

# **THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO The Kyrgyz Republic**



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

# MAP OF THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



## A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Invitee,

Congratulations on your invitation and welcome to Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic! Although we are just names to you at this point, we will become your main source of advice and support while you are serving in the Kyrgyz Republic. We take this responsibility seriously and are eager to help you be both a successful Volunteer and contributor to the long and storied history of Peace Corps in the Kyrgyz Republic and worldwide.

In 2014, we celebrated 22 years of Volunteers serving in the Kyrgyz Republic. Your Volunteer colleagues here now are working hard to maintain our reputation of service. When you arrive, you will make your own mark and contributions to this long tradition. World events of the past year have made what the Peace Corps stands for more important than ever.

Despite little in the way of resources, we face enormous challenges in this country and elsewhere. However, the Kyrgyz Republic's commitment to keeping Peace Corps Volunteers through two revolutions and Central Asia's first democratic transfer of power means that we must strive to represent ourselves as best we can as individuals, as Americans, and as global citizens.

I have seen firsthand how warmly our Kyrgyz partners have welcomed Volunteers and how well our program has been received in the cities and villages of this beautiful country. They are as excited as you are about your choice to join the Peace Corps.

You should prepare to come with an openness and willingness to adapt; to make new friends with the wonderful people of this country, whose history, culture, and traditions are rooted deep in the past; and to learn to respect and love the people and culture of the Kyrgyz Republic.

I look forward to working with you as a colleague in this endeavor. Come and enjoy the snowcapped mountains and lush valleys of the legendary Silk Road.

*Tammie*

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*As a Volunteer I intended to change the world but found, instead, the world changed me.*

Check us out at <http://kyrgyz.peacecorps.gov>

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

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

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

# **PEACE CORPS/THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC HISTORY AND PROGRAMS**

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

Since the first Peace Corps Volunteers arrived in the Kyrgyz Republic in 1993, more than 900 Americans have served in the country. Volunteers have taught English, supported public health programs, and helped community-based organizations learn how to grow and thrive sustainably.

In April 2010, fed up with corruption at the highest level of government, the people of Kyrgyzstan threw out President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in a violent revolution. A new government was formed under the leadership of interim President Roza Otunbaeva, a former ambassador to England and the United States. President Otunbaeva led the development and ratification of a new constitution that shifted power from the presidency to the parliament and prime minister. Peaceful elections in the fall brought five political parties into power. In December 2010, a coalition of three parties selected the first prime minister and speaker of Parliament.

In June 2010, tensions between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz populations in the south flared up, and hundreds were killed. The Peace Corps pulled all the Volunteers out of the south, finding new sites in the northern oblasts (regions). The loss of two oblasts in the south forced a reduction in the number of Volunteers in-country from 130 to 80. Beginning in January 2014, Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic has been conducting extensive risk assessments and threat analyses in Southern Kyrgyzstan, which have resulted in the beginning of the Peace Corps' return to the region. Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic continues to expand its presence in southern Kyrgyzstan in close cooperation with law enforcement and local partners both in and out of government, as well as the State Department's Diplomatic Security Service and the Peace Corps Office of Safety and Security in Washington, D.C.

Kyrgyzstan is a developing, nascent democracy and civil unrest and violent demonstrations do occur. Historically, even in the darkest moments of 2010, these incidents have never been directed at Volunteers nor have any Volunteers been injured or threatened. Peace Corps staff includes a full-time safety and security manager who is responsible for training Volunteers and staff in safety procedures as well as closely following developing risks and threats to Peace Corps in the Kyrgyz Republic. Volunteer safety is and has always been the agency's first priority.

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

Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic works in three primary areas: Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in secondary schools and universities, Sustainable Community Development (SCD), and Health Education (HE).

Volunteers in the TEFL sector primarily build the capacity of English teachers, teach English in secondary schools, universities, and other educational institutions, and a few are also teaching history and literature to more advanced students. Volunteers serve as regular members of the teaching faculty in their schools and teach between 150–200 students each year. Most are also involved in extracurricular activities such as conducting English clubs, HIV/AIDS education, computer training, and youth development through girls' or boys' clubs.

SCD Volunteers work with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and government-sponsored community-based groups to increase their organizational capacities and assist local communities in promoting sustainable community development.

Volunteers in the HE program are assigned to work with government agencies, village health committees, health-focused NGOs, and schools in order to promote healthy lifestyles and health practices in the

community. Volunteers address issues such as basic hygiene, women's reproductive health, prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections, disease prevention, and life skills education.

# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC AT A GLANCE

## History

The Kyrgyz Republic is a beautiful, mountainous country in Central Asia bordered by Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and China. There is little contemporary documented history about the Kyrgyz people and their land, as the Soviets “Russified” the indigenous ethnic groups and cultures across the Soviet Union. The Kyrgyz people are traditional nomadic herders who have often been subjected to the influences of foreign rulers and cultures due to their strategic location on the Silk Road.

The earliest known residents of the area that is now the Kyrgyz Republic were the warrior clans of Saka, also known as the Scythians. These gold-laden, nomadic horsemen traversed the land between the Black Sea and western China from about the sixth century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. From the sixth to 10th centuries, the Kyrgyz region was controlled by various Turkish groups, many of whom lived on the shores of Lake Issyk-Kul, the second largest mountain lake in the world after Lake Titicaca in South America. These groups, particularly the Turkic Karakhanids, introduced Islam to the area between the 10th and 12th centuries.

Historians believe that the ancestors of today’s Kyrgyz people most likely came from Siberia’s upper Yenisey River basin and were driven south in the 10th century by the Mongol incursions into the region. Mongol influence continued until 1758, when the Manchus (of China’s Ching dynasty) defeated the Mongol Oyrats of the Zhungarian Empire, leaving the Kyrgyz people to continue their herding lifestyle in peace.

An important influence in the cultural development of the Kyrgyz region was the extensive trade route known as the Silk Road, which took 200 days to traverse in full. The Kyrgyz region, along the route’s middle section, was one of the main stopovers for traders traveling from western China to the Mediterranean Sea in the second to 13th centuries, providing sources of transportation (horses and camels) and lodging for the traders.

The Kokand khanate, based in the Fergana Valley of Uzbekistan, ruled the Kyrgyz people during the 18th century. In 1865, the Russians, joining a number of allied Kyrgyz forces, defeated the Kokand khanate and gradually brought the Kyrgyz under the rule of the czar. The new rulers appropriated land for Russian settlers until the Kyrgyz revolted in 1916. Massacres ensued, resulting in the death of 120,000 Kyrgyz people and prompting an additional 120,000 to flee to China. The Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was created in 1926 and, in 1936, became a republic of the Soviet Union known as Kirghizia. Part of the Soviet Union for most of the 20th century, the Kyrgyz Republic declared its independence on August 31, 1991. Today, the country is a vibrant mix of Russian and traditional influences struggling for economic vitality. Once regarded as among the most conservative of the former Soviet republics, the Kyrgyz Republic is attempting to promote liberal economic policies and to integrate itself into the global community. However, poverty remains widespread, particularly in rural areas. Per capita income in the Kyrgyz Republic is one of the lowest in the former Soviet Union, with great discrepancies between urban and rural areas.

## Government

The Kyrgyz Republic is an evolving democracy. The executive branch consists of a president, prime minister, and the cabinet. The legislative branch is made up of the unicameral Supreme Council; the judicial system has both a Supreme and Constitutional court. The first president, Askar Akayev, was re-elected to five-year terms three times before being chased out in March 2005. His elected successor, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, was thrown out in a violent uprising just eight months after being re-elected to

office by a wide majority in July 2009. In each case, popular disgust with corruption at the highest levels led to the president's downfall.

