

The Peace Corps Welcomes you to  
**The Dominican Republic**



A PEACECORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



August 2015

# Dominican Republic Map



## A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations! With your invitation to the Peace Corps, you are now among America's best and brightest chosen to represent our country and culture in the Dominican Republic. The staff and Volunteers of Peace Corps/Dominican Republic welcome you to your new life in this beautiful Caribbean country on the island of Hispaniola!

You are about to embark on one of the most transformative experiences possible—that of serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer! Peace Corps service is an opportunity for tremendous personal and professional growth, but more importantly, it is a chance to make a contribution toward the development of the Dominican Republic. You will join the ranks of a highly professional corps of Volunteers currently in-country, and more than 4,000 who have served in the Dominican Republic over time. You will be placed in a community and the success of your service will depend much on your ability to genuinely integrate and connect with your community. You will be matched with a Dominican counterpart, through which you will realize your work, and expand your cross-cultural understanding and effectiveness. We expect you to contribute to our reputation of excellence that we—Peace Corps/Dominican Republic—have built in this country over the last 52 years. By joining us, you commit to improve lives and opportunities in the Dominican community in which you serve.

Please carefully read the core expectations for Peace Corps Volunteers. Then, live them. Thousands of Volunteers who have served before you can attest that through this challenge you will be rewarded with tremendous personal growth, self-knowledge, and new abilities that you may never have known were inside you, waiting to be expressed. For many of you, this will be your first professional endeavor. For others, it may be your first time living in a developing country. For all of you, if you commit to our culture of service and the core expectations, your service here is likely to be the most rewarding growth experience you will have in your life. There are no promises that this will be easy. In fact, Peace Corps service is tremendously challenging at times—but remember, with challenge comes growth.

Because you are now about to live and work in a developing country where the level of risk is different from the U.S., the Peace Corps commits to supporting you holistically with medical, administrative, and programmatic resources. In turn, we expect you to exercise judgment and personal responsibility to protect your health, safety, and well-being. We've got your back if you need it, but in the meantime we expect your very best. By joining Peace Corps/Dominican Republic, 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 our expectations, this wonderful country, and this beautiful and formidable force known as Peace Corps/Dominican Republic!

Bienvenidos!

Mary Latka  
Country Director

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## **CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

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

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

## **History of the Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic**

Since 1962, more than 4,000 Volunteers have served in the Dominican Republic. These Volunteers have contributed to technical skills transfer and institutional capacity-building in a wide range of fields, including agriculture, urban and rural community development, forestry, conservation, environmental education, community health and child survival, nursing, small business development, fisheries, water and sanitation, teacher education, university education, youth development, and information technology. Over the years, Peace Corps Volunteers have contributed significantly to the establishment and development of many of the country's leading non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and have worked hand-in-hand with the various administrations that have governed the Dominican Republic. In keeping with its commitment to peace and development, the Peace Corps remained in the Dominican Republic throughout its civil war in the 1960s. The agency's commitment to service has been highlighted through the good work of Volunteers and their project partners in the recovery efforts following two of the most severe hurricanes to hit the country's shores: David in 1979 and George in 1998.

## **Peace Corps Programming in the Dominican Republic**

Peace Corps/Dominican Republic provides direct, community-based technical assistance. Volunteers work in marginalized sectors of the population to promote self-help strategies that respond to basic human needs and strengthen community efforts. Currently, the 160 Volunteers in the Dominican Republic strive to increase local capacity for problem solving and to form links with grassroots, regional, and national organizations.

While Volunteers work primarily in community economic development, education, youth development, and health, the Peace Corps' programs evolve with the country's changing needs. Innovations include the incorporation of HIV/AIDS prevention, gender and development, and youth service-learning across all projects.

## **Education & Literacy**

The Childhood Literacy project lays a foundation for personal and community promotion of lifelong learning by strengthening basic childhood literacy. Volunteers work with innovative teaching methodologies, classroom management, and literacy assessment tools to promote student, teacher, parent and community involvement in literacy and the education process in general.

## **Healthy Communities**

The Healthy Communities project aims to reduce the risk of infant mortality in low-income families living in rural and marginal urban communities. Volunteers are assigned to NGOs, community-based organizations, and, occasionally, the Ministry of Public Health. They help health promoters improve and sustain basic health practices and services. The project focuses on the key causes of infant mortality: diarrhea, respiratory infections, and malnutrition. Most Volunteers also help youth and health workers promote reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention among adolescents and young mothers. In addition, a small number of Volunteers work with communities to design and construct small water systems.

## **Community Economic Development**

Community Economic Development (CED) Volunteers take a broad approach to fostering economic development opportunities and organizational capacity-building in their communities. They work with individuals to develop income-generating projects and foster entrepreneurship, while also working with community-based businesses to facilitate improved management and organizational strengthening. CED

Volunteers work on a broad spectrum of projects, including agribusiness, tourism, and artisanal products, among others.

### **Youth, Families, and Community Development**

The Youth, Families, and Community Development project focuses on asset-based youth development activities with young people and supporting organizations that work with youth development. Youth Volunteers collaborate with youth groups, community-based organizations, parents, service providers, non-governmental and governmental organizations in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

The youth project seeks to empower youth by building skills and experience to make positive decisions that will affect their personal lives and their communities. Project activities include working with sports and arts, personal development and leadership training for young people, service learning, and increasing marketable skills. The project also supports organizations that work with children and youth at risk. The youth program integrates the five principles of positive youth development: engaging caring adults and positive role models, providing safe places and supervised activities, offering a healthy start through exercise and sex education, teaching marketable skills, and providing opportunities to serve through volunteering and engagement with the community.

## **COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE**

### **History**

The island of Hispaniola, of which the Dominican Republic forms the eastern two-thirds and Haiti the western one-third, has been a center of great political struggles since the 15th century. The island was first colonized by the Spanish and, by the end of the 17th century, Spain had ceded to France all rights to the western portion of the island.

In 1804, Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader of a slave uprising in the French colony, declared the island "one and indivisible" under the new Republic of Haiti. At that time, what is now the Dominican Republic was occupied by Haitian troops. The Haitians conquered the entire island in 1822 and held it until 1844. In that year, Juan Pablo Duarte, the hero of Dominican independence, and his forces drove out the Haitians and established the Dominican Republic as an independent state.

Since independence, the country's political stability has been shaky. Economic difficulties, the threat of European intervention, and ongoing internal disorders led to a U.S. occupation in 1916 and the establishment of a military government. The occupation ended in 1924 with a democratically elected Dominican government. From 1930 until his assassination in 1961, Army Commander Rafael Trujillo ruled the country under a repressive dictatorship. The country then underwent a number of military coups, as well as an occupation by U.S. military forces from 1965–66. During those years, several key political figures rose to power, including Joaquin Balaguer, leader of the Social Christian Reformist Party, and Juan Bosch, founder of the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD). Recently, the country has experienced peaceful transitions of democratically elected governments. Hipolito Mejia was elected in 2000 for a four-year term. Former President Leonel Fernandez won the 2004 election and was inaugurated in August 2004 and re-elected in 2008. In the most recent presidential elections (May 2012), former President Hipolito Mejia ran against PLD candidate Danilo Medina. Election results were close, with Medina securing the presidency. Medina was sworn into office in August 2012. Margarita Cedeño de Fernandez, former President Fernandez's wife, is the vice president.

Although the Dominican Republic's relations with Haiti have been challenging, the two countries are intrinsically linked. There are a sizable number of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic, many of whom contribute to the Dominican economy.

The Dominican Republic has a close relationship with the United States despite the fact that America has occupied the country on two occasions. It is estimated that there are more than 1 million Dominicans living in the United States, with the majority living in New York City. The U.S. embassy estimates that 60,000 U.S. citizens live in the Dominican Republic.

### **Government**

The Dominican Republic is a representative democracy whose national powers are divided among independent executive, legislative, and judicial branches. The president appoints the cabinet, executes laws passed by the legislative branch, and is commander in chief of the armed forces. The president and vice president run for office on the same ticket and are elected by direct vote for four-year terms. Legislative power is exercised by a bicameral National Congress, consisting of a Senate (30 members) and a Chamber of Deputies (149 members).

There are three major political parties: the Dominican Liberation Party (PLD), led by President Medina; the Dominican Revolutionary Party (PRD); and the Social Christian Reformist Party (PRSC).

