

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

M A C E D O N I A



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



August 2013 CCD



A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on your invitation to become a Peace Corps Volunteer and on your decision to begin what will be one of the most rewarding and challenging experiences of your life. The people of Macedonia, along with the Peace Corps staff members, look forward to meeting and working with you over the next 27 months.

Macedonia has a rich, complex history. You are encouraged to read the history section of this book, perhaps several times. There are many influences that shape Macedonia as we know it today. Macedonia's history goes back 3,000 years and Macedonians are proud of the influence they've had in the world. Their favorite son, Alexander the Great (Alesander Macadonski), is a source of great national pride. Since 1991, Macedonia has been struggling with the growing pains associated with the newly independent countries of the former Yugoslavia, along with reforms in its economic and social landscape. There have been many changes, some easier than others, and not all have gone smoothly. For more than 10 years the country has been operating under the Ohrid Framework Agreement that established peace after a brief period of instability and conflict.

Macedonia also has a lot of natural beauty, so nature lovers and photographers will find a good home in Macedonia. You will also enjoy the bountiful fresh produce and other agricultural products.

As with Peace Corps experiences worldwide, your intellectual curiosity, sense of adventure, and personal resolve will guide you through your service in Macedonia. If you bring an open mind, a warm heart, and a sense of humor, your journey will reward you kindly. The challenges that await you are here for the taking.

We assign most Volunteers in Macedonia to locations outside of Skopje, the capital, based on their skills and knowledge and site needs. Placements vary and some sites require more self-sufficiency, flexibility, and persistence than others. You will most likely be living with a host family throughout your service. Living with a host family increases your ability to integrate and increases your safety. Carving out your own niche within your assigned organization and community in an inclusive manner is paramount to a successful experience.

One of the key cultural aspects trainees and Volunteers notice is that Macedonia is a relationship-oriented society. When you take time to establish your relationships, you will be more successful and satisfied in your life and work here.

Volunteers receive excellent medical care, training, program support, and administrative and logistical services. All of our staff is here to help make your experience fulfilling and rewarding. Upon arriving in Macedonia, you will begin 11 weeks of language, health and safety, technical, and cultural training. Because we believe that training is very important in order to provide you with a strong foundation for the following two years, we expect your full participation in this training program.

The Peace Corps is committed to the safety and security of all trainees and Volunteers. This book has more information on our Safety and Security program, and you will receive additional training after your arrival. We approach safety and security as a partnership with you.

If you are confident that you have the commitment, motivation, and flexibility to carry out the tasks of a Peace Corps Volunteer, then we look forward to your joining the Peace Corps team in Macedonia, a dynamic country in an historically rich part of the world.

Peace,
Stephen Kutzy
Country Director

CONTENTS

A WELCOME LETTER	1
CONTENTS	2
CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS	4
PEACE CORPS/MACEDONIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS	5
History of the Peace Corps in Macedonia.....	5
History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Macedonia	5
COUNTRY OVERVIEW: MACEDONIA AT A GLANCE	7
History.....	7
Economy	8
People and Culture.....	8
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION	10
General Information About Macedonia	10
Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees	10
Online Articles/Current News Sites About Macedonia	11
International Development Sites About Macedonia.....	11
Recommended Books	11
Books About Macedonia.....	11
LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE	13
Communications	13
Living Allowance and Money Management.....	14
Transportation	15
Geography and Climate	15
Social Activities	15
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior	15
Personal Safety.....	15
Rewards and Frustrations.....	16
PEACE CORPS TRAINING	17
Overview of Pre-Service Training.....	17
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service.....	20
Health Issues in Macedonia	21
Maintaining Your Health	21
Women’s Health Information	22
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	22
Medical Kit Contents	23
MEDICATIONS	23
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist.....	24
Safety and Security in Depth	25
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	27
Support from Staff	27
DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES	29
Overview of Diversity in Macedonia.....	29
What Might a Volunteer Face?	29
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS	32
WELCOME LETTERS FROM MACEDONIA VOLUNTEERS	34

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST	41
Family	41
Passport/Travel	41
Medical/Health.....	41
Insurance.....	41
Personal Papers	41
Voting	41
Personal Effects	42
Financial Management.....	42
CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS	43

CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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

PEACE CORPS/MACEDONIA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Macedonia

The Peace Corps received an invitation from the government of Macedonia in March 1996 to initiate and develop a program. By the beginning of June 1996, the first group of seven trainees arrived. They completed training in August and were then assigned to the Ministry of Education's secondary school English education program. Over the next three years, Peace Corps/Macedonia grew to include programs in business, environmental education, and municipal development. The Peace Corps program was suspended in 1999 and again in 2001 as a result of the political unrest in neighboring Kosovo and grievances between ethnic Albanians and the Macedonian majority that led to armed conflict. The Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA), a peace agreement ending ethnic fighting in 2001, placed that conflict firmly in the past. The international community has assessed that Macedonia now has security forces capable of solving the country's issues on its own.

After a rigorous safety and security assessment of the situation in Macedonia, the Peace Corps determined that enough stability had been achieved to support the return of the Peace Corps. In November 2002, Peace Corps/Macedonia welcomed the seventh group of Volunteers to continue the contributions of previous Volunteers and their partners to the development of Macedonian communities.

Since then, 10 more groups have arrived in Macedonia between September 2003–12. The Peace Corps program in Macedonia is currently implementing two programs, the English Education Development Project and the Community Development Project.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Macedonia

Macedonia's objectives are to develop a multiethnic democracy, to provide economic opportunities for its citizens, and to move toward NATO and European Union (EU) integration. Since the country gained its independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, it has made this integration a top foreign policy goal. A part of this strategy has been to encourage partnerships and cooperation with a wide range of international development organizations. The Peace Corps has worked closely with various government ministries in Macedonia to develop programs that will facilitate the attainment of this goal in several key areas. Since Peace Corps/Macedonia began in 1996, its program comprises two major sectors: English Education Development and Community Development, which include organizational development for nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), municipal government, educational institutions, or other local organizations; business development; environmental improvement; youth development; and assistance to vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

The objectives for each of these sectors are outlined in documents called project plans and the project frameworks have been translated into Macedonian and Albanian and are used as the basis for discussions with potential work sites that have requested the assistance of a Peace Corps Volunteer. As in all Peace Corps programs, work is done in collaboration with counterparts to ensure the Peace Corps goal of assisting countries to meet their need for trained men and women.

A number of different tasks are listed in each project plan, and you are likely to become involved with several of these tasks in addition to activities in the community. Information provided in the Volunteer Assignment Description (VAD), included in your invitation packet, can be matched with specific tasks of the project plan for your sector. Both the project plan and the VAD explain in some detail how you can work with both your hosting organization's program and the local community. It is up to you, however, to take the first steps to become acquainted and involved in the program.

English language teaching was the original Peace Corps program in Macedonia. There is a need for qualified English teachers at both the primary and the secondary levels, especially in small towns. Peace Corps English language teachers have a unique role as “resource teachers.” Until 2005, it was illegal for a foreign national teacher to teach in Macedonian public schools. The law has changed, but the custom continues. As an English language resource teacher, you will be paired with Macedonian teachers to work collaboratively, through co-planning and team teaching. Volunteers work with their Macedonian counterparts to promote applicable and current teaching methods and approaches, especially interactive and communicative techniques. Many of the schools where the Peace Corps places Volunteers have limited resources for materials and interactive teaching methodology. Volunteers work with Macedonian colleagues and others in the community to develop strategies to improve the educational resources in their schools and communities. Overall, Volunteers focus on assisting students to improve English writing, reading, and overall communication skills through creative and participatory language-learning activities. Volunteers and their Macedonian colleagues have collaborated in many areas, including developing supplemental materials to support English language instruction, forming clubs at schools which encourage the use of the English language (writing clubs, drama clubs, an English or American film club, a debate club, and even a music club), and developing links among schools, communities, and the world through pen pal exchanges and creative use of computer labs and the Internet to enhance the effective use of information technology. Volunteers are also encouraged to support the community at large and have helped their communities develop and implement a variety of projects, including those that seek solutions to environmental, health, gender inequalities, and other social issues.