But the people believe in democratic principles and flock to the polls on election days. A new constitution was drafted and ratified by 90 percent of the voters in June 2010. General assembly elections in October of that year led to the formation of dozens of political parties. In the end, only five parties received enough votes to take seats in the new assembly. Three parties successfully formed a coalition in December 2010, putting the prime minister and speaker in place.

Interim President Otunbayeva stepped down peacefully on December 1, 2011, when Almazbek Atambayev was elected president. This was the first peaceful change of leadership in Central Asia since the countries gained their independence from the Soviet Union. The president serves one six-year term.

## **Economy**

Traditionally, Kyrgyz people were largely nomadic shepherds and traders. The Soviet period led to the establishment of collective agriculture; 200 collective farms operated in the Kyrgyz Republic prior to independence. Today, agriculture accounts for 40 percent of the country's economic output, and there are more than 29,000 private farms and almost 610,000 farmers. The major agricultural products include wheat, soybeans, meat (mostly mutton, beef, and horse), wool, leather, potatoes, cotton, sugar beets, poppy seeds, tobacco, apples, grains, and medicinal plants.

Trade is still a vital industry with east-west routes that date back hundreds of years. Today, China, Kazakhstan, Turkey, and Russia are major trading partners. You will see thousands of small merchants buying and selling at the bazaars. Remittances from somewhere between 800,000 and one million citizens of Kyrgyzstan living abroad represent 30 percent of the country's GDP.

Mining is another major industry. Gold accounted for 43 percent of export revenues from in 2011. However, Kyrgyzstan has very little oil or natural gas, and relies on its neighbors for these essentials.

Economic reforms have resulted in several milestones through the years: achieving World Bank membership and Most-Favored-Nation trading status with the United States in 1992, introduction of non-Soviet currency in 1993, observer status in the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade in 1993, becoming the first Central Asian country to receive International Monetary Fund funding in 1993, Asian Development Bank membership in 1994, and World Trade Organization membership in 1998. Kyrgyzstan is projected to join Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Armenia in the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union in January 2015.

## **People and Culture**

The Kyrgyz think of themselves as the poets and artists of Central Asia. Nothing illustrates this spirit more than the "Epic of Manas," the longest narrative poem in the world. Manas is a hero who, according to legend, unified tribal leaders long ago in the mountains and valleys now known as the Kyrgyz Republic.

About 5.6 million people live in the Kyrgyz Republic, mostly inhabiting the fertile foothills and plains north of the Tien Shan Mountains. A quarter of the population lives in Bishkek, the capital. The country of Manas is now home to more than 80 ethnic groups from across Asia and Eastern Europe. While the people are predominantly Kyrgyz, a significant number of Uzbeks live in the south of the country and many Russians live in the north. Kyrgyz is the national language, but both Kyrgyz and Russian are used by the government.

While most Kyrgyz people are Muslim, Islam only lightly influences their daily lives. In the north, many people of Russian and European descent are Russian Orthodox Christians, but this religion plays a minor role in the country's culture.

The country has a very rich mix of traditions and customs. The Kyrgyz people are known for their felt and ceramic crafts and for their Silk Road-related history. Soviet culture fostered opera and ballet groups, theaters, and museums. Ancient tribal affiliations still govern social norms in many parts of the south, where there's more of a mix of Western and traditional Uzbek and Kyrgyz cultures. Aging, Soviet-style towns define the north. Most people in Bishkek wear Western-style clothes and fret about the same things Americans do: jobs (or the lack thereof), the price of gasoline, and pothole-pitted roads. Yet wherever you are in the country, you will find people proudly wearing traditional garments and hats, especially around the bazaars and taxi stands that cater to the Kyrgyz people who travel into town from surrounding villages to sell their farm products.

In both rural and urban areas, Kyrgyz social life centers on the family. Most Volunteers live with a host family at their sites throughout their service and find this to be one of the most rewarding aspects of their Peace Corps experience.

### **Environment**

The country's rugged, snowcapped mountains define its landscape and weather. It is cold in the winter, and there is usually snow in the northern plains and in the mountains to the south from December to February. The south is more temperate, and wild tulips bloom when mountain runoff and spring rains irrigate the land. Summers can be dusty.

The terrain provides many opportunities to enjoy the outdoors, including white-water rafting, fishing, camping, horseback riding, hiking, winter skiing, hot springs, glaciers, mountain climbing (two peaks are higher than 21,000 feet), and visits to historic Silk Road sites. Your future site is sure to be close to at least some of these activities.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and the Kyrgyz Republic and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees.

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

### General Information about the Kyrgyz Republic

Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic Website: [www.kyrgyz.peacecorps.gov](http://www.kyrgyz.peacecorps.gov)

[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

[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.

<http://data.worldbank.org/country/kyrgyz-republic>

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

[www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyrgyzstan](http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kyrgyzstan)

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

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/kg.html>

The CIA's Factbook is an authoritative collection of facts about the economy, demographics, and government.

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

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

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

The Department of State issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Kyrgyz Republic and learn more about its social and political history ([www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5755.htm)). You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

[www.bishkek.usembassy.gov](http://www.bishkek.usembassy.gov)

Find information about Department of State policies and activities in the Kyrgyz Republic. Peace Corps Volunteers are sometimes mentioned in embassy press releases and on the embassy's Facebook page.

[www.kgembassy.org](http://www.kgembassy.org)

The Embassy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the United States

[www.president.kg](http://www.president.kg)

Official site of the president of the Kyrgyz Republic

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

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

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

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

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the pages of the "Friends of" groups for most countries of service, comprising 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 Kyrgyzstan site:

[www.friendsofkyrgyzstan.org](http://www.friendsofkyrgyzstan.org)

[www.peacecorpsworldwide.org](http://www.peacecorpsworldwide.org)

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

### **Online Articles/Current News Sites about the Kyrgyz Republic**

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

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

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

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

[www.24.kg](http://www.24.kg)

The News Agency 24.kg is a mass-media market project for Kyrgyzstan that provides a wide spectrum of informational services to state, corporate, and private structures.

[www.akipress.com/en\\_index.php](http://www.akipress.com/en_index.php)

Kyrgyzstan news agency website

[www.registan.net/](http://www.registan.net/)

Registan.net covers Eurasian politics and news, seeking to draw more attention to issues and news rarely covered in much depth, if at all, by Western media.

### **International Development Sites about the Kyrgyz Republic**

[www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan](http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan)

EurasiaNet provides information and analysis about political, economic, environmental, and social developments in the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as in Russia, the Middle East, and Southwest Asia. The site also offers newsmaker interviews and book reviews.

[www.undp.kg](http://www.undp.kg)

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) links its policy-driven programs and projects with a powerful partnership with the government, civil society, and other national and international partners in addressing strategic challenges of transition.

