

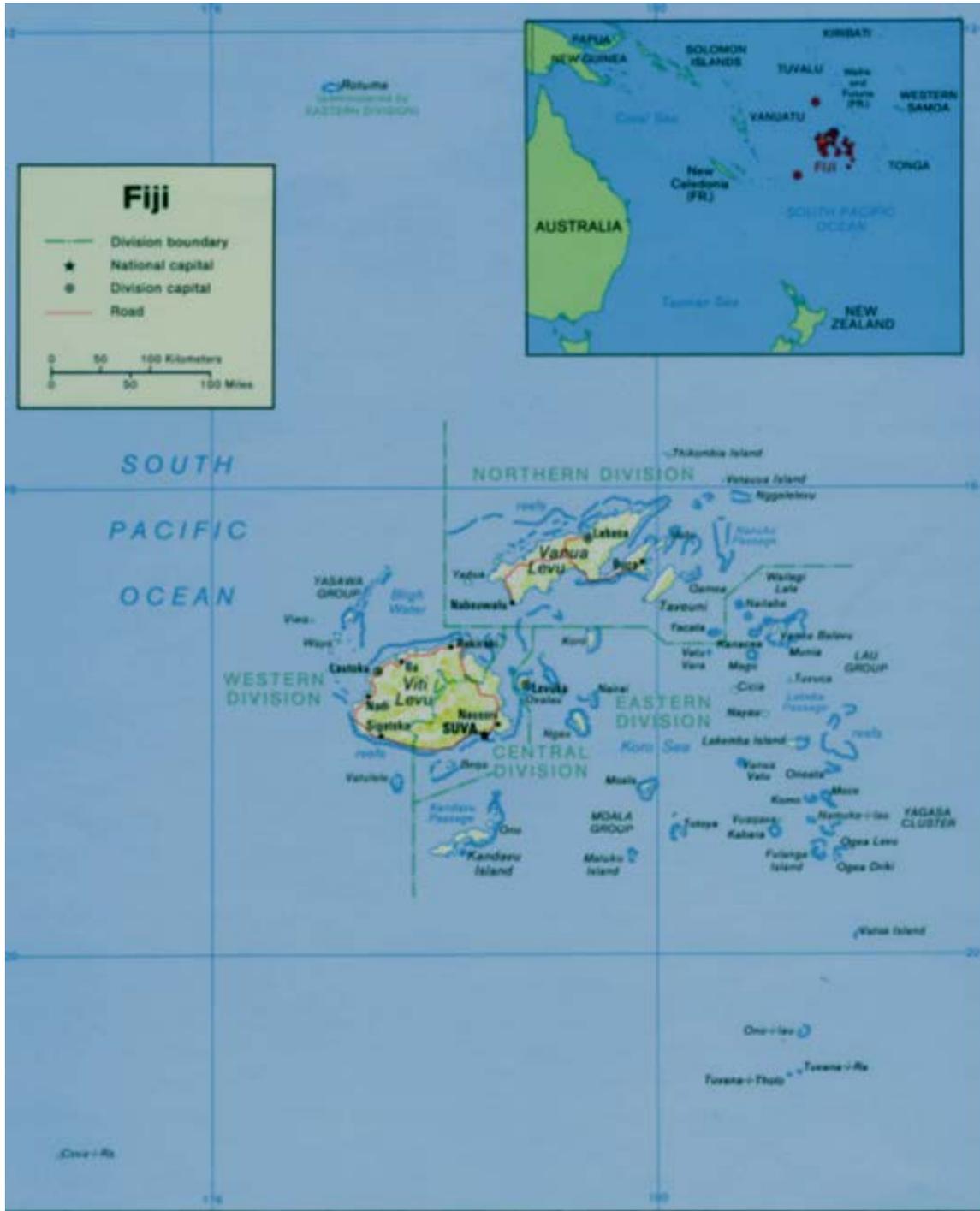
THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

FIJI



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

FIJI MAP



This map is used with permission from the State Department.

A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Fiji Invitee,

Congratulations on being invited to be part of the Peace Corps/Fiji development team! As you consider your invitation, reflect on the fact that you will become a part of a special tradition here in Fiji that started in 1968. Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer can be one of the most challenging and rewarding experiences of your life. Your group will join current Volunteers working to implement the Community Youth Empowerment Project (CYEP). Peace Corps/Fiji has joined with the Ministry of Youth, Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Health to implement and improve programs that ensure the Fijian youth have the capacity and opportunities to develop healthy and productive lives and avoid potential risks and challenges they may face, such as unwanted pregnancy, unemployment, drug and alcohol use, and suicide. As a part of the Peace Corps you will assist and support local communities, schools, and community-based organizations in this important effort.

Development work is challenging, even in the best of circumstances. You will experience frustration on a new level as you adjust to living and working in the Pacific. If you talk to returned and current Peace Corps Volunteers, you will repeatedly hear that you need to be flexible, patient, and dedicated. Listen to them carefully. The success of your work will depend not just on imparting your knowledge, but on realizing you can't change lifelong habits in a day, and that listening and learning are as important as talking and teaching. You must try your best to build working relationships with your coworkers and at the same time be independent and creative when needed. Although Peace Corps staff will be there to help you, especially during your pre-service and other trainings, as a Volunteer you will often need to cope on your own in seemingly strange surroundings. Please come with a commitment to make this experience successful, to stay the full 27 months, and to try and make a difference.

When you join us, you will be given more information about what is expected of you. That said, please bear in mind that most returned Volunteers will tell you that dealing with ambiguity and staying flexible as situations change is part of being a Peace Corps Volunteer. You may think you do not have all the resources to fulfill these expectations but you will have the opportunity to do your best every day, and success may often come over time in unexpected forms.

Our staff and Volunteers have put a great amount of thought and effort into preparing for your arrival. We are excited about working with you to contribute to development in Fiji.

Congratulations on your invitation to join Peace Corps/Fiji!

I look forward to meeting you.

Eddie Stice
Country Director
RPCV/Fiji (1976–78)

Table of Contents

A WELCOME LETTER.....	1
CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS	4
PEACE CORPS/FIJI HISTORY AND PROGRAMS	5
History of the Peace Corps in Fiji	5
History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Fiji	5
COUNTRY OVERVIEW: FIJI AT A GLANCE	7
History.....	7
Government.....	7
Economy.....	8
People and Culture.....	8
Environment	8
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION	10
General Information About Fiji	10
Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees.....	11
Online Articles/Current News Sites About Fiji.....	11
Fiji Language Resources.....	12
International Development Sites About Fiji.....	12
Recommended Books.....	13
LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE.....	14
Communications.....	14
Housing and Site Location.....	15
Living Allowance and Money Management.....	15
Food and Diet.....	16
Transportation.....	17
Geography and Climate.....	18
Social Activities.....	18
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior.....	20
Personal Safety.....	20
Rewards and Frustrations.....	21
PEACE CORPS TRAINING.....	23
Overview of Pre-Service Training.....	23
Technical Training.....	23
Language Training.....	24
Cross-Cultural Training	24
Health Training.....	24

Safety and Security Training.....	24
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service.....	25
YOUR HEALTH CARE IN FIJI.....	25
Health Issues in Fiji.....	26
Helping You Stay Healthy.....	27
Maintaining Your Health.....	27
Women’s Health Information.....	28
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit.....	28
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist.....	28
SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH.....	30
Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk.....	30
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime.....	32
Support from Staff.....	32
Office of Victim Advocacy.....	33
Crime Data for Fiji.....	33
Volunteer Safety Support in Fiji.....	33
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW.....	35
Cross-Cultural Considerations.....	36
What Might a Volunteer Face?.....	36
Possible Gender Role Issues.....	36
Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color.....	37
Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers.....	39
Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities.....	40
Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples.....	40
Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers.....	41
Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers.....	41
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	42
WELCOME LETTERS FROM FIJI VOLUNTEERS.....	45
PACKING LIST.....	49
PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST.....	53
CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS.....	54

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/FIJI HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Fiji

The Peace Corps has had a long and successful history of service in Fiji dating back to 1968. Prior to suspending operations in early 1998, Volunteers served the country for 30 years without interruption. In response to a request from the government of Fiji, the Peace Corps returned to Fiji in 2003. More than 2,225 Peace Corps Volunteers have worked with local communities and organizations in various sectors, including education, agriculture, business, environmental resource management, fisheries, and health.

Notable past achievements by Volunteers include teaching thousands of students, introducing environmental themes into secondary school curricula, working with community members on financial literacy training, collaborating with Fiji-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to train locals in monitoring and managing marine-protected areas, and the creation of a literacy camp for special needs children.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Fiji

Peace Corps/Fiji continually evaluates its operations and impact in local communities to ensure Volunteers are meeting the needs of the host country.

Community Health Empowerment Project (CHEP): At the request of, and in partnership with, the Fijian Ministry of Health (MOH), most Peace Corps Volunteers in Fiji are currently working in the Community Health Empowerment Project. Focusing on health education and capacity-building activities and depending on the needs of the MOH and community, CHEP Volunteers support the efforts of the MOH and the Fijian people to promote wellness and prevent illness in four broad areas:

- **Non-Communicable Disease (NCD) Prevention:** According to the MOH, NCDs are at a crisis stage in Fiji and the leading cause of illness, disabilities, and death. NCDs prevalent in Fiji include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, and hypertension. CHEP Volunteers work with their MOH colleagues to promote healthy lifestyles and the reduction of the major NCD risk factors. The four major risk factors are: smoking, poor nutrition, alcohol consumption, and lack of physical activity.
- **Improved Maternal and Child Health:** Volunteers work to promote the health of the mother and infants. This includes promotion of exclusive breast-feeding for the first six months and prevention and control of childhood illnesses, including diarrhea and malnutrition.
- **Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases:** Volunteers work to promote behavior change to reduce risks of communicable diseases such HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and diseases related to poor water and sanitation practices.
- **Capacity Building and System Strengthening:** Volunteers work to empower and build capacity of health-care providers and community members to promote wellness.

This project will phase out at the end of 2016.

Community Youth Empowerment Project (CYEP): Overall, CYEP focuses on behavior change promotion and capacity-building activities to empower youth in Fiji to live more healthy lives, make healthy decisions, and gain access to programs that support positive youth development. Volunteers will collaborate with local partners to implement and improve programs that ensure the youth in Fiji have the capacity and opportunities to live and develop healthy and productive lives and avoid potential risks and challenges they may face, such as unwanted pregnancy, unemployment, drug and alcohol use, and suicide. They will also work on programs and activities that enhance youths' life skills and increase their

participation in community development activities. Finally, Volunteer work may also entail building the capacity of parents, caretakers, teachers, and other adults to effectively raise and/or work with youth.

This is accomplished through the project's three goals:

1. Youth will adopt behaviors and practices in order to develop to their full potential and lead healthier, productive lives.
2. Youth will engage in activities to promote healthy communities, such as leadership development, service-learning, improved water sanitation and hygiene practices, communicable disease prevention, and environmental education principal and practices.
3. Parents, caregivers, service providers, and organizations will have increased capacity to develop positive relationships and promote healthy lifestyles with youth.

