

**THE PEACE CORPS  
WELCOMES YOU TO  
GUINEA**



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

# MAP OF GUINEA



Base 802845AI (C00295) 2-02

## A WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to Peace Corps/Guinea!

We hope that you accept your invitation! Should you accept, you will embark on an incredible experience. You will be challenged in multiple ways and you will persevere. You will make new friends of all ages and from all walks of life, and form new family ties within Guinean communities and within the Peace Corps. You will learn as much about yourself and what it means to be an American as you will about Guinea and what it means to be a Guinean.

To be successful, you will need to be resourceful, persistent, patient, flexible, and highly motivated. You must keep your sense of humor, and remind yourself from time to time why you decided to join the Peace Corps. After the initial excitement and charm of being in a new and interesting environment wears off, it is easy to become negative and critical, to succumb to the challenges, and become worn down.

Fortunately, you will not be alone! The Peace Corps/Guinea staff is committed to providing you with the best medical, technical, and administrative support possible given the economic and social realities of Guinea, which are different from what is found in the United States.

Your fellow Volunteers will support you during your Peace Corps service. The bonds you make, you will keep for life. They will be there to help you and to share their experiences. Your host communities will provide the most critical source of support. It is in the relationships that you build with your community that you will find the full meaning of your service.

During your pre-service training (PST) you will learn two languages: French and the appropriate local language for your site. Learning these languages will require persistence, patience, and hard work. With dedication and commitment you will succeed. You will find it immensely rewarding to greet people and talk with them in their native language. It is a good idea to start language practice, especially French, before you come to Guinea as this will facilitate your rapid acquisition of language once in-country.

Before your departure, please reflect on your commitment to the Peace Corps, and your motivation to work with Guineans and help in their efforts to better their lives. Peace Corps/Guinea staff will do everything possible to make sure you have the tools—cultural, medical, technical, safety, and linguistic skills—required to succeed. But the determination and will to succeed will come from within.

As you read this welcome book, the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook, and the volunteer assignment description, you will learn more about Guinea, your assignment, and the policies and circumstances that guide our program. While you assimilate this information, decide if the Peace Corps is right for you, if Guinea is right for you, and if your project assignment is right for you.

The Peace Corps staff and your fellow Volunteers look forward to meeting and working with you.

Welcome to our Peace Corps family!

The Peace Corps/Guinea Staff

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

In working toward fulfilling the Peace Corps mission of promoting world peace and friendship, as a trainee and Volunteer, you are expected to 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/GUINEA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS**

### **History of the Peace Corps in Guinea**

The Peace Corps signed a cooperation agreement with the government of Guinea in 1962, which forms the basis for the current country program. The first Volunteers arrived in Guinea in 1963. However, in 1966, relations between the United States government and the government of Guinea soured, and the Guinean government asked Volunteers to leave. The Peace Corps was invited back in 1969, but again relations between the two governments deteriorated, and Volunteers left in 1971. Soon after President Sekou Touré's death in 1984, the Peace Corps was asked to return once again to Guinea. The Peace Corps has maintained a presence in Guinea since 1986, although the program was briefly interrupted in 2007 due to civil unrest. After reopening in July 2007, the program was once again suspended in October 2009 following military violence in the capital. Peace Corps/Guinea reopened in late 2010 with a small group of Peace Corps Response Volunteers and reinstated Volunteers. In 2014, Ebola broke out in Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. In July 2014, the Peace Corps made the difficult decision to evacuate all Volunteers and the program in Guinea was suspended in October 2014. After careful consideration and consultation, the Peace Corps decided to return to Guinea with a small group of experienced Peace Corps Response Volunteers in January 2016.

### **Peace Corps Programming in Guinea**

The mission of the Peace Corps in Guinea is to partner with the people of Guinea to provide Volunteers with meaningful assignments, and the skills and support they need to promote sustainable progress in their communities. Projects address the top development priorities of the government, including education, public health, and agroforestry. Most Volunteer sites are based in rural or semi-urban areas so they may reach those communities most in need of assistance.

Since 1963, more than 1,200 Volunteers have served in Guinea. Volunteers are much in demand by schools, health centers, agricultural cooperatives, and nongovernmental organizations; requests for Volunteers historically exceed the Peace Corps' capacity to provide them.

The development philosophy of Peace Corps/Guinea is to build capacity from the ground up—to empower people to improve the quality of their own lives. This philosophy prepares Volunteers to accompany community members throughout the complex process of addressing their development needs and reinforces the importance of sustainability and community engagement. Volunteers have the opportunity to share their background, experience, and compassion with their counterparts during the community development process.

The future for Peace Corps/Guinea is promising. With its first democratic presidential elections successfully held in 2010, and legislative elections held in 2013, Guinea is currently transcending a challenging past with hope for a progressive future. The presidential elections in 2015 were mostly non-violent and with a high voter turnout. Peace Corps Volunteers have the ability to play a pivotal role in this transition by reinforcing the capacity of youth, men, and women in communities throughout Guinea to address their own needs.

## **COUNTRY OVERVIEW: GUINEA AT A GLANCE**

### **History**

Guinea's colonial period began with the arrival of the French in the early 19th century. The coastal region became a French protectorate in 1849. France's domination of the country was assured by 1898. Official French policy promoted the assimilation of French customs and language by local populations. This was based on the supposed "cultural superiority" of the French over indigenous people. As elsewhere in French West Africa, colonial rule in Guinea was characterized by neither assimilation nor association. Few Guineans were educated in either the French language or culture.

In 1958, Guinea was the first colony in Africa to gain its independence from France through an effort led by the country's first president, Sekou Touré. The decision by the newly formed Guinean government not to participate in the economic system proposed by French leaders for their former colonies led to a complete break in relations with France for years. As a result of this break with the West and ongoing political pressures of the Cold War, Sekou Touré developed close relations with Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union, and he instituted Marxist-socialist economic and political reforms. Touré's presidency was characterized by economic hardship and notorious human rights violations on one hand, and notable progress in Guinean culture and national pride on the other.

President Touré died in 1984 and a military coup was led by Guinean army Colonel Lansana Conté. The army formed a committee (Comité Militaire de Redressement National or CMRN) to run the country. This committee banned the Guinea Democratic Party, suspended the 1982 constitution, and dissolved the National Assembly. The CMRN also resolved to create a market-oriented economy and promised to encourage an open and pluralistic society.

General Lansana Conté was elected president in the country's first multiparty elections in 1993, and he was re-elected president in 1998 and 2003 (although these elections were not internationally recognized as being free and fair).

Lansana Conté's presidency was plagued by corruption at all levels of the administration, particularly during the last years of his office when his health had badly deteriorated. The country became increasingly politically and socially unstable with recurring union strikes, army mutinies, and failed political reforms. Upon Conté's death in December 2008, Guinea had virtually become a failed state.