## Recommended Books

### Books about the History of the Peace Corps

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

### Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

### Books about the Kyrgyz Republic

1. Anderson, John. "Kyrgyzstan: 'Central Asia's Island of Democracy?'" NY: Routledge, 1999.
2. Copetas, A. Craig. "Bear Hunting With the Politburo: An American's Adventures in Russian Capitalism." Lanham, MD: Madison Books, Updated edition, 2001.
3. Feshbach, Murray, and Alfred Friendly, Jr. "Ecocide in the USSR: Health and Nature Under Siege." NY: Basic Books, 1993.
4. Giampaolo, Capisani R. "The Handbook of Central Asia: A Comprehensive Survey of the New Republics." Clevedon, UK: I.B. Tauris, 2000.
5. Hopkirk, Kathleen. "A Traveller's Companion to Central Asia." London: John Murray, 1994.
6. Hopkirk, Peter. "The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia." NY: Kodansha International, 1992. (Note: this title may be out of print; readers may be able to get copies through their local library or Amazon.com.)
7. MacLean, Fitzroy. "Eastern Approaches." NY: Penguin Putnam Reprint edition, 1999. (Originally published in 1949).
8. Mayhew, Bradley, Paul Clammer, and Michael Kohn. "Central Asia." London: Lonely Planet, Third Edition, 2004.
9. Olcott, Martha Brill. "Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security." Herndon, Va.: United States Institute of Peace, 1997. (Note: this title may be out of print; readers may be able to get copies through their local library or Amazon.com.)
10. Peterson, D.J. "Troubled Lands: The Legacy of Soviet Environmental Destruction." Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993. (Note: this title may be out of print; readers may be able to get copies through their local library or Amazon.com.)
11. Richmond, Yale. "From Nyet to Da: Understanding the Russians." Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Third Edition, 2003.
12. Rosenberg, Robert. "This Is Not Civilization." Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 2005. (Written by a Kyrgyz Volunteer from the 1990s; only part of the story is set in Kyrgyzstan.)

13. Stewart, Rowan, and Suzie Weldon. "Kyrgyz Republic: Kyrgyzstan, the Heartland of Central Asia." NY: Odyssey Publications, Second Edition, 2004. (Distributed in the United States by W.W. Norton.)
14. Rafis Abazov. "Historical Dictionary of Kyrgyzstan." The Scarecrow Press, Inc. 2003.

# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

## Communications

### Mail

Few developing countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. During pre-service training, your mail should be sent to the separate PST post office box (you will be given this address before you depart for the Kyrgyz Republic). Once you have moved to your assigned site, you will use your residence or workplace as a permanent mailing address. The Peace Corps office cannot accept mail for Volunteers except in extraordinary circumstances.

Check with your local post office for information on weight and size limitations for packages. Mail from the United States generally takes three to four weeks to arrive at Volunteer sites. Advise your family and friends to number their letters and boxes so you will be able to tell when a letter has gone astray. Also advise them to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes.

Be aware that you may incur customs charges on your personal mail, especially packages. How packages are labeled in the United States can influence these charges. For example, if someone sends you a package containing both printed matter and “luxury” items such as electronics, the customs charges calculated by the post office in the Kyrgyz Republic will generally be less if the printed matter is emphasized and the luxury items are not.

Letters may arrive with clipped edges because someone has tried to see if any money was inside and packages may be opened and rifled through by Kyrgyz postal workers. This is particularly common during Peace Corps training; local postal workers have become used to valuable items arriving for new trainees. Making packages physically difficult to open is sometimes an effective deterrent. Including a list inside the package of all its original contents is also a convenient way to know if anything has gone missing. Some boxes may also be legitimately opened by customs officials to ensure nothing illegal is being shipped.

### Telephones

All Volunteers in the Kyrgyz Republic are required to have a local cellphone number. Cellphone service within the Kyrgyz Republic is generally reliable in all but the most remote villages. Phones, like the iPhone, work in Kyrgyzstan with a local SIM card if they are not locked; it may be possible to “unlock” a favorite phone before you travel for use once you arrive.

International telephone plans are available through most of the popular cellphone companies in the Kyrgyz Republic. SIM cards are available with international calling plans.

You may also have access to a landline either at your host family’s home or at work.

### Computers, Internet, and Email Access

Almost all Volunteers bring a laptop or tablet with them, along with other devices for external storage and backup, such as external hard drives and flash drives. The Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic office has three computers with Internet access in the Volunteer resource center that may be used by Volunteers when they are in the office on official business. The Volunteer lounge also has Wi-Fi for laptop and tablet access.

Volunteers communicate by email from Internet cafes, work computers, and by connecting their laptop to the cellular network with the help of a small modem if they can get a connection. Some Volunteers buy

phones that have email and browser capacity. Most village Volunteers do not access their email more than once a week, and some go for more than a month.

While laptops can be purchased locally, the quality is usually not up to U.S. standards and they are generally much more expensive. Power surges are frequent and can damage electronic equipment. Viruses are a major challenge; be sure to have up-to-date antivirus software on your computer. Computers in Internet cafes and at your workplace can quickly infect a flash drive. Technical support is hard to find.

### **Housing and Site Location**

Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic assigns Volunteers to the sites with the greatest need and to schools and organizations that demonstrate potential for making the best use of Volunteers' skills. Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic recommends homestay for the full two years of service. The reasons for this are that Volunteers who live with families have better language skills, better and deeper understanding of the local culture, easier integration into their communities, and fewer security incidents. Very rarely, and only for special circumstances are Volunteers placed in apartments.

Housing will have simple basic furniture such as a bed, a table and chairs, a wardrobe or bureau for clothing, and access to a stove and a refrigerator. The Peace Corps will provide you with a water filter or distiller. In addition, because winters in the Kyrgyz Republic are cold and many heating systems are inadequate, the Peace Corps may provide you with a coal allowance depending on your living situation. Still, you will probably need long underwear and perhaps a warm sleeping bag.

You need to be very flexible in your housing expectations. Indoor toilets are rare in the villages. Water may arrive by bucket from a well or public tap, and electricity is not reliable.

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

The Kyrgyz Republic is a cash-based economy. There are now ATM machines in the major cities, but there are limited opportunities to use credit cards. As of October 2014, the exchange rate was \$1 to 54 Kyrgyzstani soms.

As a Volunteer in the Kyrgyz Republic, you will live at roughly the same economic level as your neighbors and colleagues. You will receive a modest monthly living allowance (deposited in local currency into a bank account you will open at your site) to cover food, utilities, household supplies, hygiene products, clothing, recreation and entertainment, local transportation, telephone calls, reading materials, and other personal expenses. The amount of this allowance may not seem like a lot of money, but you will find yourself earning more than many of your colleagues and their supervisors.

You will also receive a one-time settling-in allowance in local currency to purchase household items when you move to your permanent site. The settling-in allowance is intended to defray part of the costs of items such as cooking utensils, dishes, towels, and blankets.

Finally, you will be given a quarterly program travel allowance to support regional exchanges with other Volunteers and to travel to Bishkek to visit international organizations or meet with your program manager. This allowance is designed to encourage Volunteers to exchange knowledge, skills, and best practices about their primary and secondary projects with one another.

### **Food and Diet**

Once a nation of nomadic herders, today's citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic choose a diet reflective of this nomadic heritage; traditionally, herders got everything they needed to survive from their animals. Today's diet still relies heavily on meat and a limited selection of vegetables (e.g., potatoes, tomatoes, cabbage, carrots, and onions), with much food fried or boiled. There is a wide range of fresh food for sale in

markets throughout the country during the spring, summer, and fall, including meat, vegetables, and nuts, as well as dried fruit. Oranges, bananas, and apples can be found in some parts of the country but are often expensive.

It's difficult to be a vegetarian in Kyrgyz Republic, but possible. While the diet in-country is largely based on meat and bread, fruits and vegetables are available in sufficient variety to maintain a healthy vegetarian diet. The cost of purchasing fruits and vegetables out of season can be very expensive, but previous Volunteers have managed. Most local markets have white, pinto, mung, and red beans; chickpeas and split peas; pasta; rice; and peanuts and other nuts. Cheese, eggs, and milk are available in many, but not all, markets, and potatoes, cabbages, carrots, and onions can be found almost everywhere. Tofu is available in larger towns. The most difficult aspect of being a vegetarian is likely the social pressure to eat meat. With a little patience, most vegetarians have served their two years with few problems. Due to the local diet and cultural importance of sharing meals with host families, Kyrgyz Republic would be a difficult placement for vegans.