CYEP Volunteers may work in several settings, including schools, communities, district government offices, or youth training centers. Depending on the specific needs of local partners and communities, Volunteers may be involved in the following activities:

- Implementing and/or strengthening health programming for schools and non-formal education activities to provide life skills training for at-risk youth
- Designing, developing, and facilitating programs or activities on exercise and nutrition, life skills, civic engagement, and/or community development
- Facilitating activities to create an awareness of health issues and potential mitigation strategies and develop life skills (e.g., decision making; self-esteem; civic engagement; leadership, etc.)
- Training and supporting youth to implement community service-learning projects around self-identified topics in their communities
- Providing training of trainers for teachers, community health workers, and community members to engage youth
- Facilitating discussions for parents, caregivers, and service providers to increase their knowledge of health and wellness
- Promoting the inclusion and participation of both youth and adults in health promotion and life skills activities
- Encouraging environmental awareness and promotion in communities, including improving water, sanitation, and hygiene practices

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: FIJI AT A GLANCE

History

Fiji became a British Crown colony in October 1874. In 1970, the nation became self-governing under the British Commonwealth. Fiji was converted into a republic after a 1987 military coup, but rejoined the commonwealth in 1997. A similar pattern occurred when George Speight, a businessman who ignited ethnic tensions, led a civilian coup in 2000. Speight and his men took 45 government officials hostage for nearly two months until the military restored order. The interim president, Josefa Iloilo, was eventually sworn in by the Great Council of Chiefs in March 2001. In September 2001, general elections were held and interim Prime Minister Laisenia Qarase was elected to that position. General elections were held again in May 2006, and both the president and prime minister were re-elected to their positions. Despite the election, another coup toppled the government on December 5, 2006. Led by Commodore Voreqe “Frank” Bainimarama, the military peacefully, but forcefully, removed Qarase and Iloilo.

On January 4, 2007, Commodore Bainimarama returned executive power to ousted President Iloilo. Fiji is currently led by Prime Minister Bainimarama and President Epeli Nailatikau, Iloilo’s appointed successor.

Government

The capital and government seat of Fiji is Suva, which is on the largest island in Fiji, Viti Levu. The government of Fiji is undergoing changes from its major restructuring after the 2000 and 2006 coups. Fiji’s current government is headed by the military, per the 1999 constitution. In April 2009, Prime Minister Bainimarama and then-President Iloilo nullified the constitution, restricted the press, and pushed the date for elections to 2014. As a result, Fiji was excluded from the British Commonwealth and the Pacific Islands Forum and has ongoing disputes with other countries over its governance, most notably with Australia and New Zealand. Following peaceful elections in 2014, Fiji was invited back to the Pacific Island Forum.

Indigenous Fijians have a well-developed local system of government, beginning at the village (*koro*) level. Each village is represented by a village headman (*turaga ni koro*), who is elected by the villagers. Villages are grouped into 18 districts (*tikina*) and these districts are grouped into 14 provinces (*yasana*). The Fijian Affairs Board appoints a *roko tui* to head each province.

Indo-Fijians and other non-Fijians are served by a provincial administration that represents ministries at the local level, provides funding for infrastructure projects, and maintains government services. An advisory counselor represents Indo-Fijians’ and other non-indigenous Fijians’ interests at the provincial level.

The traditional sociopolitical governing system of the indigenous Fijian people is the chiefdom system. The chief can be male or female, though most are male. The Fijian word for chief is *ratu* for men and *adi* (pronounced “andi”) for women. The chief has sovereign power over the people of his or her village. The roots of this lifestyle go deep into the Fijian soul and you will encounter evidence of it when you might least expect it. You will learn more about the dynamics of this during training and throughout your assignment.

As a Volunteer you may observe incidences of discrimination in the behavior between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians. That said, the issues that define these relationships are historic, complex, and often difficult for outsiders to fully understand.

Fiji held its national election in September 2014. The previous prime minister, Frank Bainimarama, was re-elected. Prior to the election, Bainimarama was an Independent but stood for the FijiFirst Party in 2014. The Social Democratic Liberal Party and the National Federation Party both received over 5 percent of the votes, which is the threshold for a party or independent to have seats in the parliament. Note: It is extremely important that, as a Peace Corps Volunteer, you be non-political regarding Fiji at all times. Although it is fine for you to discuss your own beliefs about politics in the U.S., you may not discuss or become involved in local or national politics or in discussions regarding the government of Fiji. It is very important that you not be perceived as an advocate for one group over another, as this may seriously impact your effectiveness in your community and workplace or even lead to you having to leave Fiji early.

Economy

Fiji's economy is based largely on tourism. Previously, the sugar industry accounted for approximately 30 percent of the gross domestic product; however, its importance has been diminished since indigenous Fijians rescinded the land-leases from the mainly Indo-Fijian cane farmers and the industry is struggling to return to prominence. Garment manufacturing, gold mining, timber, commercial fishing, kava farming, coconut harvesting, and other agro-based products also contribute significantly to Fiji's economy. Their natural artesian water has also become a significant export. Unfortunately, the sugar and garment industries are seriously at risk and could possibly collapse in the near future due to changes in international trade agreements.

People and Culture

Fiji is a multiracial society. Officially all citizens are now referred to as Fijians or Fiji nationals. There are two major ethnic groups in Fiji: indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians (mostly descendants of indentured laborers and servants brought from India by the British during the colonial period). According to a 2014 estimate, the population of Fiji is 903,207, with 57 percent being indigenous Fijians (iTaukei), 37.5 percent Indo-Fijians, and other races making up the remaining 6 percent.

Indigenous Fijians are mostly Melanesian, but there are some communities that are mainly Polynesian or Micronesian, because Fiji lies within a transitional zone between several areas of the South Pacific. Most indigenous Fijians live in rural villages of approximately 50–500 people led by a chief, although more recently many are moving to urban areas. Most Indo-Fijians live in towns, cities, or settlements, the latter being similar to villages, but less formally structured.

Christian missionaries have had a profound impact on the religious practices of the Fijians and there are many practicing Methodists, Catholics, and other Christian denominations among the Fijian people. Indo-Fijians are generally Hindu or Muslim, but a small percentage are also Christian. Although ancient Fijian religious ceremonies are not widely practiced except in demonstrations or at cultural events, many of the traditional beliefs and stories remain interwoven with Christian practices.

When you reach your work community, you will find your neighbors to be curious about you. The degree of curiosity is directly related to the location of your site. The more urban you are, the more likely your neighbors are to have encountered Europeans or other Americans. In the villages, you are going to be a local celebrity—at least for a while.

Environment

Known as the soft coral capital of the world, Fiji has an abundance of overwhelmingly colorful reefs, more than 1,000 tropical fish species, and many interesting and unusual invertebrates. Fiji has more than 300 islands spanning approximately 1.3 million square kilometers (500,000 square miles) of the South Pacific. Thousands of miles of coral reef thread throughout the islands.

Fiji has a tropical maritime climate. However, due to its steep mountain ranges and the vast area it encompasses, local conditions can range from hot and dry to warm and humid. The “cool” dryer months are May to October, while the hot and wet season generally lasts from November to April.

Environmental and climate change awareness is growing among Fijians—especially in coastal villages where damage to some shorelines and the coral reefs has had a dramatic impact on people's lives. Numerous coastal areas have developed marine protected areas (MPAs) to preserve their local environments. Elders are becoming more cognizant of the impact of reckless fishing practices (e.g., using dynamite or poison) and over-fishing. Support from resorts, NGOs, and the government for MPAs has been very positive and the University of the South Pacific’s Fiji Locally Managed Marine Area project (led by a returned Peace Corps Volunteer from Fiji) has had an inspiring impact on several coastal areas. In the recent past, Peace Corps Response Volunteers in Fiji had been worked with the government on climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Fiji 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 Fiji State.gov

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

Gpo.gov/libraries/public/

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

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/

United Nations resource book with 2014 statistical country data

Data.un.org

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

Wikipedia.org

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

Worldbank.org

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

Data.worldbank.org/country

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

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can find out anything from what time it is in the capital of Fiji to how to convert from the dollar to the Fijian currency. Just click on Fiji and go from there.

www.politicsresources.net

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

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

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

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

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

www.worldinformation.com

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

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

RPCV.org

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

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Fiji

UN.org/News/

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

VOAnews.com

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

www.fiji.gov.fj

The official site for the government of Fiji

<http://www.fiji.travel/>

This is official website of Tourism Fiji. While it is geared toward travelers, there is useful information on history and culture.

Fiji has two main daily newspapers printed in English, *Fiji Sun* (www.fijisun.com.fj) and the *Fiji Times* (www.fijitimes.com). Both are regulated by the government and print very little political news. Other news can be found on blogs (be aware of biases writers may have!) and cultural information in local magazines, such as *Mai Life* (www.mailife.com.fj), *Marama*, and *Turaga*.

Fiji Language Resources

<http://www.fijiguide.com/page/the-language>

Good overview of the history of the Fijian language. Included on this site are a pronunciation guide and lists of key words and phrases in both Fijian and Fiji Hindi. This is a great place to start.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fiji_Hindi

See the first link under the “Fijian” heading. It includes a thorough overview of the history of Fiji Hindi and word lists of English and Fijian words that have been incorporated into Hindi.

International Development Sites About Fiji

www.crc.uri.edu

Coastal Links Coastal Resources Center

www.usp.ac.fj/marine

University of the South Pacific's School of Marine Studies

www.sprep.org

Secretariat of the Pacific Regional Environment Programme

<http://www.adb.org>

Asian Development Bank in Fiji

www.un.org/esa/agenda21/natlinfo/countr/fiji/index.htm

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division of Sustainable Development

www.undp.org.fj

United Nations Development Programme—Fiji Multi Country Office

www.sidsnet.org

Small Island Developing States Network

<http://www.wpro.who.int/countries/fji/en/>

World Health Organization in the Pacific

<http://www.acys.info/>

Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies

Recommended Books

Books about Fiji

1. Derrick, R.A. *"A History of Fiji."* Suva, Fiji: Government Press, 2001.
2. Lal, Brij V. *"Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the 20th Century."* Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1992.
3. Geraghty, Paul A. *"Fijian: Lonely Planet Phrasebook."* Footscray, Victoria: Lonely Planet Publications, 2008.
4. Insight Guides. *"Insight Pocket Guide Fiji Islands."* 2003.
5. Stanley, David. *"Moon Handbooks Fiji."* Calif.: Avalon Travel Publishing, 2004.
6. Starnes, Dean and Nana Luckham. *"Lonely Planet Fiji."* Lonely Planet Publications, 2009.

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).

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Airmail leaving Suva takes about six to 10 days to make it to its U.S. destination. However, it sometimes takes twice that for U.S. mail to reach Suva. (Note: The farther you live from Suva, the longer the mail will take in both directions. The additional time may range from one day to two weeks or more.) If possible, items from the States should be mailed in padded envelopes instead of boxes. They will arrive much faster, won't be searched as thoroughly by customs, and will be cheaper to send. If you need to mail something in a box, use the flat-rate boxes. If a package has more than FJ\$500 (about \$280 U.S.) of goods inside, you will have to pay a tax on the package. And just learn to accept that it takes a long time for things to get here.

The local mail system is better than in many developing countries and, once you have been assigned to a permanent site, you will be expected to have your mail delivered to your new address. During pre-service training, you may use the following address:

“Your Name,” PCT
Peace Corps/Fiji
Private Mail Bag
Suva, Fiji Islands
South Pacific

Most essential items that are available in the U.S. are also available in Fiji through local stores in Suva and in larger towns. If your friends and family want to send you packages, have them check with their home post office as to what they can and cannot send. Customs agents are diligent about checking for food items and no seeds can be shipped to Fiji. Many times, Packages with food and/or seeds are confiscated, leading to frustration on the part of the sender and receiver. You are encouraged not to send these types of items to Fiji.