Hours after Conté's death, a junta called the National Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD), headed by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, took over power in a bloodless coup. Following initial support due to the relative stability the CNDD was able to maintain, Camara quickly became widely criticized for clinging to power. On September 28, 2009, the military opened fire on a peaceful political gathering organized to protest the CNDD's failure to move forward with promised democratic elections. The massacre sparked unprecedented condemnation from the international community, followed by heavy sanctions and pressure.

### **Government**

The first round of presidential elections took place on June 27, 2010, and produced two leading candidates. Elections were largely recognized by the international community as free, fair, and peaceful, despite some logistical problems, irregularities, and allegations of fraud. The second and final election round was held in November 2010. Despite some tensions prior to the announcement of final results, the elections were largely peaceful, and the losing party accepted the results. In January 2011, professor Alpha Condé was sworn in as president of Guinea and, in 2015, he was re-elected to a second five-year term.

## **Economy**

Despite its mineral wealth, Guinea is one of the poorest countries in the world. The country's economy depends mostly on agriculture and the extraction of natural resources. Leading export crops are coffee, bananas, palm kernels, and pineapples. Guinea possesses between one-fourth and one-third of the world's known bauxite reserves and high-grade ore. The country ranks second in ore production and is the world's largest exporter of bauxite. Mining is the most important source of foreign exports, providing the majority of export revenues. There are rich deposits of iron ore, gold, and diamonds, but Guinea's underdeveloped infrastructure has prevented the extraction and use of these resources.

Industrial and commercial sectors are in the early stages of development. Significant economic liberalization has been achieved by reforms begun in 1984. There has been growth in the trade, agricultural production, manufacturing, and informal (i.e., street vendors and other small-scale entrepreneurial activities) sectors. However, many economic issues are unresolved, including creating a healthier environment for the growth of the private sector and better economic achievement.

## **People and Culture**

Guinea's population of approximately 11.2 million is growing at an annual rate of 2.8 percent. One-sixth of the population lives in Conakry, the capital, where the population is increasing at a rate of 2.64 percent per year. Forty-two percent of Guineans are under the age of 15. Life expectancy is 59 years, and infant mortality (first year of life) is 57 per 1,000.

Both the ethnic and linguistic distribution of people in Guinea are a function of natural geographic divisions. Although there are more than 20 ethnic groups in the country, each geographic region has a predominant group that absorbs or influences the others in the region. In some cases, smaller ethnic groups are actually subdivisions of larger ones, with similar linguistic and cultural roots.

Lower Guinea (Basse Côte) is made up of the Susu, Baga, Nalu, Landuma, Tyapi, and Mikiforé people. Susu is the largest of these and represents about 15 percent of the population of Guinea. Middle Guinea (Moyenne Guinée) includes the Fulani people (Peuhl in French), who represent approximately 40 percent of Guinea's population, Djalonké (the original inhabitants of the Fouta Djallon), and Tanda. Upper Guinea (Haute Guinée) is made up of the Malinke, Djalonké, and Ouassoulouké. The Malinke account for about 30 percent of the total population of Guinea. Finally, people of the Forest Region include the Kissia (Kissi in French), Loma (Toma in French), and Kpèlè (Guerzé in French). Over the last few decades, conflicts in neighboring countries, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, forced more than 800,000 people to migrate to Guinea as refugees. Most of these refugees were women, children, and the elderly. The Guinean government contributed more than 1,000 troops to peacekeeping forces in neighboring countries. The signing of a peace accord between rebels and the Sierra Leonean government in 1996 has provided stability and nearly all the refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia have been repatriated.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Guinea 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 Guinea

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

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

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

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

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

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

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

[Data.worldbank.org/country](http://Data.worldbank.org/country)

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

## **Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

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

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

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

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

## **Online Articles/Current News Sites About Guinea**

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

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

[VOAnews.com](http://VOAnews.com)

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

[AllAfrica.com](http://AllAfrica.com)

This is a site for news about Africa (in English).

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

This is a news site from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (in English).

[Aminata.com](http://Aminata.com)

This web portal features news about Guinea (in French or certain web browsers will translate the page into English).

[Jeuneafrique.com](http://Jeuneafrique.com)

This web portal features news about Africa (in French or certain web browsers will translate the page into English).

## **Recommended Books**

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

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

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

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

### **Books About Guinea**

1. Laye, Camara. "The Dark Child." New York City, NY: Farar, Straus, and Giroux, 1954.
2. Diallo, Kadiatou. "My Heart Will Cross this Ocean." New York City, NY: One World Books, 2003.
3. Diallo, Yaya. "The Healing Drum." Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1989.
4. Wills, Anita. "Notes and Documents of Free Persons of Color." Lulu Publishing, 2003.
5. Bari, Nadine. "Grain de Sable." Paris: Centurion, 1983.
6. Portos Diallo, Abdullaye. "La Verite du Ministre." Paris: Calman-Levy, 1985.
7. O'Toole, Thomas E. "Historical Dictionary of Guinea (Republic of Guinea-Conakry)." Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978.
8. Bah, Mariama. "So Long a Letter." Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1981.
9. Morrow, John H. "First American Ambassador in Guinea." New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1968.
10. Monenembo, Tierno. "Cinema." Paris: Seuil, 1997.

# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## Communications

### Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. In Guinea, mail from the U.S. takes a minimum of three to four weeks to arrive in Conakry, and can take an additional two weeks or more to reach places outside Conakry. Peace Corps/Guinea collects all Volunteer mail from the post office, and will forward your mail to regional capitals. Some mail may simply not arrive or some letters may arrive with clipped edges because someone may have tried to see if any money was inside (these cases are rare, but do happen). Advise your family and friends to number their letters for tracking purposes, and to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes.

Despite the delays, it’s a good idea to communicate regularly with your family. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. If a serious problem were to occur, Peace Corps/Guinea would notify the Counseling and Outreach Unit at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, D.C., which would then contact your family.

Note that nothing of great value should be sent via international mail, since packages sometimes arrive with items missing. While marking a package “educational materials” may increase the odds that a given item will arrive intact, this labeling should be reserved for books, magazines, and the like. You will be charged a customs and handling fee for all incoming packages, which varies depending on the contents of the package. Valuable items may be mailed via DHL, but please bear in mind that you will be responsible for clearance fees, which may exceed \$100. Often, Volunteers who are travelling to and from the U.S. for vacation, as well as friends and family coming to visit Guinea, are willing to carry packages of reasonable size.