### **Transportation**

Most Volunteers travel within the country in commercial minivans (called *marshrutkas*), but some choose to pay more and hire long-distance taxis. Although the vans often do not operate on a set schedule, there is regular public transportation between cities. Travel by bus among cities is also possible. Because of safety issues, Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic prohibits Volunteers from driving or riding on two- or three-wheeled motorized vehicles for any reason. Volunteers are not allowed to own or drive private automobiles or tractors. There are also affordable domestic flights linking the two major cities, Bishkek and Osh. Road travel between oblasts after dark is prohibited and road travel within oblasts after dark is strongly discouraged; violation of these policies may result in the termination of your Volunteer service.

### **Geography and Climate**

The Kyrgyz Republic borders Kazakhstan on the north and northwest, Uzbekistan on the southwest, Tajikistan on the south, and China on the southeast. The Tien Shan mountain range covers approximately 95 percent of the country, which is about the size of Nebraska. The mountaintops are perennially covered with snow and glaciers.

The Kyrgyz Republic has four seasons, including very cold winters and hot, dry summers. The duration of each season depends on the region of the country. In the mountains, the temperature can drop to minus 30 degrees Fahrenheit. In the rest of the country, winter is much like that in the Midwestern United States, but with less snowfall. Northern Kyrgyzstan is much colder than the south, with normal winter temperatures in the mid-teens to low 20s.

### **Social Activities**

Although the Kyrgyz Republic's traditionally nomadic herders are now comfortable on both motorcycles and horses and many live in apartments, Kyrgyzstan has not lost its rich cultural heritage. The Kyrgyz people's hospitality endures, and most social life at Volunteer sites centers on visiting friends' homes, a custom known as "guesting." Guesting means being invited to a home for a meal and conversation; this could last up to five or six hours, depending on the time of day. As the only American (and often the only foreigner) present in a community you will often be the guest of honor.

Being a guest in a Kyrgyz home can be simultaneously rewarding and stressful. The local people, whether ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbek, or Russian, are hospitable, charismatic hosts. This means that you, as the guest, will be constantly encouraged to eat and drink more and more. Although it can be difficult to convey to your hosts that you have had enough to eat or drink and would like to go home, Volunteers find that they are better able to manage such situations as their language skills develop.

Alcohol is prevalent in most social situations in the Kyrgyz Republic and can cause stress for Volunteers. Volunteers may regularly feel pressure to drink heavily when in new social surroundings either with their new Kyrgyz friends or with other Volunteers. The pressure to drink often eases as a Volunteer becomes better known, and some Volunteers abstain from drinking at their sites. Program managers and the safety and security and medical officers help Volunteers develop strategies to manage the pressure of alcohol consumption.

The Peace Corps has policies and strategies that will help Volunteers assess and manage their use of alcohol. Excessive use of alcohol may result in behavior that affects your performance, effectiveness, safety, and credibility. Inappropriate behavior resulting from alcohol abuse or the inability to carry out your assignment due to alcohol use is grounds for administrative separation from the Peace Corps. Individuals with a history or predisposition for alcohol abuse should seriously consider whether the Kyrgyz Republic is an appropriate assignment.

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

In order to gain the trust and acceptance and ultimately integrate into your host community, it is essential that you dress appropriately and conduct yourself professionally. As in the U.S., not only the first impression, but ongoing assumptions as to one's competence, dedication, and professionalism are directly tied to one's appearance and attire. Living life in a fish bowl can at times be frustrating: By dressing appropriately in public, you can help minimize speculation/gossip about you and your character if your dress is perceived to be appropriate and respectful. Professionalism and maturity are qualities that our partners expect of Volunteers at all times. There will be much attention by officials, local authorities, ministries, and other professionals, be they Kyrgyz or associated with an international organization, so there will be more peer pressure to dress and act professionally.

People in the Kyrgyz Republic take pride in their personal appearance and tend to dress up both for social occasions and for daily activities and generally dress more formally than many Americans do in the U.S. While most people cannot afford a large wardrobe—it is not unusual to see co-workers wear the same outfit two or three days in a row—wearing clean and ironed clothes is important. To gain the acceptance, respect, and confidence of Kyrgyz colleagues, therefore, it is essential that you dress and conduct yourself professionally. Professional dress is required in the workplace, which means slacks, or knee- to calf-length skirts with blouses or dresses for women, and pressed chinos or dress slacks with jackets or sweaters for men. While the Kyrgyz Republic is a predominantly Muslim country, western styles of dress are popular for women in all but the most rural and conservative areas. While Volunteers should dress modestly, they will find that in casual settings most clothing considered appropriate in America is also appropriate in Kyrgyz cities.

Dress is very important in the Kyrgyz Republic. People are judged by the way they dress in the Kyrgyz Republic, more so than in the United States. Your colleagues will dress as professionals and for you to do otherwise would be considered disrespectful. If you come to work inappropriately dressed, your colleagues, students, and others in the community will probably not say anything to you directly but may talk unfavorably about you to others. Following the lead of your co-workers will help you gain acceptance and respect in your community.

### **Special Notes:**

- It gets cold in the winter, so pack for any winter weather. Jeans, khakis, and slacks offer little warmth, so men and women alike should bring a few pairs of thermal underwear.
- Bring clothes that do not require frequent and special care, i.e., dry cleaning. Blazers, suits, sport coats, and sweaters should be dark colored to disguise the toil of frequent use. Remember too that

you will likely be laundering your clothes by hand. Jeans, light-colored clothing, and some fabrics can prove difficult to wash, dry, and keep looking fresh in these conditions.

- Dress shoes or boots are essential. As it is the custom to take off your shoes before entering someone's home, Volunteers might wish to bring shoes that easily slip on and off rather than ones with laces.
- Facial piercings are not recommended by Peace Corps in this country since working-age people in Kyrgyz Republic do not wear them and they are not considered professional here.

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

### **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 Kyrgyz Republic Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in the Kyrgyz Republic. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. Volunteers and families are encouraged to 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 in the Kyrgyz Republic is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. Because of financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support they promised. In addition, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

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

You are going to develop friendships with both Americans and Kyrgyz people that will last a lifetime. When you live with a local family you will form new bonds that are almost as strong as those of your own family. Some of you will bond with your counterparts, others with people you meet on the sports field or in the classes you teach. You will see students and counterparts flourish because of your work. You may see a school re-furbished with the help of a grant from U.S. Agency for International Development or a new greenhouse or school library funded by your friends and family. You will leave a legacy; it may not be visible, but the people you touch will never forget you.

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

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

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

You will be prepared for this through a homestay experience, which 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.

For your first three days in-country, you will stay at a training facility in Bishkek, after which you will move to the permanent training site located approximately an hour outside of the capital. Once there, you will live with a host family in a rural village or small town with a few other trainees. While you and your fellow trainees will meet as a group, you will also have a chance to experience Kyrgyz customs on your own with your host family and on technical field trips. These experiences will help bring to life the topics covered in training and will give you the chance to practice your new language skills and directly observe and participate in Kyrgyz culture.

At the beginning of training, the staff will outline the goals and competencies you will need to reach before swearing-in as a Volunteer and the criteria that will be used to assess your progress. Evaluation of your performance during training is a continual process that is based on a dialogue between you and the programming and training staff. The training staff will assist you in achieving the goals by providing you with feedback throughout the training process.

Peace Corps pre-service training (PST) is built on the community-based training (CBT) model. The model was designed to immerse you in the Kyrgyz Republic in order to simulate your actual Volunteer experience. The community where you will live during training will become the classroom and your language trainer, host family, and other community members will be your teachers. The philosophy behind CBT is that “experience is the best teacher.” Participating in culture is better than talking about it in a classroom. Listening to a new language in authentic or real situations is better than memorizing vocabulary. Experiential learning is also extremely important for your safety and security, your self-confidence when you no longer have staff to assist you, and your integration into the community where you will live and work.