At the time of this writing, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has agreed that Peace Corps Volunteers are able to import, under concession, personal packages for their first six months in Fiji. If the items being imported are less than FJD \$1,000 in value, the items can be cleared by local Peace Corps staff. If the value of the items is more than FJD \$1,000, then you will have to engage the services of a registered customs agent to clear the paperwork through customs (with additional costs).

The local postal service (Post Fiji, Ltd.) can be contacted in-country at 0800.330.7966 for specific questions.

Telephones

All Peace Corps Volunteers in Fiji have mobile phones. Inexpensive mobile phones are readily available for purchase in Fiji and you will be able to purchase one during your first few days in-country (your settling-in allowance includes a stipend to buy a local mobile phone). Most Volunteers live close to a phone (either a landline or a radio telephone) or have mobile coverage. Some Volunteers may have limited or no cellphone coverage at their site. In extremely rural areas, people sometimes use a “radio phone” (similar to citizens’ band radios).

The country code for Fiji is 679; there are no city codes.

To call the U.S., many Volunteers use Skype or FaceTime to make voice and video calls over the Internet. Calling computer-to-computer is free and calling a U.S. phone number with Skype has a minimal charge. Currently serving Volunteers will be a great source of information regarding less expensive ways to communicate via mail, phone, and Internet in Fiji.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

There are several Internet cafes in Suva and other urban centers. Access currently costs FJD\$2–\$5 per hour. You will probably not have regular access during pre-service training and it may be very limited at your site unless you are in a larger town. Many Volunteers will be able to purchase mobile WiFi devices, which can be used to access the Internet from *most* sites.

Housing and Site Location

You will be living with a village-based host family during your eight weeks of pre-service training in Fiji. You will soon discover that families are very important to the people of Fiji and that living with a host family can be both enjoyable and challenging. Going into the experience, you should definitely set some learning goals and make sure you are getting the most out of your host family experience—including language, culture, and other adjustment issues.

Your living accommodation is intended to be modest and comparable to that of your counterparts and neighbors. As in any country, housing in Fiji varies in architecture and amenities. Village houses may be constructed of palm fronds (bures) or may be made of wood, concrete block, or corrugated iron. Depending on assignment, Volunteers live in various settings, including rural areas, villages, towns, or urban areas. Some Volunteers are assigned to share accommodations with another Peace Corps Volunteer(s). Most houses in Fiji have running water, except for those in some rural villages. While rainfall is plentiful in most parts of Fiji, there may be periods where drinking water is scarce, especially in the western part of the main island and in places where rain catchment is the only source of water. Some Volunteers may have to walk short distances to carry water to their house.

Most people in Fiji do their laundry by hand either in their homes or at a local water source. You will likely do the same and have the opportunity to practice this skill in your pre-service training.

Traditional houses usually have separate kitchen and toilet facilities. Many rural communities do not have access to electricity, but most have at least a few hours of electricity a day provided by a generator. Some Volunteers may be placed on outer islands and/or in interior villages where transportation is by small plane, boat, and pickup truck.

A word about pets and other critters: There are a lot of animals in Fiji, and you'll experience the wildlife of Fiji no matter where you're stationed. Some Volunteers choose to have cats and/or dogs, but this can be very challenging. Dogs and cats are not treated like they are in the U.S.: They are considered "animals" as opposed to "pets." They serve a purpose and are typically kept outside. Volunteers who choose to have a cat or dog are strongly encouraged to wait until they have been at their site at least a few months and to have the pet neutered or spayed. The Peace Corps is unable to assist with the care and transport of Volunteer pets.

Living Allowance and Money Management

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

During your training period, the Peace Corps will open an account for you at one of the local banks. The Peace Corps will deposit your living allowance into this account each month. There are banks and ATMs in all of the urban centers throughout Fiji. Most banks are open from 10 a.m.–3 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 10 a.m.–4 p.m. Friday. Some urban stores also allow you to use your ATM card to make purchases.

ATMs are available in all the large cities in Fiji, and both Visa and MasterCard are accepted (with applicable charges from your bank).

Every month, the Peace Corps will deposit a lump sum into your local bank account. It will be enough money to cover modest living expenses with the expectation that your lifestyle is similar to that of your local counterparts. Your living allowance also covers utility expenses that are not covered by your host agency, and a very modest amount to cover in-country telephone or Internet charges. As the goal of a Volunteer is to live a lifestyle similar to your counterparts, the Peace Corps strongly encourages Volunteers to live on this living allowance alone and to not supplement it with money from the U.S.

Fijian money is counted in dollars and cents. They have \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 notes (not bills), and 5-, 10-, 20-, 50-cent coins and \$1 and \$2 pieces. The exchange rate between the American and Fijian dollar fluctuates. The rate at the time of this writing is roughly FJD \$1.82 for every US\$1. The estimated costs quoted in this *welcome book* are in Fijian dollars, unless otherwise noted.

Food and Diet

Fiji has a wide selection of food and many fruits and vegetables are locally grown. Availability is seasonal, but you can usually get pineapple, bananas, and papaya, as well as many other fruits and vegetables. The staple foods in Fijian villages are starchy root crops, namely, dalo (taro root) and cassava. There is also plenty of curry dishes in Indo-Fijian communities. Urban areas offer much more variety and you can get very inexpensive Chinese food and even the local version of pizza. Suva has a wider selection of restaurants, from upscale to very cheaply priced food stands on the corner—including McDonald's.

Volunteers receive a local cookbook and will learn how to cook local foods during pre-service training. Volunteers in remote areas will find that their daily food selection will be limited and they will be asked to start a garden to grow their own vegetables and demonstrate good garden and nutrition techniques to the community. Flour, tinned fish, rice, curry spices, and *dalo* are usually available everywhere. The farther you are from the urban center, the fewer choices you will have.

In addition to dalo, cassava is one of the more pervasive root crops found in Fiji. Cassava is the root from which tapioca is made. It is white and starchy and tastes something like a textured potato. There is plenty of fish available: fresh, frozen, and canned. Mutton is imported from New Zealand, while chicken is raised locally.

Most fresh fruits (mangoes, bananas, pineapples, oranges, passion fruit, guavas, papaya, etc.) and vegetables (cassava, *dalo*, beans, squash, jack fruit, breadfruit, sweet potatoes, Chinese cabbage, English cabbage, chilies, tomatoes, etc.) can be purchased from local open-air markets. Some items are available year-round and some only seasonally. Vendors set up their wares on tables and crates or just on the ground, and sell it all “by the heap.”

Shops range from the small corner markets and village shops that sell basic items to large supermarket outlets that offer goods from food to tools. Cost-U-Less, a warehouse store similar to Costco (but with less selection), opened in Suva, but prices are higher than in most other stores.

Depending upon where your site is located, you may find yourself cooking on a small two-burner gas stove, by kerosene, or over an open fire. Gas stoves are more common in urban areas and the kerosene burners in the rural villages.

Yaqona is the Fijian name for kava, a non-alcoholic drink made from the roots of the kava plant, which is a member of the pepper family. The roots are ground and made into a drink that looks like muddy water. It numbs your tongue temporarily and has something of an “earthy” taste. (Some say it tastes like water with twine soaked in.) It has a pleasant, calming/relaxing effect on the body and may make some people slightly drowsy or even “drunk” if consumed in large amounts.

Traditionally, *kava* has been a ceremonial drink—the ceremony is called a *sevusevu*—and it has great significance to the Fijian people. You will see *yaqona* offered at virtually every event of any significance and at many ordinary events. You will also see people (mostly men) drinking it in the markets, at taxi stands, at work, and at most social gatherings. Though of indigenous origin, many Indo-Fijians also drink it, but in less ritualized settings. As a Volunteer, you will be involved in many ceremonies and significant events, which means you will be drinking your share of *yaqona*. You will become accustomed to it, and possibly become fond of it. It is considered impolite to refuse the first *bilo* (smooth, half-coconut shells especially used for drinking *yaqona*), but after the first, you can choose whether to drink more. (But be forewarned: Fijians will be delighted if you drink more than one!)

You will learn much more about *yaqona* and the *sevusevu* ceremony, Fijian protocol/etiquette, and Indo-Fijian customs during your training.

Transportation

Most of the time, you will travel on foot. Look to the right! Fiji is a former British colony and everyone drives on the left side of the road. There is bus transportation to nearly every community in Fiji, except for the outer islands. The bus prices are relatively inexpensive. Local buses (the ones that travel in and around town, or those that stop at every stop along a longer route) may not have glass windows. If it rains, you unroll a plastic flap that’s designed to keep most of the rain out of the bus. Express buses that connect urban areas usually have glass windows and may have air conditioning.

There are also mini-buses (small vans) that carry passengers along the main urban centers and around villages. Until recently, they have not been regulated and have tended to be overcrowded and poorly maintained. Volunteers are strongly advised not to ride in them unless this is the only mode of transportation to your site.

Taxis are numerous in Suva and they seem to make up the bulk of the traffic on city streets. Rides within town are usually governed by meter (the flag falls and starts the hire rate at \$1.50 from 6 a.m.–10 p.m. and \$2 from 10 p.m.–6 a.m.), whereas longer trips are negotiable. Most rides in town will cost between \$2–\$5, depending on how far you are going.

In rural areas, you may travel by carrier truck (*lorry*). These are large trucks with tarp-covered backs for passengers. Each side of the truck bed is lined with a bench that can usually carry up to 25 people comfortably. These are most often used by local residents bringing their agricultural products to market, in addition to passengers. Prices usually match the local bus rates.

Fiji is a country comprised of islands. Chances are very high that you will travel by boat at some point during your service. The larger islands have regularly scheduled service, but all schedules in Fiji are subject to last-minute changes. Many of the villages on outer islands have local boat captains to bring villagers into the larger centers for shopping or to catch a ferry to Suva. There are also punts in some

areas for crossing rivers. Volunteers serving in Fiji should be comfortable both on and in the water, as many assignments will require periodic boat travel.

If you are uncomfortable with your swimming skills or have a fear of water, please contact the Fiji country desk officer or your placement officer at Peace Corps headquarters to further discuss this issue prior to accepting your invitation to serve in Fiji.

There are two international airports, Nadi International Airport on western Viti Levu and Nausori International Airport outside Suva. Many of the outer islands have airstrips for periodic Pacific Sun flights and/or private planes.

Geography and Climate

Fiji is composed of 332 islands with a total area of 18,376 square kilometers. Fiji is located between 15 and 22 degrees south latitude and 177 west to 175 east longitude. There are four main islands: Viti Levu, Vanua Levu, Kadavu, and Taveuni. (The Peace Corps currently has Volunteers working on six islands.)

Fiji is located just at the edge of the International Date Line, so it is one of the first countries in the world to see the dawn of each new day! Fiji is 12 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time, which means that it is generally 20 hours ahead of Pacific Standard Time and 17 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time. Daylight saving time was just reintroduced in Fiji, pushing it ahead one hour (EST + 18) from October to March. (For example, the time difference from Fiji to California is three to five hours earlier and a day later depending on daylight saving.) When in doubt regarding the time difference between Fiji and another place in the world where you wish to call, you may consider visiting websites such as <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/converter.html>.

The main urban centers on Viti Levu are those that are usually labeled on maps of Fiji (e.g., Suva, the capital; Nausori; Korovou; Rakiraki; Tavua; Ba; Lautoka; Nadi; and Sigatoka). The main urban centers on Vanua Levu are Labasa and Savusavu. For the outer islands, the port town is generally the main trade center.