## **Economy**

For the last two decades, the Dominican Republic has been one of the fastest growing economies with GDP growth averaging around 5.8 percent per year between 1991 and 2012. Despite exceptional growth performance, poverty is higher today than in 2000. Poverty soared from 32 percent in 2000 to almost 50 percent in 2004 following the 2003 financial and economic crisis, before declining gradually to 40 percent by 2011. After the global recession, the country's economy rebounded in 2010–14, and the fiscal situation continues to improve. A tax reform package passed in November 2012 and a reduction in government spending helped to narrow the central government budget deficit from 6.6 percent of GDP in 2012 to 2.7 percent in 2014. A successful government bond placement in 2013 and 2014 helped finance the deficit.

On the other hand, the Dominican Republic has experienced a sharp fall in exports relative to GDP since 2000 and its ranking in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Index fell to 105th out of 144 countries in 2013. In addition, the country faces the challenge of sustaining economic growth while making it more inclusive. Challenges for inclusive growth include the following:

- Improving the investment climate to boost entrepreneurship and job creation while strengthening access to labor markets for the poor: Growing sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, telecommunications, and financial services have not generated as many jobs as envisaged initially. Instead, most of the jobs created have been low-skilled jobs in the informal sector. Real wages declined by 27 percent in the last 10 years, even as labor productivity rose. Improving competition policy and the investment climate would generate more and better jobs.
- Promoting equitable, efficient, and sustainable fiscal policy: The current tax system is hampered by low revenue collection and relies heavily on indirect taxes. Making the tax system more progressive would allow more redistribution, as well as enable more investments in essential public services such as water and sanitation, quality education, and health care for the most vulnerable.
- Improving public service delivery to reach the poor: Despite significant improvements in service delivery, access to basic public services remains unequal and of low quality, particularly for the poor. Better program targeting, monitoring and evaluation, along with incentives such as performance-based budgeting, could help improve service delivery.

## **People and Culture**

The Dominican population was 1 million in 1920; in 2014, it was estimated at 10.35 million. The country has one of the highest population densities in the hemisphere. The population is roughly 22 percent rural and 78 percent urban.

The Dominican people are a blend of Spanish, African, and indigenous Taino influences. The Spanish arrived in 1492; by 1520, the indigenous population had been virtually eradicated by warfare, disease, and an unsuccessful attempt to enslave them to work in the country's fields and gold mines. As the indigenous population decreased, the labor shortage was filled by African slaves brought to Santo Domingo. The current population is largely mulatto. More recently, there has been a small influx of Japanese, Chinese, European Jews, Central and South Americans, Arabs, and other groups. However, by far the largest ethnic minority in the country are Haitians, who number nearly 1 million when counting Dominicans of Haitian descent as well as Haitian immigrants.

The Dominican culture reflects its Spanish, African, and indigenous heritages. From the Spanish, Dominicans inherited their language, cuisine, Roman Catholicism, and patriarchal family structure. From the African and indigenous cultures, they inherited their music (merengue), folklore, social activities, handicrafts, cuisine, and many of the names given to children. Spanish is the official language, although many indigenous and African words have been incorporated into Dominican Spanish. While Roman

Catholicism is the predominant religion, Christian evangelical churches are becoming more influential in the country.

### **Environment**

The Dominican Republic has some of the most varied and beautiful terrain in the hemisphere, including mountain ranges, tropical beaches, dry forests, and desert (found primarily in the southwest). It boasts the highest mountain in the Caribbean, Pico Duarte, which is surrounded by extremely productive farmland in the Cibao region. Sugar cane and rolling landscapes highlight the southern and eastern parts of the island.

There is growing concern about the Dominican Republic's rapid rate of environmental degradation in both rural and urban areas. About 60 percent of the country's original forest cover still existed in the early 1900s. By the end of the 1980s, that figure had plunged to approximately 12 percent as a result of slash-and-burn agriculture, overgrazing, forest fires, and charcoal production. Degradation and silting in the Caribbean and Atlantic have also negatively affected the extremely rich coral reef environments found around the island.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and the Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic**

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

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

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

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

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

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

[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World\\_Statistics\\_Pocketbook\\_2013\\_edition.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf)

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

[Data.un.org](http://Data.un.org)

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

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

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

[Worldbank.org](http://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](http://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](http://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 the Dominican Republic site: <http://www.fotdr.org/>

[PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org](http://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 the Dominican Republic**

[UN.org/News/](http://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](http://VOAnews.com)

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

[www.dr1.com](http://www.dr1.com)

This site provides daily news summaries in English.

[www.listin.com.do](http://www.listin.com.do)

Online edition of Listin Diario, a Dominican newspaper (in Spanish)

[www.hoy.com.do](http://www.hoy.com.do)

Online edition of Hoy, a Dominican newspaper (in Spanish)

[www.dominicanrepublic.com/](http://www.dominicanrepublic.com/)

Official Internet portal to the Dominican Republic, with information on history, culture and arts, economy, business, politics, news, etc., (in Spanish and English)

## **International Development Site About the Dominican Republic**

[www.usaid.gov/locations/latin\\_america\\_caribbean/country/dominican\\_republic/](http://www.usaid.gov/locations/latin_america_caribbean/country/dominican_republic/)

The U.S. Agency for International Development’s programs in the Dominican Republic

## **Spanish-Learning Resources**

[http://www.byki.com/free\\_lang\\_software.pl](http://www.byki.com/free_lang_software.pl)

Free language learning software Before You Know It (byki) is based on the flash-card system. The free version of the software contains 17 lists of words and phrases, which include sample phrases for polite conversations, meeting and greeting, and food and beverages vocabulary.

<http://www.studyspanish.com/>

A free Spanish tutorial, Learn Spanish, provides a good opportunity for self-study. It contains lessons, audios, and exercises corrected instantly. A section of the site is free, while additional exercises are provided with a subscription.

<http://www.miscositas.com/>

Short stories, links, and other exercises for learning Spanish, French, and English

<http://mld.ursinus.edu/~jarana/Ejercicios/>

Spanish language exercises. Materials and exercises available for students and teachers from Ursinus College, Collegeville, Pennsylvania.

## **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 the Dominican Republic**

The first three are novels about Dominican history and the immigrant experience by a writer who moved to the United States as a girl when her parents fled the Trujillo regime.

1. Alvarez, Julia. "How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents." Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1991.
2. Alvarez, Julia. "In the Time of the Butterflies." Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1995.
3. Alvarez, Julia. "¡Yo!" Chapel Hill, N.C.: Algonquin Books, 1997.
4. Fischkin, Barbara. "Muddy Cup: A Dominican Family Comes of Age in a New America." New York: Scribner, 1997. (A journalist follows the emigration of a Dominican family from the time they apply for visas through their move to New York.)
5. Ruck, Rob. "The Tropic of Baseball: Baseball in the Dominican Republic." University of Nebraska Press, 1999. (Traces baseball's roots in the Dominican Republic against a historical background of economic and political change.)
6. Pons, Frank Moya. "The Dominican Republic: A National History." New York: Hispaniola Books, 1994.
7. Wucker, Michele. "Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola." New York: Hill and Wang, 1999.

# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## Communications

### Mail

Mail delivery between the United States and the Dominican Republic can be unreliable. Letters and packages sent by airmail take from 10 days to several weeks to arrive. Surface mail can take months.

Your address for **regular mail** service in the Dominican Republic while you are a Peace Corps trainee (PCT) will be as follows:

“Your Name,” PCT  
Cuerpo de Paz  
Av Bolivar 451, Gazcue  
Apartado Postal 1412  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic

Note: Do not send money, airline tickets, or other valuable items through the mail.

If you need to have a package sent to the Dominican Republic, it is best that the contents be limited to items that fit into **padded envelopes**. These are less likely to be lost, opened, or taxed than other types of packages.

Packages may also be shipped via a parcel delivery service. Federal Express and DHL have offices in Santo Domingo. If you want them to deliver a package to the Peace Corps office, you must provide the office street address (instead of the post office box address listed above) and phone number:

Your address for **expedited mail** service in the Dominican Republic while you are a Peace Corps trainee or Volunteer will be:

“Your Name,” PCT  
Cuerpo de Paz  
451 Avenida Bolivar  
Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic  
Telephone: 809.685.4102

Note: Federal Express and DHL will not deliver items larger than an envelope to the Peace Corps office, so **you may have to pay significant customs duties to retrieve larger items from customs**, and picking up the items may mean an entire day’s travel to the capital. In addition, packages sometimes disappear in transit.

Additionally, there is a tax levied on every package received by a trainee or Volunteer. The Peace Corps does not cover these costs. All packages received in-country are charged RD\$100 (currently US\$2.77) for retrieval and then an additional RD\$100 per pound. So, for example, a 10-pound package would cost the Volunteer RD\$1,100 (US\$34), which is a significant amount considering a Volunteer’s living allowance.

Private courier services, such as Mail Boxes Etc., provide mail-forwarding service from Miami; however, these companies are limited to major cities and receiving rates vary according to weight. While mail-forwarding services can be considered more reliable than standard surface or airmail, they can be quite costly.