PST is a very intense and exhausting experience and you should be prepared to have your time very strictly managed by the Peace Corps. If you successfully complete PST, you will swear-in and depart for

your new site with a brand-new set of responsibilities and opportunities as a full-fledged Peace Corps Volunteer.

### **Technical Training**

Technical training will prepare you to work in the Kyrgyz Republic by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, the Kyrgyz Republic experts, and current Volunteers will conduct the training program. Training places great emphasis on learning how to transfer the skills you have to the community in which you will serve as a Volunteer.

Technical training will include sessions on the general economic and political environment in the Kyrgyz Republic and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Kyrgyz Republic 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.

In addition to regular classroom sessions, you will be given assignments to work on with your community, school, or organization. These activities will help you acquire many of the skills and experiences necessary to be an effective Volunteer.

### **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. Kyrgyz Republic 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.

Although the prospect of learning a new language may seem daunting, Volunteers before you have been successful and many have learned to speak Kyrgyz or Russian fluently. Prior to leaving the United States, you will need to visit [kyrgyz.peacecorps.gov](http://kyrgyz.peacecorps.gov) to start on some of the basics. Both the Kyrgyz and Russian language use the Cyrillic alphabet. Becoming familiar with the alphabet prior to your arrival can also help minimize some of the culture shock when you first step off the airplane.

In the majority of communities, Kyrgyz is spoken predominately, while in a few communities Russian is the main language (mostly in the north and east). Many Kyrgyz people who speak Kyrgyz also understand Russian, but Russian speakers don't always understand or speak Kyrgyz. In some regions, a mix these two languages is spoken.

### **Cross-Cultural Training**

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in the Kyrgyz Republic. You will also discuss the questions you have about

the behaviors and practices you observe in the Kyrgyz Republic, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

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

The host family experience provides a unique context for cross-cultural learning, and is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of PST and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in the Kyrgyz Republic. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

You will also learn about local history, and arts. The Kyrgyz people take great pride in their poets, writers, artists, and composers, so awareness of their cultural achievements is an important aspect of adapting to life in the Kyrgyz Republic.

### **Health Training**

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

### **Safety and Security Training**

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

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

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

- **In-service training:** Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.
- **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 THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC**

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of every Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in the Kyrgyz Republic maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in the Kyrgyz Republic at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in the Kyrgyz Republic, you will be transported to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility. If the Office of Health Services (OHS) determines that the care is not optimal for your condition at the regional facility, you will be transported to the United States.

### **Health Issues in the Kyrgyz Republic**

Health care at local hospitals and clinics is not at the same standard as provided by similar-sized facilities in the United States. Because of this, there are risks associated with taking medication in local facilities. In addition, many pharmaceuticals are counterfeit and local manufacturing standards are often inadequate. Volunteers should not receive injections or take medications unless they are administered by the Peace Corps medical officer or a facility approved by the Peace Corps. Breaking this policy may be grounds for administrative separation.

### **Helping You Stay Healthy**

The Peace Corps will provide you with all the necessary inoculations, medications, and information to stay healthy. Upon your arrival in the Kyrgyz Republic, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. By the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

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

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in the Kyrgyz Republic will consult with the Office of Health Services in Washington, D.C., or a regional medical officer. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in the Kyrgyz Republic, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

### **Maintaining Your Health**

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

Tuberculosis is present in the region, so it is advisable to stay away from people who are coughing constantly or show other signs of TB infection and to regularly ventilate your home and office. A TB skin test is required for pre-service medical clearance prior to arrival in the Kyrgyz Republic and at the end of your service.

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

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

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

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

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

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in the Kyrgyz Republic 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	Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner
Ace bandages	Band-Aids
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)
Adhesive tape	Butterfly closures
Antacid tablets	Calagel anti-itch gel
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Condoms
Antibiotic ointment	Cough lozenges
Antifungal cream	Decongestant
Antihistamine	Dental floss

Gloves  
Hydrocortisone cream  
Ibuprofen  
Insect repellent  
Iodine tablets (for water purification)  
Lip balm  
Oral rehydration salts

Scissors  
Sore throat lozenges  
Sterile eye drops  
Sterile gauze pads  
Sunscreen  
Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)  
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 dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact OHS to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Health Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations (other than yellow fever vaccination as directed by OHS) prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or during your first six months in the Kyrgyz Republic. 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 (including birth control pills).

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 the Kyrgyz Republic there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

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

After you arrive in the Kyrgyz Republic, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in the Kyrgyz Republic learn to do the following:

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

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

The following are other security concerns in the Kyrgyz Republic of which you should be aware:

- Disaffected political groups using violence
- Earthquakes and landslides
- Inter-city ground transportation during winter months
- Volunteers also experience varying degrees of harassment and unwanted attention, though most learn to cope by changes in dress, using local phrases to preempt or respond, avoiding locations where such harassment is more common, and abiding by local norms.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

### **Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime**

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in the Kyrgyz Republic may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in the Kyrgyz Republic will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

### **Support from Staff**

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may

necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also support and assist Volunteers who choose to make a formal complaint with local law enforcement. It is very important that a Volunteer reports an incident when it occurs. The reasons for this include obtaining medical care and emotional support, enabling Peace Corps staff to assess the situation to determine if there is an ongoing safety and security concern, protecting peer Volunteers and preserving the right to file a complaint. Should a Volunteer decide later in the process to file a complaint with law enforcement, this option may be compromised if evidence was not preserved at the time of the incident.

### **Office of Victim Advocacy**

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

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

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

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

### **Crime Data for the Kyrgyz Republic**

Crime data and statistics for the Kyrgyz Republic, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://files.peacecorps.gov/manuals/countrydata/kyrgyzrepublic.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 the Kyrgyz Republic**

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

The Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It

is expected that you will do your part to ensure that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

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

Certain **site selection criteria** are used to determine safe housing for Volunteers before their arrival. 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/Kyrgyz Republic's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in the Kyrgyz Republic at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## **What Might a Volunteer Face?**

### **Possible Gender Role Issues**

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

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them. They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Since it is culturally acceptable for women to marry at a young age in the Kyrgyz Republic, it becomes frustrating to continually explain that it is normal to be a single woman in America. People are often confused and sometimes immediately try to find me a husband. When I share my personal experiences with other women, it makes them realize their independence and self-worth and gives them confidence and motivation, which is very beneficial to the Kyrgyz Republic. Be prepared to answer many personal questions if you’re a single woman. However, sometimes creativity can play an important role if you are tired of replying to the same questions constantly. When I’m tired of explaining why I’m still single, I use my imagination and usually receive a laughing response when I say, ‘Leonardo DiCaprio is my fiancé.’”

“The men in this country have different attitudes toward women. You won’t experience harassment every day, but it will definitely happen. The worst experience I had was in my village. I was stopped on the road by a man who asked how I was. I didn’t recognize him, but he seemed to know me, so I stopped about a meter and a half from him to talk. That was a mistake. He was a stranger, and when he figured out I couldn’t understand him, he reached out and pinched my breast. I was so stunned that I could only cuss at him in English and walk away. The moral to this story is, Do not talk to men you do not know!”

“At my site, I live with a single mother, and the vast majority of teachers at my school are women. As a result, I have very few daily interactions with men. However, women definitely are treated differently here. It is especially noticeable to me when I am with male Volunteers. At these times, I do notice a difference in how we are treated. Often, I am not even acknowledged. The local men always go to the male Volunteer, and I have been treated as if I don’t exist. It can be extremely annoying and frustrating at times. In many situations, I feel like waving my hands, jumping up and down, and yelling ‘Hey!’”