The weather in Fiji is “mainly fine with some scattered showers, especially over the eastern parts of both main islands.” This is a typical weather report that is aired every two hours on radio Fiji. It is usually steamy and hot here from November to April, during the rainy season. Generally, it will never get cooler than the low 60s (to the low 50s in the winter in the hills) and never be any hotter than the 90s. During the rainy season, it is common to have one, two, or more cyclones per year. Many people wonder during the rainy season (i.e., most of the time on the eastern side of Viti Levu) if their laundry will ever dry. Refer to the packing list for some detailed suggestions of things you could bring to be comfortable in this weather.

Social Activities

Fiji has an absolutely beautiful natural environment, which draws many tourists to the resorts that are located throughout the islands. Although Volunteers are considered “on duty” 24 hours a day, seven days a week, each Volunteer receives 24 days of vacation per year of service. Even in remote areas, villages and settlements usually have social and cultural events nearly every weekend, in which Volunteers may choose to participate. Big parties surround events such as weddings, New Year’s, birthdays, etc. When a Fijian or Indo-Fijian child turns one year old, there is a big family birthday party to celebrate. The same goes for the 21st birthday. Occasionally, for important events, there will be a traditional dance performed, called a meke, or an all-night dance party, called a taralala.

Hopefully you will encounter a lovo (feast) and/or taralala in your training village. There are quite a few festivals between July and September, many of which are fundraisers. The Hibiscus Festival in Suva is especially popular and takes place in August. Nadi hosts a Bula (“Welcome”) Festival in July, Lautoka

hosts a Sugar Festival in September and, on Vanua Levu, Labasa hosts the Friendly North Festival in August. In addition, there are many Christian, Hindu, and Muslim celebrations throughout the year.

Many Volunteers jog or walk for exercise. While exercising, women generally wear wraparound skirts (sulus), skirts, or knee-length shorts, depending upon their site. Volunteers need to be aware of areas or times of day where it may not be safe to walk or run alone or at all. There is an Olympic-sized pool open to the public in Suva, as well as opportunities for swimming at local beaches. Volunteers are expected to observe local customs for dress, as well as for using an area that belongs to a particular village; in Fiji, there are very few areas that are truly public land, even if there is not a town or home in sight.

Sports are year-round and there is something for everyone. If you think you might want to play a sport, bring cleats or other equipment. Other Volunteers have used yoga mats, running shoes, exercise balls, bands/tubes, and jump ropes to continue their fitness routines while here. Bring exercise DVDs for your use and classes. Rugby and soccer are very popular here. Rugby is to Fiji as American football is to the United States, except that it is easier to get an autograph from a local hero here! Fiji's seven-person team is often considered the best in the world.

There are many activities available to fill your leisure time in your community. Some Volunteers learn to socialize more; others spend their time introducing their hobbies to their new local friends. Some Volunteers have taught aerobic classes (which go over surprisingly well here!), taught local kids new songs, or established a weekly craft night. Volunteers may also find themselves learning some of the local handiwork skills, such as mat weaving. Others rediscover their love of reading. If you like to read, bring some good books, as they are expensive to purchase locally. Paperback books are available in many local stores and the University of the South Pacific (located in Suva) has a fair selection in its bookstore, but they are very expensive. The Peace Corps office has a resource center where Volunteers may find professional and project-related material that can be checked out. Over the years, Volunteers have also left many books behind, leading to the establishment of small lending libraries or book exchanges in Labasa, Savusavu, and Suva.

Consider keeping a journal of your stay here in Fiji. It is not only a great way to document your experiences and accomplishments, but it is also great to use and review when filling out your work reports!

Fiji has three major television stations and 12 radio stations. Suva and Lautoka have cinemas that carry first-run Hollywood movies (some movies have even had their premier screening in Fiji). In the villages, Volunteers may find themselves invited to a common building to watch an old movie.

During vacation time, many Volunteers choose to explore other areas of Fiji. There are accommodations ranging from the typical inexpensive "backpackers' lodge" on the beach to very expensive resorts catering almost exclusively to tourists. Often, resorts have nice, if overpriced, restaurants, shopping, and will be overrun with tourists during the high travel season. Less expensive properties are often much quieter and more relaxing.

The reefs that surround most of the islands here are teeming with marine life, offering excellent snorkeling and diving opportunities. If you own your own snorkeling equipment, you may consider bringing it along or sending it to yourself. There are also many dive shops that offer scuba (self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) training, certification, and equipment rental.

There are also several nearby destinations that Volunteers may want to consider visiting, including Australia, New Zealand, Tonga, Samoa, and Vanuatu, which are easily accessible by plane from both Suva and Nadi.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Fiji is a warm and welcoming place where foreigners are a familiar sight. What distinguishes Volunteers from tourists is their knowledge of, and respect for, Fijian and Indo-Fijian culture and customs. Volunteers receive extensive training on culture and the important part it plays in community life.

The atmosphere in Fiji appears somewhat relaxed, slow, and perhaps less formal than what you may be accustomed to in the U.S. However, do not assume that the informal atmosphere allows for informal dress. Just as in the States, people dress differently in various situations. Volunteers are encouraged to carefully observe what others are wearing—how professional people dress for work and social occasions. Learn what these standards are and follow them.

Being sensitive to Fijian dress norms, which lean toward the more conservative, will increase your effectiveness as a Volunteer. Volunteers are expected to dress appropriately and appear neat and tidy—both on and off the job. Volunteers who are sensitive to the cultural norms will gain respect and acceptance more readily.

This respect is integral to an enjoyable and meaningful Peace Corps experience. Generally, a clean, well-groomed, somewhat low-key appearance works well in Fiji. In Suva, a more fashion-oriented style is typical; in rural areas, most people dress in more traditional, conservative clothing. Dreadlocks, spiky or brightly colored hair, or other unusual hairstyles and visible tattoos may make integration more difficult.

For women, dress is conservative and women cover up a lot more in Fiji than in the U.S. Ankle-length skirts are recommended. It is best to have them wide enough to sit comfortably on the floor with legs covered. Full dresses or skirts with modest tops and sleeves are appropriate. These are easily purchased in Suva, if needed. One-piece, loose-fitting dresses with no waistband are also very good for hot weather. Wearing shorts in public is inappropriate, except at resorts or other tourist areas. Miniskirts, short-shorts, tank tops, plunging necklines, midriff shirts that expose your belly, and strapless tops are inappropriate.

Men are also expected to dress conservatively. Long hair or untrimmed facial hair on men is considered unprofessional to Fijians. Nice slacks and shirts are the most appropriate attire, as are dress slus (men's skirts). Men often wear long pants in public, and long shorts are worn when doing outdoor activities in the village, such as gardening, or for sports and hiking.

Nice-looking sandals are appropriate for both men and women. For those Volunteers who may work in an office setting, especially in urban locations, flip-flops are not acceptable at work. It is considered very rude to wear any type of hat inside buildings or in a village. Swimming attire for women should be very conservative (bikinis are only acceptable on resort beaches); local women wear T-shirts and wraparound skirts (slus) while swimming.

For most of the year, the climate will be hot and humid. Neutral-colored cotton clothing works best in this environment. One of the paradoxes of packing is that while lightweight clothes are the most comfortable to wear, the laundering process (do-it-yourself with scrub brushes and harsh soaps) favors sturdy items. Bright colors will fade in harsh sun and light colors will pick up curry and mud stains. Consider bringing some medium-weight cotton-poly blends that will survive the washing, sun, and climate without looking worn out during the last months of your stay.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an

unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Fiji 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 Fiji. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

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

Rewards and Frustrations

While the vision of a tropical island in the South Pacific may capture your imagination, romantic notions of this lifestyle may quickly wear thin as you adjust to the heat and humidity that descend on Fiji for six to eight months of the year. Other challenges include the occasional cyclone; the incessant ants, cockroaches, and mosquitoes that you will likely encounter; the “island fever” that can arise from living in a relatively small community where everyone knows what everyone else is doing; and the seemingly laissez-faire attitude that some people exhibit toward work and change. The island lifestyle, tropical climate, isolation, and lack of work-related resources and materials call for individuals who possess good health, stamina, self-reliance, flexibility, and a positive attitude. You will need to adapt to a pace of life that, though not unique to the Pacific, may be quite different from what you are accustomed to in the United States.

Some individuals are surprised by the fact that, when joining the Peace Corps, they become subject to the norms of their local in-country agencies, as well as those of the Peace Corps. As a Peace Corps Volunteer working with a host agency or institution, your professionalism will be counted on in order to respect policies your supervisors have established for their staff. Though you are a Volunteer, if you work in an office setting, you will be required to work the same hours as your colleagues, often a 40-hour a week desk job. Although you may be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will ever experience—you will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your counterparts with little guidance from supervisors. You may also work for months without seeing any visible impact or without receiving any feedback on your work. This is the nature of development work. It is a slow process and often results are only seen after the combined efforts of several generations of Volunteers. You must possess self-confidence, patience, and maturity to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

The Peace Corps has a highly successful history in Fiji, and most Fijians fondly remember Volunteers living and working in their communities. Volunteers play roles in both technical assistance and cultural exchange. When citizens of Fiji interact with Peace Corps Volunteers, their impressions of America are formed by those interactions. Your ability to serve as a competent professional and a tactful ambassador will affect both the image of the Peace Corps as an agency and of Americans in general. This is a significant responsibility for all Volunteers worldwide and will become part of Peace Corps/Fiji’s continuing legacy.

The goodwill and hospitality of the Fijian people and the richness of their culture, the beauty of the environment, and the challenges offered by your work can make your life as a Volunteer exciting and rewarding.

Peace Corps service requires dedication, a “can-do” attitude, commitment, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of humor. It will be an emotionally exhausting and demanding experience. However, it is an opportunity for personal, as well as professional, growth and fulfillment, and the rewards are likely to far outweigh the challenges.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Fiji 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 Fiji 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. On average over 90 percent of trainees are sworn in as Volunteers.

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

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

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

PST is conducted in Fiji and directed by the Peace Corps with participation from representatives of Fiji organizations, current Volunteers, and/or training contractors. The length of pre-service training is nine weeks, plus a one-week Phase 2 PST which occurs about three months after you complete the training and are sworn in as Volunteers.

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

Woven into the competencies is the ability to communicate in the host country language, which is critical to being an effective Peace Corps Volunteer. So basic is this precept that it is spelled out in the Peace Corps Act:

No person shall be assigned to duty as a Volunteer under this act in any foreign country or area unless at the time of such assignment he (or she) possesses such reasonable proficiency as his (or her) assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he (or she) is assigned.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Fiji 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, Fijian experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to work directly with target population(s) as well as 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 Fiji and strategies for working within such a context. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with partner Fijian 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 and/or workplace.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are critical to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are essential to your job performance, help you integrate into your community, and can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Fijian and Hindi language instructors usually teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups.