The Community Development program is the newer sector stemming from the merger of the environmental education and management and municipal/NGO development projects back in 2005. Peace Corps Volunteers in this program facilitate community development efforts in collaboration with local organizations. The Community Development program combines the knowledge and skills of Volunteers and their community partners in identifying common objectives, setting realistic expectations, and reaching informed decisions to address local needs.

Volunteers work with NGOs representing environmental, youth development, disadvantaged groups, women’s groups, and other grassroots organizations at the local level as well as educational institutions and departments of local government. Volunteers are helping these local organizations develop internally to become sustainable and capable of delivering needed services through organizational and managerial development, increasing their skills in project management, grant writing, fund raising, and networking. In organizations focused on local business development, Volunteers and their local partners conduct market research, prepare business and marketing plans, build networks with the business community, apply better use of information technology, and provide information and advice for local businesses and associations. In those organizations focused on environmental activities, Volunteers and their local partners identify and distribute environmental education materials to schools, youth groups, and NGOs; develop environmental education programs for local organizations; develop and promote environmentally sustainable practices in forestry, agricultural organizations, and local farmers’ associations; teach environmental classes in the public school system; work with eco-clubs to develop their capacity and improve their activities; participate in community beautification activities; organize community clean-ups; initiate programs for the collection, sorting, and/or recycling of waste; and organize community-oriented environmental awareness projects. In organizations focused on youth development, Volunteers and their local partners provide information to youth via workshops and printed materials on topics related to social issues and physical and mental well-being, such as fitness, nutrition, prevention of violence, recognizing and handling substance abuse, self-esteem, gender equality, ethnic tolerance, and human rights. Volunteers and their local partners also organize activities that promote tolerance and equal opportunities for under-represented groups, including those with special needs, the economically disadvantaged, and those from ethnic minorities; promote volunteer community service; and motivate youth to develop strategies and activities for the constructive use of free time.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: MACEDONIA AT A GLANCE

History

The Republic of Macedonia is a small, landlocked country in the Balkan Peninsula, bordered on the north by the newly independent Kosovo and Serbia, on the east by Bulgaria, on the south by Greece, and on the west by Albania. It forms part of the historical region of greater Macedonia, the rest of which is now in Greece and Bulgaria. The capital is Skopje. Formerly part of Yugoslavia, it became independent in 1991 and was admitted to the United Nations as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia under pressure from Greece, which objected to the use of what it considers a Hellenic name. (The ancient kingdom of Macedonia, situated in the north of modern Greece, was established by Perdiccas I in about 640 B.C.)

Although a small country today, Macedonia was once the dominant power in the Balkans. In the Middle Ages it competed with the Byzantine Empire and greatly influenced the cultural life of the region until it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in the late 14th century. In 1913, Macedonia was annexed by Serbia and, in 1918, it became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later known as Yugoslavia). From 1944–90, the country was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

In 1990, a coalition of reformist communists and Macedonian nationalists took office and, in 1991, Macedonia, following the example of Croatia and Slovenia, declared its independence from Yugoslavia and adopted a new Constitution. Greece, which controlled the southern part of historical Macedonia and feared claims on its territory by Macedonian nationalists, opposed recognizing the new nation under the name “Macedonia” and imposed an economic blockade. Macedonia gradually won recognition from most of the international community, however, and was admitted to the United Nations (U.N.). The Republic of Macedonia is the constitutional name of the country (recognized by the United States and others) and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is the internationally recognized name by the United Nations. The name FYROM is not popular with Macedonians and should not be used within the country. In Greece, FYROM is the only name they will recognize.

In 1993, Kiro Gligorov of the Social Democratic Alliance (former Communist Party) was elected as the first president of Macedonia. Over the next several years, the young democracy made slow progress in developing a stable government.

In early 2001, internal tensions resulted in an armed insurgency led by radical elements of the ethnic Albanian minority. After six months of armed conflict, with negotiations conducted in parallel, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was signed on August 13, 2001. The provisions of the OFA included the reaffirmation of the multi-ethnic identity of the country; equitable representation; the use of language, flags, and symbols; and decentralization and municipal reforms. As a result of the ongoing implementation of the OFA, interethnic relations became more relaxed, with isolated incidents of minor intensity and influence on the stability of the country. As of the date of this welcome book, nearly all elements of the OFA have been successfully implemented with a few items still under discussion, primarily regarding compensation for ex-combatants.

With the declaration of independence in Kosovo in 2008, the official establishment of diplomatic relationships in 2009, and the finalization of the border demarcation with Macedonia the same year, all are having a significant contribution to regional stability.

Decentralization reforms, especially the Law on Territorial Division that reduced the number of municipalities from 124 to 84, were passed in 2005. These reforms decentralized authority to local government for education, health care, infrastructure, and other services. Financing these local-level responsibilities is critical to the success of this reform.

Full EU and NATO membership is still a critical aspiration for Macedonia. The country still has challenges to overcome, including the country's name dispute with Greece, which remains unresolved and is holding up Macedonia's membership to NATO. The United Nations appointed a mediator to help Macedonia and Greece find an acceptable solution, but as of the date of this welcome book, no agreement has been reached.

An important step toward EU membership was reached on October 2009 with the European Commission recommending opening of accession talks between the EU and Macedonia but without a concrete date. The date will be left to the EU Council to decide. Vital issues that Macedonia still needs to tackle include corruption, judicial reforms, and economic development.

Government

The executive branch of the government is composed of the president, vice president, prime minister, and Council of Ministers. The president and vice president are elected by popular vote for five-year terms. The prime minister serves as chairman of the Council of Ministers and is nominated by the president for confirmation by the National Assembly (after being proposed by the majority party or coalition in the assembly). Deputy prime ministers are nominated by the prime minister.

The legislative branch is composed of a unicameral National Assembly, or Sobranie, with 120 members. Major political parties include the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO DPMNE), Social Democratic Alliance (SDS), Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA), Socialist Party, Liberal Democratic Party, New Social Democratic Alliance, Party for Democratic Prosperity, and several others. Nikola Gruevski, from VMRO DPMNE, is the current prime minister and Gjorge Ivanov is president.

The judicial branch is composed of a Supreme Court chairman appointed by the president and a Constitutional Court. The Supreme Court addresses administrative matters and the Constitutional Court addresses constitutional matters.

Economy

When Macedonia became independent in November 1991, it was the least developed of the Yugoslav republics, producing a mere 5 percent of the total federal output of goods and services.

Ten percent of Macedonia's GDP comes from agriculture, 32 percent from industry, and 58 percent from services. A 2011 World Bank report reported that 19 percent of the population lives in poverty and is unable to meet its basic needs. Sixty percent of the population is concentrated in urban areas and 40 percent in rural areas. The unemployment rate has remained unchanged at around 35 percent over the past several years. Unemployment, low salaries, and improper social policy are highlighted by the World Bank as the main reasons for poverty in the country. The major industries are coal, metallic chromium, lead, zinc, ferronickel, textiles, wood products, and tobacco. The major agricultural products are rice, tobacco, wheat, corn, millet, cotton, sesame, mulberry leaves, citrus, vegetables, beef, pork, poultry, and mutton. In April 2013, \$1 was equivalent to 47 denars.

People and Culture

According to the Macedonian Bureau of Statistics, of the total population of 2.05 million, 66.6 percent are ethnic Macedonians and 22.7 percent are ethnic Albanians. Ethnic Turks, ethnic Serbs, and Roma comprise the remainder.

The dominant religion is Eastern Orthodox, which has at least nominal adherence of most Macedonians, Vlachs, and Serbs. A separate Macedonian Orthodox Church has existed since 1967. Turks and most Albanians are Muslim.

Since the Constitution was amended in 2001, the language of any ethnic group which constitutes more than 20 percent of the residents in any given community is treated as an official language.