While in Guinea, your address will be as follows:

*Volunteer Name, PCV  
s/c Corps de la Paix  
B.P. 1927  
Conakry, Guinée*

### Telephones

The telephone system in Guinea can be unreliable, and calling the U.S. can be difficult and expensive. However, most Volunteers are able to call home at least once a week. Land lines are rarely used, but many communities are covered by cellphone networks. In order to facilitate communication, Peace Corps/Guinea has signed a contract with a local telephone service provider (Orange) to create a cellphone network for all its staff members, as well as Volunteers. Although not all Volunteers will have Orange network coverage at their sites, cellphone network coverage is rapidly expanding. It is not possible to make collect calls or calls to toll-free numbers from Guinea. Note that Guinea is five hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (four hours ahead during Daylight Saving Time).

### Computer, Internet, and Email Access

The infrastructure needed for electronic communications has progressed in Guinea. Access to email and the Internet is getting better in most of the country, although connection speed is oftentimes slow. The Peace Corps has installed computers for Volunteers to use at regional workstations and at the information resources center at the Peace Corps office in Conakry. Some Volunteers are able to access the Internet at

their sites through internet USB keys available from several cellphone service providers. While access can be difficult at times and will be intermittent throughout your service, many Volunteers create and post messages to websites and blogs. This is an excellent forum you might consider for sharing your experience with family and friends. Should you choose to create a website or blog, please refer to the guidance and Peace Corps policies in the Volunteer Handbook. Additionally, Volunteers should discuss the content of their blogs and websites with the country director.

### **Housing and Site Location**

Before Volunteers arrive, Peace Corps/Guinea staff, in collaboration with local partners, identify safe and secure Volunteer housing. Volunteer housing represents community or partner organizations' contribution and, therefore, varies greatly depending on their means and norms. Your housing might be a two-room house made from cement with a corrugated tin roof or a mud hut with a thatch roof. Volunteers are generally located no more than 50 kilometers from the nearest Volunteer or regional capital.

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

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

Although credit cards and ATM cards can rarely be used in Guinea, they are widely accepted in neighboring countries and are convenient to have when traveling abroad. U.S. dollars can be changed in many large cities; however, \$100 bills are preferred; \$20 bills often cannot be changed or receive a less favorable exchange rate.

### **Food and Diet**

Guinea's major food crops include rice, millet, maize (corn), manioc (cassava), groundnuts (peanuts), and palm oil. In addition, coffee, bananas, potatoes, and many other fruits and vegetables are cultivated for local consumption and export.

Rice is the staple food, regardless of region. Most Guineans consider a meal without rice incomplete! Rice is served with a variety of sauces, such as peanut sauce, several different leaf sauces, and "soup." If a family has the means, beef, chicken, or fish may be added to the sauce.

The supply of fruits and vegetables varies according to the season and the region. Bananas are available year-round, but oranges, avocados, and pineapples are seasonal. Mangoes are plentiful during rainy season.

### **Transportation**

Volunteers in Guinea primarily use public transportation, including taxis and buses, to get around. Volunteers are not allowed to drive motorized vehicles. Every Volunteer is issued a mountain bicycle (see the Packing List regarding bicycle equipment). Only those Volunteers with special authorization from the country director are permitted to ride as passengers on their counterparts' motorcycles for work-related reasons, and must wear a Peace Corps-issued helmet at all times.

### **Geography and Climate**

Guinea has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons: a dry season from November to April and a rainy season from May to October. Annual rainfall varies from 170 inches in Conakry to fewer than 60 inches in Haute, Guinea. Temperatures also vary by region. On the coast and in the Forest Region, the average

temperature is 81 degrees Fahrenheit. In January, in the Fouta highlands, temperatures vary from 86 F to 95 F during the day, dropping below 50 F at night. In the dry season, midday highs of more than 100 F are not uncommon in Haute, Guinea.

### **Social Activities**

You will be invited to the major celebrations in your community, such as marriages and baptisms, which usually feature music and a feast for all participants. Religious holidays such as Ramadan, Tabaski, and Christmas offer additional opportunities to socialize with your community and learn about local customs and ways of life. Some communities also have dance halls (discos). There may be organized sporting events between youth associations in your community, especially those involving football (soccer). The best opportunities for socializing will come when you have made friends at your site.

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

Dress and appearance in Guinea are of the utmost importance in the educational system; one is actually judged by the quality of his/her attire. Appropriate Volunteer conduct and dress are critical for the Peace Corps' reputation. The Volunteer is usually the only U.S. citizen in his/her community. As such, Volunteers have a responsibility to conduct themselves in a manner reflecting well, not only on themselves, but also on the Peace Corps and the United States as a whole. This also applies to your dress while at the Peace Corps Office and the U.S. embassy. Because these places are routinely visited by many different countries' government officials, your appearance takes on added importance. Appropriate dress for teachers includes clean, neat clothing, shirts covering the shoulders, and pants or long skirts (no shorts or short skirts are allowed in the classroom context). Remember that, as a Peace Corps representative in your community, you should be considered and treated as a professional. Thus, should you look as well as act accordingly in all circumstances.

### **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 Guinea 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 Guinea. 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](http://peacecorps.gov/safety).

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

### **Rewards and Frustrations**

Although the potential for job satisfaction is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. Due to financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies may not always provide the

support they promised. In addition, the pace of work and life in Guinea is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work; perhaps more than in any other job you have had or ever will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance or supervision. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress may come over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, willingness to learn, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

Overcoming these difficulties will require maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Guineans are warm, open, and hospitable people, and the Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during challenging times, as well as in moments of success. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Guinea feeling that they gained much more than they gave during their service. With a commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will enjoy your Peace Corps service.

# 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 Guinea 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 Guinea by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

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

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

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

The PST program has four major components: language, technical, cross-cultural, and medical (which includes personal safety and security). The overall training program is designed to integrate as many of these components as possible into simultaneous training sessions.

PST is based in Dubreka (a semi-urban town about 35 miles/50 kilometers north of Conakry) and its surrounding villages. During training, you will live with a Guinean family. Peace Corps language and cultural facilitators will live in the community with you (approximately one per three trainees).

Trainees and Volunteers in Guinea consistently rate the host family experience as the most challenging and meaningful aspect of training. The challenge lies in adapting to the basic living conditions of a Guinean family and communicating before you've become comfortable in French and your local language. You will have a private room with a bed and a mosquito net. Toilet facilities usually consist of an outdoor pit latrine and bathing is done with water in a bucket in outdoor stalls—under the sun or stars! You will eat breakfast and dinner (and lunch on Saturdays and Sundays) with your host family. Peace Corps/Guinea staff asks your family to feed you local food and to treat you as a family member, not to give you special treatment.

## Technical Training

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

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in Guinea and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Guinea agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You

will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities, report your progress, and serve as a productive member of your community.