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

Cross-Cultural Training

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Fiji. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Fiji, 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 Fiji. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

Health Training

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

Safety and Security Training

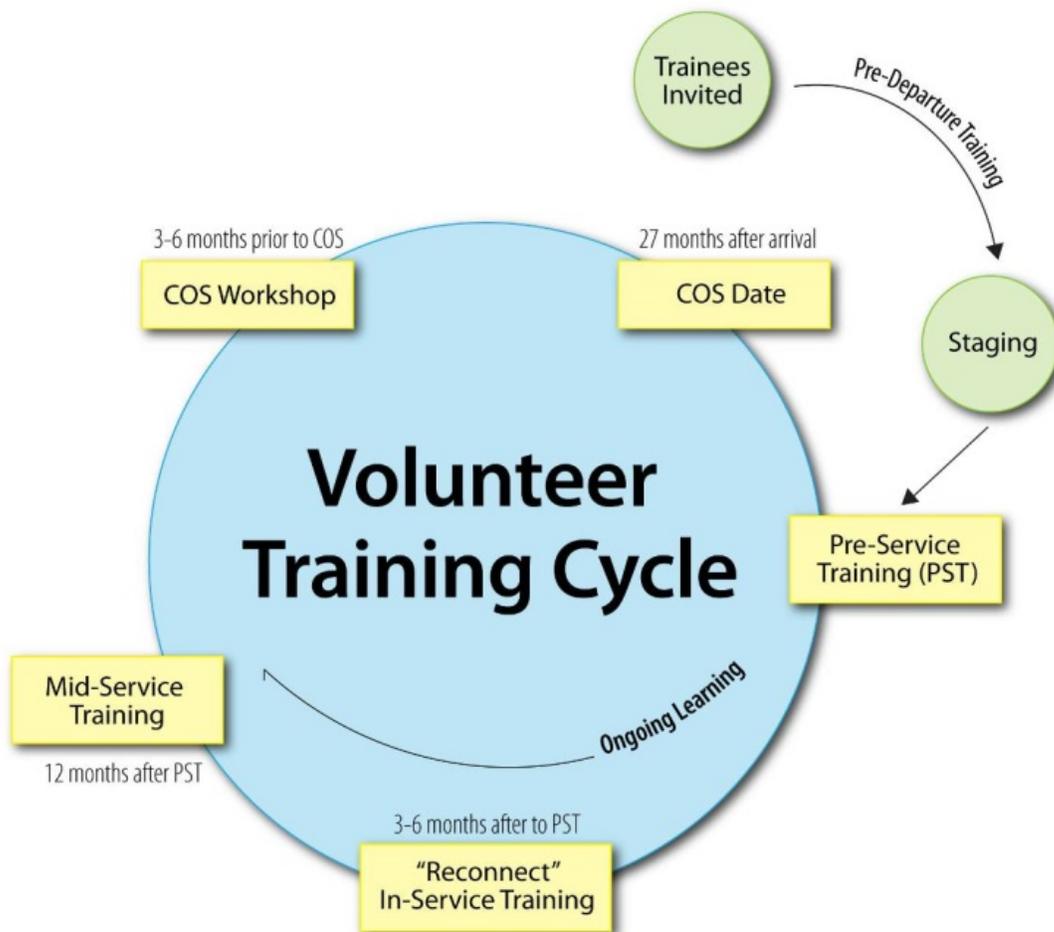
During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace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

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 Fiji 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 Fiji at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Fiji, 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 Fiji

With careful adherence to the preventive measures you will be taught, it is possible to remain healthy throughout your service in Fiji, and many Volunteers have done so. However, standards of hygiene and food handling may be lower, and sickness is more common than in the United States. Although there is a great deal you can do to minimize risks, Volunteers may suffer from gastrointestinal disorders, upper respiratory infections, skin infections, and other medical problems from time to time.

Below is a summary of some of the more common health concerns in Fiji. You will receive more in-depth information on prevention and treatment during your pre-service training.

Insect-Borne Diseases: Fiji is a malaria-free country. However, malaria is present in neighboring countries, such as Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu, so you will need to consult with the medical officer for appropriate medications before traveling to these areas. Mosquitoes do transmit dengue fever in Fiji, which occurs in all of the Pacific Island nations. There is no preventative vaccine for dengue and the only measure that can be taken is to prevent mosquito bites. You will receive as much insect repellent as needed during your stay in Fiji, as well as a mosquito net.

Food and Water-Borne Diseases: Diarrhea, dysentery, and hepatitis A are common throughout the Pacific and are transmitted through contaminated food and water. You will be vaccinated for hepatitis A upon your arrival in Fiji. These illnesses are more common during the rainy season or after a cyclone. Intestinal worms can also be a problem. Additionally, some reef fish may be unsafe to eat.

Other Diseases: Hookworm can be contracted by going barefoot. Additionally, tuberculosis is an important health concern in some areas. There is no rabies in Fiji.

Water Safety and Encounters with Marine Life: It is best to ask about local marine hazards before venturing out. In general, some marine life to look out for are sharks, rough coral (which can result in infected wounds), fire coral (which can deliver a powerful sting), sea snakes (deadly poisonous, but non-aggressive and small-mouthed), jellyfish, sea lice, certain stinging fish, stingrays, sea urchins, and crowns of thorns (starfish). Dehydration, cramps, strong rip currents, and decompression sickness (from diving) are all health risks involved with working and swimming in open waters. You will be given specific information regarding marine hazards during water safety training.

Minor Health Issues: Sunburn, blisters, fungal infections, insect bites, colds, flu, and skin rashes are common to visitors in the Pacific. Minor health problems can usually be addressed with supplies from your Peace Corps-provided 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 Fiji, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

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

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

- **Dengue fever:** Along with your medical kit, you will receive a mosquito net and insect repellent to prevent mosquito bites.
- **Gastrointestinal problems:** In your medical kit, you will receive water purification treatment tablets. It’s recommended that you filter your water and properly prepare foods (this will be explained in PST).
- **Overexposure to the sun:** It’s recommended that you wear sunscreen, a hat (see guidelines under “Shoes and Accessories” regarding cultural norms for wearing hats), and sunglasses.
- **Skin infections:** In your medical kit, you will receive skin ointments so you can treat all minor wounds promptly before they become infected.
- **Hazardous marine life and water safety:** You will receive a personal flotation device that you must wear when traveling by water. Additionally, you should avoid touching any sea creatures and to be alert to changes in the sea and weather patterns. (Please see section titled “Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk.”)

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 Fiji 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

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

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

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

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Health Services

(OHS). Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

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

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

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

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

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

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

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

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

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

- The Peace Corps assesses the security environment where you will live and work
- The Peace Corps inspects the house where you will live according to established security criteria
- The Peace Corps provides you with resources to take measures such as installing new locks
- The Peace Corps ensures you are welcomed by host country authorities in your new community
- The Peace Corps responds to security concerns that you raise
- You lock your doors and windows
- You adopt a lifestyle appropriate to the community where you live
- You get to know neighbors
- You decide if purchasing personal articles insurance is appropriate for you
- You don't change residences before being authorized by the Peace Corps
- You communicate concerns you have 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 Fiji 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 Fiji, 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 Fiji 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 Fiji. 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 Fiji of which you should be aware:

- Motor vehicle accidents are the greatest risk to your safety. Buses and taxis are the most common modes of motorized transportation in rural areas. Volunteers should not travel on roads and highways at night because of the risk of accidents. Volunteers should wear seatbelts whenever available. Choosing larger buses in good repair is wise. Volunteers should also avoid traveling by mini-buses as they are generally overcrowded and less safe than regular buses or taxis.
- Unfortunately, pickpocketing and purse snatching have become more common in the urban areas of Nadi and Suva in markets, bus stations, and other areas where crowds are present. Volunteers traveling through these areas may be perceived and targeted as tourists. Homes in these areas may also become a target for robbery. Money and other valuables should be kept secure. While unusual, theft can occur even in rural villages. Houses should be kept locked and valuables should be kept in a locked trunk when you leave your village. Violent crime is very rare in rural villages, but it is a growing concern in larger cities, particularly in Suva. There are certain high-crime areas (which will be pointed out to you) that must be avoided. In cities, Volunteers should travel in groups of two or more at night.
- In rural areas, children will be curious about you and your lifestyle and may "borrow" small items for closer inspection. Volunteers should carefully consider whether or not to bring more expensive, tempting items, such as laptop computers and fancy cameras. The Peace Corps has established minimal housing criteria that sponsoring villages/organizations must meet to minimize risks. You will be advised on proper home safety during pre-service training.
- Foreigners, including Volunteers, have been targets of sexual assault in Fiji and other countries in the Pacific. Alcohol consumption and cross-cultural differences in gender relations are often associated with sexual assaults, and the assailant is often an acquaintance of the victim. Volunteers who take seriously the training provided by Peace Corps/Fiji regarding sexual assaults can minimize their risk. Volunteers are urged to report all assaults and threats of assault to the medical officer so appropriate support can be provided.
- Volunteer assignments and recreation may involve considerable interaction with the marine environment, including travel by boat. Peace Corps/Fiji requires Volunteers to know how to swim and be comfortable on and in the water. As many boats in Fiji do not come equipped with life vests, Volunteers are issued one upon arrival in-country and are required to wear it whenever they

are in a boat/vessel. Other marine hazards, from coral cuts to poisonous water snakes, will be discussed more specifically during pre-service training.

- Tropical cyclones are common between November and April, with one or two generally affecting Fiji each year. A sizeable one struck Vanua Levu late in 2002 and caused significant damage. In 2007, Fiji experienced two cyclones, one in April and one in December. Fortunately, both of these cyclones veered off Fiji Islands, hitting a small part of the island groups where there were no Volunteers. In 2009, the first cyclone of the season crossed Viti Levu in December. In March 2010, a particularly destructive cyclone destroyed many houses in Fiji, including some Volunteer homes; however, all Volunteers were contacted in advance of the storm and relocated to safe areas. There is usually ample time to prepare for storms; appropriate precautionary measures for you and your community will be discussed during pre-service training.
- Most local crimes and assaults involve alcohol use either by the victim or the perpetrators. Any individual's use of alcohol that repeatedly places the individual at risk or results in discredit to him/her or to the Peace Corps is considered unacceptable and the individual may be asked to leave the Peace Corps. If, in the opinion of the medical officer, a Volunteer is abusing alcohol, that individual may be medically evacuated to Washington, D.C., for assessment and counseling.
- Volunteers tend to attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are more likely to receive negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network—friends and colleagues—who look out for them.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Fiji 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 Fiji 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

Crime Data for Fiji

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

Please take the time to review this important information.

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

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

Volunteer Safety Support in Fiji

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

The Peace Corps/Fiji 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 Fiji. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural aspects, health, and other components of training. You will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas, including safety and security, as a condition of service.

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. The Peace Corps staff works closely with host communities and counterpart agencies to help prepare them for a Volunteer's arrival and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure placement in appropriate, safe, and secure housing and worksites. Site selection is based, in part, on any relevant site history; access to medical, banking, postal, and other essential services; availability of communications, transportation, and markets; different housing options and living arrangements; and other Volunteer support needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Fiji's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Fiji at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

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

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

Cross-Cultural Considerations

Outside of Fiji'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 Fiji 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.

Though women hold positions of authority and responsibility in Fiji, it is not as common as in the United States. Gender roles in Fiji are strongly defined. Women generally have traditional responsibilities that center on the home. These include caring for the family and working long, hard hours to prepare food and raise children. In addition to this heavy workload, women do not enjoy the same level of equality as women in the United States. However, women have tremendous influence in villages and are often the backbone of community development efforts. Female Volunteers may face initial difficulties finding acceptance and credibility at work. While it may be challenging at times, female Volunteers will enjoy success by aligning themselves with the women's groups in villages and working within the gender-defined system to influence change.

Volunteer comments:

“I am a young woman living in my own house in a culture where this is extremely rare and unusual. Respect from certain groups must be earned with a sense of humor and a willingness to stand up for oneself. [My] strategy is to understand that certain challenges are backed by many years of tradition. This is cultural, not personal.”