During training, Peace Corps staff will deliver mail to you at least twice a week while you are in Santo Domingo and less often when you are outside of Santo Domingo. Once you move to your site, you will be responsible for sending your new mailing address to friends and family. Some Volunteers find it more convenient to continue using the Santo Domingo address. In that case, mail received at the Peace Corps office will be put in your locker in the Volunteer lounge, and you will collect it periodically.

You are encouraged to write to your family regularly, as family members may become worried when they do not hear from you.

### **Telephone**

The Peace Corps office in the Dominican Republic can be reached by direct dialing from the United States. The number is 1.809.685.4102. The phone number for the after-hours duty officer is 1.809.723.9944. The fax number is 1.809.689.9330.

Long-distance telephone service is available in the Dominican Republic and is not expensive. However, you may or may not have access to a land-line or cellphone signal at your site. **All Volunteers are issued cellphones by Peace Corps/Dominican Republic.** These are issued as safety devices that enable staff to maintain contact with Volunteers and to send messages in an emergency. You will be issued your phone during training. There is no charge for receiving calls or text messages on cellphones, but **all personal calls are at the Volunteers' expense.** Phone card rates for calling internationally to the U.S., Canada, or Puerto Rico are typically the same as making a local call. Prepaid calling cards bought in the United States typically don't work. Volunteers may use call centers of the major telephone companies, which have branches throughout the country. During training, you may or may not have access to a telephone. During your first days in-country you will be placed with a host family and will have sporadic access to a phone. Please inform your family and friends that you will not be able to confirm telephone communication for at least three days after your arrival to the Dominican Republic.

### **Computer, Internet, and Email Access**

If your sponsoring agency or project partner owns a computer, you may be able to arrange access for work-related or personal use. The resource center and computer room at the Peace Corps office in Santo Domingo has a limited number of computers with Internet access for Volunteer use. However, if you want to receive personal email, you will need to set up an account with a service such as Yahoo!, Hotmail, or Gmail. Internet access is also available at Internet cafes throughout the country. Peace Corps staff computers are not available for Volunteer use. For those with laptops, wireless services are available at the Peace Corps office, training center, and larger shopping centers in the cities; however, **service can be unreliable and unpredictable.** Volunteers recommend bringing a laptop if possible, as it can enhance Volunteer work in many ways. If you do plan on bringing a laptop or any other valuable electronic equipment (camera, iPod, etc.), consider purchasing personal article insurance as theft is a serious issue in the county.

### **Housing and Site Location**

During pre-service training (PST), you will live with two Dominican host families. One will be located in the northern barrios of Santo Domingo, close to the training center. During the community-based technical training (weeks three through eight of PST), you will live with another family in the interior of the country where your technical training program takes place. The families are selected by training staff. Houses in Santo Domingo typically have electricity and running water (when these systems are operating). Houses in the interior communities frequently have little access to electricity and water; however, this will depend greatly on your program and the nature of the technical training. Your host family will provide you with a private room, and you will eat your meals with the family.

You will also live with a host family during the first four months of your Volunteer service. These host families are identified by the community and/or the host country agency and are approved by Peace Corps staff prior to your arrival. Living with a Dominican family allows faster integration into the community, provides a safe environment while you are settling in, and gives you time to look for independent housing should you choose to do so. It is important to understand that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee that Volunteers will find independent housing after the initial four-month period of living with a host family. Due to a general shortage of quality housing options in the small communities where Volunteers live and work, many Volunteers often find that living with a host family for longer than four months is the norm. During service, you are expected to live in the same type of housing commonly found in your community. Housing varies widely, depending on whether you live in a city, a large or small town, or a *campo* (rural village).

Volunteers typically live in houses with tin roofs, walls of wood or cement block, and cement floors. Many communities have electricity, though some do not. Power outages are very common. The water supply is subject to the same inconsistencies. Many communities do not have water piped into houses. Rural families, for example, often have to walk to the nearest river or other water source for household water. Even if you live in a house with faucets, there is no guarantee that there will be water; it is common for water not to appear for days at a time. Volunteers placed in towns and more urbanized areas will also face some of these same challenges.

### **Living Allowance and Money Management**

Volunteers receive a monthly allowance in Dominican pesos 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. Peace Corps/Dominican Republic will open a bank account for you and provide you with an ATM card. You will need to budget appropriately to make the living allowance last a month.

Additionally, you will receive a monthly vacation allowance equivalent to \$24, paid in local currency at the same time as the living allowance. You will also receive a one-time settling-in allowance to purchase needed household furniture and equipment (e.g., a bed, a stove, kitchen items, and locks) and pay several months of advance rent if required.

Most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in the Dominican Republic with these allowances, and you are strongly discouraged from supplementing the living allowance with money from home. However, some Volunteers bring money from home for out-of-country travel. Credit cards can be used in many establishments in major cities and traveler's checks can be cashed for a small fee.

### **Food and Diet**

The Dominican diet consists primarily of rice, beans, yuca (cassava), plantains, sweet potatoes, potatoes, and other vegetables, along with eggs, chicken, pork, beef, and some fish. The national dish is *sancocho*, a rich vegetable-and-meat stew served on special occasions. A typical Dominican meal, called *la bandera*, is a mix of rice, red beans, and meat. Yuca may be boiled, prepared as fritters, or baked into rounds of crisp cracker bread called *casabe*. Most dishes are not spicy. Locally grown, seasonal fruits include bananas, mangoes, papayas, pineapples, guavas, and avocados. Dominicans generally eat small quantities of meat at meals. *Bacalau* (dried fish, usually cod) can be found in several areas, but fresh fish is generally available only along the coast. *Habichuelas con dulce*, a sweet dessert made from beans, is popular at Easter.

Vegetarians will be able to maintain their diet at home, but they will be offered—and most likely expected to accept—traditional foods, including meat, when visiting Dominican families. You will have to be open and flexible about sharing the Dominican diet when necessary.

During training, your host family will provide your meals. Once you are at your site, you can choose to eat with Dominicans or cook on your own. To supplement their diet, some Volunteers plant gardens at home.

## **Transportation**

Transportation is relatively easy in the Dominican Republic. Most urban travel is by bus and van, although *carro públicos* (a sort of shared taxi) are available as well. Intercity travel is by bus, while rural travel runs the gamut—from air-conditioned minibuses to crowded *carro públicos*, to lots of walking. Although inexpensive, *carro públicos* are where most Volunteers experience pick-pocketing and robberies. For security purposes, Peace Corps/Dominican Republic does not allow Volunteers or trainees to use public transportation between the hours of 7 p.m. and 7 a.m. Private taxis must be used at night.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to drive vehicles or motorcycles in the Dominican Republic. Violation of this policy will result in termination of your Peace Corps service.

Most Volunteers rely on public transportation to get around, but Volunteers can request assistance from the Peace Corps in arranging alternative means of local transportation. Volunteers can apply for and receive limited funds from their Volunteer readjustment allowance to purchase a bicycle to use during their service in the Dominican Republic. The Peace Corps will also provide you with a helmet, which you must wear at all times while riding a bicycle. Failure to abide by this policy will result in termination of your Peace Corps service.

## **Geography and Climate**

With an average temperature range of 65–95 degrees Fahrenheit, this Caribbean country is probably not as hot as you might think. It is difficult to define a rainy season, since showers can occur at any time during the year, depending on the area. However, the period of heaviest rainfall for most of the island is late April to early October, months that can be relatively hot and humid. The cooler season—from November to February—is pleasant but still warm, with temperatures from 65–85 F. You will need both lightweight clothing suitable for hot weather and at least one heavier garment for traveling to cooler, mountainous areas, such as the 10,000-foot Pico Duarte, the highest mountain in the Caribbean.

## **Social Activities**

Social activities in the Dominican Republic vary depending on where you are located. They include taking part in festivities such as Carnival, parties, and dances. Some Volunteers visit other nearby Volunteers on weekends for work-related or social occasions and will make an occasional trip to the capital. Volunteers are encouraged to remain at their sites as much as possible to help accomplish the Peace Corps' goal of cultural exchange. Most regional capitals have cafes and restaurants, movie theaters, and other forms of entertainment.

Social life in the Dominican Republic often revolves around the family porch, where people talk while playing dominoes, a national pastime. Outdoor tables in front of homes, bars, and *colmados* (neighborhood markets) are surrounded by men who play for hours, especially on Sundays. Outdoor players are almost exclusively men, but everyone plays at home. Even young children become adept at the game. Baseball is the country's most popular sport. The competition is keen, and rarely does a day go by when children, youth, and even adults are not playing baseball with anything they can find to use as a bat and ball. Cockfighting is another national pastime, and the gambling stakes can be high.