### **Language Training**

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

Language study during PST will be very intensive. Your instructors will be Guinean teachers with years of experience teaching languages to Peace Corps trainees. Volunteers will be expected to attain at least a basic understanding of French by the end of training. Volunteers will also have the opportunity to learn the Guinean language (in addition to French) that is widely used in their local communities. It is highly recommended that invitees take an intensive French course before departing for Guinea in order to have more time to focus on learning the local language. Language skills will help provide a foundation for effective communication across cultures and smooth cultural adjustments, and will directly impact one's success as a Volunteer.

### **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 Guinea. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Guinea, 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 Guinea. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

### **Health Training**

During pre-service training, you will be trained in health prevention, basic first aid, and treatment of medical illnesses found in Guinea. 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 nutrition, food and water preparation, emotional health, alcohol awareness, prevention of HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and common illnesses, domestic and intimate partner violence, emergencies, and medical policies in Guinea.

## Safety and Security Training

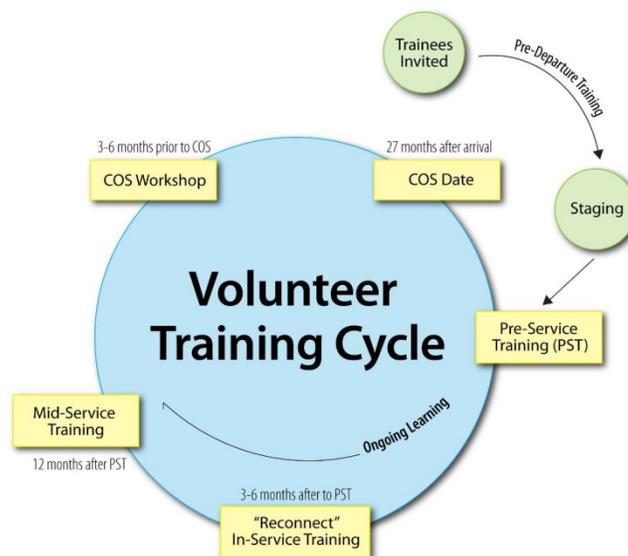
During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace 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.
- **Midservice training** (done in conjunction with technical sector in-service): Assists Volunteers in reviewing their first year, reassessing their personal and project objectives, and planning for their second year of service.
- **Close-of-service conference:** 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 GUINEA**

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

Major health problems among Volunteers in Guinea are rare, and most often the result of Volunteers not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems in Guinea are also found in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and emotional distress. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Guinea because certain environmental factors raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illnesses and injuries.

Guinea is considered a tropical country and there are many diseases found here that do not commonly exist in the U.S. Among these, amoebas, schistosomiasis, and malaria are the most common.

Because you will be serving in an area where malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, is prevalent, it is mandatory that you take an approved anti-malarial drug, usually Mefloquine (Larium). Mefloquine is currently known to be the best prophylaxis available, and it is safe and generally well tolerated. Some Volunteers (fewer than 5 percent) experience side effects such as upset stomach, nightmares, or blurry vision. These side effects can almost always be eliminated by simple measures (e.g., taking the Mefloquine with or following a meal, taking it in the morning or at bedtime, or dividing the dose by taking half a tablet twice a week rather than a single tablet once a week). If Mefloquine is not advised for an individual due to a specific medical condition, the alternative prophylactic regimens Doxycycline and Malarone are available to Volunteers. The Peace Corps medical officer will assist you in determining the best prophylactic regimen. Before switching your malaria prophylaxis you must discuss it with your medical officer.

Rabies does exist in Guinea. If you decide to keep a dog or cat, you must make sure it is vaccinated against rabies. Exposure to rabies can occur through animal bites or scratches and from contact with animal saliva. You will receive three preventive rabies shots during training. Any possible exposure to a rabid animal during service must be reported to the Peace Corps medical officer immediately and appropriate treatment, if needed, will be administered.

The Peace Corps has been actively monitoring the Ebola outbreak, and has determined Volunteers can safely serve in Guinea at this time. Once in Guinea, Volunteers will be trained on Ebola awareness and prevention during pre-service training. Additional precautions will be taken in housing and transportation, and Volunteers will work only in communities where there are no known active cases of Ebola.

### **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 Guinea, 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 Guinea 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 Guinea, 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 Guinea is to take the following preventive measures:

Malaria is a major health issue in Guinea. The most important step in preventing malaria, and many other tropical diseases, is to avoid mosquito bites. The best ways to avoid insect bites is to sleep under a mosquito net (provided by the Peace Corps), wear long sleeves and pants whenever possible, use insect repellent, and be sure there are functional screens on your windows and doors. Mosquitoes bite primarily from dusk until dawn. Since no one can entirely prevent all mosquito bites, Volunteers in Guinea must take anti-malarial medication; failure to do so is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps.

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

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

### **Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk**

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

Before you depart for Guinea 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 Guinea, 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 Guinea 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. Like anywhere in the world, crime occurs in Guinea. 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 Guinea of which you should be aware:

- **Unwanted Attention:** Volunteers attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network ("family," friends, and colleagues) who look out for them. While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and respond according to the training you will receive. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs.
- **In Conakry:** Volunteers should exercise additional caution when visiting Conakry; you may not travel by foot at night and should arrange for transportation ahead of time.
- **Travel:** One of the two most dangerous aspects of Volunteer service in Guinea is public transportation (the other is malaria). Do not travel in taxis that appear unsafe (during pre-service training, you will participate in a session on strategies for selecting the safest transportation option available). In addition, do not be afraid to speak to a driver who is driving too fast or in an unsafe manner. Risks increase greatly when traveling after dark. Traveling at night is not allowed by Peace Corps policy except in emergencies.
- **Security at Home:** Volunteer homes have been burglarized in the past. To reduce the risk of a break-in, assess your house carefully for adequate protection against burglars. Peace Corps/Guinea will work with Volunteers to ensure that their housing is safe and secure. In some cases, you will need to use your settling-in allowance to have necessary modifications made to your house.
- **Identification:** Volunteers are regularly asked for ID by local authorities. You will receive a Peace Corps and Guinea-issued ID; always carry these with you.

### **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 Guinea 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 Guinea will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

### **Support from Staff**

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

### **Office of Victim Advocacy**

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

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

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

Email: [victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov](mailto:victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov)

### **Crime Data for Guinea**

Crime data and statistics for Guinea, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://files.peacecorps.gov/manuals/countrydata/guinea.pdf>. 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 Guinea**

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

The Peace Corps/Guinea 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 Guinea. 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/Guinea'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 Guinea 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 Guinea'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 Guinea 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, 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.

Female Volunteers who are single are often considered an oddity by Guineans because most Guinean women, particularly in rural areas, are married, some with children, by the time they are 20. Single women also face what in the United States would be considered inappropriate advances from Guinean male colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances. Strategies to deal with these issues are discussed in training, and the Peace Corps staff can offer help in resolving any problems. These problems become less common once Volunteers have been accepted into their communities and have built a network of female friends and co-workers.

