

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO
THAILAND



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

November 2015

THAILAND MAP



This map is used with permission from the State Department.

A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps/Thailand Invitee:

Welcome!

Sawadi ka and congratulations on your invitation to join Peace Corps/Thailand. You are about to embark on an experience that should prove challenging, rewarding, and ultimately life-changing. We hope that you are approaching this experience with an open mind, ready to learn about yourself and about another culture and that you are excited to serve the youth of Thailand with your energy, creativity, and flexibility.

Peace Corps/Thailand

The Peace Corps has a long history in Thailand. Since the program began in 1962, more than 5,300 Volunteers have served and touched the lives of hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Thais. While Thailand has developed steadily over those years, the Peace Corps continues to serve at the request of the Royal Thai Government (RTG) in two program areas: (1) Teacher Collaborative and Community Service, and (2) Youth in Development. In both of these programs, Peace Corps Volunteers are working with Thai partners to help rural underserved youth enhance their skills and expand their life opportunities. Our unofficial motto for our programming is: **Working together with rural communities to give youth greater opportunities.**

Pre-service training

As you know, you will begin your service as a trainee in pre-service training (PST). As you prepare to start this journey, you should understand that training is a critical part of the qualification process to be a Volunteer. Developed over the past 50 years, Peace Corps training programs provide you with the skills, knowledge, and experiences needed to be a successful Volunteer. To become a Volunteer, you will be expected to demonstrate Thai language competence, cross-cultural understanding, and professional expertise in your program area, as well as being generally knowledgeable about health, safety, and security issues in Thailand. While we do not expect mastery of all these areas, your positive attitude and diligent efforts, especially in learning Thai, is absolutely critical to your success.

Having a safe, healthy, and productive service

As Peace Corps/Thailand staff, we are committed to helping you stay safe and healthy, and to finding you sites where meaningful work is available. While we invest a great deal in providing a good environment for service, the ultimate success of your service will be up to you. It will be your attitude, your flexibility, your creativity and energy, and your willingness to adapt to a new context that will make your service in Thailand great.

You will witness some very developed and very tourist-oriented parts of Thailand as you travel here, but your sites will be in the more rural and remote areas where youth have not had access to the benefits of the country's development. We ask that, before you embark on this journey, you affirm you are prepared to serve in a community where you are needed, whatever its level of development; that you are ready to invest time and effort into learning to speak Thai; and that you are prepared to integrate into a culture which is quite different from ours. If you are ready to make that 24/7, 27-month commitment, you will find this experience to be an incredibly rewarding and transformative one.

This welcome book provides an overview of Peace Corps/Thailand. As you will read, serving as a Volunteer can be a great experience. However, like many great experiences it may contain great challenges. This book is designed to help provide an understanding of those challenges while suggesting how to meet them.

We eagerly look forward to welcoming you to the Kingdom of Thailand,

Kathryn Goldman
Director of Programming and Training
Peace Corps/Thailand

Table of Contents

A WELCOME LETTER.....	1
CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS.....	4
PEACE CORPS/THAILAND HISTORY AND PROGRAMS.....	5
History of the Peace Corps in Thailand	5
Peace Corps Programming in Thailand.....	5
COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THAILAND AT A GLANCE	7
History.....	7
Government, Policies, and Foreign Relations.....	7
Economy.....	8
People and Culture.....	8
Environment	9
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.....	10
General Information About Thailand.....	10
Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees.....	10
Online Articles/Current News Sites About Thailand.....	11
Recommended Books	12
Books About the History of the Peace Corps	12
Books on the Volunteer Experience	12
Books About Thailand	12
LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE.....	13
Communications.....	13
Housing and Site Location	13
Living Allowance and Money Management	14
Food and Diet.....	14
Transportation	15
Social Activities	15
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior.....	15
Rewards and Frustrations	17
PEACE CORPS TRAINING.....	18
Overview of Pre-Service Training.....	18
Technical Training.....	19
Language Training.....	19
Cross-Cultural Training	20
Health Training	20
Safety and Security Training	20
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	20