Dominicans also love music and dancing. *Merengue* is the national dance, and many people, including small children, know the steps. The fast-paced, rhythmic music of merengue is traditionally performed with three instruments: a *tambora* (a small drum), a *melodeon* (similar to an accordion), and a *guira* (a scraping percussion instrument). *Bachata* is another folk dance that has become just as popular as merengue. Salsa and other styles of Latin American music are popular, as are North American pop and jazz. Discos exist even in rural communities.

What has kept merengue alive over the years is its place in the Dominican Republic's Carnival celebrations. All of the major cities celebrate Carnival with zeal, incorporating music and dance into street parades and other festivities. In Santo Domingo, Carnival occurs twice a year. The first occurs during the traditional pre-Lenten holiday. The second one, much smaller but just as festive, starts the day before August 16, which is the anniversary of the Dominican Republic's declaration of war against Spain in 1863.

Each July, Santo Domingo hosts a merengue festival along its main seaside strip, El Malecón. The street is closed off to make way for some of the country's most popular bands. Celebrations also take place at clubs, hotels, and even nighttime beach parties. Smaller merengue festivals take place in other towns.

### **Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior**

A popular Dominican saying:

*"El pasajero se conoce por la maleta. Un roto significa abandono, un remiendo humildad."*

"The passenger is known by his/her luggage. A rip means carelessness, a patch means humbleness."

In the Dominican Republic, dress reflects your professional status, impacts your ability to integrate into the Dominican culture, and has ramifications for your safety and security. Looking neat, clean, and professional will enhance your image and reflect positively on you and Peace Corps/Dominican Republic. The Peace Corps/Dominican Republic office and training center receive regular visitors, including government officials and other professionals, all of whom expect to observe business dress within the office.

Please respect the following guidelines while at the Peace Corps office or participating in any training activity anywhere in the country. During "down time" at home, you may wear casual clothes.

Volunteers should not wear the following during business hours or participating in training events: flip-flops (calypsos de goma), revealing or low-cut tops, or tops that show your bra on women, and tank-tops on men. Shorts, mini-skirts, or short dresses are unacceptable.

Although revealing clothing is worn by some Dominican women, this isn't appropriate in a professional setting. In government buildings, women with bare shoulders will be prohibited entrance. Also, some Dominican men view revealing clothing as an invitation.

Similar to dress, people in the Dominican Republic will make judgments about you based on your personal hygiene, and this will affect your working relationships and friendships. Most Dominicans, despite the conditions of poverty in which they may live, hold themselves to high personal hygiene standards. These standards may be different from yours, but are nonetheless the basis on which you will be judged while living in the Dominican Republic. The following are very basic personal hygiene norms followed by most Dominicans. You are expected to adhere to these norms as well.

- Daily bathing: Most people bathe at least twice a day, in the morning and afternoon/evening
- Use of deodorant
- Clean shaven or neatly kept beard/mustache for men
- Men tend to wear short, neatly kept haircuts. In the education sector, male Volunteers will usually be obliged to wear short hairstyles when working in schools due to Dominican norms unrelated to Peace Corps regulations.
- Clean and cut finger and toenails for both men and women. Note: Some men have a long pinky nail, which can be associated with drug use, or as a means to clean or scratch the ears/nose, and is considered unprofessional.
- Visible body piercings (other than earrings for women) and tattoos for both men and women are not generally accepted in professional settings. Please be prepared to cover tattoos whenever possible. Wearing facial piercings may make it more difficult to integrate into your community.

### **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. Becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (often times 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 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 the Dominican Republic. 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 consult safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [peacecorps.gov/safety](http://peacecorps.gov/safety).

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

During training risks and strategies for staying safe will be discussed; however, please be advised that theft is quite common. Trainees and Volunteers are strongly advised to purchase personal articles insurance.

### **Rewards and Frustrations**

Although the potential for job satisfaction in the Dominican Republic is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter frustrations. Because of financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support promised. In addition, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work, perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability

to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance from supervisors. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from, or without receiving feedback on, your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress most often comes after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

To overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. The Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge as well as in moments of success. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave the Dominican Republic feeling that they gained much more than they gave during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful Volunteer.

Volunteers usually are readily accepted by their host community and make lasting friendships. However, for many Volunteers, constantly being asked personal questions, the lack of privacy, being considered a rich foreigner, and the need to be aware of different social mores can be trying. As in most Latin American countries, women in the Dominican Republic do not have the freedoms to which North American women are accustomed. A female Volunteer's inability to adapt to this reality can make her less effective and possibly even affect her safety.

The Peace Corps is not for everyone. Creativity, initiative, flexibility, patience, and a high tolerance for ambiguity are necessary attributes in confronting the challenges associated with facilitating change in a cultural setting different from the United States. Your dedication, however, can have real and lasting results. When your service is over, you will have the deep satisfaction of having played a role in a grassroots development process that helped give Dominicans greater control of their future.

# PEACE CORPS TRAINING

## Overview of Pre-Service Training

Once you arrive in the Dominican Republic you will be a Peace Corps trainee. Only after you have demonstrated required competencies, and demonstrated to staff that you are committed to Peace Corps service, will you then be invited to swear as a Peace Corps Volunteer. The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in the Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

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

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

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

Training is an essential part of Peace Corps service. The goal is to give you the skills and information necessary to live and work effectively in the Dominican Republic, building upon the experiences and expertise you bring to the Peace Corps. Your training should be approached with an open mind, a desire to learn, and a willingness to become involved. Trainees officially become Peace Corps Volunteers after successful completion of training.

You will participate in 10 weeks of intensive training in five major areas: technical job orientation, language (Spanish), cross-cultural adaptation, health, and safety training. You will live in a community near Santo Domingo with a Dominican family, sharing meals, conversations, and other everyday experiences. You will also visit secondary towns and rural areas to get accustomed to the realities of life in the Dominican Republic. Trainees are together for the first three weeks of training. For five-and-a-half weeks, you will live in a smaller town for community-based training by project sector. Following the community-based portion of your training, you will travel to your future project site for an orientation visit and then return to the capital for a training wrap-up and to swear in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. If you are serving with a spouse and you and your spouse are assigned to different programs, you will live apart for the community-based training portion of the program. Couples who are in different project areas are allowed to visit one weekend during community-based training.

Training helps you learn how to apply your strengths and knowledge to new situations, developing your skills as a facilitator in a variety of technical areas. It doesn't make you an expert. At the onset of training, the training staff will outline the goals you must achieve to become a Volunteer and the criteria that will be used to assess your progress. (A detailed breakdown of these criteria will be provided in-country.)

Evaluation of your performance during training consists of a continual dialogue between you and the training staff.

### **Technical Training**

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

Your technical training will mainly be carried out during the community-based (weeks three through eight of PST) portion of training. During this time, you will train only with those individuals assigned to the same sector. Trainees and staff will travel to a local community and live with host families during this portion of training. The training will be specific to your technical sector and provide you with the opportunity to carry out learning objectives in the local context and through collaborating with local community members.

### **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.

To qualify for service, trainees must achieve a language level of Intermediate Mid on the ACTFL scale by the end of training. For a better understanding of language levels, see <http://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012-Speaking.pdf>. Throughout training, the language teachers will evaluate trainees for progress in their language acquisition to ensure that each new Volunteer begins service with the necessary Spanish to communicate and integrate into his or her community.

The Dominican language instructors usually teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups. Trainees will be placed in differing classes according to skill level. 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 the Dominican Republic. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in the Dominican Republic, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

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

The host family experience provides a unique context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in the Dominican Republic. 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 treatment of medical illnesses found in the Dominican Republic. 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 include 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 the Dominican Republic.

### **Safety and Security Training**

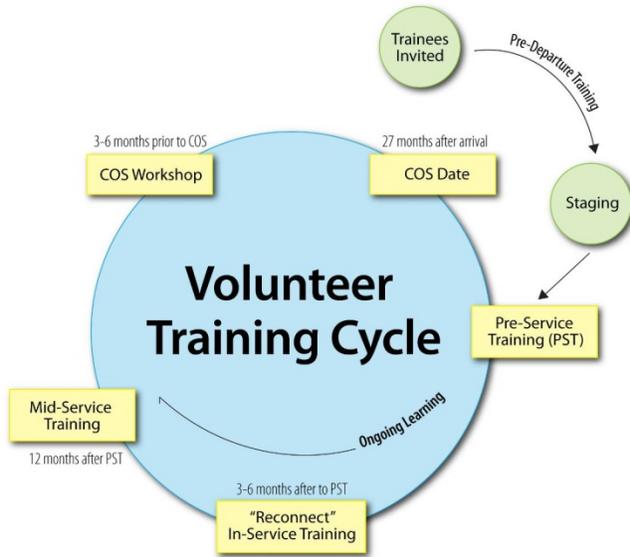
During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace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

### **Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service**

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

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **Mid-service training** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** 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 THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC**

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in the Dominican Republic, 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 the Dominican Republic**

Major health problems among Volunteers in the Dominican Republic are rare and are often the result of a Volunteer not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems in the country are minor ones that are also found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), adjustment disorders, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in the Dominican Republic because certain environmental factors here raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illnesses and injuries.