### **Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color**

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

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

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

### **Volunteer Comments**

“On the whole, the experiences of Asian-American Volunteers seem to be not much different from those of other Volunteers. We all have to get past a number of common hurdles. One difference, though, is the amount of attention you will receive. I don’t get people staring at me as much as other Volunteers because I look like the Kyrgyz people. I haven’t had any problems with the militia at all, but I think that has more to do with the way I carry myself than anything else.”

“Being a female Asian-American Volunteer in Kyrgyzstan is a uniquely rewarding but also uniquely challenging experience. Because I look similar to my host family in a Talas village, I found myself welcomed instantly as a part of the household and a member of the community. Particularly in rural areas, this ability to blend in will prove to be a huge asset to your work, especially if you work hard at the local language. It may also be possible for you to ‘pass’ for Kyrgyz at bazaars and in taxis, which will allow you to eat and travel more cheaply! Looking like a Kyrgyz woman will give you a special firsthand understanding of the social structures here, but it also means that you will face difficulties that other Volunteers will not. You will not be treated with the distance and respect that more ‘American-looking’ Volunteers are; outside of urban areas, you will have to be ready to deal with regular harassment and comments about your suitability to be a Kyrgyz bride. For me, this has been the hardest aspect of my service, but because I greatly value the perspective this gives me on the life of females in Kyrgyzstan, I feel that the trials have been worth it.”

“My initial experience here was somewhat tainted by the daily instances of people stopping mid-sentence or mid-stride to blatantly point, laugh, and call me ‘negger.’ To my dismay, these mocking sessions escalated once I moved from my training village to my permanent site in the city. Thankfully, positive self-talk, emotional support from my host family, and email and text messages of encouragement from home helped me to regain my footing. After much observation and persistent inquiry, I have finally come to understand that, while some of this attention is malicious in nature, most of the reaction that I get comes from lack of cultural exposure and interaction combined with nervous behavior. On the other hand, I recognize that some of it is malicious in nature due in part to the discriminatory ways that the Kyrgyz themselves have been treated and the demeaning things they have been taught about Africans/blacks in the past. Using discernment, I now stop and diplomatically yet firmly correct those—from university students to men hanging on the corner to those who touch my locks on the marshrutka to mothers pointing me out to their children to the kids at play in my neighborhood—who call me negger. I explain that the appropriate term to use is Afrikan Amerikanskaya and I find that they are usually recognizably ashamed and apologetic. I am now

actually excited about working with my NGO to creatively address this broad-scale issue of cultural competence (internal and external) throughout Kyrgyzstan. Ultimately, personal success as a Volunteer is really all about having a support system and finding positive ways to take control of negative situations. I can honestly say that while many more challenges lay before me, the glide is back in my stride and I am thrilled to be here!”

“Kyrgyz people have shown a lot of polite curiosity regarding my ethnicity, and discussion of it has often led to some in-depth conversations about cross-cultural issues in America and the Kyrgyz Republic. Being a Mexican-American Volunteer has been a positive experience for me. People have been very welcoming and interested in my family’s traditions and customs. I brought postcards and pictures of Mexico to show and these have been a hit. By the way, Latin telenovelas are popular here, so sometimes when I tell people I’m Mexican American, I get an excited reaction: ‘Oh! Like Veronica Castro!’”

“My experience as a Filipino American here in Kyrgyzstan has been very distinct. Looking Kyrgyz and being male, in all honesty, has served to my advantage more often than not. When people come to find out that I am indeed American (which is sometimes met with disbelief...as if it makes more sense that I forgot my Kyrgyz while studying in America), the challenge begins. In some ways I think that people expect more of my language skills because of how I look and, before I learned the routine conversation of my looks, my nationality, and my ethnicity (I now ask people to guess what my ethnicity is and it becomes more playful than invasive), it was difficult for me to deal with. For the most part though, my side of this Kyrgyz-looking experience has been positive. When I want to, I can blend pretty well and be left alone in places where I am not already known as an American. And, when I don’t want to blend and be mistaken as Kyrgyz, I can do that too with what I wear or what I am saying in public. In that way, I have a choice that many other Volunteers don’t. One thing that I would strongly recommend is to specifically learn how to converse with people about your appearance and your origin and turn it into something that can build rapport.”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given the Kyrgyz Republic’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. As of this edition, legislation in the Kyrgyzstani general assembly is up for a vote that would severely curtail the civil liberties of the LGBTQ community and their supporters. The proposed legislation would impose heavy fines and possible jail sentences on anyone seen as “promoting same-sex relations.” The ban on “gay propaganda” would extend to groups that defend the rights of sexual minorities and journalists seen as supportive of the LGBTQ community. Among the LGBTQ community, the situation facing transgender individuals in Kyrgyzstan is particularly dire. There have also been reports of violence directed at the local LGBTQ community at the hands of local law enforcement.

Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that the Kyrgyz Republic is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni

website at [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).

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

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

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Living a white lie is, unfortunately, a part of everyday life. In the beginning, the idea of not completely sharing my life with my Kyrgyz colleagues appeared to be something I could tolerate. However, as time passed, I have started to build close friendships and would like to share my life with friends on a more personal level. But to avoid rejection and social problems in my town, I have chosen to keep this aspect of my life to myself. Saying that a close Volunteer friend of mine is my girlfriend has put a stop to the uncomfortable questions about my love life.”

“It helps to know that there is a small community of gays in Bishkek. Their lifestyle also is very secretive, and they keep to themselves. I've decided not to associate with them to avoid raising suspicion. Everyone seems to know one another, and gossip travels around quickly.”

“Looking back, the toughest decision about joining the Peace Corps was the question of whether I would be able to cope with a society that regards homosexuality as taboo. I do not regret my decision to join. Your experience here will be everything you make it be. Homosexuals, and minorities as a whole, need representation in the Peace Corps.”

“Living in the Kyrgyz Republic as a lesbian definitely has been one of the more challenging things I have ever done. I am someone who loves being around my friends and enjoys gay social life and community organizing in the United States. Essentially, within my community, I have had to give that up and pursue my passion for the community and the nongovernmental organization I work with. Of course, working for a group that organizes pensioners is not the same as community organizing with gay people. Despite this, I have found the experience extremely rewarding because I'm learning to work with a broader community of people and learning to appreciate the value of going directly to them and listening to their needs. The lack of a significant gay community is very hard. I have found one of the best ways to deal with this is to be out with my fellow Volunteers. This is essential because it gives me a forum in which to talk about parts of my life that I cannot speak of in my community. Furthermore, developing contacts with other gay Volunteers in Central Asia is very rewarding because we can share our experiences.”

### **Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities**

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

### **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 the Kyrgyz Republic relationships. The Kyrgyz Republic 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 the Kyrgyz Republic 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.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Everybody here expects you to be married if you’re over 20, so I fit in well. The second question always is, ‘Are you married?’ Joining the Peace Corps as a married couple definitely has its advantages and disadvantages. As for advantages, there is always someone there to listen to you and to walk you home at night. However, always being around each other can be a disadvantage for some couples. When you arrive in-country, remember that this is not a honeymoon. The experience will test your commitment, so the more experience you have together, the better off you will be. For those who are newlyweds, this can be a crash course in marriage.”

“Being married here poses some challenges but, in turn, offers some benefits. The gender gap in the Kyrgyz Republic is huge, and this will affect how married couples relate in Kyrgyz society. My advice to married couples is to be even more open than usual and to communicate about everyday frustrations and accomplishments. If you don’t let the daily stress of life in Kyrgyz society come between you, you will come back closer and stronger as a couple.”