“Every day I face the challenge of lack of respect for women. I'm struggling with how much can be attributed to 'cultural differences' when it comes down to feelings of individual human beings. Where does one draw the line between accepting culture and trying to empower women to change what they know is unacceptable treatment in the 'culture' of any human being? I'm still learning every day and working on this issue.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

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

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

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In African and Latin American countries, host country nationals may say “welcome home” to African Americans or Hispanic Americans. Sometimes Volunteers expect to be “welcomed home” but are disappointed when they are not. More commonly, if a Volunteer is mistaken for a host-country national citizen, he or she is expected to behave as a male or female in that culture behaves, and to speak the local language fluently. Host country nationals are sometimes frustrated when the Volunteer does not speak the local language with ease. Conversely, some in the same country may call you a “sell

out” because they feel the United States has not done enough to help with social issues. These instances can be turned into teachable moments for the Volunteer and the host country national, in which the Volunteer can ask questions surrounding perception and collaborate with respect to issues and projects at hand, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. All Volunteers, to include white Volunteers and those of color, should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture in your country of service. These issues may significantly affect how Volunteers interact with fellow Volunteers and host country nationals. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience in interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

Most Fijians assume that all Americans are European in origin, and this can cause confusion and curiosity. African-American Volunteers may be dealing with stereotypes projected in the media (especially hip-hop culture) and, therefore, may be called the N-word. At the same time, you will have the opportunity to be accepted because you can pass for a Fijian. Some Volunteers of color may be mistaken for Pacific Islanders and, thus, may be treated differently than Caucasians. Asian Americans, in particular, may encounter different treatment because of the many merchants and laborers of Asian origin working in provincial centers throughout Fiji.

Volunteer comments:

"As a Volunteer in Fiji, being African American has allowed me to become accepted with minimal effort because of our likeness in features. But at the same time, the image portrayed by hip-hop has predetermined my description here in Fiji as the N-word, even in professional settings. Even though being called this has tested my will, I have learned to let go of the American meaning of the word and understand that Fijians are only looking for acceptance from me and my race."

"Coming to Fiji as an East Indian American and trying to integrate with the local community was somewhat of a double-edged sword. It was great, because on one side, having the same background as my local community, I was immediately accepted and welcomed into their homes. However, on the other side, they expected me to know everything they did about the Indian culture. It would get frustrating when people would judge me because I didn't know how to speak Hindi before I came to Fiji or if I didn't know when to celebrate a religious ceremony. After one-and-a-half years of service, I am glad to say that I am much more proficient in both of those areas! When it comes down to the overall experience, it's been amazing. I've learned so much about my own culture, and I've also shared my experience of what it's like growing up in America as an East Indian. I really do believe that after my service in Fiji, my community and I will have a much better understanding of where we were coming from and where we'll be going."

"I am an Asian-American woman of Korean descent living in Suva. I am commonly mistaken for being either Chinese or Japanese, as those races are more common here. Unfortunately, a large number of Chinese women are also prostitutes, and I am sometimes mistaken as one of these women also, regardless of how conservatively I am dressed. I occasionally get rude (sexual) comments from local men, but I have learned to ignore them. There are also instances when people will speak in mock Chinese or yell '*Konichiwa*' to me as I pass. I am frequently told that I am 'smart in speaking English' by both Fijian and Indo-Fijian locals, who are used to the broken English of Asian overseas volunteers and tourists. I sometimes explain that I am American and have spoken English my entire life, but sometimes I just smile and nod. Asian men are seen as kung fu experts and are sometimes asked to demonstrate their karate moves. Although it is difficult at times to be asked a lot of seemingly rude questions, it is important to be patient and understanding to their (usually) innocent queries, and prepare to do a lot of gentle explaining. Besides, I've had people ask me rude questions and say inappropriate things to me in certain areas of America as well. Fiji is a great place and most people, especially the children, are just being

curious and showing their genuine interest in you. I have not had many negative experiences related to my race/ethnicity, so it has not put a huge damper on my overall Peace Corps experience, nor has it stopped me from enjoying my host country and its people."

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Fiji's traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Fiji 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 lgbrcpv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at spectrum@peacecorps.gov.

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

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

Fiji is very conservative by U.S. standards and same-sex acts have only become legal as recently as February 2010. In the village setting, it may be difficult to be open about your sexual orientation and maintain a positive working relationship with locals. You may find a support system within the Volunteer group. In the larger urban areas like Suva, Nadi, and Lautoka, beliefs are a bit more progressive than other parts of Fiji and its LGBTQ populations are a little more open. The Peace Corps staff is committed to maintaining a supportive atmosphere for all Volunteers and will address LGBTQ Volunteers' concerns in a sensitive and confidential manner.

Volunteer Comments:

"Being a LGBTQ Volunteer in Fiji is not entirely difficult, but very different than the climate in the U.S. In Fiji there are many homosexuals and transvestites, also called '*pufias*,' who are mostly seen in the major urban centers of Suva, Nadi, and Lautoka, but like America, there are also LGBTQ Fijians and Indo-Fijians scattered throughout the villages and settlements. Though there seem to be many LGBTQ people in this small country, it is still a very taboo subject and careful discretion must be considered when disclosing your sexuality to your host community, counterparts, etc. Since I work for a religious-based organization, I have chosen to keep my sexuality private in order to be most effective in my work. I did inform Peace Corps/Fiji staff about my concerns about safety and security, and they were able to place me in an assignment that didn't put me in danger or make me feel uncomfortable. Overall, I am very happy with my time in Fiji."

“As a gay male Volunteer living in a Fijian village, I have chosen to keep my sexuality to myself. I have had very little inner conflict in doing so and even though I am always asked when I will ‘marry one Fijian girl,’ I just play it off in the same way most straight Volunteers do. Over time and after developing stronger relationships, I feel I could possibly come out to those around me without causing detriment to my service, but have chosen not to take that chance since being open about my sexuality is not of great importance to me personally, though others may feel differently.”

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

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 Fiji relationships. Fiji 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 Fiji culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both.

To serve effectively, couples must have established positive communication patterns with each other and have a solid foundation in their partnership to face the daily challenges they may encounter while in service. Couples in Fiji may face gender role issues, as men traditionally have a more prominent role in communities and more access to social settings. However, couples in Fiji do have a cultural place in society and may find integrating into communities easier than single Volunteers.

Volunteer Comment:

“I love serving in the Peace Corps with my husband because I find it easier to navigate the gender roles than some of my female Volunteer friends. My husband and I are able to serve the whole community because he works with the men and I work with the women. Together we make a

good team, complementing our skills to work with the most people possible. It has also been great to have time to reconnect with each other without the stress of U.S. life.”

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Christianity has been an integral part of indigenous Fijian culture since Christian missionaries first arrived in Fiji more than 100 years ago. Fiji’s major Christian churches include Methodist, the Assemblies of God, Anglican, Apostolic, Church of Christ, Seventh-day Adventist, Presbyterian, and Catholic. Indo-Fijians are primarily Hindu, with a small percentage of Muslims or Christians. Wherever you are assigned within Fiji, it is essential that you understand and respect the importance that religion holds in the lives of Fijians. Volunteers who show respect for local beliefs are more likely to be accepted into the homes and lives of the members of their new community.

You will also have to be patient when some Fijians feel it is their duty to “convert” you to their religion. Some Volunteers find this issue one of the most frustrating and try to explain to Fijians that they are not religious or have other religions. Others find that just going along with religious observances as a cultural behavior can aid the integration process.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in Fiji. 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 older trainees, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A 50+ individual may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some 50+ 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.

Older Volunteers offer Fiji a wide variety of experience and skills which will be put to use during service. Occasionally, Fijians will assume that an older Volunteer is an immediate “expert” in his or her field, which can be a blessing and a curse. Elders in Fijian communities are considered leaders and are often given great respect, though this can be challenging for Volunteers as they often feel like novices in their new environments. Living conditions in Fiji are basic and medical services are not readily available in villages. Older Volunteers need to be prepared to take special health precautions to ensure a healthy completion of service.

Volunteer Comment:

“As an older Volunteer, I found sitting on the floor and the ground for long periods of time proved to be one of the hardest challenge for me. The Fijians sit on the floor for everything, even if they have furniture. To be culturally sensitive and not to be sitting above the others, I sit on the floor. Another area where I have faced challenges has been socially at Peace Corps gatherings because many of the young Volunteers gather to party, excluding the older Volunteers. Finally, language learning in the Fiji heat was very difficult. Languages usually come easily to me, I have learned three foreign languages, but not in Fiji and not at this age.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Fiji?

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 Fiji?

220–240 volts, 50 hertz. Outlets take plugs with two or three flat pins (as in Australia). You will need a voltage converter if the device you are bringing is 110 volts. This applies to most U.S. appliances, although many computers and personal electronics operate on dual voltage (in this case, you will simply need the appropriate adapter plug and these are readily available and reasonably priced in Suva and many larger towns).

How much money should I bring?

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

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

The Peace Corps does not provide insurance coverage for personal effects; Volunteers are ultimately responsible for the safekeeping of their personal belongings. However, you can purchase personal property insurance before you leave (contact your insurance company). Volunteers should not ship or take valuable items overseas. Jewelry, watches, radios, cameras, electronics, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and, in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Fiji 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 Fiji friends and my host family?

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

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

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

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member. The Counseling and Outreach Unit can be reached at 855.855.1961, select option 2, 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 Fiji?

You can receive phone calls on your local mobile phone at no charge to you. You can call mobile phones or landlines in the U.S. for about 20–90 Fijian cents per minute depending on your local phone carrier's plan. Also, many Volunteers who have Internet access use Skype or FaceTime to make calls from a computer at no or minimal charge.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

A few Volunteers have chosen to bring a mobile phone (unlocked and GSM capable) for personal use from the U.S. as service continues to improve in Fiji. All Volunteers will be provided funds to buy a local mobile phone from their settling-in allowance. These funds may not be available to you in the first few days after arrival, so if you wish to purchase a phone soon after arrival, you will need to pay out of pocket so you should bring some additional funds.

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

Internet access is available in urban areas and in public Internet cafes. However, in rural areas, you may not have Internet access. Most Volunteers, even those who do not have Internet access in their village, often travel to nearby towns to access the Internet. Please plan on **not** having regular daily access during your first three months in-country.

Can I ship items to myself once I arrive?

Many Volunteers comment on how they wish they hadn't brought so much stuff, as almost everything you'll need is readily available in Suva and the major cities. That said, there's nothing more exciting than receiving packages from home! Small packages from home sent via the U.S. mail tend to reach Fiji within two to three weeks. Large shipments (i.e., via sea freight) are strongly discouraged.

Should I bring my computer and other electronics?

Volunteers who have brought computers to Fiji have been glad that they did. However, whether or not to bring a computer is a personal decision. Most sites, if not all, will have electricity for a number of hours per day. Electronic equipment may mark you as a target for theft, and you should carefully consider the possibility of losing your equipment. Fiji's climate is harsh on electronics and many Volunteers have had problems with their computers crashing. Despite these facts, a large percentage of Volunteers choose to bring a laptop with them to Fiji. If you do decide to bring electronic equipment, you should also strongly consider purchasing insurance for your items.

Please be aware that the Peace Corps requires Volunteers to submit official reports electronically to staff. If a Volunteer does not have a computer with Internet access, s/he will need to complete the reports at an Internet cafe.

Should I bring my scuba gear or have it sent to me?

Current Volunteers report that snorkeling equipment is much more useful and that scuba equipment is available for rent throughout Fiji. Keeping sensitive dive equipment in good working order can be challenging and you will be better off renting gear from a reputable dive operation.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM FIJI VOLUNTEERS

Bula Re!