The most common major health problems are dengue fever, malaria, chikungunya, and amoebic dysentery. Because malaria is endemic in the Dominican Republic, taking antimalarial pills is required. You will receive vaccinations against the following: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, meningococcal meningitis, rabies, typhoid, MMR (measles, mumps, and rubella), flu vaccine, and TD (tetanus and diphtheria). If you have already received any of these vaccinations, please bring written documentation of the dates they were administered with you.

Amoebic dysentery can be avoided by thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables and either boiling drinking water or using the water purification tablets provided in your Peace Corps-issued medical kit.

### **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in the Dominican Republic, 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 mid-service and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in the Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

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

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

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

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

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

## **Women’s Health Information**

Feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase on the local market. If you require a specific product, please bring it with you. Note that menstrual cups are not available in country.

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

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

## Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

### Medical Kit Contents

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

### Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH**

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

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

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work.
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria.
- The Peace Corps provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks.
- 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 are trained in how to 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 need written authorization from Peace Corps to move to a new house.
- 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 the Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in the Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic. 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 the Dominican Republic of which you should be aware:

- **Location:** Most crimes occur when Volunteers are in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). 59 percent of assaults take place when Volunteers are away from their sites.
- **Absence of others:** Assaults usually occur when the Volunteer is unaccompanied. In 82 percent of sexual assaults, the Volunteer is unaccompanied and in 55 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer is unaccompanied.
- **Relationship to assailant:** In most assaults, the Volunteer does not know the assailant.
- **Consumption of alcohol:** 40 percent of all assaults involve alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.
- **Motor vehicle accidents:** The Dominican Republic's fatality rate for drivers is 41.7 per 100,000 people. Dominicans have a one in 480 chance of having their lives taken by a motor vehicle according to the WHO Global Status Report on Safety in 2013. This is one of the largest risks to Volunteer safety in the Dominican Republic. During pre-service training Volunteers will be given information on mitigating this risk, including instructions to avoid riding in overcrowded public buses or vans, prohibition on traveling long distances in cars or buses at night, and the requirement to wear helmets at all times while riding motorcycles.

### **Robbery/burglary**

Robbery and burglary are on the rise, and you need to exercise precaution at all times. The Peace Corps will provide information on proper home safety during training and requires landlords to install proper locks on all Volunteer housing. In addition, many Americans and Dominicans have been the victims of muggings, especially in Santo Domingo.

A common strategy of muggers is for two men on a motorcycle to hold up the victim at gunpoint and get away quickly. It is important to travel on well-lit streets at night with other people around you, and take a taxi when possible. Carrying bags/purses and using cellphones in public is highly discouraged.

### **Border Conflicts and Haiti**

There is a long history of animosity between Dominicans and Haitians, including border conflicts and military involvement. Tensions between the two countries still exist today. Court rulings since 2013 have

left many people of Haitian descent stateless in the Dominican Republic and have drawn international attention. It is predicted that these tensions will continue, and possibly intensify through the next presidential election in June 2016.

Volunteers serving in the Dominican Republic, especially those near the Haitian border, may feel the effects of the current legal tensions. For example, Volunteers have been removed from public transportation by Dominican troops at roadside checkpoints in spite of proof of legal residency and American citizenship. While this has affected various Volunteers, black Volunteers with darker complexions may be mistaken for Haitians and are thus more often subjected to this practice. Peace Corps/Dominican Republic has developed travel procedures for Volunteers serving along or near the border as well as those traveling on routes connecting to Haiti. In addition, all Volunteers in transit are required to carry their identity documents with them. Peace Corps staff is always available to support Volunteers in any situation where they feel their safety is at risk.

### **Sexual and Other Harassment**

Volunteers have reported varying levels of harassment, including sexual comments and being called derogatory names, though this rarely happens at Volunteers' sites, where they are known. Both men and women may feel sexually harassed if perceived as not conforming to expected gender norms. Many Volunteers may feel harassed for the constant, unwanted attention that comes from being a foreigner in a Dominican community. Strategies for dealing and coping with harassment will be discussed during pre-service training.

### **Alcohol Abuse**

The Dominican Republic has a higher rate of alcoholism than the United States. Volunteers have reported being approached by drunken men asking for money and alcohol. It is best to avoid frequenting bars, particularly at night. Alcohol use impairs judgment and must be consumed responsibly. The Peace Corps does not tolerate public drunkenness by Volunteers, which can lead to termination of service.

### **Sexual Assault**

Volunteers have been targets of sexual assault in the Dominican Republic. Alcohol consumption and cross-cultural differences in gender relations often are associated with sexual assaults. Volunteers who take seriously the training provided by the Peace Corps regarding sexual assaults will minimize their risk. Volunteers are urged to report all assaults and threats of assault to the Peace Corps medical officer so staff can respond with appropriate support.

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 the Dominican Republic may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in the Dominican Republic will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

## **Support from Staff**

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety 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](mailto:victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov)

## **Crime Data for the Dominican Republic**

Crime data and statistics for the Dominican Republic, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/dominicanrepublic>. 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 you through the process. Peace Corps staff will ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Furthermore, the Peace Corps will help you exercise your rights to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the Dominican Republic.

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 the Dominican Republic**

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. The Dominican Republic's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Dominican Republic 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 the Dominican Republic. 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. 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/Dominican Republic'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 contact form with your address and contact information. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in the Dominican Republic 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.

Working as a Peace Corps Volunteer will require adaptation to the new host country culture. This will start from the moment you arrive in-country and be necessary throughout your service in order to be a successful Volunteer. This adjustment may take many forms, and every successful PCV finds their own way to cope and adjust. Peace Corps/Dominican Republic celebrates the diversity of America, and staff will support you in your journey of adjustment.

### **Diversity and Inclusion in Peace Corps/Dominican Republic**

Once Volunteers arrive in-country, 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 the Dominican Republic 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—both between you and other Volunteers, and between you and Dominicans—and to find common ground with your peers and Dominican community alike.

### **Being an Ally**

Diversity and inclusion cannot be realized unless we act upon and defend them as principles. Being an ally is one way to do this. Allies are individuals who actively support and affirm others and who provide non-judgmental guidance to their peers. One of the most important parts of being an ally is to be a good listener. In addition, allies also act as advocates on behalf of those who may be marginalized, bullied, objectified, or denigrated in the face of oppression and discrimination, especially when other voices are not forthcoming. Allies are collaborative, know when to ask questions, and seek to understand before acting. Building alliances within the Volunteer community is a major part of Volunteer support as friendships reduce the negative effects of stress and isolation, which can affect one's service. Allies have been pivotal figures in situations that have put Volunteer coping and resilience to the test.

Being an ally also promotes Volunteer safety. Volunteers traveling as a group, negotiating with host country nationals as a team, and showing other displays of solidarity are quiet, but powerful weapons that may prevent the occurrence of potentially dangerous or negative situations. Supporting your peers, promoting respectful communication, and diplomatically confronting ignorance and prejudice are fundamental ways in which Volunteers can make a positive difference at post.

### **Cross-Cultural Considerations**

Outside of the Dominican Republic'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 the Dominican Republic 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.

Dominican society has elements of machismo. Men often hiss and make comments to women walking by, and the best strategy to deal with this is to completely ignore men who behave in this way. Most female Volunteers never fully accept this sexual harassment, but they develop a tolerance within which they are able to function effectively. Dating for American women in the Dominican Republic is also a sensitive subject, as cultural perceptions of dating and male-female friendships are quite different from the U.S. For example, a female Volunteer who lives alone should not invite a male into her home as others will think they are having sex. Especially for women, sex outside of marriage is not looked upon favorably in the Dominican Republic and the perception of promiscuous behavior may jeopardize your safety or your ability to develop mutually respectful relationships in your community and your job.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Being a woman in the Dominican Republic is sometimes frustrating. This is a patriarchal society that treats women much like America did pre-1960s. It helps that three Peace Corps women have successfully served before me in my community, and the elders recognize the contributions that we, as women, are making. It's also an inspiration to see the women of the community empowered by the women's leadership conference several Volunteers co-sponsored last year. Change here is slow, but I definitely see the society evolving. It's sometimes difficult to put my American attitude of gender equality aside, but I keep reminding myself that I am here to share their culture as much as I am here to share mine with them.”