YOUR HEALTH CARE IN THAILAND	22
Health Issues in Thailand	22
Helping You Stay Healthy.....	22
Maintaining Your Health.....	22
Women’s Health Information	23
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	23
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	24
SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH.....	26
Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk.....	26
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	27
Support from Staff.....	27
Office of Victim Advocacy	28
Crime Data for Thailand	28
Volunteer Safety Support in Thailand	28
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW.....	30
Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site.....	30
Cross-Cultural Considerations	31
What Might a Volunteer Face?.....	31
Possible Gender Role Issues.....	31
Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color	32
Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers.....	34
Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities	35
Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples.....	36
Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers	36
Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers.....	36
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	38
WELCOME LETTERS FROM THAILAND VOLUNTEERS.....	40
PACKING LIST.....	45
PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST.....	48
CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS	50

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/THAILAND HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Thailand

Thailand was one of the first countries to host the Peace Corps, with Volunteers arriving in January 1962. With the group in January 2015, more than 5,300 Americans have served as Peace Corps Volunteers in Thailand. Projects in early decades covered areas such as secondary teaching in English, teacher training, community development, agriculture and fisheries, primary health care, malaria control, development of national parks, and soil and water conservation.

Peace Corps Programming in Thailand

Peace Corps has recently undergone an impact study and a series of meetings with partners to determine the direction of future programs. A recent impact evaluation revealed that Volunteers continue to make an impact in education, which aligns with national priorities. Recently youth development has also emerged as a pressing need for the Thai government for the National Economic and Social Development Plan.

Current Programs

1. Youth in Development

The Youth in Development (YinD) Project aims to prepare and engage young Thai people in remote areas for their adult roles. Youth projects cannot eliminate all the problems that young people face, but good youth programming engages young people and builds on their strengths so that they are fully prepared to transition into adulthood. This YinD Project views young people as resources to be developed so that they can become healthy engaged, contributing adults. Additionally, the project helps to recognize and fully develop assets, both internal and external, that lead to a productive and fulfilling adulthood. This Youth Development Project focuses on the following:

- 1.) Supporting young people to choose healthy lifestyles and prepare for family life
- 2.) Preparing young people for the world of work
- 3.) Engaging young people as active citizens
- 4.) Supporting parents and the community to have a stronger relationship with its children

Youth for this project is defined as age 11–15 and was agreed upon with government partners. This age range captures youth in their formative years (pre-adolescents) to encourage adoption of healthy behaviors. Additionally, this is a stationary group (youth leave their villages at adulthood) and more accessible to the Volunteers through school and established youth groups.

Peace Corps YinD Volunteers serve in mostly rural areas where youth have less access to the resources of the cities. Hence, much of YinD Volunteers' work is about helping youth open their minds and develop skills that enhance their career and life opportunities.

2. Teacher Collaboration and Community Service

Improving English learning is a priority for the Royal Thai Government and improving students' English skills helps open up the world to them in terms of their long-term career prospects, and their access to information, travel, and resources from the rest of the world. As Thailand increasingly integrates into the Association of Southeast Asian Nations community, its citizens will need English to engage with the region economically, socially, and politically.

PCVs are placed in primary schools where they co-teach with Thai teachers in the classroom, introducing various participatory learning approaches and activities and helping students practice with a native speaker. Volunteer sites are mostly in rural areas, in schools that are either more remote or have less resources than other schools in Thailand.

The project supports national education reform efforts and aims to help Thai primary school teachers to improve and apply participatory learning approaches in the English classroom as well as other subjects, and to design creative lessons and materials to support an integrated curriculum.

The schools and communities where PCVs are placed also collaborate to promote lifelong learning and enhance the quality of life of students and their families through sustainable, school-initiated development projects. They are actively involved in lots of creative, small-scale school projects in the areas of education, health, environment, and more. Volunteers may partner with their school to identify priorities and design and implement projects that meet both school and community needs.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: THAILAND AT A GLANCE

History

Thailand is an ancient land rich in history. Perhaps the best-known parts of Thai history are the stories of its great kings and the kingdoms they established as they moved southward through the Chao Phraya Valley toward the Gulf of Thailand. Also well-known are Thailand's struggles with kingdoms in what are now the neighboring countries of Myanmar (Burma), Laos, Vietnam, and Cambodia. The current Chakri Dynasty was established in 1782. The fourth and fifth kings of this dynasty, King Mongkut and King Chulalongkorn, are especially well known for their many achievements in the cultural realm and in affairs of state. Their savvy statesmanship prevented European powers from colonizing Thailand while all its neighbors were colonized.

Government, Policies, and Foreign Relations

Thailand became a constitutional monarchy in 1932, and the process of achieving a fully democratic society continues to unfold. The revered current monarch, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, is the ninth king of the Chakri Dynasty. The Thai parliamentary system includes an elected House of Representatives and a partially elected Senate. The prime minister is selected from among the members of the House.