Welcome to Peace Corps/Fiji! I once heard it said that being invited to Fiji is like winning the Peace Corps lottery, and I'd have to say that's true in my experience. Fiji has something to offer everyone: It has some towns and it has villages, it has beaches and it has mountains, it has traditional Fijian culture and it has Hindi culture (and even Islamic culture if you know where to look), it has fancy resorts and it has some great hole-in-the-wall mom-and-pop type places as well. It has a lot of different options: You just have to find what interests you and go with the flow. I'm sure you've heard lot of people's perspectives on Fiji and Peace Corps life here, but I've been asked to throw in my experience as well... Enjoy!

My name is Tyler, I'm a Midwest boy from South Dakota/Iowa, and I live in a rural Fijian village in the friendly north. I live in a village that is next to the nursing station where I serve. My village is pretty small, like my district. My village is made up of about 80–90 people, with about 25 houses, and my district is roughly 1,000 people spread out over 10 villages. The village is pretty small compared to many, but I personally really like that: It made it very easy for me to meet people. The other thing about living in a small village/district is that everyone knew my name the morning after I moved in, because I'm the only white person in the village, and they were very excited to have me living in the village and working at the nursing station.

One of the requirements for a community to get a PCV is that there has to be housing for the Volunteer; to prepare for this my village built me a traditional Fijian bure. My house is pretty small, only about 10 feet by 10 feet, but it suits me well. The walls are made of woven bamboo and there is a thatched roof with a tarp over the top to keep the rain out. I also have an outside bathroom that has a flush toilet and a shower. Right now I spend most of my time sitting on the floor, like Fijians usually do; it's where I read, talk with friends, eat, and cook. I keep all my food in my tin box (provided by the Peace Corps) which is helpful for keeping the critters out, but is only big enough to hold about one-and-a-half to two weeks' worth of groceries at a time. Because of these food storage needs, and wanting to see my PCV friends, I go to town about every other weekend. I'm lucky because the bus stays overnight in my village, starting and stopping right across from my front yard. The bus leaves early, before the sun rises, so I usually take a small travel pillow (taken from the flight on the way over here) and sleep for the first few hours of the trip. The bus ride is about five hours one way, and then I get four hours in town to shop and have lunch with other PCVs, then five hours home. It seems like a long ride, but it's great for catching up on books that I've been meaning to read! I really enjoy my trips to town too because it's usually the only time I get to see other PCVs.

I work at a nursing station, which is served by one nurse and me. I have come to really like working in a nursing station because I have been able to form a great working relationship and friendship with my nurse and her family. My nursing station covers the whole district, so I get lots of opportunities to spend time in the other villages on outreach/home visits meeting people. Because there is not an overabundance of transportation in my area we often walk to other villages for outreach, which provides a great opportunity to talk with my nurse and for us to be physically active.

So that is a little about the rural life of Peace Corps/Fiji. I hope you enjoyed it. Again, congratulations on your invitation to serve as a PCV in Fiji!

—Tyler Fuller
Fiji Group 90

Bula Si'a from Vanua Levu! Vanua Levu is the second largest island here in Fiji and is to the north of the main island of Viti Levu. I am posted on the northeastern edge of this island in a government station—which is neither a village nor a town but a rural post. I have Fijian neighbors to my right and Indian neighbors to my left, which is really cool. I am sure you have so many questions around how to be the most prepared you can be. Here is my advice:

1. No matter what you pack you will have too much of something and wish you had brought something else. That is what the mail is for: It does work here.
2. Take each day and experience it for what it is and as it comes and take lots of pictures and video to remember it all!

My daily life is pretty simple. I get up in the morning to the sounds of my neighbors making breakfast and lunch for school in the outside kitchen attached to my house. I get a workout in, breakfast, and a shower (that I am lucky to have inside my house) before I head up to the health center. Sometimes I am able to go straight there, but usually I end up somewhere talking with people—either the shop next door or the police post. If it is a school visit or outreach day, I gather my materials and we (doctor, nurse, dentist, and I) head out and return around 4 or 5 p.m. If not, I spend much of my day at the health center or just in the community, sometimes working on demo ideas, sometimes just having tea. After work I head to the ground where the local soccer team practices and the kids come out to play. When it gets dark, I go home and make dinner, shower, read, write, and go to bed. I have Internet service via a flashnet drive which is a USB device that plugs into my computer and runs off the cell network. I have a cellphone, but only use it for quick calls and text messages. I use my neighbor's fridge and washing machine (those are the important things right?).

How do I know what to do? I worked with my supervisor, the senior medical officer, early to understand what her priorities were for the area and for my service. Sometimes I work on those—for me, it is HIV and non-communicable diseases. Sometimes, I get swept up in whatever is the priority for the moment. I will spend most of my time just working on relationships and I guarantee you that what I thought I would work on and what projects end up completed will likely be worlds apart by the end—and that is OK! I will need to listen to my community too. Many times, I am not able to ask questions, because I don't know what questions to ask. So, I just listen.

It is good to have plans and to have a vision. Plans keep me moving forward and visions keep me motivated, however, sometimes—even for weeks at a time—something else is more important. Sometimes there is a death. Funerals in Fiji are so beautiful: The care and the respect taken to honor the life that was lived is humbling. This week, I have been sitting vigil in the evenings for the head of the *matanqali* (clan) of my area who passed away this week. What does this mean? It means that the new priority is taking care of that family and honoring Tutu. It means listening.

I know you are so excited to see what Fiji has to offer, and you should be. Life in Fiji is truly on island time, which means it is on their time and, as such, it will provide you with so many rich experiences if you are able to forget about the time and just listen. See you all when you get here!

—Jamie Roesncrans
Fiji Group 90

Bula Vinaka and congratulations on receiving your invitation to be a part of Peace Corps/Fiji!

Coming to Fiji you will most likely have many expectations on how life will be for you. The Fiji we hear about in America is the postcard beaches of the Yasawa's, the world famous coral reefs and the sunsets, the friendly people, and the year-round sunshine. And while these things are definitely here and definitely

a part of your life, what you don't hear about is how Fiji's people, and more importantly its children, are rapidly becoming more and more obese with the introduction of imported processed foods and the overall decrease in physical activity. You don't hear about how non-communicable diseases are responsible for 80 percent of all deaths in Fiji. You don't hear about how amputation cases, blindness rates, and stroke patients are increasing yearly due to the increase in Type 2 diabetes. And you don't hear about how heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and lung disease and the complications that go along with them are not only killing Fiji's people but causing a heavy burden on its health-care system and its economy.

I am currently serving as a health promoter in the Fiji National Wellness Center in the capital city, Suva. I do work with awareness and education on non-communicable diseases on a national level as well as a community level. My organization focuses on four main areas of health promotion: smoking cessation, better nutrition, alcohol awareness, and increased physical activity. I go to an office every day and work closely with my counterpart; together we develop programs and campaigns and nationwide awareness activities. I encourage you to take advantage of your co-workers' experience and build relationships with them in order to successfully complete projects and ensure your initiatives are sustainable.

Working within a national organization has given me the unique chance to see many different sides of Fiji and to work in many different communities. The issues in rural communities and urban areas are the same but they present themselves in different ways. You have to be prepared to address the same issues many different ways in order to reach the most people. In the city you can hold workshops and organize mass media events and make a big production of things. However, I have a chance to convey those same messages in the village just by sitting and talking with the ladies while helping prepare food, or by drinking *grog* (the local non-alcoholic drink) with the men and answering any questions they may have, or by playing games with the children and instilling in them habits from an early age that will hopefully stick around until adulthood.

Coming to Fiji I was told to have no expectations. I was told I could be living anywhere, in any living condition, working with anybody, doing any number of things. But I still came in with my grand expectations. So this is my advice to you: Expect to be challenged, expect to be frustrated, expect to learn something new every day, expect to have the worst day of your life and then turn around and have the best day of your life, and expect to get more out of this experience and these people and this amazing country than you could ever hope to give.

If you let yourself, you will have an amazing two years serving here in paradise!

Sincerely,

—Alicia Phillips
Fiji Group 88

Bula, Raam-raam, and Salaam!

First of all, congratulations for being invited into Peace Corps/Fiji's 92nd group! There are probably a few people who have already told you that you've won the "Peace Corps lottery," and in some ways you have. You're about to come to one of the most beautiful, peaceful, and friendly countries on the planet. That said, don't let anyone convince you that you're about to embark on a two-year vacation. Though it may sound cliché, there's a reason the Peace Corps had the motto: "The toughest job you'll ever love." Because it's true. I hope through this letter I can give you some realistic expectations as to what exactly that phrase will mean.

For the past 20 months, I've been living in a small town nestled between the Nakauvadra mountain range and Viti Levu's northern coast. My roommate and I live in a three-bedroom flat outside of town, complete

with electricity, running water, a fridge, and even Wi-Fi. Of course when I signed up for the Peace Corps, I envisioned that I would be living without all these things, and that physical hardships would be my biggest struggle as a Volunteer. However, the struggles I face here in Fiji are far different from what I expected, and they are arguably even more challenging. Regardless of whether you have a nice house, the true personal growth you achieve in the Peace Corps comes from learning to live and work within a foreign culture so different from ours. So don't let anyone put you down for coming to a "Posh Corps" country: You're still going to have an extraordinary experience here.

Partnering with the local health center, I work on a range of projects that include training community health workers, teaching a peer-education class, and conducting health talks with primary-school students. You've probably read earlier in this packet that Peace Corps/Fiji is now has a partnership with the Ministry of Health here, with Volunteers working directly out of hospitals and health centers throughout the country. While there are certainly many advantages to being partnered with a government agency (as opposed to being an old-fashioned "village Volunteer"), remember that you are still going to have to make your own work for the most part. It will still be your responsibility to identify what improvements can be made in your community and to develop ideas on how to make those changes. Recognizing that working with the Ministry of Health is not fundamentally much different from working with a village is the first step toward being successful Volunteer here.

The people of Fiji have thoughts, beliefs, and values that are very different from ours, so the most important piece of advice I can give you is to always stay mindful of that. In my view, this is the one thing that helps me stay positive as a Peace Corps Volunteer, a practice I call "mindfulness." By this term I'm referring not so much to its current meaning as a form of meditation, but rather to how a person chooses to derive meaning from experiences. In other words, you can either spend your days thinking that everything is terrible (trust me, you will feel this way at times), or you can exert some cognitive control over how you view others and the work you are doing. This is especially important in the Peace Corps, because it is very easy to get stuck in a perpetual state of antipathy for the people and culture you are working with, and in this state you will likely miss the small but meaningful impacts you are making. Whether it's improving the health of one person or an entire community, being a Volunteer here has taught me to cherish the little impacts my fellow Volunteers and I have made, because they do add up, even if you can't see it right away.

As my service draws to a close, I've been spending a lot of time reflecting on what I've learned and how this experience has impacted me. Walking a mile in Fijian shoes has given me a deeper understanding of what it means to be an American. It puts it all into perspective, in a way that makes you more at peace with yourself. What this means is more complicated than just "appreciating the little things" or not worrying so much about "first-world problems" (though I guess that's kind of a big part of it). Either way, even if I could articulate what this mini-enlightenment means, it's not something you can just read about to understand. You have to experience it for yourself.

A good friend of mine from Group 88 once told me that making it through two years of the Peace Corps is like getting a big tattoo on your back. It's not a change that you can see easily in yourself, but your friends and family back home certainly will.

—Matthew Allen
Fiji Group 89

PACKING LIST

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

General Clothing

- One black outfit for a funeral; for women, a black dress and/or skirt (conservative, long)
- Jacket and sweatshirt. It does get cool here, so bring something that is sturdy and made of cotton.
- Waterproof windbreaker. A lightweight, waterproof jacket is a good thing to have. Make sure it isn't too heavy and that it's breathable. You will not need a full raincoat, as a cool, afternoon shower will be a welcome change from the heat! Plastic raincoats tend to be cumbersome and very hot in this weather.