“My experience in the Dominican Republic has both tamed and fueled the feminist in me. I realized when I got to my site that I wasn’t going to be productive by starting the ‘foreigner’s feminist movement’ in the Dominican Republic. Since alcoholism among men here is high, women in the Dominican Republic seem to carry the larger burden (specifically in the home, taking care of chores and family), but you’ll never hear them complaining. I like working at the grassroots level, sponsoring workshops for women in coordination with our Women in Development committee. We are working with the younger generation, raising young women’s self-esteem and trying to change their perceptions of women’s importance in the community.”

“Not only am I a woman in the Dominican Republic, I am a young, single, childless, and extremely independent woman. These are traits rarely seen in Dominican women and often misunderstood by Dominican men. However, these traits also allow me to express my individualism and self-pride. Yes, I experience unwanted attention from men and, in extreme cases, a few annoying admirers. But these situations allow me to face sexism and disrespect head-on by educating the violators about why women should be looked upon as equals to their male counterparts. It also helps that I’m from America and I’ve faced similar challenges there. Therefore, being a feminist (but not to the extreme) in the Dominican Republic attracts respect from both men and women. I also get the opportunity to educate and help young girls build confidence in themselves. I suggest that female Volunteers exude confidence and their ability to perform as integral parts of society. And if it gets too frustrating, you have a support team of over 60 American women (Peace Corps staff and fellow Volunteers) to tell you why you are strong and phenomenal!”

### **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. They may not envision the United States as a place of rich diversity with various culturally acceptable perspectives, personalities, and characteristics. Thus, a Volunteer of color may be questioned about their U.S. citizenship or have their American nationality dismissed or poorly understood by community members, authorities, and others.

In situations where stereotypes and/or locally held beliefs about Americans influence perception, Volunteers of color should be mindful of the reasons for these views. All too often, host country nationals are simply unaware of the diversity of the United States and require additional information and dialogue. Direct interaction 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 predominantly 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, he or she is expected to behave as a male or female in that culture behaves, observe all associated social customs, and to speak the local language fluently. Host country nationals are sometimes frustrated when the Volunteer does not speak the local language with ease or has a different culture or worldview in spite of resembling the local population. Or, Dominicans may hold locally held assumptions about Volunteers because of their outward appearance, without recognizing that culture and physical appearance are two distinct concepts. For example, in the Dominican Republic, Asian-American Volunteers may be presumed to be “Chino” and black Volunteers may be assumed to be Haitian. 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 should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture of your country of service. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

In rural sites and even in some cities, a Volunteer is usually the only foreign resident and receives extra attention, especially because of his or her racial or ethnic background. Volunteers in certain areas of the country are more prone to racial discrimination than others. African-American Volunteers in the northwest or near the Haitian border, for example, may be asked for their passports. Most Volunteers of color say that despite initial confusion regarding their nationality, they are well-received in their communities.

African American Volunteers may face some unique challenges. They are sometimes mistaken for Dominicans or Haitians depending on their appearance. If seen as Dominican, this can lead to an expectation of Spanish fluency; if seen as Haitian, this can result in poor treatment by Dominicans. On the other hand, being identified with black ethnic groups other than Haitians, such as members of the English-speaking Eastern Caribbean population, may lead to faster acceptance. African American Volunteers should be prepared to face some instances of discrimination and racism. The most effective strategy is to be open-minded and calm. Many of these situations are due to lack of education and the history of the Dominican Republic. Female African American Volunteers should also be prepared to face issues concerning their hair. Many Dominicans consider the straightness of a woman's hair an important quality. Though natural hairstyles are accepted, they are not as highly looked upon as straight hair. Relaxers, usually manufactured locally, are available for Volunteers who wish to use them. U.S. hair products may be available but they may be more expensive. With the growing popularity of natural hairstyles, some Volunteers have also worn braided and twisted styles and have led discussions with host country nationals on how to execute these styles.

Hispanic-American Volunteers may be surprised to find that some Dominicans are unaware that not all Hispanic-Americans are of Mexican origin. Because there is a small population of Dominicans of South Asian descent, some Asian-American Volunteers have been misidentified as Dominicans, especially in urban areas.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“I am one of the African-American Volunteers in the Dominican Republic. There are stares and giggles, which is quite disconcerting. Many people believe you are from Africa. Most people have been very nice and have opened up their homes to me. Many people believe that there are no races of people other than Caucasians living in the United States. I really believe my presence is an educational experience for the community. I would do it again. People here are very hospitable; they want to meet and get to know you. There are no special products for hair and skin care for African-Americans, so load up your bags or send packages through the mail. I am having a great time at my site. The community really wants to know what America is like.”

“Locally produced hair and skin products are readily available in stores for Volunteers who wish to use them. U.S. brand names are available at high-end beauty salons or stores located in the two largest cities in the country (Santo Domingo and Santiago). They may be hard to find in communities where Volunteers serve and much more expensive than local products.”

“Pride, self-love, confidence are just some of the things that get me through a normal day in the Dominican Republic. Similar to every country in the world (including the United States), racism exists in

the D.R., whether it's between the D.R.'s neighbors (Haitians), visitors (tourists of color), or themselves. I've made it a part of my mission as an African-American Volunteer to bring awareness to fellow Volunteers and the Dominican community, as well as to support other diverse Volunteers with their struggles against racism. I've begun to praise the color of skin, appreciate the history of my people, educate the Dominicans of my community, acknowledge the differences in society, and love myself even more. As Volunteers, we take on a task to shed all that is familiar and comfortable and experience what is different and disturbing. For me, some days are more challenging than others, but every day counts. So, every day I wake up thankful for the color of my skin, the texture of my hair, and my commitment to fighting the cause another day."

"Being a Mexican-American Volunteer in northern Dominican Republic has been a positive experience. People have been very welcoming and interested in my family's traditions. At first, they figured they knew everything about my heritage because most are quite familiar with the images of Mexico and Mexicans presented on the dubbed Mexican soaps that are all the rage here. Sometimes when I tell people I'm Mexican-American, I get an excited reaction: 'Oh! Like Veronica Castro!' I brought postcards and pictures of Mexico, which have been a hit."

"I wouldn't say I have had problems as an Asian-American Volunteer. A few people are surprised when they discover I'm American and have said, for example, 'You don't look American.' For the most part, though, being Asian has been more of a positive than a negative. There are many places where I can go where I won't and don't stand out."

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

**For LGBTQ Volunteers:** Given the Dominican Republic's traditional values and the dominance of Catholicism/Christian beliefs, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Gay or bisexual Volunteers are not able to express their sexual orientation as openly as they may have in the United States because of cultural differences and machismo in the Dominican Republic. Because of prejudice against gays and lesbians in Dominican society, it is wise to know your community and co-workers well before disclosing your sexual orientation. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers.

Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that the Dominican Republic is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at [lgbpcv.org](http://lgbpcv.org). Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQA employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at [spectrum@peacecorps.gov](mailto:spectrum@peacecorps.gov).

While there are certainly gays and lesbians in the Dominican Republic, they do not have the level of acceptance found in much of the United States. Although some Dominicans consider homosexuality immoral, they may hold foreigners to a different standard than nationals.

Most LGBTQ Dominicans probably have migrated to larger cities, but many Peace Corps Volunteers are posted in small communities. Relationships with gay, lesbian, or bisexual host country nationals can happen, but as with other cross-cultural relationships, they may not be easy.

**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.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Know that you may face additional challenges as a gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteer. But we have to remember that making sacrifices is part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. I can say that having to ‘go back into the closet’ in my community has been one of the biggest challenges of my service thus far. The best advice I can give to gay Volunteers coming to the Dominican Republic is to find support within the Peace Corps/Dominican Republic community right away. I’ve found that most of the administrative, training, and health staff, as well as other Volunteers, have been very supportive. Remember that you don’t have to completely hide your identity, but it’s going to take some time and may be challenging to find healthy and socially acceptable ways to express it. Be patient with yourself and Dominican culture.”

“Living a white lie is, unfortunately, a part of everyday life. In the beginning, this idea of not completely sharing my life with host country nationals appeared to be something I could tolerate. However, as time passed I started to build close friendships and would like to share my life with people on a more personal level. To avoid rejection and social problems in my town, I have chosen to keep my orientation to myself. For such reasons and to put a stop to the constant questions about my love life (everyone wants to know why someone in his mid-20s has not married yet), saying that a close Volunteer friend of mine is really my girlfriend put a stop to the uncomfortable questions.”

“There is a small gay community in the capital. Their lifestyle is very secretive and they keep to themselves. I’ve decided to not associate with these people to avoid raising suspicion. Everyone seems to know one another, and gossip travels quickly.”