Environment

The country has a total area of 25,740 square kilometers (9,900 square miles). The largest river is the Vardar River, which flows southeast through the country into Greece. Macedonia consists mostly of highlands and mountains, with elevations reaching 2,751 meters (9,078 feet) in the Korab range on the Albanian border. The mountains are separated by the Vardar River Valley and by a number of lakes, the largest of which are Ohrid, Prespa, and Dojran. The mountain slopes are covered by mixed forest and shrubs to an elevation of 2,000 meters (6,600 feet) and by steppe meadows above that level. Earthquakes occur frequently in Macedonia. The climate in Macedonia is influenced by the Mediterranean and Continental climates, and is characterized by hot, dry summers and cold winters with rain or snow.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

A note of caution: As you surf the Internet, be aware that you may find bulletin boards and chat rooms in which people are free to express opinions about the Peace Corps based on their own 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 Macedonia

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Skopje to how to convert from the dollar to the Macedonian denar. Just click on Macedonia and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.state.gov

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

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

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

www.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

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

www.friendsofmacedonia.com

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 Macedonia

www.maknews.com/

Current events in Macedonia from many sources

www.mia.com.mk/default.aspx?lId=1

The site of Macedonia's official information agency, in English, German, and Macedonian

www.antiwar.com/regions/regions.php?c=Macedonia

Unconventional news about Macedonia

www.exploringmacedonia.com

National tourism portal, providing travel tips and accomodation; well-rounded site about all aspects of Macedonia

www.ajvar.com/

A site (in Macedonian) with some entertainment value

www.blesok.com.mk/main.asp?lang=eng&izdanie=67-68

A site featuring electronic literature and other arts

International Development Sites About Macedonia

macedonia.usaid.gov/en/index.html

Information about the U.S. Agency for International Development's work in Macedonia

www.undp.org.mk/

The United Nations Development Programme in Macedonia

www.isc.org.mk/

Site of the Institute for Sustainable Communities, which manages the USAID-funded Civil Society Strengthening Project in Macedonia

www.mlga.com.mk/

Site of USAID-funded local government project in Macedonia

Recommended Books

Books About Macedonia

It can be difficult to find texts specifically about Macedonia, but because its history and culture are intrinsically bound with Balkans history, other books about the Balkans will provide insight into Macedonia.

1. Andric, Ivo. "The Bridge on the Drina." Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.
2. Danforth, Loring M. "The Macedonian Conflict: Ethnic Nationalism in a Transnational World." Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997.
3. Fonseca, Isabel. "Bury Me Standing: The Gypsies and Their Journey." New York City: Vintage Books, 1996.

4. Kaplan, Robert D. "Balkan Ghosts: A Journey Through History." New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1993.
5. Kita, Sapurma, and Petrovska Pandora. "Children of the Bird Goddess." VAE Enterprises, 1997.
6. Pettifer, James (ed.). "The New Macedonian Question." New York City: St. Martin's Press, 1999.
7. Phillips, John. "Macedonia." Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2004.
8. Silber, Laura, and Allan Little. "Yugoslavia: Death of a Nation." New York City: Penguin Books, 1996.
9. West, Rebecca. "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon: A Journey Through Yugoslavia." New York City: Penguin Books, 1995 (originally published in 1941).
10. Evans, Thammy. "Macedonia: Bradt Travel Guide." London: Bradt Travel Guides, 2004.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

LIVING CONDITIONS

You will live with a host family for the entire two years of your service. **This is a mandatory requirement for all Macedonia PCVs.** Your host family will provide you with the living space that meets Peace Corps criteria. The housing criteria are designed to be modest yet functional and safe. During the site identification process, Peace Corps evaluates housing closely, ensuring that every host family meets the required standards (at least one room, separate or shared bathroom and kitchen, basic furniture, shared entrance and provisions for security).

Communications

Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service expected in the United States. If you expect U.S. standards for mail service, you will be in for some frustration. Mail takes a minimum of 10 days to arrive in Macedonia if sent by airmail. Packages sent by surface mail can take up to four months. Some mail may simply not arrive (fortunately this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen). Letters may arrive with clipped edges because someone has tried to see if any money was inside (again, this is rare, but it does happen).

Your address during training will be as follows:

[Your Name]
Miroven korpus
Oslo 6
1000 Skopje
MACEDONIA

Telephones

Telephone service in Macedonia is generally good. You may choose to purchase a cellphone. Service is good and most PCVs get “prepaid” service. Your living allowance will include sufficient funds to cover reasonable cellphone usage.

Almost all communities of reasonable size have post offices (look for the yellow signs that say “PTT”) that provide telephone services as well as postal services.

Many Volunteers make international and local calls by using Internet calling programs, such as Skype and Dial Pad.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

For your personal laptop, the Peace Corps does not provide email accounts or technical and repair support for Volunteers. Insurance is recommended, but not required, for your computer and other electronic gear.

Some, but not all, Volunteers have access to computers at their work sites, which may or may not have Internet and email capabilities. Such equipment, however, is intended to be used primarily for work-related activities, and you should not assume that it can be used for personal purposes. Internet and email access is available throughout Macedonia. Internet cafes can be found in most major cities and towns, and wireless Internet is available in many cafes. Some Volunteers also choose to have an Internet connection installed in their homes.

Housing and Site Location

Housing must adhere to Peace Corps-defined standards and the Peace Corps staff visits all proposed living arrangements to evaluate their suitability. Volunteers will live with host families throughout their service in their assigned communities and should be prepared to serve in any region of Macedonia.

Living with a host family will help Volunteers learn the customs and cultures of the host country nationals, making it easier for Volunteers to integrate into the community as well as stay healthy and safe. The Peace Corps encourages both families and Volunteers to work at understanding and appreciating one another. Often, lasting relationships are formed between Volunteers and host families.

Peace Corps Volunteers are expected to adjust to the daily habits, customs, and lifestyle of their host families to learn about the similarities and differences in host country culture and American family behavior and share American culture and traditions with the host family. Volunteers will participate in host family events and domestic daily life, assisting with cleaning, cooking, chores, etc. Volunteers are expected to respect the individual rules of each household as explained to them by host family members and according to their own observation of their religion, customs, habits, etc. This includes dressing, appearance, behavior, and attitude.

Volunteers may cook and eat together with their host families. Depending on the situation, Volunteers may negotiate with their host families to cook for themselves and eat meals on a different schedule.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive a monthly living allowance and housing/utility allowances designed to enable you to maintain a modest lifestyle. These allowances are deposited in your bank account in denars every month and are intended to cover housing/utilities, food, household supplies, local transportation, toiletries, recreation, entertainment, and incidental expenses.

Lifestyles are different here than in the States, but most Volunteers who adopt a Macedonian lifestyle find their living allowance to be sufficient for their needs. In other words, the lifestyle you adopt while serving in Macedonia will largely determine the adequacy of the living allowance. If you adopt a typical Macedonian lifestyle, your living allowance will be more than adequate.

The exchange rate at the time of this writing is approximately 47 denars to the U.S. dollar. Traveler's checks are not recognized and are exceedingly difficult to cash. Credit cards can be used in some locations in Skopje, particularly those that cater to tourists. ATMs are available throughout the country. Some Volunteers have found it useful to retain their checking accounts in the United States to pay bills in the U.S. or to access U.S. funds. Currency should only be exchanged at banks and legal change bureaus; changing money on the street is illegal.

Food and Diet

You will not find many prepared foods in Macedonia and there is limited choice of frozen food, but a wide variety of delicious fresh food is always available. "Homemade" is the best word to describe the fare on a Macedonian dining table. Peppers, tomatoes, potatoes, cabbages, onions, garlic, meat (pork, chicken, lamb, beef), and olive oil are staples in Macedonian cooking. The meat most often found in restaurants and shops is pork, though chicken and fresh fish are also available. Sirenje and kashkaval (two types of cheese), eggs, milk, and yogurt (not the typical U.S. supermarket-style yogurt) are also a regular part of the Macedonian diet.

Vegetarians will not have any problems maintaining a healthy diet if they cook at home. Lentils, processed tofu, beans, and rice are widely available, as are peanuts and other kinds of nuts. Eating out at restaurants may be a little more difficult for vegetarians, as most menu consist of meat dishes. You will never go wrong

ordering a salad, *gravche tavche* (the traditional bean dish), and bread. In the larger cities you will even find vegetarian pizza.

Along with a wide variety of vegetables, fruits are plentiful in season. Southeastern Macedonia is widely known for the production of fruits and vegetables. You can make your own juice and jam from these, or they are available in local stores. It might be a good idea to learn to make a few of your favorite dishes before you move to your site, and you might want to bring the recipe for your favorite spaghetti sauce from home. Spaghetti can be purchased easily here, but you will have to make your own sauce.

Transportation

Macedonia has a large network of bus and train routes, which makes it possible to travel to practically all destinations by public transportation. A few previous Volunteers have experienced thefts while traveling. As you would anywhere else, you must be vigilant in protecting your valuables while using public transportation.

