting scissors
- Makeup and nail polish (hard to find locally and expensive)

Electronics

- iPod or other MP3 player (with speakers)
- External hard drive with music, recent TV shows, or movies
- Digital reader such as a Kindle or Nook
- Rechargeable batteries and battery charger
- Reliable watch (durable, water-resistant, inexpensive)
- Travel alarm clock
- Compact flashlight (e.g., Maglite or Fenix)

Kitchen

- Measuring cups and spoons
- Plastic storage containers and zip-top-style bags of assorted sizes (large containers are good for organizing items such as medicine and clothing)
- Good kitchen knife and knife sharpener (if you're attached to a certain kind or quality)
- Favorite recipe book
- Packaged mixes (sauces, salad dressings, soups, drink mixes such as Crystal Light or Gatorade)
- Favorite spices
- A variety of open-pollinated (recyclable) vegetable seeds, if you like to garden

Miscellaneous

- 12 passport-size photos (make sure to have them in hand when you arrive; Peace Corps/Cameroon will need them the day after you arrive for in-country documents)
- Anything that will make you happy and feel at home (personal touches)
- Map of Africa and/or Cameroon (those available here are expensive)
- Travel-size games, such as Yahtzee, Scrabble, and Uno, as well as playing cards
- Art supplies (paints, brushes, paper, colored pens, and crayons)
- Books (each Peace Corps satellite office has a library, but classics are hard to come by)
- A favorite writing utensil, with replacements or refills
- Stationery and an assortment of greeting cards
- U.S. stamps (returning Volunteers can take mail home for you)
- Addresses of people you may want to write
- Weekend-sized backpack
- Bandannas
- Extra absorbent micro-fiber towel (small and great for traveling)
- Sleeping bag (good for overnight stays at other Volunteers' homes)
- Bicycle shorts and gloves (a helmet, repair tools, and an under-seat bag are provided by the Peace Corps)
- Heavy-duty duct tape (good for everything) Concealable money pouch or belt
- Water bottle (e.g. Nalgene or Sigg)
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman tool (very important to many Volunteers)
- Combination padlocks
- Good-quality portable umbrella
- High-school grammar books and literary anthologies (for English teachers)

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items are relevant to everyone, and the list is not comprehensive.

Family

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

Passport/Travel

- Forward to the Peace Corps travel office all paperwork for the Peace Corps passport and visas.
- Verify that your luggage meets the size and weight limits for international travel.
- Obtain a personal passport if you plan to travel after your service ends. (Your Peace Corps passport will expire three months after you finish service; if you plan to travel longer, you will need a regular passport.)

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

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

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. (Information about loan deferment is online here: peacecorps.gov/learn/whyvol/finben/. Answers to frequently asked loan deferment questions are here: peacecorps.gov/learn/whyvol/finben/faq/.)

- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business. Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 1770. Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

| For Questions About | Staff | Toll-free extension | Direct/Local |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|--|
| Responding to an invitation | Office of Placement | ext. 1840 | 202.692.1840 |
| Country information | Christina Stegura Cameroon Desk Officer | ext. 2329 | 202.692.2853 cameroon@peacecorps.gov |
| Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters | CWT SATO Travel | ext. 1170 | 202.692.1170 |
| Legal clearance: | Office of Placement | ext. 1840 | 202.692.1840 |
| Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental) | Screening Nurse | ext. 1500 | 202.692.1500 |
| Medical Applicant Portal questions | | | amsadmin@peacecorps.gov |
| Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor) | | | 800.544.1802 |
| 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 |
| New Volunteer Portal questions | | | staging@peacecorps.gov |
| <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i> | | | |
| Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours | Counseling and Outreach Unit | ext. 1470 | 202.692.1470 |
| Office of Victim Advocacy | | ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text) | 202.692.1753 202.409.2704 |