“Married couples in Kyrgyzstan have a unique ability to demonstrate how husbands and wives can work together in an equal relationship, but don’t come to Kyrgyzstan expecting Kyrgyz men or women to understand this relationship dynamic right away. When we lived with our host family, my wife and I cooked together. However, all our host mom took away from this was that my wife must be such a terrible cook that I had to get involved. Now that we live in an apartment, our host mom is worried that my wife won’t eat every time I am out of town. No matter how much explaining we do, our host mom is still convinced my wife can’t cook for herself. I still believe showing by example is a good start, but don’t be surprised if your actions don’t immediately translate to Kyrgyz men and women on the other side of the cultural barrier.”

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

Although the Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Tajiks in the country are predominantly Muslim, the “Russification” of indigenous ethnic groups and cultures has been significant. While there has been a resurgence of Islam in some regions of Central Asia, religion does not seem to play a dominant role in the political or economic life of the Kyrgyz Republic except in the southern region of the country. Volunteers are frequently asked about their religious affiliation and may be invited to attend a community mosque. Those not in the practice of attending religious services may be challenged to explain their reluctance, but it is possible to politely decline if the religious services are not of one’s own faith. Most Volunteers have found effective ways to cope with these issues and have come to feel quite at home in the Kyrgyz Republic.

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

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

Seniors are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps’ program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for seniors, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A senior 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 seniors find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some seniors 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.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“I have come to love this country and the people of the Kyrgyz Republic despite some of the challenges that are encountered here. Patience and flexibility are definitely attributes you will want to hone. Being an ‘older’ Volunteer has its advantages. I love it when I travel with some of the younger Volunteers and local people get up to give me their seat on the bus while my friends have to stand. Being around young people and their energy is contagious. After I retired from work in the States, I knew I still had more to offer and I have found the program and the country in which to do it. Being able to share ideas and help develop various projects in-country is extremely rewarding.”

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

“I have not experienced negative issues at my site from either Volunteers or work associates. I feel I have been accepted on all levels and included in local and Volunteer activities and social events. Training was a little uncomfortable. I felt generational differences at the time, but it may have been

largely the tension of attending concentrated training of a sizable group such as ours. Personal support from the Volunteers at my site is always available and very warmly and sincerely offered.”

“As a woman of 53 and one of the older Volunteers, my experiences in the Kyrgyz Republic have been both challenging (especially learning the language) and rewarding. I am a business development Volunteer and am serving in a women’s nongovernmental organization in a small village. At first, the people approached and scrutinized me very cautiously because I am the first American to live in the village. As they realized that I was eager to learn about their culture, they included me in many activities. Some of the most fun times that I have experienced are the parties with the women: They drink, dance, sing, and have a wonderful time. I find the women truly remarkable. I continue to learn about the role of nongovernmental organizations in this country and the Kyrgyz culture, and I am enjoying the experience tremendously.”

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

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

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

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

### **What is the electric current in the Kyrgyz Republic?**

The Kyrgyz Republic uses 220 volts, 50 cycles; if you plug a 110-volt (the U.S. standard) appliance or radio into a 220-volt socket, it will be damaged and possibly destroyed. Transformers can be purchased locally, but it is better to buy electrical appliances in-country. Laptop computers, iPods, and the like normally support both 110 and 220 volts.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Volunteers in the Kyrgyz Republic do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission.

from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

**What should I bring as gifts for the Kyrgyz Republic friends and my host family?**

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

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

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

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

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

**How easy is it to call home from the Kyrgyz Republic?**

Most cellphone service providers have international calling plans. The quality is good and the rates are affordable.

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

Cellphones are extremely useful here, though coverage can be spotty, even in the cities. If you have an old phone and a charger that works with 220 volts, you can bring it. The Peace Corps recommends that you **not** buy a new phone before you leave nor bring an expensive phone as they tend to get lost. If you do decide to bring a phone with you, make sure that it is "unlocked" so it will be compatible with a local SIM card. iPhones, Android phones, and other sophisticated phones will work, though some data services may not be available. Keep in mind that the post will provide you a cellphone with most basic functions upon your arrival to the country. You will buy minutes for the phone as you need them.

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

Internet access is improving, but village-based Volunteers say it is hard to find. Most, but not all sites, have cellphone coverage. The local companies offer a cellular modem that is fast enough for email. The larger cities have Internet cafes, but they can be unreliable. DSL service is available for apartments in cities, but expensive. Some work sites have good Internet access. Wi-Fi is available at the Peace Corps office and some cafes and public spaces in Bishkek. Wi-Fi is not as common outside of Bishkek.

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC VOLUNTEERS

“Congratulations on your invitation into Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic program. Though you may not know much about the Kyrgyz Republic, I can assure you that you are very lucky in your placement. The country is one of the most beautiful in the world, and, though it is only the size of Nebraska, it contains a wide array of geographical features and ethnic cultures. From the forests and Uzbek enclaves of Arslonbob to the mix of Kyrgyz, Kazak, and Russian culture on Lake Issyk-Kul, the Kyrgyz Republic is a country unlike any other.

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“No doubt there are plenty of questions and concerns keeping you occupied right now, but that's all part of the excitement. The best piece of advice I can offer you as you get ready to begin the adventure that is service in the Peace Corps is to keep your sense of humor. You are coming to the Kyrgyz Republic to do serious work, but I guarantee it will not be possible without the ability to laugh at yourself. Your daily routines will change so much from what you know at home in the States, from how you wash your socks to the language you will be speaking. Expect to make mistakes, but remember that so many Volunteers have made those mistakes before you, and many will after you. It's pretty relieving to know that you're not alone when you struggle to form a grammatically correct sentence and end up sounding like a 3-year-old. That said, you're in for a lot of incredible experiences that will shape both your time here and you as a person. Again, congratulations and good luck!”

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“Welcome to the Kyrgyz Republic. You are about to embark on an incredible journey to a country known for its mountains, nature, and people. The snowcapped mountains are spectacular by any measure. I don't know if there is any place in the Kyrgyz Republic that isn't a backdrop. The people here are proud of their 'nature' as they call it. Bring a camera as you will want to take many photos. The Issyk-Kul Lake is a huge lake located in the northern part of the Kyrgyz Republic; I believe the color of it changes daily if not hourly—beautiful! And then the people! You will find them to be a proud, hospitable, and gentle people. They invite you into their homes and want to feed you lots of food. You need to be prepared to be adventuresome in some of your eating habits as you may be served dishes you wouldn't have thought about eating in the States.”

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“For the next two plus years you will meet a lot of different people. Getting to know Volunteers from around the States is fun and you will have many stories to share with the people back home. Your fellow Volunteers will be a valuable support system during your time here. You will meet different nationalities of people in the Kyrgyz Republic including Kyrgyz, Russians, Uzbeks, and Turkish to name a few. Depending on your home stays and site placements, your experience here may be totally different from another Volunteer placed at the same time and same *oblast* (region).

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“Be prepared to work hard. You will be learning a new language, a new culture, how to get around in a new country, and just how to live life in general. Probably a lot of you have already traveled abroad before this experience, but it may be a little different living the life here. Many homes don't have indoor plumbing, cooking may take place outdoors, and you may eat sitting on the floor, but all this adds to the ambience. You will want to do a good job at whatever your placement is but it will be hard to learn

everything you need to know as fast as you want to know it. Be prepared to learn patience and flexibility (if you don't already have those traits)."

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"Peace Corps staff and other Volunteers are here to help you learn about all the things you need to know, so don't worry if you aren't really sure what to expect once you get here. Just come on over: It's great! We can't wait to meet you and share in the experience."

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"Congratulations on your invitation to serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer and welcome to the Kyrgyz Republic. Looking back, I remember the excitement and anticipation my wife and I felt when we received our country assignment and embarked on this two-year adventure."