Geography and Climate

Macedonia is influenced by a Mediterranean and Continental climate with four distinct seasons. As in the United States, weather patterns have been changing in recent years, so it is difficult to describe a “typical” year. July and August can be very hot and dry, with temperatures staying in the 90–100-degree Fahrenheit range for a two-week period or longer. In the winter, the whole country can be blanketed in snow, with more snow in the north than in the south. Long underwear, winter boots, and a warm coat are necessities because of the inconsistency of heating. Because of the scarcity of air conditioning, comfortable, lightweight clothing is important for the summer months.

Social Activities

You will find no shortage of entertainment opportunities in Macedonia. There are museums, concerts, theaters, athletic events, hot springs, outdoor markets, historical and ethnographic centers, coffee shops, bars, discos, and cinemas for you to enjoy. Most recently released American films are shown in theaters in English with Macedonian subtitles.

Macedonia boasts some of the most magnificent natural areas in eastern Europe, with a great diversity of flora and fauna. Opportunities for outdoor recreation include hiking, camping, rock climbing, and bird-watching. During the summer, Macedonians flock to Lake Ohrid to enjoy its pristine waters and beautiful scenery. During the winter, Macedonia’s several ski resorts attract skiers from all over Europe.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity and working as a professional. It is not an easy situation to resolve, but the Peace Corps can provide you with guidance. While there are no hard and fast rules, a foreigner who wears ragged or dirty clothing is likely to be considered disrespectful and possibly unreliable. Improper attire creates difficulties in gaining the respect and acceptance of your Macedonian and Albanian colleagues. You will have occasions to dress up regularly, so bring some more formal attire in addition to professional clothes appropriate for everyday wear in the office or classroom. Think business casual.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps’ approach to safety is contained in the Health Care and Safety 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 Macedonia Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Macedonia. Using these tools, you are expected to take a large degree of responsibility for your 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 the safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at www.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 Macedonia is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. Because of financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies may not always provide the support they have agreed to. The pace of work and life here is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and the local people may be hesitant to change long-held practices and traditions.

Volunteers are often given a high degree of responsibility and independence in their work, perhaps more than they have experienced in other jobs. Volunteers often find themselves in situations that require an ability to be self-motivated with little guidance from supervisors. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from, or without receiving any feedback on, your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress more often comes after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

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

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within a competency-based training program that continues throughout your 27 months of service in Macedonia. Pre-service training ensures that Volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform their jobs.

Pre-service training is conducted in Macedonia and directed by the Peace Corps with participation from representatives of Macedonian organizations, Volunteers, and/or training contractors. The length of pre-service training varies, usually 11 weeks in Macedonia, depending on the competencies required for the assignment. Peace Corps/Macedonia measures achievement of learning and determines if trainees have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

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

Peace Corps training is founded on adult learning methods and often includes experiential “hands-on” applications such as conducting a participatory community needs assessment and facilitating groups. Successful training results in competence in various technical, linguistic, cross-cultural, health, and safety and security areas. Integrating into the community is usually one of the core competencies Volunteers strive to achieve both in pre-service training and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the local trust and confidence Volunteers build by living in, and respectfully integrating into, the Macedonian community and culture. Trainees are prepared for this through a homestay experience, which requires trainees to live with host families during pre-service training. Integration into the community not only facilitates good working relationships, but it fosters language learning and cross-cultural acceptance and trust, which help ensure your health, safety, and security.

Woven into the competencies, the ability to communicate in the host country language is critical to being an effective Peace Corps Volunteer. So basic is this precept that it is spelled out in the Peace Corps Act: No person shall be assigned to duty as a Volunteer under this act in any foreign country or area unless at the time of such assignment he (or she) possesses such reasonable proficiency as his (or her) assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he (or she) is assigned.

Peace Corps/Macedonia’s competencies are designed to be accomplished throughout the Volunteer’s 27 months of learning. A trainee may not be able to complete all learning objectives for a competency during pre-service training; however, he or she must show adequate progress toward achieving the competencies in order to become a Volunteer¹.

Peace Corps/Macedonia’s competencies include the following:

Core Competency 1: Integrate successfully into the community.

¹ Peace Corps Manual section 201.305.4.

Core Competency 2: Commit to professionalism and a spirit of service that supports the mission and goals of Peace Corps.

Core Competency 3: Build capacity of community members.

Core Competency 4: Commit to safety and maintaining well-being in Macedonia.

TEFL Sector Competency: Transfer English language teaching skills and knowledge to local teachers and students.

CD Sector Competency: Develop host organization's capacity to address local needs.

Evaluation of your performance throughout service is a continual process, as Volunteers are responsible 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for personal conduct and professional performance. Successful completion of pre-service training is characterized by achievement of a set of learning objectives to determine competence. Failure to meet any of the selection standards by the completion of training may be grounds for a withdrawal of selection and disqualification from Peace Corps service.

Progress in one's own learning is a dialogue between you and the training staff. All of the training staff—including the training manager (PST director), and the language, technical, medical, safety and security, and cross-cultural trainers—will work with you toward the highest possible competencies by providing you with feedback on learning objective performance throughout training. After reviewing and observing your performance, the country director is responsible for making the final decision on whether you have qualified to serve as a Volunteer in the host country.

Upon successful completion of training, trainees who qualify for Peace Corps service are required by law to swear or affirm an oath of loyalty to the United States; it cannot be waived under any circumstances. The text of the oath is provided below. If you have any questions about the wording or meaning of the oath, consult a staff member during training.

I, (your name), do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States of America against all enemies, domestic or foreign, that I take this obligation freely, and without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion, and that I will well and faithfully discharge my duties in the Peace Corps.

The pre-service training experience provides an opportunity not only for the Peace Corps to assess a trainee's competence, but for trainees to re-evaluate their commitment to serve for 27 months to improve the quality of life of the people with whom Volunteers live and work and, in doing so, develop new knowledge, skills, and attitudes while adapting existing ones.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Macedonia 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, Macedonia 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 Macedonia and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Macedonian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be

supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

This technical component will focus on theories, methods and techniques for Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In addition you will be familiarized with teaching English in the context of the Macedonian educational system. It will also introduce you to Macedonian schools: the structure, teaching methods, the attitudes of teachers and students, and the underlying philosophy of education upon which these are based.

The training incorporates a wide range of training activities and events all based on the concepts of adult learning. There will be opportunities for independent and self-directed learning supported by informational sessions with lots of opportunities for discussion and sharing, as well as hands-on experience, including teaching in local schools, and trainer feedback, as part of the practicum.

Community Development (CD)

This technical component is designed to enable you to build your skills, knowledge, and attitudes to act as competent community development players with the local organization you will serve in during your Peace Corps service.

It will give you the opportunity to become familiar with the Macedonian NGO sector and the local government system. It will also concentrate on building skills for conducting local needs assessments, project design and management skills, networking, and organizational development. The training is designed to provide you with basic knowledge and skills for the first three months in-country working in a different cultural context.

The training incorporates a wide range of training activities and events all based on the concepts of adult and experiential learning. There will be ample opportunities for independent and self-directed learning supported by informational sessions and hands-on experience, through working with a sample number of community/organizations to assist you in understanding the local conditions as a part of the practicum.

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, they help you integrate into your community, and they 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. Macedonian language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people. A certain percentage of Volunteers will have the opportunity to learn, besides Macedonian, a second language, Albanian, depending on the requirements of their future placements.

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 work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Macedonian (or Albanian) host family. This experience 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 pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Macedonia. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

This component is designed to provide you with abilities, knowledge, and outlook in order to understand, value and adapt to life and work in Macedonia and develop personal strategies to cope with cultural challenges. It will be integrated into all components of training and it will be even more emphasized and reinforced by your homestay family experience and the discussions with the language and technical trainers.

Health Training

During pre-service training, you will be given basic medical training and information. You will be expected to practice preventive health care and to take responsibility for your own health by adhering to all medical policies. Trainees are required to attend all medical sessions. The topics include preventive health measures and minor and major medical issues that you might encounter while in Macedonia. Nutrition, mental health, setting up a safe living compound, and how to avoid HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are also covered.

Safety Training

During the safety 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 and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their language, 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.*
- *Midterm conference: 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 the 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 Volunteer.

YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN MACEDONIA

The Peace Corps' highest priority is maintaining the good health and safety of each Volunteer. Peace Corps medical programs emphasize the preventive, rather than the curative, approach to disease. The Peace Corps in Macedonia maintains a clinic with one full-time and one part-time medical officer and a medical assistant, who take care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs. Additional medical services, such as diagnostic and treatment, are also available in Macedonia at local facilities. If your condition can not be managed adequately in-country, you will be evacuated either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in Macedonia

Major health problems among Volunteers in Macedonia are rare and incidental. The most common health problems are ones that also exist in the United States, such as colds, diarrhea, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), adjustment disorders, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. Unlike the States and similar to many other developing countries, Macedonia is a smoking society. Smoking is common and normal in most state-run institutions, municipalities, and schools. In many of the homestay families, at least one family member is smoking, so exposure to secondhand smoke is very common.

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 Macedonia, 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, 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. The Peace Corps uses generic equivalents of medications.

You will have screening physical and dental exams at midservice and at the end of your service. However, the medical unit is available at all times to manage common medical issues occurring in Volunteers. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Macedonia will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Macedonia 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. Most of your responsibilities in Macedonia do not differ much from the ones you have in the States: maintain a healthy diet, exercise, frequent hand washing, moderate alcohol consumption, and practicing safe sex.

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

Abstinence is the most effective choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. 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 you are a female on birth control pills, please be advised that Peace Corps/Macedonia medical unit (as well as all Peace Corps medical units worldwide) routinely stocks five formulations of birth control pills:

- 0.1 mg levonorgestrel/20 mcg ethinyl estradiol (e.g., Aleese)
- 0.3 mg norgestrel/30 mcg ethinyl estradiol (e.g., Lo-Ovral)
- Norgestimate/ethinyl estradiol; 0.18 mg/35 mcg; 0.215 mg/35 mcg; 0.25 mg/35 mcg (e.g., Orthotricyclen)
- 0.15 desogestrel/30 mcg ethinyl estradiol (e.g., Orthocept)
- 3 mg drospirenone/30 mcg ethinyl estradiol (e.g., Yasmin)

Once you arrive in-country, the medical officers will review the birth control pills that you currently use during medical intake interviews. If your birth control pill differs from any of the stocked categories as listed above, an appropriate switch will be suggested and discussed. Please note that the decision to accept an appropriate switch is yours. If for any reason you do not want to consider this, or you've had problems with other types of pills in the past, the medical unit will do its best to provide you with your particular brand of birth control. You are strongly encouraged to discuss this with your current health-care provider. If possible, show him/her the list of the formulations routinely in stock and make the switch before coming to Macedonia.

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

Please note that in Macedonia, feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase on the local market. The Peace Corps medical office in Macedonia will not provide them.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer will provide you with a kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. All medications from the medical kit and some of the health supply items can be periodically restocked at the medical office.

Medical Kit Contents

MEDICATIONS

Acetaminophen tablets 325mg
Antacid tablets (Tums)
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)
Anti-diarrheal caplets 2mg
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)
Bismuth Subsalicylate tablets (Pepto Bismol)
Caladryl Cream
Cepacol lozenges (Sore throat lozenges)
Clotrimazole cream 1%
Dextrometorphan lozenges (for cough)
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
Hydrocortisone cream 1%
Ibuprofen tablets 200mg
Iodine water purification tablets
Oral rehydration salts packets
Phenylephrine HCl tablets 5mg
Saline eye drops

HEALTH SUPPLIES

Adhesive tape
American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook
Band-Aids
Butterfly closures
Condoms
Dental floss
Elastic bandage
Insect repellent stick
Lip balm (Chapstick)
Non-sterile gloves
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Scissors
Sterile gauze pads
Sunscreen cream, SPF 30
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 Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or pregnancy can endanger your health and may be considered a non-disclosure, thus jeopardizing 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 the Office of Medical Services 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 Medical 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 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 shortly after you arrive in Macedonia. 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 any supplements, herbal or nonprescribed medications, such as St. John's wort, glucosamine, selenium, Omega 3, or coenzyme Q. Peace Corps/Macedonia medical unit routinely stocks multivitamins, vitamin C, calcium, and vitamin D. Please note that all other vitamins are issued only by medical indication and not by personal preference of the Volunteer.

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 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 discourages you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services has given approval.

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

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 sexual and physical assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without a serious safety and security incident.

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 of burglary—follows:

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

This welcome book contains sections on Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle, Peace Corps Training, and Your Health Care and Safety that all include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is the agency's highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach 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 Macedonia there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

- Leave valuable objects in the States
- 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

Macedonia is a relatively safe place to live from the standpoint of personal security. However, like anywhere in the world, it is not without petty crimes and assaults (including sexual assaults). You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions.

Because you are a foreigner and will probably be considered rich, your home may be more prone to break-ins than those of your neighbors. Crowded places and public transport, especially in large towns, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. Fortunately, violent crime is relatively rare. If you follow a few simple guidelines, you will reduce most risks.

After you arrive in Macedonia, 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 Macedonia 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
- 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 Macedonia. 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 Macedonia of which you should be aware:

Politics is something that Macedonians often discuss over everyday conversations. Volunteers should try to avoid any political conversations and political gatherings. If you feel you need to participate in a discussion on politics, please remember to express that this is your personal opinion and that you are not representing the official policy of the U.S. government or the Peace Corps.

Macedonia experienced an armed conflict in 2001. The Macedonian government and international community have made efforts in clearing the country of landmines, but the risk still exist in some border regions in the north part of the country. These areas are restricted for travel (information about the restricted areas is included in Peace Corps/Macedonia Transportation Policy).

Volunteers tend to attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are more likely to receive negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network—friends and colleagues—who look out for them.

While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Macedonia 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 Macedonia 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 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 assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

Crime Data for Macedonia

Crime data and statistics for Macedonia, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link:

<http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/macedonia>

Please take the time to review this important information.

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of serious crimes and crimes that do occur overseas are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities through the local courts system. If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to file a complaint with local law enforcement. If you decide to do so, Peace Corps staff will be there to assist you. One of the Peace Corps' tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. The Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country.

If you are the victim of a serious crime, you will learn how to get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps staff as soon as you can so the Peace Corps can provide you with the help you need.

Volunteer Safety Support in Macedonia

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

The Peace Corps/Macedonia office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in the All Volunteer Memo (AVM) 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 in ensuring 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 Macedonia. 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.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Macedonia'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 Macedonia 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 security incident 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 future Volunteers.

DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

In fulfilling its mandate to share the face of America with host countries, the Peace Corps is making special efforts to assure that all of America's richness is reflected in the Volunteer corps. More Americans of color are serving in today's Peace Corps than at any time in recent history. Differences in race, ethnic background, age, religion, and sexual orientation are expected and welcomed among Volunteers. Part of the Peace Corps mission is to help dispel any notion that Americans are all of one origin or race and to establish that each of us is as thoroughly American as the other despite our many differences.

Diversity helps the Peace Corps accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Macedonia, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Macedonia.

Outside of Macedonia's capital, residents of rural communities have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What people view as typical American 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 Macedonia are justly known for their generous hospitality to foreigners; however, members of the community in which you will live may display a range of reactions to cultural differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Macedonia, 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 available to them in the United States; 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 diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Macedonia

The Peace Corps staff in Macedonia recognizes the adjustment issues that come with diversity and will endeavor to provide support and guidance. During pre-service training, several sessions will be held to discuss diversity and coping mechanisms. The Peace Corps looks forward to having male and female Volunteers from a variety of races, ethnic groups, ages, religions, and sexual orientations, and hope that you will become part of a diverse group of Americans who take pride in supporting one another and demonstrating the richness of American culture.

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Macedonian women have historically been a vital part of the country's workforce, taking on both managerial and supervisory roles and working as school administrators, business owners, doctors, local government officials, and members of Parliament. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes are more evident and accepted in Macedonia than in the United States.

Female Volunteers should not expect to be able to maintain all of their American habits in Macedonia. Adapting to local norms and customs is a necessity wherever Volunteers serve.