Almost every citizen has enormous respect for the monarchy, and there are *lese majeste* laws and policies to encourage that respect. Given this, visitors should avoid making any pejorative comments about any members of the Thai Royal Family or engaging in disrespectful conduct within temples or toward religious objects. Such behavior could result in arrest and/or expulsion from Thailand, as well as damage the Peace Corps' reputation.

Bangkok, the capital, has expanded rapidly over the past few decades. The greater metropolitan area (including Bangkok and Thonburi, on the opposite bank of the Chao Phraya River) has a population of more than 12 million. The country has 77 provinces, which are divided into districts, sub-districts, and villages. Decentralization efforts are underway to delegate authority to lower levels of administration.

The political scene has been turbulent in recent years and, on several occasions, demonstrations created deadlock in Bangkok. For example, in late 2008 anti-government demonstrators managed to close the international airports in Bangkok for several weeks. In April and May 2010, there were intermittent anti- and pro-government demonstrations in Bangkok, which sporadically became violent. Controversial and highly politically charged investigations into the events of 2010 continue. National elections in July 2011 resulted in the formation of a new government led by the Pue Thai Party, led by Yingluck Shinawatra, the younger sister of former Prime Minister Taksin Shinawatra, who was forced into exile in 2006 but remains deeply engaged in Thai politics.

From November 2013 to May 2014, anti-government demonstrations were led by Suthep Thaugsuban, a former Thai deputy prime minister who resigned from the opposition Democrat Party to lead the rallies to force Prime Minister Yingluck Shinawatra to resign. In early May 2014, the Constitutional Court ordered Yingluck to step down, as she had violated the charter by unlawfully transferring a security czar shortly after she came to power. On May 22, 2014, Army chief Gen. Prayuth Chan-ocha announced that the armed forces were seizing power after months of deadly political turmoil. Chan-ocha was endorsed by the king and formally became prime minister on August 25, 2014.

Since the National Council for Peace and Order (NCPO) assumed control of national administration on May 22, 2014, the main priorities have been to maintain peace and order while initiating comprehensive reforms to move the country toward a fully functioning and sustainable democracy with the king as head of state. The efforts in transitioning the country toward a full and sustainable democracy are based on the NCPO's three-phase roadmap. The first phase is to resolve urgent problems, expedite national

administration, and prepare for the reform process in phase two by fostering reconciliation and returning happiness to the Thai people. The second phase involves implementing a provisional constitution, setting up a national legislative assembly and a reform council, selecting a prime minister, and drafting a new constitution, all within a one year timeframe. The third phase will be holding elections under a fully democratic system. This roadmap has been the initiative of General Prayut Chan-o-cha, head of the NCPO. The operational structure is divided into three work groups: maintaining peace and order, national administration, and reconciliation and reform. The general election is expected to be held in 2016.

On August 17, 2015, a bomb exploded at the Erawan Shrine at Rajprasong intersection in Bangkok, killing 20 people, injuring more than 100, and causing significant damage. While there have been smaller blasts before (outside the Paragon shopping complex on February 1, 2015 and at the Criminal Court on March 7, 2015), this was the first attack that resulted in deaths and significant casualties. There was a second small explosion the next day in the Chao Phraya River beneath the Taksin Bridge; no one was injured in the second blast. The Thai authorities arrested two individuals and pursued additional suspects. Following the incident, the Peace Corps has tracked developments closely in collaboration with the U.S. Embassy. There is no evidence that any attack has targeted Americans or Westerners in general and Peace Corps operations in the country have not been affected.

Economy

“In the waters there are fish; in the fields there is rice.” This favorite saying by King Ramkhamhaeng dating to 1295 captures the essence of Thailand’s abundant agriculture. Over the past several decades, a series of five-year national development plans have emphasized the manufacturing sector. Thailand was among the world’s fastest growing economies in the decades leading up to the financial crisis in 1997. For the next few years, the economic boom halted and poverty increased. Since the turn of the millennium, Thailand’s economic recovery has been remarkable despite world events, political conflicts, health and environmental challenges (e.g., basic sanitation, respiratory problems due to agricultural burning, avian influenza, H1N1, HIV/AIDS, etc.), the 2004 tsunami, the 2006 coup, protests in 2008 and 2010, massive flooding in 2011, and the 2013–14 protests and coup.