### **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 host country 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 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.

Volunteers who belong to minority ethnic groups will generally not experience overt biases. However, Guineans may make some stereotypical assumptions based on someone’s background. For example, many Asian-American Volunteers are considered experts in Chinese or kung fu, and African-American Volunteers may be mistaken for a Liberian or Sierra Leonean because of an Anglicized French accent.

Caucasian Volunteers may be annoyed by local terms for “white people” such as toubab, porto, or foté, but should understand that they are not pejorative. Even educated, middle-class Guineans are also sometimes referred to by those terms. Once Volunteers become known in their towns, children’s curiosity and name-calling diminish.

**Volunteer Comment:**

*“Although being a minority will affect the nature of your stay in Guinea, life here will probably not be any more or less difficult for you. There are benefits and difficulties, ranging from being a minor celebrity to not sticking out as much as other Americans. This, of course, depends on the type of minority one is and the time of day. You will face a variety of challenges, but, at the same time, you will be coming in with useful life skills that you picked up as a visible minority in America. The fishbowl effect and issues of cultural identity or relativity will not be new.”*

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

**For LGBTQ Volunteers:** Given Guinea’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 Guinea 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 [lgbprcv.org](http://lgbprcv.org). Additionally, the Peace Corps’ LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at [spectrum@peacecorps.gov](mailto:spectrum@peacecorps.gov).

Many LGBTQ Volunteers have served successfully in Guinea 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.

Same-sex sex acts are illegal in Guinea and sexual and gender minorities are not publicly acknowledged or discussed in Guinean society. Although gay and lesbian Volunteers have generally chosen not to be open about their sexual orientation, they have successfully worked in Guinea.

In the past, imams have vocally opposed the possible neutrality of the law as to sexual orientation (regarding marriage being between different sexes), but further discussion since has died down. The culture is intolerant, but the same culture makes it easy for discreet sexual and gender minorities to go unnoticed.

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

**Volunteer Comment:**

*“As a Volunteer, along with all the feelings of community and belonging, you will probably, from time to time, experience feelings of loneliness, being out of place, and being something of an oddity. If you are*

*gay, lesbian, or bisexual, chances are you're no stranger to being made to feel this way. Unfortunately, those feelings can be intensified here. I have found my group to be extraordinarily tight, close, and open-minded and have gotten nothing but support from them. What's missing, however, is complete understanding. I've not found other gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteers to discuss this with, so though my friends are perfectly willing to hear me out whenever I need or want to talk, I've not found anyone who really knows what I'm feeling and going through. In my site, the question of my sexuality has never been raised. The idea that I'm anything other than straight doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone, and I've chosen not to challenge that assumption. As I'm not here looking for love, but rather am here to work, whether I'm gay or straight is not really an issue. Fielding the all-too-frequent inquiries as to why I'm not yet married and wouldn't I like to become the fourth Mrs. Mamadou Camara is, not surprisingly, somewhat uncomfortable, but I have to imagine that that's not so pleasant for the heterosexual Volunteers among us either. So, I guess what I'm trying to say with all this is this: The Peace Corps can be difficult, and being gay can make it somewhat more difficult. Or, looking at it another way, being gay can be difficult, and being in the Peace Corps can make it somewhat more difficult. However, because of the universal support and acceptance from staff and Volunteers alike, it has not been at all unbearable or anywhere close to making me regret having chosen to come here."*

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

As a disabled Volunteer in Guinea, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. Physically challenged Volunteers will be treated initially with curiosity. Those who require ambulatory devices will encounter obstacles to mobility because there are no ramps or lifts on public transportation or in buildings. But those who serve will ultimately win respect and be considered role models.

### **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 Guinean relationships. Guinean 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 Guinea 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.

In general, couples serving in Guinea earn additional respect from their communities, as they are viewed as more “responsible” than their single Volunteer peers. Couples also provide support for one another and can organize complementary work-related activities. Due to this inherent support system, however, couples may need to make an extra effort to integrate in their communities. They may also encounter comparisons and/or traditional assumptions in terms of their mutual roles. Due to this, however, male Volunteers oftentimes have a unique opportunity to demonstrate the various roles they play in their household, including cooking, fetching water, going to the market, etc.

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

Guinea is, for the most part, a Muslim country (the exception is in the Forest Region, where Christians and followers of traditional religions are more numerous). Being of a different religion is not an issue, as all Guineans are very tolerant. They may not always agree with your beliefs, but they will not act negatively toward you because of them.

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

Older Volunteers may find their age an asset in Guinea. 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.

Volunteers in their early 20s sometimes find they have to make an extra effort to be accepted as professional colleagues, since Guineans of the same age often are still pursuing an education. Older Volunteers, in contrast, are automatically accorded respect, because Guinean culture recognizes that wisdom and experience come with age.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Guinea?**

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 Guinea?**

It is 220 volts and approximately 50 hertz.

### **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 for information). 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 Guinea 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 Guinea 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.

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

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

**How easy is it to call home from Guinea?**

Cellphone coverage is increasing quickly throughout Guinea and it is relatively easy and inexpensive to call the US. Several companies provide reliable service in regional capitals and many small towns. Most Volunteers have cell service in their villages; others must travel to the next village or to their market town to use cellphones. Many volunteers have some access to the Internet in their villages and there is Internet available at all Volunteers in the regional capitals and Conakry.

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

Peace Corps/Guinea will provide funds to purchase a simple mobile phone as soon as you arrive. You can also purchase a cellphone yourself. If you bring a cellphone, be sure that it will work on the GSM frequency, which is what is used in Guinea, and can accept local SIM cards.

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

Many Volunteers choose to bring a laptop; however, the climate and environment in Guinea are very hard on electrical equipment. Additionally, if you do bring a laptop or other electronic device, it may be difficult to keep it charged as the electricity in Guinea is of poor quality and intermittent, if available at all but there is plenty of sunshine for solar charge devices. Electronic devices, especially computers, are also seen as valuable items and may increase the risk of theft. There is Internet and email access in many larger cities as well as the Peace Corps' information resources center in Conakry and regional workstations.

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM GUINEA VOLUNTEERS

Congratulations on being invited to join the very exclusive club of Peace Corps/Guinea! Squeezed on the coast of West Africa one finds this tropical paradise, minus the running water, intermittent electricity, and stable governmental infrastructure. However, there *are* pineapples so what else could one really ask for, right? Just think within this invitation is the opportunity to explore a world few others have had *la bonne chance* to discover.