Macedonians, especially women, generally lead more restricted lifestyles than Americans do. Women do not go out alone at night, and jogging or walking alone for exercise is uncommon. In addition, women in villages do not usually smoke in public. While these activities are not forbidden for female Volunteers, they may have to make some compromises. For example, Macedonians tend to speak more quietly and do not smile as much in public. Groups of Americans may seem too loud to locals. Female Volunteers should avoid eye contact with strange men, especially on buses and in the street. In addition, gender roles and acceptable behavior between the sexes may also change within the various ethnic groups represented in the country, which includes Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Roma, and other ethnic groups.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

You may be the only trainee or Volunteer within a particular project who is a member of a minority group. You may not receive, or be able to receive, the necessary personal support from other Volunteers, and there may be no minority role models.

Once you move to your site, you may work and live with individuals who have no experience or understanding of a non-Caucasian-American culture. Because of ignorance, stereotyped cultural perceptions, or Macedonia's historical involvement with certain countries, you may encounter varying degrees of attention in your day-to-day life. You may not be perceived as being North American, in some instances, for those Volunteers who are of Asian-American background, you may even be referred to as "Japanese" or "Chinese." These comments are not derogatory but derive from people in Macedonia focusing attention on the ethnicity of any individual. This might lead people here to think that you are really not an American but instead are from the country of your ethnic background. In any community where you are not known, you need to be prepared for staring, pointing, and comments. Finally, you should be prepared to encounter comments that would be considered completely inappropriate in the United States. Such offensive terms, however, usually are uttered because people are not aware of acceptable terms in English and not because they are meant to be offensive. Keep in mind also that Macedonia is a country of ethnicities, whereas the United States is a country of many nationalities. This emphasis on ethnicity will lead many in Macedonia to question Volunteers who may represent an ethnic group about their background and history.

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Respect comes with age in Macedonia. Younger Volunteers may have to work harder than their older colleagues to be accepted as professionals. It is not uncommon for younger Volunteers to look to older ones for advice and support. Some seniors find this a very enjoyable part of their experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Overall, senior Volunteers are highly valued for the wealth of experience they bring to their communities and counterparts. Yet you may sometimes feel isolated within the Peace Corps community because the majority of Volunteers are in their 20s; they may have little understanding of the lives and experiences of seniors.

Training may present its own special challenges. Older trainees have encountered a challenge in addressing their specific needs for a particular learning environment, including timing, presentation of materials, comfort level, and health. You may need to be assertive to develop an effective individual approach to language learning.

Before leaving for Macedonia, you should consider how you will deal with issues such as possible family emergencies, maintaining lifelong friendships, and deciding who will have power of attorney for attending to your financial matters.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

In Macedonia, any discussion of American sexual mores should proceed cautiously. Macedonian culture is not as open about issues of sexuality as is American culture. Although it is not against the law in Macedonia, homosexuality is not culturally accepted. Gays, lesbians, and bisexuals certainly exist in the country, but without the same level of acceptance as in the United States. Most are likely to have migrated to larger cities. Because of cultural norms, gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers may discover that they cannot be open about their sexual orientation in their assigned community.

You may serve for two years without meeting another gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteer, and there may be little emotional support for sexual minorities. Relationships with host country nationals can develop, but as with all cross-cultural relationships, they may not be easy.

Lesbians, like all American women, are likely to have to deal with constant questions about boyfriends, marriage, and sex. Gay men may have to deal with *machismo*: questions about girlfriends, talk of sexual conquests, marriage, girl-watching, and dirty jokes.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

You are free to exercise your religious beliefs but you may not engage in proselytizing or other activities that are against the law or would impair your effectiveness as a Volunteer. Most Macedonians belong to the Eastern Orthodox Church. The second largest religion is Islam, but you will also find small numbers of Roman Catholics and Protestants.

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

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

Possible Issues for Married Volunteers

A married Volunteer serving alone in Macedonia might get questions by the locals of why he/she left their spouse/children back home in the States and decided to serve as a Volunteer in a foreign country. This is due to the fact that, in Macedonia, being away from immediate family is a foreign concept. Married couples that serve together are easily accepted in the communities, but they are also exposed to similar questions, especially if they left sons or daughters back home.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Macedonia?

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 80 pounds [or 100 for countries with cold weather] total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

Peace Corps Volunteers are not allowed to take pets, weapons, explosives, radio transmitters (shortwave radios are permitted), automobiles, or motorcycles to their 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 Macedonia?

It is 220 volts, 50 hertz. If you plan to bring electronics with you, check with a good store to purchase the appropriate voltage transformers or plug adapters. There are two types of transformers: one for small appliances and one for larger items. Electrical sockets in Macedonia fit standard European plugs, so if you bring an adapter shaped like a square, it may not fit into the socket. It is better to wait and buy 220-volt appliances when you arrive in Macedonia.

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. ATM and credit cards are preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own needs; however, large amounts of cash are discouraged due to the possibility of loss or theft.

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 and encouraged 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, and expensive appliances are subject to loss, theft, and breakage, and, in many places, satisfactory maintenance and repair services are not available.

Volunteers often find it useful to bring a laptop with them. There are places to get repairs for laptops, and laptops can be bought here (although generally at a higher price). There is an Apple store in Skopje.

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Macedonia 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.

What should I bring as gifts for Macedonian 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 several weeks of pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to get to know each trainee's technical skills, interests, and background prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with the local schools and organizations. Keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you think you would like to be; the needs of the work site are the driving force and determine where each Volunteer will be placed according to their skill set. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour or less from another Volunteer. Most places in Macedonia have well-organized infrastructure and many of the aspects of modern living. Regardless of the location of your assignment, keep in mind that your success will depend mostly on how well you integrate into your worksite and community.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) 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. During normal business hours, the number for the COU is 888.855.1961, option 2, then ext. 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the COU duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 888.855.1961.

Can I call home from Macedonia?

International phone service to and from Macedonia is reasonably good throughout the country, but can be rather expensive. You are likely to have ready access to a telephone while living with a host family during training and may be able to receive calls from home. However, trainees are discouraged from making international phone calls from the host family phone. Most Volunteers also have cellphones that can be used for international calls. Volunteers with laptops often use Internet phone services such as Skype or Dial Pad.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

Most U.S. cellphones are locked and cannot be used with SIM cards for cellular services in Europe. Reasonably priced cellphones are widely available in Macedonia. Most Volunteers purchase a local cellphone for \$30–\$50 during their first week in Macedonia.

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

Internet and email access is available throughout Macedonia and Internet cafes can be found in most cities and towns. If you already have a laptop and do not bring it with you, you will probably wish you had. As with any valuables, you should seriously consider purchasing personal property insurance for a computer before you leave.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM MACEDONIA VOLUNTEERS

Добредојдовте во Македонија! Mirëse erdhët në Maqedoni! Welcome to Macedonia!

Some of you probably thought you were headed to Africa, the Pacific, or Latin America when you decided to join the Peace Corps. Now, you might be a little of unsure of what to expect from a small Balkan country in Eastern Europe. Many of you had no idea where Macedonia was until you opened your welcome packet and quickly ran to the computer to Google it. Have no fear, because you my friend have been placed in one of the most interesting, culturally rich, politically polarized, and wonderful countries in all of Eastern Europe!

Now I encourage you to take all those expectations you may have been gathering in America in preparation for you service and throw them out the window! Even what I will tell you in this welcome letter may not match up with the reality that your service will be in Macedonia. Every Peace Corps Volunteer's service is different.

I will try to explain more now about what I mean about having no expectations. To begin, Macedonia is not Africa. You will probably not be hauling your own water or living in a hut with no electricity. You will most likely have Internet, it will probably be wireless. There is McDonald's in the capital, shopping malls, big grocery stores, and you can even find soy sauce in some parts of the country! Sometimes life will seem very American. However, you will run into problems, like the power going out intermittently, heating with a wood stove in the winters, waiting an hour or more for the bus to come, no air conditioning, maybe no washing machine, and definitely no dryer. This is an interesting country, because you might be able to Skype every night with your friends and family back home, and you don't have to take malaria pills, but you will be faced with cultural differences that may test your Americanness to its very core.