## PACKING LIST

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

Before you move to your site, the Peace Corps will provide you with a water filter, smoke detector, many technical resources and language manuals, and a medical kit.

Your living allowance should not be considered a source of funding for major clothing purchases, although replacement clothing (purchased once in-country) is factored into the living allowance. Peace Corps/Kyrgyz Republic provides a settling-in/winterization allowance that covers the purchase of some winter clothing and supplies in-country. The hard water and strong detergent, not to mention hand-washing, will be harsh on your clothing, so make sure that whatever you bring can stand up to this treatment. Most Volunteers wear their clothes for several days before washing them, so dark colors are a good idea. Be selective in what you bring and consider buying some of your professional clothing in Bishkek; the quality and style may not be equal to American brands, but they will be the same clothes your local colleagues will be wearing.

If you have a hard time finding your size in the United States, you probably won't find it here, and "high-tech" fabrics are not readily available. Very warm, locally made winter clothes can be purchased in-country. Walking will be your main mode of transportation around town, and the terrain here is rather rugged, so you need footwear that can take a lot of abuse.

Luggage should be lightweight, durable, lockable, and easy to carry. Duffel bags and backpacks without frames are best because you will be hauling your luggage around on foot.

### General Clothing

- Warm winter jacket (with down or a synthetic)
- Lightweight jacket
- Mix-and-match clothes for layering, such as solid-color turtlenecks
- Cold weather gloves and hat
- Long underwear—silk is lightweight, easy to clean, and warm
- T-shirts (without wording or pictures about controversial issues such as politics, drugs, or sex)
- One or two pairs of jeans
- Sports and fitness clothing, such as jogging pants (shorts are inappropriate in most places but can be worn in a gym or when running in a stadium)
- Hat or baseball cap for protection from the sun
- Underwear and socks for two years (locally available products tend to be of poor quality)
- Bandanas or handkerchiefs
- Stocking cap/ski cap
- Wool socks (at least six pairs)

### *For Men*

- Sport jacket or suit
- Several pairs of nice slacks

- Several shirts with collars
- A few nice sweaters
- Ties

#### *For Women*

- Several skirts or dresses with hems below the knee, for summer and winter
- Several nice blouses and shirts (short-sleeved tops are fine if modest)
- A couple of pairs of nice slacks (which can be worn as professional clothing in some places)
- A shorter skirt or dress for evenings out in Bishkek
- Nylons or tights (thicker ones are great for cold weather)

*Note: Avoid bringing white or light-colored clothing, as dust and mud are ubiquitous. Additionally, the largest size of clothing available typically is large. Extra-large or larger is not to be found here.*

#### **Shoes**

- Dress shoes—for men, loafers are practical because they can be slipped off easily when entering a home; for women, comfortable, low-heeled pumps or flats are recommended. Volunteers who will be on their feet a lot might consider black sneakers that look like dress shoes.
- Sneakers
- Sandals and/or flip-flops (for both dress and use as shower shoes)
- Hiking or warm waterproof winter boots (either or both: men and women often wear boots to work in the winter; great boots in smaller sizes are available locally for around \$20)
- Extra shoelaces

*Note: Shoes larger than size 10 (men) or size 9 (women) are not available locally.*

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

- Enough deodorant, soap, and other toiletries to last you through pre-service training (many of the brands available in Bishkek will be familiar to you, but if you require specific brands, you may want to bring more); feminine hygiene supplies are available in local markets but may be expensive or of poor quality. (Please see notes in the health section above.)
- Soap carrier
- Makeup
- Lotion or other moisturizers (Kyrgyz Republic has a semi-arid climate)
- Lip balm—while this is an item in the medical kit, you might want to bring your own brand
- A three-month supply of any medications you take, to last you until the Peace Corps can order refills for you
- Two pairs of eyeglasses, if you wear them (replacements can take a long time to arrive from the United States); consider bringing a repair kit
- Hand sanitizer—a large bottle and a smaller one to refill—or baby wipes
- Spot remover or laundry detergent for clothes that need special care
- Fabric freshener or odor remover
- Favorite vitamins or nutrition supplements
- Tweezers, items for nail care, pumice stone, callus removers, etc.

#### **Electronics**

- Laptop (great for pictures, movies, entertainment). For better portability, you can bring an iPad (but don't expect to find tech support). Make sure your laptop is protected with antivirus software and bring a backup drive.

- E-reader (Kindle or iPad), pre-loaded with books. Wi-Fi is only available at the Peace Corps office and some cafes in Bishkek.
- Flash drives (available in cities, too)
- iPod, MP3, or other portable music player
- Your favorite music (inexpensive CDs of many popular recording artists are available locally)
- Your favorite DVDs (including workout videos) if you bring a laptop. Some English language videos can be bought locally.
- Video recorder (Flip or GoPro)
- Camera—pocket cameras are great and often allow video recording. DSLRs are best for serious photographers. Make sure you have a strategy for backing up your images.
- Batteries or rechargeable batteries and a charger with a converter for electronics (local batteries are expensive and not always of good quality)
- Hand-crank charger for cellphones in case of a power outage. One with multiple tips will support all types of phones. Some chargers include a handy flashlight.

### **Kitchen**

You can buy most kitchen supplies in-country, but there are a few items that Volunteers recommend:

- Lots of sealable plastic storage bags (you can pack stuff in them for the trip to the Kyrgyz Republic)
- Aluminum foil
- French coffee press
- Packaged mixes for sauces, salad dressings, and soft drinks
- Your favorite spices
- Artificial sweetener, if you use it
- Peanut butter
- Popcorn

### **Miscellaneous**

- Four passport-size photographs, which will be used by the Peace Corps and the Kyrgyz government for ID cards and visas
- Internal frame backpack or small overnight bag
- Luggage straps
- Sturdy water bottle (e.g., Nalgene or Camelbak)
- Small tool kit (wire strippers and phone repair tools are also useful)
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman tool
- Watch (durable, water resistant, and inexpensive) with extra batteries
- Battery-operated alarm clock
- Key chain with flashlight
- A money holder that looks like a household item (such as a shaving cream can)
- Small, reliable flashlight (LED lasts longer)
- Sewing kit
- Sleeping bag with stuff sack for traveling in cold weather
- Fleece throw/lap blanket for cold nights
- One bath towel and two washcloths
- Pillowcase (sheets and wool blankets are available locally)
- Laundry bag
- Duct tape
- Photos from home (picture sharing is important in the Kyrgyz Republic)

- Maps of the world and the United States
- Games such as playing cards, Uno, Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit, chess, and/or Frisbee
- Envelopes of various sizes, including padded ones (American-style envelopes are not available), stationary and pens
- U.S. postage stamps for mail carried by people traveling back home
- A two-year planner
- Musical instruments (if you play)
- Subscriptions to your favorite magazines
- A few books by your favorite authors
- Teaching materials (for education Volunteers), such as markers, chalk, erasers, magazines, simple children's books and American music; you can also pack items for someone to ship to you later
- Interesting wall decorations (maps, posters, etc.)
- Copies of all financial and personal documents such as power of attorney, birth certificates, and passport
- Graduate study materials (e.g., GRE, LSAT)
- A copy of the global Peace Corps Handbook (provided in your Invitation Kit)

### **What Not to Bring**

- Appliances—buying them locally may eliminate the need to bring a voltage converter; items such as irons, blow dryers, and boom boxes are available at reasonable prices

## PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

### Family

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

### Passport/Travel

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

### Medical/Health

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

### Insurance

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

### Personal Papers

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

### Voting

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

### Personal Effects

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

### Financial Management

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

## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Doug Knight Desk Officer	ext. 2422 <a href="mailto:dknight@peacecorps.gov">dknight@peacecorps.gov</a>	202.692.2422
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.818.8772
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704