Guinea is a beautiful and unpretentious West African country filled with some of the kindest people I've ever known. Guineans are the most welcoming, generous, and tolerant people one could find in this world. Although the scenery is postcard worthy, it's the people and their communities that Volunteers find themselves falling in love with. No longer pinned as a tourist or outsider, I'm recognized by my neighbors as one of their own, despite my weird American girl tendencies (what kind of person talks to a pet cat?). As my friends and colleagues would say, "Wantanara," or "We are all together." This saying truly encompasses the brotherhood that is so engrained in the Guinean culture.

My name is Alexa Gudelsky, or Fatoumata Yarie Camara as I am known in Guinea. I was a second-year public health Volunteer living in a small village. Every morning I was woken up at dawn by the call to prayer from the mosque down the dirt path from my house. I rolled out of bed and bought my morning baguette from the baker at a pre-market discounted price saving me all of 7 cents. I then went for my morning jog, making sure to shout good morning to my neighbors who are out doing their morning chores as I pass. I pulled water from the well for my chilly bucket bath and ate my breakfast with my cat. I usually rode my bike the 15 minutes to the market each morning to peruse the tables and pick up whatever produce I need for the day. Going to the market was one of my favorite activities, defined more as a mandatory social experience than a chore. I got to greet all of my friends and practice my toddler-level Susu (the local language) while I get the news of the day. The afternoons were spent working on my Peace Corps projects. As a public health Volunteer, I had the flexibility to dabble in many different areas and do projects that interest me. For me, this included all kinds of activities from teaching entrepreneurial courses to organizing an HIV and AIDS support group. The evenings I devoted to hanging out with my neighbors. I had both Susu and Pulaar neighbors and did not master either language but I nonetheless spent time with them cooking rice and sauce or playing soccer with the children. My neighbors always found it hilarious whenever I tried to pound rice, pump water, start a fire, or do any other "Guinean" activities. By the time I went home, ate dinner, read, and went to bed, I was asleep by 9 p.m. But hey, there's only so much one can do without electricity.

I can remember all too well what it's like after a yearlong application process to finally get "the envelope" in the mail. Whether Guinea is where you thought you would be or not, know that there have been many of us in your exact place—all too ready, and yet hesitant to make this next big jump. So go ahead, go look up as many Wikipedia pages as you can that describe life in Guinea and hop on to one of the many Peace Corps/Guinea Facebook groups. No matter how much you think you can prepare yourself, nothing will change the fact that your life will never be same after serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guinea.

Alexa Gudelsky  
2013–14 Peace Corps/Guinea

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Welcome to the Peace Corps/Guinea family! You are about to embark on one of the most exciting, challenging, and rewarding adventures of your life.

As with most people, you probably made a beeline for a map when you saw the invitation to Guinea. Your friends and family probably thought you meant Ghana or Papua New Guinea when you told them about your placement. It is fascinating how little attention Guinea gets considering it is one of the most beautiful countries in West Africa with stunning waterfalls, mountains, forests, and beaches. Not only that, but Guinean culture is rich with many ethnicities and local languages, stories, dances, and drumming. The Guinean people are some of the most gracious, welcoming, and generous people—not to mention they have a great sense of humor.

Despite Guinea's natural and cultural richness, it remains one of the poorest and least-developed countries in the entire world. Though this means that service in Guinea is especially challenging, it also means that the work you will do is especially important. Education is one of the sectors in which Guinea most needs help. There are few teachers to teach huge classes of students who can barely read or write, with no materials in school systems that hardly function. However great these challenges, you will learn to be patient, flexible, and creative and, *petit à petit* you will change your students' lives. I have stayed here long enough (three years) to see many of my students start university and their success is my proudest accomplishment of my service.

So, get excited about Guinea, about mango season, about tropical rains, and about looking really fly in traditional African clothes (if you so wish). Trainees spend three months training in Dubreka learning French and local languages, teaching methods, and cultural integration. You'll live with a host family during this time and it will likely be the hardest, yet most memorable time of your service. You'll want to pack things that you'll need during this time; once you're a Volunteer you'll be able to buy most anything on trips to the capital. The things I was most happy I brought were my headlamp, a solar light bulb (Nokero), a shortwave radio, and tons of photos to share with friends and to put up on the mud brick walls.

Once again we are so excited to welcome you into our Volunteer family.

*Bonne chance!*  
Liz Chadwick  
2011–14

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Welcome and congratulations on your recent invitation to Guinea!

OK, so I'm sure you've tried to research Guinea, evaded search results for "guinea pig" and "Papua New Guinea," and odds are you still have found very little on what day-to-day life looks like. I understand your difficulty. So I could offer you all advice on what to pack and such, but instead I've decided to share an anecdote of what my life here in Guinea looks like on an average day in hopes of giving you a taste of living here. Here's a journal entry from April 2014:

Last Saturday I had my first chance to visit a farm in a small village called Banko with some members of my local microfinance institution, RAFOC. My colleagues at RAFOC had just told me they were heading out to visit a local farm. Farms are very important to me as an Agroforestry Volunteer, so despite my plans to clean my sand-covered house and do my laundry, I decided to hop along impromptu. The trip went really well, I learned a lot, and I got right up to the border of Mali! But it took ages. And by the late afternoon I was pretty hot and tired.

So the RAFOC chauffeur, my Guinean counterpart, and I are driving back to Siguiiri from this village in the middle of the savanna-boonies and the road is full of potholes, which forces the chauffeur to

continuously speed up, slow down, and swerve back and forth. In the midst of this roller-coaster ride my counterpart comments, “Hey, Muhammed (our chauffeur), I think it’s cool that you drive stick. That’s a good skill to have.” (This is happening in French but I figured I’d give a rough translation).

Muhammed lights up and says, “Well, I can teach you! You want to learn?”

My counterpart gives him a wild look and glances at the road, “Uh...I don’t know if now is the right time. We’re kind of in the middle of nowhere and the road’s not real great.”

“Nonsense! It’s fine! There’s no time like the present! C’mon it’s easy!”

So I looked on in disbelief as my driver and counterpart switched places on this deserted road and my counterpart took his first swing at driving a manual car. And for those of you that don’t know, driving a stick is not easy. And driving on Guinean roads is not easy. So the combination...golly.

“So you just put one foot on this pedal, it’s called the clutch, and the other on that pedal, the gas (I don’t think he’d ever driven any car before to be honest). And now we’re going. OK you’re going to want to slow down...slower...OK seriously slow down!”

THUD! (pothole)

“OK. If at first you don’t succeed! Let’s try again!”

Like I said...golly.

Luckily, the madness stopped after only 15 minutes or so and after Muhammed turned to me and asked, “So do you want to learn?” I did not take him up on his offer, though now I kind of regret it.

But we did make it back in one piece, and it’s comforting to know that a taxing afternoon often later becomes a funny story! Though at the time I was amazed at such a scenario occurring, it became a rather fond and humorous memory depicting a typical day in Guinea. And it’s a memory I’ll cherish for a long time.