For Women

- Long dresses with sleeves—should be loose and well below the knees (ankle-length is best). Latest casual fashions are fine. One or two “nicer” dresses are good to have for the swearing-in ceremony and other important occasions, such as weddings and attending church services.
- Long, loose skirts (below the knees and full enough for you to be able to sit on the floor with your legs to the side and your knees covered)
- Tops and shirts. Plenty of loose-fitting, comfortable, short-sleeved cotton shirts (lightweight; medium or heavy weight cotton absorbs sweat and is hard to dry); at least one or two long-sleeved tops to wear when you've had enough sun; and synthetic/wicking shirts (lightweight and fast drying). . Tight-fitting and/or low-cut shirts or sleeveless tank tops/camis are not appropriate. You may also want to consider one or two sleeveless tops for when you are traveling (vacation/at resorts).
- Blouses. Bring a few nice, lightweight tailored blouses. Short sleeves are best for the hotter weather.
- Bras (regular and sports varieties) and underwear (cotton). Consider cotton or a good wicking fabric. Bring as many as you will need for your full two years, as they are very expensive to replace here and tend to wear out with repeated scrubbing. It is good to have an unopened pack of underwear to use the second year.
- Cotton slip (more comfortable than nylon). You may need to wear a slip with your lightweight dresses and skirts. Don't bring pantyhose and stockings (they are too hot in this climate).
- Spandex or boxer briefs to wear under a skirt. The heat and humidity intensify the chaffing.
- Jeans and long pants (lightweight cotton and capri-type). Pants and jeans are acceptable for home wear and some urban activities, but almost never in a village or settlement (often too heavy to wear in the heat anyway). Bring a couple along for travel and/or visits to Suva.
- Shorts. One or two pair(s) of knee-length shorts are advisable for beach or sports. For exercising outdoors, below-the-knee or capri-length shorts are acceptable.
- T-shirts and board shorts. With the exception of being at a resort, it is not appropriate to swim in just a bathing suit. Women swim covered up.
- Nice out-on-the-town clothes. There will be opportunities to dress up in Suva and other major cities. Whatever you bring should be somewhat conservative.

For Men

- Slacks and long pants. Permanent press cotton-poly blends are acceptable in professional situations and at your site. Medium-weight, drab colors will last and hide stains and can usually go a bit longer between washings. Blue jeans are not acceptable in professional situations and are usually too heavy to wear anyway, but are fine to wear around the house and for some urban activities.
- Shirts. Permanent press, collared, button-down cotton shirts are suggested for work. Long sleeves rolled up are acceptable, but short sleeves are cooler and more commonly worn. Golf shirts are fine to wear to work. T-shirts and rugby shirts are for recreation only. Lightweight and thin T-shirts are ideal as they are cool and easier to dry after they are washed. One or two dressier shirts are needed for special occasions or church.
- Shorts. These are usually worn only in casual, non-job-related activities and in some rural-based assignments (e.g., fisheries). Cutoffs and gym shorts are for recreation only. Cargo-type khaki shorts work best but, once again, the lighter weight they are, the better. If you plan on exercising while in Fiji, one or two pairs of running shorts is good. Otherwise, stick to packing permanent press, medium-weight, drab-colored cotton shorts that come just to, or below, mid-thigh.
- It is not necessary to bring a sports jacket, but there are events when you might like to have one (swearing-in ceremonies, local celebrations, etc.). A tie with a short-sleeved dress shirt is also acceptable without a jacket for dressier occasions.
- Undergarments. Boxer shorts are best. Lightweight and synthetic materials help keep moisture away and breathable. Bring five to 10 pairs. Underclothes are very expensive in Fiji and wear out quickly due to hand-scrubbing and humidity. Cotton boxer shorts are not available here.
- Swimsuits. Local men just wear their walking shorts for swimming. Trunk styles are acceptable; bikini styles are not.
- Neckties. One will come in handy for special occasions and for church. Most men do not wear ties to work due to the weather.
- Socks. Cotton socks are expensive and hard to find here; however, you probably won't need more than a few pair.

Shoes and Accessories

- Athletic shoes. Fiji offers many different sporting activities, especially walking. If you plan to do a lot of running, hiking, or playing squash, bring the appropriate shoes for it. Brand-name shoes are often available, but expensive, and styles are limited. Be aware that expensive athletic shoes are among the items most often stolen from Volunteers. Leather hiking shoes are usually too hot and will get moldy before you get much use out of them.
- Sandals/walking shoes. A sturdy, waterproof pair of sandals that can be worn both in the water and out are a good investment; you will find yourself living in them. You may also want to bring along a "nice" pair of sandals for more formal occasions (swearing-in, celebrations, etc.). Non-leather flip-flops with traction on the top and bottom are recommended. Plastic flip-flops are widely available and are great for showers. You probably won't need dress shoes, heels, rain boots, etc.
- Sunglasses. The sun in the tropics is very strong, so be kind to your eyes. If you wear prescription glasses, you may want to invest in a pair of prescription sunglasses. Cheap, non-polarized sunglasses are available in urban areas; duty-free shops carry quality brands, but be ready to pay a premium for them.
- Hats. Hats are taboo in the villages, but there will be plenty of times when you are away from the village when you will be glad for some protection from the sun. A collapsible, washable type that is easily packed is best. Note: never wear a hat inside a building or house.

- Umbrella. It rains a lot here! Inexpensive folding umbrellas are available, but tend to be poorly made. Consider bringing one from home. Better quality, full-size umbrellas are available.
- Waterproof watch. Even if you don't get the watch wet, if it isn't waterproof, it will rust from the humidity. Watches can be purchased here at reasonable costs.
- Waterproof wallet (useful for swimming and boat trips)

Electronics

- Phones. If you have a mobile phone, you should consider bringing it. However, if you do bring it, make sure it's an unlocked and GSM-capable phone and is a tri- or quad-band phone. Phones here operate on 900 MHz. (You don't need to buy a new phone, but if you already have a phone that meets these standards, consider bringing it. Or, you can easily buy one here.)
- Small alarm clock, either windup or battery-powered
- Radio. Quality radios are very expensive. A good hand-crank radio or small compact radio is very useful during emergencies. Peace Corps/Fiji will supply you with a basic radio for accessing the news, but it may not produce the music quality you are used to.
- Music. MP3 players used with small battery-operated speakers work best.
- Laptop. Most Volunteers have found having a laptop available very useful, especially the smaller notebooks: Volunteers move around a lot. Peace Corps requires reports be done electronically and having your own laptop facilitates the process.
- Laptop cooler, to safeguard your laptop from heat and humidity, which kills electronics here
- A few flash drives and external hard drive with movies, TV shows, and music loaded on them. 500GB is not too large.
- Flashlight. Also known as a "torch" in Fiji. Consider a waterproof flashlight. Mini-flashlights are great, too. LED head lamps are ideal for walking through the village at night or reading late and they use much less battery power.
- Silica gel to protect your electronics (camera, etc.) from moisture damage. It also comes in handy with leather items, shoes, your medical kit, etc. You can get packets at your local craft store (used to dry flowers), at some chain stores (Target), some home stores, and on the Internet. The kind that you can bake and re-use is best.
- Camera. Digital cameras are best! If you like to snorkel, you may want a waterproof camera.

Kitchen and Home

- Good, sharp kitchen knife. This will make your hours in the kitchen fewer and less painful! Remember to pack this in your luggage and not in your carry-on bag. You may want to bring a knife sharpener as well.
- Portable tool kit. Screwdriver, pliers, etc. can be bought here, but you may want to bring a small portable kit.
- Two towels and face cloths (lightweight towels dry faster in the humidity)
- Pocketknife or multi-purpose tool (Swiss Army knife or Leatherman)
- A good plastic water bottle. Metal bottles get too hot in the sun.
- Bring a 12-ounce stainless steel press if you are a heavy coffee drinker and are willing to pay the price for real coffee. (Coffee and coffee presses are expensive.)
- Basic paperback cookbook
- Vegetable steamer (nonelectric, basket-type that fits inside a pot)
- Zip-close bags. These have so many uses! They keep the bugs out of your food; they can be used to store items (with a little silica packet to capture the moisture), for travel, wet clothing, cosmetics, etc. They are easily obtainable in Fiji, but expensive.
- Dryer sheets to keep clothes smelling fresh
- Pillow (hard to find good ones in Fiji)

Personal hygiene and toiletry items

- Just about anything you need can be purchased here; however, imported items often cost roughly the same as they would in the U.S. If you have a favorite brand or product, you might consider bringing a supply with you. If you are on any special medication, bring a three-month supply with you, as it may take that long for a replacement to be ordered from the U.S. Anyone with glasses, hearing aid, etc., should bring at least one replacement. In most cases, the Peace Corps will not replace more than one pair of eyeglasses.

Miscellaneous

Bring along small, but replaceable, parts of your life you don't want to live without for the next two years. Make sure they are light enough to carry, sturdy enough to last, and dispensable enough that losing them wouldn't be a serious problem. Here are some suggestions:

- A few small luggage locks (for when your bags are in storage) Note: Most airlines are discouraging their use in flight, unless they are TSA approved, so you may want to pack them in your suitcase rather than actually using them on your trip over.
- Day pack/backpack. Waterproof is best. You will use it often.
- Sturdy luggage/travel bags. Waterproof and collapsible. Hard luggage tends to be cumbersome here as you will not have much room for storage. Collapsible cloth bags or backpacks tend to be more durable than leather, which can mold quickly. Once you are in Fiji, you will travel during training for extended periods of time with your necessities in one suitcase, so bring one average-sized lightweight piece of luggage so you can travel light when necessary. You might consider a few waterproof bags—also known as sea bags or dry sacks—for when you travel by boat.
- Sleeping bag liner. You will not need a full-size sleeping bag, but a “dream sack,” cotton “mummy” sleeping bag liner, or other lightweight travel sheet will come in handy.
- Checks. It's a good idea to keep a checking account at home so you can write checks for things like tax returns, graduate school applications, etc.
- U.S. postage stamps (to send mail with staff or other Volunteers who are going to the States)
- Paperback books. Very expensive in Fiji. The Peace Corps is developing a limited lending library. Books can be shipped surface mail or “M-bag” (ask the post office for information), but will take several months to arrive.
- Duct tape (a roll or two will come in handy)
- Inflatable globe or lightweight atlas. Great for explaining where you come from to local children.
- Small board games, playing cards, Frisbees, etc.
- Musical instrument(s) (if you play any)
- Book of American songs
- Photos of home. Photos of winter/snow scenes will be especially fascinating. Be sure to bring a picture of family members. It will be needed in language training, and your community friends will be fascinated to see your relatives.
- American pocket dictionary (British versions available [here](#))
- Inexpensive gifts: cheap baseball logo hats, U.S. symbols (such as pins, flags, etc.), bottle openers, nail clippers, bumper stickers, ashtrays, ballpoint pens, comic books, cheap windup toys, posters, magazines, and/or logo T-shirts
- Water sport equipment. If you plan on scuba diving or snorkeling, you might consider bringing some gear—especially light-gauge wetsuits or dive skins to protect you from water lice. Snorkeling equipment might also be handy. Scuba tanks, regulators, and buoyancy compensating devices can be rented.

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

Family

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

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

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

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. Information about loan deferment is online at peacecorps.gov/loans/.
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business. Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 1770. Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Rachel Goldstein Fiji, Samoa, Tonga Desk Officer	ext. 2519 rgoldstein@peacecorps.gov	202.692.2519
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