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

As a disabled Volunteer in the Dominican Republic, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In the Dominican Republic, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. What is more, there is very little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

### **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 Dominican relationships. Dominican 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 Dominican culture can be challenging to men and women in different ways given cultural expectations of gender roles, which tend to be traditional. 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.

Being a couple in the Peace Corps has its advantages and its challenges. It helps to have someone to share your experience with, but there are also cultural expectations that can cause stress in a relationship. It is important to remember that you are in a foreign country with new rules and you need to be open-minded about cultural differences. A couple may have to take on some new roles.

A heterosexual man may be encouraged by Dominicans to be the more dominant member in the relationship, be encouraged to make decisions independently of his spouse, or be ridiculed when he performs domestic tasks. A woman may find herself in a less independent role than she is accustomed to or may be expected to perform “traditional” domestic chores such as cooking or cleaning. She may also experience a more limited social life in the community than single Volunteers (since it may be assumed that she will be busy taking care of her husband). Younger Volunteers may look to couples for advice and support. Couples also are likely to be treated with more respect because the community sees marriage as a responsibility. They may be asked when they are going to have children.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“I have gotten to know my spouse better than I ever would have otherwise. I have my best friend here.”

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

Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community church. Volunteers not in the practice of attending church may be challenged to explain their reluctance, but it is possible to politely decline if the church or religion is not one of your choice. Most Volunteers find effective ways to cope with this and feel quite at home in the Dominican Republic.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“I’ve never really been too religious in my life, and certainly never tried to persuade someone to be a certain way. So it was a little strange for me when I arrived at my site and had many of my neighbors asking what religion I was, whether I went to church on Sundays, and how well I knew the Bible. My first few weeks, I didn’t attend church on Sundays—unlike just about everyone in town—and felt like a pariah. The services would last for hours. Well, I developed a strategy of going for about the first hour or so, showing my face, and then splitting. Even though I felt a little odd doing this, I found that my community opened up more to me and to the projects I had developed. I wouldn’t recommend what I did to everyone, but my compromise seemed to help me.”

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

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in the Dominican Republic. They will often have access to individuals and insights that are not available to younger Volunteers. On the other hand, they will be in a

distinct minority within the Volunteer population and could find themselves feeling isolated, looked up to, or ignored.

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

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

Approximately 5 percent of Volunteers in the Dominican Republic are seniors. The vast majority of other people in the Peace Corps community are in their 20s. Service in the Dominican Republic can present significant social and logistical issues for older Volunteers. Still, older Volunteers find Dominicans, the Peace Corps staff, and fellow Volunteers to be very welcoming.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“I love it! In fact, when I went home for a vacation, I was suddenly confronted with age discrimination. Here in the Dominican Republic, I was constantly treated with respect. I was never hassled by men on the streets, almost always given a seat on the bus, and given an inordinate amount of respect by younger people. The Volunteers were great and, although I am over 60, one of my best friends is 22. Oh, and my health has never been better. Walking everywhere brought my cholesterol levels down to below average, my body is almost in shape (I lost about 40 pounds), and I feel 20 years younger than I did before I joined the Peace Corps.”

“I have not experienced negative issues at my site from either Volunteers or work associates. I feel I have been accepted on all levels and included in local and Volunteer activities and socializing. Training was a little uncomfortable. I felt generational differences at the time, but it may have been largely the tension of attending concentrated training in a sizable group such as ours. Personal support from the Volunteers at my site is always available and very warmly and sincerely offered.”

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to the Dominican Republic?**

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 the Dominican Republic?**

It is 110 volts, 60 cycles (similar to that in the United States). Many Volunteers do not have electricity in their houses or have it for only a few hours a day.

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

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. Within 24 hours of your arrival, you will receive some discretionary funds, after which you will be given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which will cover your expenses. Volunteers sometimes bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries, but Peace Corps/Dominican Republic recommends being cautious about this. 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 the first five and a half months in country (during training or the first three months of service), or the last three months of service, except in conjunction with an authorized emergency leave. Family and friends are welcome to visit you after pre-service training and the first three months of service as long as their stay does not interfere with your work. Extended stays at your site are not encouraged and may require permission from your country director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

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

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

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

Volunteers in the Dominican Republic 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 Dominican 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 counterparts. You will have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are frequently within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital. Few Volunteers are based in regional capitals, and even fewer in Santo Domingo (some third-year Volunteer leaders).

**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 the Dominican Republic?**

You can call the United States easily from the Dominican Republic. Many businesses sell calling cards that work with any phone.

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

You do not need to bring a cellular telephone with you; Peace Corps/Dominican Republic issues a cellphone to each Volunteer to ensure efficient communication with staff. Your phone can also be used to call internationally or locally by using a calling card; however, not all areas of the country currently have cellphone service.

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

Many communities have computer centers or Internet cafes that provide email and Internet access, and the resource center at the Peace Corps/Dominican Republic office has computers for Volunteer use. It is a good idea to set up a web-based email account before you leave the United States so you have an email address family and friends can use to contact you in the Dominican Republic.

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM DOMINICAN REPUBLIC VOLUNTEERS

¡*Felicidades y bienvenidos a la Republica Dominicana!* You are going to have an amazing two years here working and living in a fascinating country. As I write this to you, I have ripe mangos bouncing off my roof, fresh vegetables being offered at my doorstep, and my neighbor calling me over to drink coffee. It's a wonderful place to be a Volunteer. You may not yet grasp all that you have gotten yourself into by committing to serve here, but know that every day is a potential adventure and if you open yourself up to it you will have the unique opportunity to create families and friends wherever you go, to impact the lives of those in your community while they do the same for you, and to know yourself in a completely new way.

As a third-year healthy communities Volunteer, I have had the chance to live everywhere from a small village in the northwest without any communication, water, or electricity (but 38 incredibly loving homes) to the vibrant northern city of Santiago to a small town in the south surrounded by cactus and iguanas (not to mention a hop, skip, and jump away from some breathtaking beaches). My work has focused on training women as rural health promoters and training youth as peer sex educators but has also included summer camps for boys and girls, training youth for a half marathon, courses on world diversity, water filters, improved cookstoves, gardens, chickens, kids' art, rainwater collection, school hygiene, and, of course, slip and slides among many more. It's a flexible job that allows me to work in a focused area while also addressing the variety of interests and needs of community members (not to mention my own).

So be prepared to open yourself up to the opportunities that being a Volunteer offers, to accept the generosity of those in your community (or on the bus), to stick out the challenging times knowing that the reward is hidden in there somewhere, to give over control at some point, to say yes to everything (within reason) at least once, to learn from your community (even if it's just about yucca), and to always go big. This will be an amazing experience: Enjoy every minute.

—*Meg Hudson, Peace Corps Volunteer Leader, Healthy Communities*

Dear Aspirantes (This is what they will call you until you complete your 10-week training and officially become a Volunteer!),

You are about to embark upon one of the defining experiences of your life: Get excited! While you and other fellow Volunteers come from different places, diverse backgrounds, and varying levels of experience, you will soon share a distinctive experience that will forever bond you together and may profoundly transform you. Peace Corps in the Dominican Republic is unique and paradoxical. A country filled with so much beauty: unimaginable natural wonders, virgin beaches, crystal clear waterfalls, and gorgeous mountain views. To the outsider, it is a Caribbean paradise. But you will get the chance to be an insider—to experience the good, the bad, and the ugly. You will see dire poverty, lack of educational opportunity, misuse of resources, and corruption. But you will also get to know, on an intimate basis, the beauty of the Dominican spirit: energetic optimism in the face of challenge; profound love of food, music, and celebration; loyalty to family; and insistence on leaving things up to God (with a phrase you will come to know well “*si Dios quiere*”). Your absorbance in Dominican day-to-day culture will force you to reexamine and redefine your beliefs and assumptions. You will be challenged, and quite possibly you will be changed.

My experience in the last two years has defied the Peace Corps stereotypes. Unlike many Volunteers, I wasn't in a remote “campo” location, but rather in a city working with a child's rights NGO on capacity building and organizational strengthening. I came with my hiking shoes, and ended up needing heels!

Suspend your expectations, come with an open mind, and prepare to have the adventure of your life!  
Bienvenidos!

—*Natalie Ferrell, Youth Development Volunteer*

Howdy trainees,

I am a Community Economic Development Volunteer currently living in the capital to get a jump on my extension project, but my original project site community was in Villa Hermosa in La Romana in the east where I still have business, science, and environment projects going on in addition to my boys' group. I am also a married Volunteer and my wife is the Volunteer leader for the Youth sector.