This event defines my life pretty well. Every day is a story. Every day is a new adventure. Get excited. This series of adventures will change your life forever.

I recently read a biography on Teddy Roosevelt (you have plenty of time to catch up on reading here) and it was said of him after he spent time in Sub-Saharan Africa (though he was in East Africa), as noted by his colleague, "He was just the same in manner, in appearance, in expression yet there was something different. We, all of us...felt it. To me he had ceased to become an American but a world citizen. His horizon seemed to be greater. His mental scope more encompassing... He is bigger, broader, capable of greater good...than when he left." The same is true of all of us after our Guinean experience.

Get ready for the greatest adventure of your life.

Austin Schott  
Peace Corps/Guinea 2014

Welcome to Guinea! Get ready for the ride of your life!

This road may not be silky smooth, but it can be more beautiful and fulfilling than you could ever imagine. Having the opportunity to come serve in a place like Guinea is really one of the sweetest gifts that you may never fully understand.

Guinea is a country of stunning beauty and extreme kindness. Waterfalls, mountains, rivers, tropical forests, and savannah plains fill this diverse, untouched landscape with imagery that you believed only to be true in dreams. People here provide for one another, in and with respect for the land and its many gifts. Beautifully colored fabrics drape across people who have little yet look like royalty. The rains come down, shaking the land with its thunder, and bringing life to the never-limited shades of green, ever growing. Mud and straw huts scattered throughout the village, women preparing food over fire, children transporting firewood on donkey carts, men plowing the fields with their cows, circles of dance, singing and drumming, calls to prayer of the mosque. This is truly a traditional Peace Corps experience as you take a step back many, many years to a simple life where you grow your own food, collect your water from the well, bike many miles to get to another town, eat rice together with your family, and live in the calmness of no electricity.

Many children play wildly with incredible enthusiasm and joy of their new American friend. When you come to Guinea, you are never alone as you join an incredibly large, warm, and generous family.

Now this is only a small glimpse of my experience. Every person will have a totally different experience because it is what you make it out to be. If you are open-minded with flexibility and a sense of humor, you can have a richly fulfilling experience. Some of the most ridiculous things may happen to you, and it may also be some of the funniest experiences of your life.

When you decided to join the Peace Corps, you may have the intention of helping other people, but trust me, Guineans will give you much more than you ever could have tried to give them. Being one of the poorest countries in the world, I believe it to be one of the richest in generosity, love, and happiness.

Nothing is so easy in Guinea but you will soon realize that the little successes make all the struggling worthwhile. The smiles, laughter, and genuine care of the other people in your community will inspire you to simply be a good person more than you could imagine.

You can't change the world, but you sure can change yourself, and when that happens, all around you will naturally change to make fit. This experience will for sure change who you are.

Guinea is a land of hope within a sea of problems. But it's not about the problems: It's about believing and trusting that the smallest seeds we plant may patiently grow into the most beautiful trees. We see this happen every day, little by little.

As you put on your belt of courage, it's time to let go of everything but gain so much more. I congratulate you on your new journey and wish you the best of luck!

Michelle Pitcher  
2013–14

## PACKING LIST

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

### **The First Few Days**

Bring all the essential stuff for the first few days, even things you would expect to find here. Pack mini shampoo bottles, toothpaste, and other essentials. When you first arrive, you will stay in the capital for a few days of orientation, but you aren't likely to leave the compound. Have items for these days in a small side bag so they are easy to access. After a few days, you will go to Dubreka and move in with your host families. There's a small market in Dubreka, and an even bigger one ("Kilometer 5") a short taxi ride away, so there are resources you can tap into once you get more comfortable in Guinea.

### **General Clothing**

*For both men and women*

Don't pack a lot of clothes! Buying cloth and having clothes made here is easy. Just bear in mind that most cloth will have lots of designs and colors, so bringing solid-colored shirts or pants may be advantageous. Avoid white or light-colored garments that stain easily. You can also buy jeans and solid-colored shirts here, but these may be hand-me-down shirts donated from America. Since it's cheap (relatively speaking) to have clothes made here, bringing clothing catalogues from home can be helpful to show tailors what you would like done or what you are searching for.

- Sleeveless shirts and shorts are good for down time when it's hot and you want to relax and sweat in private.
- Bring something for you! Once a month you get to go to the regional capital with other Americans, so you will have chances to wear whatever American non-conservative clothing you want within the privacy of the compound.
- Do not bring anything you are not willing to lose. Any clothes here will have to sustain two years of bucket washing, sweat stains, and molding. Stretchy clothes tend to survive bucket baths better. Keep in mind that you likely won't have access to an iron.
- Consider bringing a light, long-sleeve shirt so you don't get sunburned during long bike rides.
- Some warm clothing, maybe one warm hoodie or jacket, for chilly nights.
- Definitely bring a bathing suit! Bathing suits are difficult to come by. During training you will get to visit some waterfalls and go swimming, and once at site you may end up near a beach or a big river!
- A few pairs of socks (Volunteers typically wear open-toed shoes with no socks; runners should bring a week's worth of good socks). Bringing a few pairs of athletic socks with synthetic "smart" fabrics is a good idea (Smartwool, etc.).
- Hat or cap for sun protection
- An unlined waterproof jacket (rainy season is no joke)
- If items start getting expensive, stick to the essentials. Once you're here you can call home to friends and family and ask them to send care packages.

*For men*

- Clothing that covers more of the body is recommended. For example, shorts aren't offensive, but they also aren't acceptable for formal situations like teaching or meetings with local authorities.

- Underwear. Many male Volunteers are very happy with the synthetic, anti-microbial, moisture-wicking variety made by ExOfficio or similar companies. A week's supply should be fine.
- One nice outfit (business casual—trousers and a button down shirt, tie optional—for conferences and meetings)
- A few pairs of trousers. Travel-style pants with zippered pockets or zip-off legs are great). Jeans are optional.
- Two to three T-shirts (easy to buy locally if you need more during your service) in colors that easily match everything
- Two or three short-sleeved, button-down or polo-type collared shirts (especially important for teachers)
- One to two pairs of shorts

#### *For women*

- Sleeved shirts (no spaghetti straps) and shorts/skirts that go below the knees (for cultural sensitivity)
- Basic jewelry (if you normally wear it; nothing expensive). Women get dressed up, so this is definitely acceptable.
- One to two week supply of underwear
- Three to five bras, including a few sports bras (good bras are unavailable locally)
- Two or three casual dresses or skirts that cover your knees, even when sitting (cotton is best; sleeveless is OK, but spaghetti straps are not acceptable)
- Two or more pairs of jeans or pants (agroforestry Volunteers tend to wear pants more, while teachers usually wear skirts or dresses)
- Two to three cotton T-shirts (can be bought in Guinea)
- Two or three short-sleeved, button-down or polo-type collared shirts (especially important for teachers) long enough to cover your backside
- A pair of shorts that cover your knees if you plan to participate in sports
- Scarf to cover your head during religious ceremonies

#### **Shoes**

Among Volunteers, opinions vary in regards to the best footwear to bring. Here is the most basic selection you'll want to pack:

- A quality pair of flip-flops from the States (i.e., Havaianas or Rainbows) will outlast 10 pairs of the ones found in Guinea.
- A pair of all-purpose athletic shoes
- Durable sandals (i.e., Texas, Chacos, Salomons, etc.). Many Volunteers bring them and love them. Others don't like how they look, think they're uncomfortable, or want more protection for their toes. Bottom line, you'll want a pair of durable shoes that can get very, very dirty and wet.
- Dress shoes (optional). Education Volunteers can teach in anything that isn't dirty.