You will be most likely living with a host family here in Macedonia for your entire two years of service. You will have one host family in your training community and one at your site. Do not worry about if they will accept you because most likely they will welcome you into their home as their son or daughter, aunt, uncle, or whatever relation they see fit. My host family is one of my best experiences in Macedonia and they truly are my home away from home. My host parents see me as their second daughter and their grandchildren are my dear little host sisters. I drink tea with them and watch Turkish soap operas in the evenings, help the girls with their homework, visit family, babysit, help in the fields, and do everything a normal family member would do here in Macedonia. I have learned a lot from them about the culture and the language and they have learned a lot from me about America. Every day it is a cross-cultural dialogue which is why I love it. Yes, I had to sacrifice some independence to live with them, but part of the Peace Corps is sacrifice and being uncomfortable.

I hope that this letter has shed some light on the Peace Corps experience in Macedonia. Remember leave your expectations in the U.S. and get ready for an awesome next two years in the Balkans. There will be some rough days, but your good days will make up for those rough ones and will create memories that will last a lifetime.

Пријатно! Tung! Bye!

Enid Moore
MAK 16 TEFL Volunteer
Villages of Pershefca/Glogji/Macedonia

Hello and congratulations on receiving a placement as a Peace Corps trainee in Macedonia! Not long ago, we were excitedly preparing for our upcoming adventure just as you are now. Our names are Rob and Sandi Merrigan. We are a married couple in our 60s serving in Macedonia as TEFL in a primary school (Sandi) and community development (Rob). We have only been in Macedonia for five months. We stayed with a

Macedonian family for our first two-and-a-half months while we were in language, cultural, and technical training. Now we are living and working in Delchevo, a small town in eastern Macedonia.

First of all, the Macedonian people have been wonderful to us! The kindness shown to us on a daily basis is heartwarming. When we had to say goodbye to our host family, we were in tears. They sent us off with gifts of homemade ajvar, rakiya, and honey. Our neighbors here in Delchevo check in on us almost daily to make sure we are OK and warm and well-fed.

The greatest challenge for us is the language barrier. Despite an intense language training program and a private tutor, we usually do not understand much of what is going on around us. We do seem to be able to speak and understand enough to make ourselves understood. We smile a lot and use sign language. Our “pidgin” Macedonian is apparently very amusing and a great source of merriment for all!

As we tell our friends and family in the States, we may freeze but we won't starve! Staying warm is a challenge here in winter, but the food is plentiful and delicious. In fact we have both put on a few pounds. There are several small supermarkets in our town which supply just about everything you need to cook your favorite meals. Every Saturday, there is an outdoor market brimming with fruits and vegetables from nearby farms. We also frequent some very good and affordable restaurants.

Here are some packing tips. Pack a very warm coat, warm gloves, and insulated winter boots. Silk long johns are also great to wear for added warmth. Black wool slacks, warm sweaters, and black dressy boots are the school teachers' “uniform” here! A suit for men and a nice dress for women are recommended for the occasional wedding or dressy event. Make sure that all your shoes are very comfortable and made to last. We walk everywhere here. Be prepared to walk on mud, ice, snow, and rocks. We both brought high quality hiking boots for those long walks in the countryside. Bring “yak-traks” to attach to your shoes for icy conditions.

Macedonia is up-to-date when it comes to technology. Bring your laptop computer. We have a flat-screen TV with cable service featuring over 100 channels, many in English! Our Internet service is excellent. If you read a lot, you may want to bring a Kindle as books in English are scarce. We also brought an Apple Nano loaded with music. We bought speakers here.

We brought a small photo album with pictures of our family and friends. When you can't think of anything else to say in Macedonian, pictures and postcards of your state fill the awkward silence.

We usually make the trip by bus to Skopje, the capital, about once a month for R&R: to shop, see the city sights, and drink a draft Guinness at St. Patrick's Irish Pub. There are several inexpensive hostels to stay in.

Another thought. The three-prong plug for your laptop will need an adapter so you can charge your laptop. If you don't bring the adapter with you, Peace Corps/Macedonia's super IT guy, Zoran, can supply you with that and make recommendations on where you can find any other IT items you may want or need. Good luck with your travel preparations. We hope to meet you at a Peace Corps “Field Day” in the future.

Regards and ciao,
Sandi and Rob Merrigan
MAK 17 TEFL and CD Volunteers
Delchevo/Macedonia

Hello and congratulations,

You have successfully passed the first phase of Peace Corps service: getting accepted. Being accepted to Peace Corps takes an enormous amount of dedication and perseverance. It is this type of work ethic you will need to succeed.

Arriving in Macedonia is just the beginning of your journey. The next 27 months will be filled with so many wonderful experiences. It is important that you find a way to document your experience whether by blogging, journaling, or photographing. Your times in Macedonia will be the best of part of the next 27 months of your life and you learn how to dance with reflection.

You learn a new knowledge, participate in cultural traditions, and smile at the art of reinventing yourself. Remember that there are three goals in Peace Corps that should be added to your survival kit: If you have tried everything that you know, try to do something you do not know; the key to getting unstuck is letting go; and make every moment one that makes you smile. Most of all do not take yourself too seriously: 27 months is a lot shorter than you think.

Serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer and living in Macedonia has changed my life. Every day is an adjustment and I love every minute of it. It is not always going to be easy but it will always be rewarding. You made the right decision and, trust me, it is going to be worth it.

Lakesh Abreu
MAK 17 CD Volunteer
Radovish/Macedonia

“You made it through the wilderness, somehow you made it through” and now you are poised to become one of the luckiest Peace Corps Volunteers in the world. Macedonia is one of the most amazing countries to be placed in and you are going to love it! So be excited. You should look forward to working alongside some of the best and most creative PCVs and supportive Peace Corps offices in the world.

Macedonia is a small country, about the size of Vermont, just north of Greece. It is one of the only countries that was able to peacefully exit Yugoslavia into independence in 1991. This says something about the peaceful nature of the people. Macedonia has a huge diversity of placements, ranging from mountaintop villages, to big metropolitan cities, to lakeside tourist towns, and chances are that wherever you are placed will become your favorite place in Macedonia.

I am a Community Development (CD) Volunteer in a community called Struga; we have 6,000 citizens in the town and surrounding villages. Struga is located on Lake Ohrid, a spring-fed lake shared by Albania. I work in a small nongovernmental organization that creates and implements capacity-building projects around Struga. We work with women, teens, the environment, rural tourism, and interethnic dialogue. NGOs in Macedonia typically operate “project to project” and oftentimes have very broad mission and vision statements that allow them to apply for an array of vastly different grants. As a Peace Corps Master’s International (PCMI) student, I am developing professionally by helping my organization design and implement projects while simultaneously sharing, or transferring, the skills I developed in my master’s program. The skills I am transferring are primarily in monitoring and evaluation, but also organizational development skills that I didn’t know were organizational development skills, such as agenda planning, networking, social media use, and interviewing skills.

Struga is one of the few towns in Macedonia that is 50 percent Macedonian and 50 percent Albanian. Macedonia’s largest ethnic minority are Albanians who live in the western portion of the country bordering Albania. To live in this area I had special language and cultural training to prepare me for the assignment. Choosing a dual-language community was one of the best decisions I have made in my service: It has really enlarged my understanding of what is happening socially and politically in Macedonia by giving me access to both communities in a way other Volunteers can’t.

Macedonia is relatively well connected to the global market and you can buy most things that you are accustomed to in the capitol city, including both food and sundries. In terms of what to bring with you, I would recommend anything that connects you with what you can't access in country. For me, that meant bringing all the seasons of "RuPaul's Drag Race" as well as other LGBTQI literature and media. As a gay man who cannot connect with my community openly in Macedonia, I have used these and other resources to keep me connected with parts of my identity that I cannot share with host country nationals. I would also recommend bringing the warmest clothing you can find, as many common areas are not heated, and a sleeping bag for the same reason. My last piece of advice is to look for a MAK 18 Facebook group, or create it, so that your group can face the coming challenges as a group and begin to connect interpersonally.

Again I welcome you, and I am excited to meet you when you get off the plane this autumn.

Stephen Robinson
MAK 16 CD Volunteer
Struga, Macedonia

Hello everyone,

Congratulations on having won the Peace Corps lottery. You are about to live and work in a young country with a very long history, a rich culture, beautiful mountains and lakes, and many wonderful people. So, where to start ... well, let's start with Staging, move through pre-service training (PST) and then into your actual site assignments.