“The toughest job you’ll ever love” was just a catchy phrase two years ago, but has since become the perfect way to sum up my experience. I came in as a Level 1 (yeah, that’s low) in Spanish, struggled through training at times, and had many ups and downs for the first six months in country. For months I felt like I was just spinning my wheels. Then, slowly, things started to fall into place. The investment of taking the time to integrate into the community started to yield opportunities. After some initial successes, enthusiasm started to grow, then exploded to where I had to identify what I could tackle and what I could not. In my second year, I took over as national coordinator for our youth entrepreneurship initiative, which is what I am currently focusing on in the capital.

Feelings about my service transformed from frustration to a very challenging and rewarding passion to invest in the long-term economic direction of a country I have come to deeply appreciate. Work hard, laugh at yourself, and talk with another Volunteer when you need a break. Enjoy it when it’s fun and appreciate it when it’s hard. Every phase of service gets easier and better, and if I can make it to the end of my service ready to extend, anybody can.

—*Brian Humphreys, Community Economic Development Volunteer*

When I applied for the Peace Corps, I knew I wanted to be placed in the Dominican Republic. And despite following the advice of my recruiter to “keep hopes high and expectations low,” that’s exactly where I was to dedicate the next two years of my life.

Whether you were hoping for this scenic Caribbean island for your service, or had to look at a map to locate your new home, you have a lot to look forward to! The island of Hispaniola offers such beauty and diversity for your living and exploring pleasure, and the Dominican people express a generosity that most of us have never experienced from complete strangers: They love to celebrate all of life, and will welcome and celebrate you! Your service will not be without its emotional highs and lows, its failures and its moments in which you feel like quitting. But you will find your rhythm.

Your cadence will be found somewhere between teaching and learning. It will be found in the teacher who now plans his lessons before classes, the 15-year-old who told her boyfriend she wants to wait, the farmers whose harvest is more plentiful, and the *doña* who taught her neighbors how to stay healthy, all because of you. Your cadence will be found at the bottoms of sugary *vasitos de café*, the joy of being the one holding the double-six domino, and the shining look of surprise on your host mom’s face when she discovers how good you are at dancing *bachata* (...or that you’re working on it!). Your cadence will be found when you realize that as much as you’re giving in your service, that this experience is also shaping you for the better.

You indeed have a lot to look forward to! So get ready to take it all in. Take pictures of everything, keep a journal in some form, if your Spanish (or your Dominican Spanish) isn't great, remember you can communicate so much with a smile, and be humble: We don't know everything, and it's called "service" for a reason. So when it seems the *luz* will never come, or your meeting is canceled because of the rain, try to keep things in perspective. Grab some fresh mangoes from a tree to share with your neighbor, and appreciate where life has called you to go! ¡*Bienvenidos!* :)

—*Laila Shahid-El, Education Volunteer*

## PACKING LIST

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

### General Clothing

During training, Peace Corps events, and some of your work activities, you should wear business casual clothing. In the context of Peace Corps/Dominican Republic, this includes to the following: nice jeans (no tears), khakis, business slacks, knee-length skirts/dresses for women, button-up shirts, polo shirts, shirts/blouses that cover the top of the shoulder for women, and nice sandals or close-toed shoes. Note: Shorts are not acceptable during Peace Corps training events or while in the Peace Corps office.

- One or two business casual outfits. If you are a Community Economic Development or Education Volunteer, consider bringing three or four outfits, but remember you can always buy clothes here; one dressy outfit for swearing-in ceremony (nice dress, shirt or pant outfit for women; nice pants and long-sleeved shirt for men).
- Three to five pairs of jeans/casual pants (or capris for women) for everyday work
- One or two pair of shorts for jogging/sports (not too short)
- At least five T-shirts/everyday shirts
- Two-week supply of underwear (cotton is highly recommended)
- Work and dress socks (one-week supply)
- One to three swimsuits
- Two sweatshirts (remember, it is a mountainous country and some places can get quite cool)
- Rain jacket and/or umbrella
- Hat (baseball hats are popular here)
- One or two belts
- Several small, sturdy locks for suitcases/bags/backpacks (Given the openness of the homes, you should keep valuables locked inside a bag at all times)

**Men:** One or two ties (for formal occasions, i.e., swearing-in ceremony, weddings)

**Women:** Two to four casual dresses and/or skirts. One or two pairs of conservative/longer shorts to wear at your site; consider bermuda shorts or those just above the knee.

### Shoes

- One pair sturdy of walking/hiking shoes
- One pair athletic shoes
- At least one pair of sandals such as Chacos/Texas/Rainbows
- One pair dress shoes (men) or one to three pairs of nice sandals without heels (women)
- Some Education, Community Economic Development, and Youth PCVs recommend one pair of high heels for work events. However, these can be purchased in-country in the rare case that you feel you need them.

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

You can buy almost anything that is available in the United States in the Dominican Republic. However, if you have favorite brands of toiletries or cosmetics, you may want to bring a supply, as most imported items are considerably more expensive here.

- Start-up supply of shampoo, deodorant, etc.
- One bath towel and one quick-dry towel for swimming
- Women: If you use tampons, bring several months' supply. They are available only in large cities and are very expensive. Or, bring Diva Cups (two).
- Contact lens solution (The Peace Corps recommends that you use regular glasses, however, in the event that you do decide to use contacts, the solution is very expensive here; and is not supplied by Peace Corps.)

### **Kitchen**

You can easily buy most kitchen supplies (e.g., dishes, pots, glasses, and utensils) locally. There are a few items you might consider bringing:

- An assortment of zip-top bags
- One or two plastic containers
- Sturdy can opener
- Favorite spices (most are available here but expensive)
- Peeler
- Set of measuring cups/spoons
- Favorite recipes

### **Electronics**

Please keep in mind that many Dominicans in the areas where you will be living do not have and cannot afford expensive electronics like iPods and computers. If you are considering bringing items on this list, you should purchase personal articles insurance as these high-priced electronics may be at risk of theft and/or loss. A good battery source is also recommended since most towns, including the neighborhoods of Santo Domingo, experience frequent and prolonged power outages.

- iPod/other music player (iPod touch and iPhone can pick up wireless Internet at no charge in airplane mode. This can be useful for Skype, and they are more portable than a computer.)
- Portable speakers with batteries
- Digital camera
- Electronic reader (Kindle or similar)
- Rechargeable batteries and charger
- USB flash drive (external hard drives are highly recommended because many Volunteers use them for work purposes and to download movies and TV shows)
- A laptop computer with wireless access is highly recommended. Many Volunteers list this as the most useful thing they brought; netbooks or smaller laptops are also highly recommended
- Surge protector for electrical appliances

### **Miscellaneous**

- Money belt
- One to two good quality water bottles (such as Nalgene)
- Sturdy backpack or bag for three- or four-day trips
- Backpack or day pack
- Queen-sized cotton sheets with pillowcases (it may be better to have these shipped after you know what mattress you will have for the next two years)

- Travel alarm clock
- Multiple-utility pocketknife (such as a Leatherman or Swiss Army)
- Light, compact sleeping bag (this will be helpful for the times when you have to bring your own sheets to training events or if you live in a colder area you can unzip it and use it as a blanket)
- Yoga mat (if you practice yoga)
- Head lamps are highly recommended, especially LED
- Sewing kit
- Start-up supply of stationery and pens
- Small/interesting games
- Sunglasses
- Pictures of family and friends

The following have been recommended by Education and Youth Volunteers and suggest they could be useful for your service:

- Easy puzzles
- Good markers
- Assorted craft supplies
- Coloring books
- Materials for easy science activities
- Games and playing cards
- Pens, pencils, and a sharpener
- World map

### **Things Not To Bring**

- English-Spanish Dictionary or 501 Spanish Verbs (you will receive these during training)
- Too many books (The Peace Corps office has a large variety of books that have been left by Volunteers over the years. The Peace Corps resource library is also quite extensive, so only bring resource manuals you find necessary to your work while in-country.)
- Sunscreen and bug spray (will be supplied once you arrive)
- Mosquito nets (will be provided)
- Too many clothes (You will be changing host families three times during your first three months and much of what you have can probably be easily purchased here or shipped from home.)
- Large supply of over-the-counter medications like Tylenol or Ibuprofen; all trainees will receive a medical kit.

## PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

### Family

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

### Passport/Travel

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

### Medical/Health

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

### Insurance

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

### Personal Papers

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

### Voting

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

### Personal Effects

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

### Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. Information about loan deferment is at [peacecorps.gov/loans](http://peacecorps.gov/loans).
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.

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

## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Alissa Mayer Desk Officer	ext. 2512 <a href="mailto:amayer2@peacecorps.gov">amayer2@peacecorps.gov</a>	202.692.2512
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 reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.818.8772
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704