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

Bring enough to get you through the first three months of training. All basic toiletries are available in-country, but if you are partial to a certain brand/type, bring plenty of it.

- Deodorant\*
- Toothbrush and toothpaste\*
- Mouthwash with fluoride\*
- Moisturizers, lotions\*
- Shampoo, conditioner, and soap\*
- Comb\* and/or brush

- Razor blades (enough for your normal shaving routine)\*
- Travel toothbrush\* and soap holders
- Nail clippers\*
- Pumice stone
- Microfiber, quick-dry camp towel (highly recommended)
- Feminine hygiene products\*
- Small bottles of gel hand sanitizer
- Baby wipes
- Tissues

\* Available in regional capitals; you'll have a chance to buy them once a month.

### **Electronics**

- iPod or MP3 player with mini-speakers (most music sold in Guinea is on cassettes; however, Volunteers enjoy their MP3 collections)
- Alarm clock
- Camera with additional memory and batteries
- Adaptor for 220-volt plugs
- Good-quality headlamp with extra batteries
- Batteries for your electronics and camera (batteries from the U.S. last longer and AAA type batteries are harder to find here; you might also consider bringing a solar battery charger as there may not be electricity at your site)
- USB flash drives
- Watch (waterproof)

### **Kitchen**

During training you will be eating mostly with your host family, apart from when you go to the market to buy your own lunch (this will likely be bean sandwiches, fruit, or veggie salads). But once you get to site you can either eat with your host family or cook for yourself. You can find spices in the capital, but they can be expensive, so bring your favorites! Also bring candy and dried foods! There are some days when these will be the best pick-me-up you could ask for (emotionally or just for sensitive stomachs)!

- Spatula\*
- Good-quality can opener (local ones can be frustrating)
- One or two good-quality kitchen knives (paring knife, chef knife, serrated knife)
- Swiss Army-type knife or Leatherman-type tool (remember to pack in checked luggage)
- Garlic press
- Small cutting board
- Two sturdy water bottles (e.g., Nalgene, Sigg; small-mouth water bottles are easier to use during transport)
- Vegetable peeler
- Plastic food-storage containers\*
- Zip-top plastic bags (some large, some small)\*

\* Available in regional capitals.

### **Some Items Volunteers Wish They Brought:**

- Teriyaki sauce
- Cheez-Its
- Oreos

- Endless amounts of powdered cheese from mac-and-cheese packs (you can get the macaroni here). Freeze-dried cheese from Emergency Essentials (beprepared.com or honeyville.com) is also a Volunteer favorite.
- Dried foods/powdered items (dried apricots, trail mix, pancake mix, brownie mix, etc. There are ovens in the regional capitals where you can make baked goods once a month.)
- Gatorade drink mix
- Snack bars (cereal, nutrition, energy, etc.)
- A good source of protein (nuts, beef jerky, tuna, tofu)
- Tea
- Sauce packets (pasta sauces, salad dressing mixes, etc.)
- Spices

### **Bikes**

You will be issued a mountain bike, and for most Volunteers it is their primary source of transportation, so bring any bike gear you use and love: pump, gloves, multi-tools, water bottle, etc. Peace Corps–Guinea will provide a basic pump, multi-tool, and lock.

### **Miscellaneous**

- Peel-and-seal letters, small padded package envelopes, and U.S. stamps (travelers to the U.S. are frequently willing to hand-carry small envelopes)
- Frisbee, volleyball, football, etc.
- Playing cards
- Photos from home
- Calendar/planner
- Art supplies (e.g., markers, colored pencils, pens, glue, glitter, construction paper, sketch books, coloring books)
- A good book or two, or a Kindle/Nook (there is also a supply at all regional Peace Corps facilities)
- Musical instrument (if you play one)
- Tape (duct and transparent types)
- If you like camping: tent, sleeping bag, hammock, and travel mosquito net (a regular mosquito net is provided by the Peace Corps for your use)
- Good-quality sunglasses
- Sewing kit and scissors
- Earplugs (if you are a light sleeper)
- A gift for your host family in Dubreka and your host family at site. They will likely give you a welcome or parting gift. Gifts don't have to be big as they are mostly symbolic. Guineans will appreciate small gifts from the States. So bring inexpensive toys and gadgets; anything Bieber, Rihanna, Beyoncé, Akon, Usher, etc.; spices; things with pictures
- Pillow
- French grammar books and 501 French Verbs

### **Packing It All**

- Hard suitcase/large duffel bag (with wheels if possible)
- Camping backpack: Backpacks are best for traveling. Find one that can fit enough stuff for trips lasting longer than 4-5 days but that isn't too large.
- Schoolbag/day pack or good-size purse
- Money belt
- Luggage locks/combination locks

### **A Few Notes**

- Try out all electronics you plan to bring to make sure they work and be sure to bring spare batteries/chargers/adaptors.
- Limit clothes. Really. You'll probably wear lots of locally made clothing. Clothes are inexpensive in Guinea, and, in addition to tailors, and an abundance of cloth, there is a large selection of used clothing available in most towns, including a variety of T-shirts, jeans, etc.
- Finally, don't stress! Have fun! You'll probably pack some stuff you won't use while you are here, but that's OK—everyone does!

## PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

### Family

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

### Passport/Travel

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

### Medical/Health

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

### Insurance

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

### Personal Papers

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

### Voting

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

### Personal Effects

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

### Financial Management

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

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

## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Guinea Country Desk Officer	ext. 2858 Desk Officer	202.692.2858 <a href="mailto:guinea@peacecorps.gov">guinea@peacecorps.gov</a>
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Applicant Portal questions			<a href="mailto:amsadmin@peacecorps.gov">amsadmin@peacecorps.gov</a>
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.544.1802
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
New Volunteer Portal questions			<a href="mailto:staging@peacecorps.gov">staging@peacecorps.gov</a>
<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