OK, so you are very likely wondering about how to prepare to move to the middle of the Balkans. Well, you can look at the Facebook group sites for the groups already here. Consider creating a group site for yourself and your cohorts so you can start meeting each other and share information.

But, what about staging? It is an afternoon and evening when you will meet everyone in your group. There will be the inevitable introductions/ice breakers and you will begin to learn the policies and procedures of the Peace Corps and you receive WAM (walking around money) for expenses en route.

Keeping on the sequence of experiences, you will travel long hours with connecting flight(s) to get to Macedonia. Peace Corps staff will greet you upon your arrival at Alexander the Great Airport and shepherd you to the orientation hotel via bus. At the orientation hotel you will receive your first allotment of Macedonian money.

If you do not already know, this country is approximately the same geographic size as the state of Vermont with a population of just over 2 million. But don't let that fool you. It is quite diverse in many ways and has several distinct regions with varied terrain, crops, and many small towns and even smaller villages, some with their own dialects. Speaking of dialects, let's go to the topic of learning a new language. Best advice: relax. Do not worry about "getting a jump" on the language because everyone will start at the same place in small groups with excellent language teachers.

By this point, you are now a Peace Corps trainee (PCT) and you will leave the warm mutually supportive group living in the hotel and will move out to one of several training sites, which are usually in villages. There will be a few other PCTs in the same area where you will each live with your own host family and convene with each other daily for the 11 weeks of PST.

Every day throughout your 11-week PST, you will have four hours of language instruction and practice and meetings for other topics. Evenings will be homework and time spent with your host family. During your PST, your host families will be very helpful with practicing the language and learning their culture. Did you

remember to bring some gifts of appreciation for them? Nothing very expensive, because most Macedonians sincerely appreciate small, thoughtful gifts, especially items representing your home area in the States. For instance, large photo wall calendars, perhaps some food specialties (I brought pure maple syrup and apple butter), and maybe some items that have something identifying them as from America, or your region/city/etc. Before I departed from the States, I also made two small (4x6) photo albums with photos of my family, home, and general area where I lived and gave them as gifts. I noticed in some host homes that there were photos of previous PCTs on display. They are as proud to help you learn about their country as you are to share information about yours. Bring a lot of loose photo prints (not computer files) because passing them around and talking about your family, where you lived, worked, traveled in the United States is a great basis for conversations and beginning to use your new language.

Having coffee together is a major social activity at all times of the day. There are many outdoor cafes. Never turn down any offer to have coffee. It is a great way to get to know people and at the same time become more accustomed to the language. Oh, the coffee is Turkish style (boiled and the grounds are still in the cup). You can always substitute tea or other drinks. The point is the socialization.

Do not worry about buying too many personal things for your stay here because most Macedonians dress in generally west European/American style clothing. Bring what you have been wearing for work and free time in America. Jeans (nice, clean pairs for work) are generally OK for the guys, while the women here usually dress nicer than the guys and wear nice slacks and even dresses. Men usually wear sneakers or hiking boots, while the women prefer dressy boots. Pavements are often uneven or cobblestone and the roads are often cobblestone or even unpaved. So, consider safety and comfort for footwear. The climate is often described as hot, dry summers with cold, wet winters. The PCVs in the more mountainous areas have experienced some very cold, very snowy winters. Houses are generally not insulated as we are used to having in the States, nor do many houses have central heat for the winters or A.C. for the summers. Bedrooms and bathrooms are generally cold. Almost all Macedonian households follow the custom of leaving your street shoes at the front door and wearing slippers in the house. Do not count on being comfortable wearing only socks. Warm slippers are a must. Bathrobes are helpful, not only for warmth, but you will be sharing a house throughout PST and making evening and morning trips to the bathroom. Bring favorite recipes because sharing them is also welcomed by most families and a lot of home life centers around the kitchen when it is cold outside.

During orientation week, you will be offered options for purchasing any of a wide variety of cellphones. Bring a laptop and do bring an external hard drive to keep everything backed up. Bring a huge capacity one for swapping and downloading movies, TV shows, music, etc. OK, we have reached swearing in. The next day you are off to your assigned site.

Don't worry too much about packing things for your life at your assigned site such as cooking utensils, spices, and so on. You can get nearly anything you need here, at least in the larger cities. Several of us joke that if you can't find what you are looking for here, perhaps you do not really need it. The Peace Corps experience is all about a whole lot of things and for sure among them is learning to do with what you have, or improvise. You are about to have the experience of a lifetime. Everyone here looks forward to greeting and meeting you. Среќен пат! (pronounced srechen paht = happy journey!)

Lew Hemmer
MAK16 CD Volunteer
Negotino, Macedonia

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Macedonia 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 an 80-pound weight limit on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Macedonia.

General Clothing

All Volunteers will need an assortment of clothing for work, play, and socializing. Suitable attire for male teachers includes slacks with a nice shirt and an optional tie. Community Development Volunteers working in a municipal or NGO office may find a suit and tie acceptable for everyday wear, but wearing nice slacks with a sport coat or blazer is fairly common. Community Development Volunteers working with an environmental NGO fall somewhere in between, depending on the organization they're placed with. Suits, dresses, and skirts that are not too short, or nice slacks with blouses are all suitable work attire for women. For both men and women, nice jeans (but not the grunge look), dressed up with a nice shirt and jacket, are also acceptable in many situations, especially social ones. For most places outside of Skopje, a more conservative approach to dressing is appropriate for women. Clothing is expensive because most of it is imported, so it is best to bring most of what you will need. Shipping clothes from the States is also possible but expensive. See further suggestions below:

- Two or three pairs of fleece or silk long underwear (available locally but not of great quality), in colors other than white (which is harder to clean)
- Several sweaters
- Scarves, hats, and gloves (waterproof and breathable if possible)
- Winter socks
- Windproof and waterproof coat
- Winter coat (the winters are very cold)
- Jeans
- Clothing for warmer weather

Shoes

- Hiking boots made of leather, waterproof, and lightweight (good-quality ones are available in Macedonia but expensive); winters are cold and very wet
- Work shoes

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

A wide variety is available in Macedonia, so do not pack extra toothpaste, toilet paper, dental floss, or shampoo.

Miscellaneous

(Note that most items can be bought in Macedonia and many dried spices and herbs can be found here, especially in Skopje).

- Favorite recipes
- Plastic measuring cups and spoons
- The Peace Corps discourages you from wearing contact lenses and does not provide contact lens cleaning supplies. You may bring your own supplies or buy them here. Contact lens maintenance supplies can be found in Skopje, but are somewhat expensive (around \$15–\$30).
- Alarm clock
- Backpack for overnight trips, small, durable, lightweight, and of good quality (suitcases are a nuisance and large packs may be cumbersome for short trips)
- Money pouch or belt (to hide your passport and other valuables when traveling)
- Minimal cash (for vacation; travel debit cards linked to your U.S. account are a better option)
- Personal checks from a U.S. checking account (handy if you plan to apply to graduate school, etc.)
- Credit card (accepted in many places in Skopje and other large cities, also useful for wiring money to Macedonia)
- Laptop computer (please see prior sections for tips and other advice on transporting this item); not required but could come in handy
- Flashlight (small and durable), an absolute necessity
- Compact sewing and tool kits
- Compact sleeping bag
- CDs (also available in Macedonia, except for country music)
- Colored chalk (if you will be working in a school)
- Family pictures or postcards to share with your host family and friends

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 will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

Family

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps Counseling and Outreach Unity at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (call 855.855.1961; follow instructions for headquarters office at ext. 1470 or dial 202.692.1470).
- Give the Peace Corps [On the Home Front](#) handbook to family and friends.

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 your 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 overseas, 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 U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- 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 2, then the extension number (see chart below)

Peace Corps mailing address:

Peace Corps
Paul D. Coverell Peace Corps Headquarters
1111 20th Street NW
Washington, DC 20526

For questions about:	Staff:	Toll-free extension:	Direct number:
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country and program information	Country Desk Officer	ext. 1184	202.692.1184
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Staging and reporting instructions <i>(Please note that you will receive comprehensive information, including flight and hotel information, approximately three to five weeks prior to departure.)</i>	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
Loan readjustments, tax readjustments and power of attorney	Office of Financial Services	ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Family emergencies	Counseling and Outreach Unit (24-hour line)	ext. 1470	202.692.1470