Tourism, automobile manufacturing, electronics, and agriculture, continue to fuel economic growth. The Thai government is currently debating the country’s economic future, including the role of subsistence production, the growth of small- and medium-sized enterprises, and strategies to develop human resources to meet future challenges.

People and Culture

Thailand’s unique cultural heritage has developed over more than 700 years. Thais possess a strong sense of freedom (“Thai” means “free”) and are a fun-loving, friendly people.

The majority of the nation’s population is ethnically Thai and speaks one of the dialects of the Tai language family, including central Thai, northern Thai, northeastern Thai, southern Thai, and several others. Other ethnic groups include Chinese (the largest); Malays, located primarily in the four southern provinces; five major groups of hill tribes in the north; and people from Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar—many of whom originally came as refugees or economic migrants. Though Thais are 97 percent Buddhist, they have a high degree of tolerance for other religions. Other religions and doctrines present in Thailand are Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Shintoism, and animism.

The three pillars of Thai society are the nation, religion, and the monarchy. These are emphasized to Thais throughout their lifetime. The key Thai values of generosity, loving kindness, and smooth interpersonal relationships have served to promote the stability of the country and harmony among its citizens.

Environment

Thailand is a lush, fertile country, rich in flora, fauna, and natural resources. Bordered by Myanmar (Burma) and the Indian Ocean (west), Laos (north), Cambodia (east), and Malaysia and the Gulf of Thailand (south), Thailand covers an area of 205,246 square miles (513,115 square kilometers), approximately the size of France.

The country can be divided into three main geographical regions: the central plain, which is traversed north to south by the Chao Phraya River and produces most of the country's rice; the plateau and mountains of the north, noted for teak forests; and the southern peninsula, responsible for the production of major export commodities, such as rubber and tin.

Thailand is tropical, with three seasons: relatively cool from November–February, hot March–June, and rainy July–October. Humidity is high, with an average annual temperature of 84 degrees Fahrenheit in Bangkok (ranging from 80 degrees during the cool season to 100 degrees during the hot season).

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

General Information About Thailand

State.gov

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

Gpo.gov/libraries/public/

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

lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html

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

http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

Data.un.org

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

Wikipedia.org

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

Worldbank.org

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

Data.worldbank.org/country

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

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

RPCV.org

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

Volunteers who served in those countries. There are also regional groups that frequently get together for social events and local volunteer activities. Or go straight to the Friends of Thailand site:
<http://www.friendsofthailand.org/>

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

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

www.pcthailand.org

For more information and resources from Volunteers currently serving in Thailand, visit the PCV-run wiki at this site. You can find links to Volunteer blogs, resources from the 2 programs and much more.

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Thailand

UN.org/News/

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

VOAnews.com

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

Recommended Books

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

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

Books About Thailand

1. Cooper, Robert, and Nanthapa Cooper. "Culture Shock! Thailand" (rev. ed.). Singapore: Times Publishing, 1986.
2. Cummings, Joe, and Steven Martin (eds.). "Lonely Planet Thailand."
3. Fieg, John P. "A Common Core: Thais and Americans." Yarmouth, Maine: Intercultural Press, 1989.
4. Hollinger, Carol. "Mai Pen Rai Means Never Mind." Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965.
5. Klausner, William. "Reflections on Thai Culture" (4th ed.). Bangkok: Siam Society, 2000.
6. Klausner, William. "Thai Culture in Transition." Bangkok, Siam Society, 2000.
7. Wyatt, David K. "Thailand: A Short History." New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1986.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Thailand has a relatively reliable postal system and every sub-district and district town has a post office. Some, but not all, post offices are equipped with postal box rentals, international telephone facilities, and express mail services. Regular mail within Thailand usually takes two or three days, while express mail takes one to two days. International mail takes two to three weeks.

Your mailing address during training will be as follows:

“Your Name,” PCT
242 Rajvithi Road
Amphur Dusit
Bangkok 10300, Thailand

Only letters will be accepted at this address. **Packages should be sent to your permanent site, once you have been assigned.** Trainees and Volunteers should not have any packages delivered to the office in Bangkok. Note: there are often high customs fees for packages, especially for electronics. Items of a medical nature (vitamins, supplements, etc.) should not be mailed as it is extraordinarily difficult to get them released from customs. You will need to pay customs fees for items to be released.

Telephones

Trainees are provided with funds to purchase a basic cellphone upon arrival as a safety and security requirement. Volunteers regularly use text messaging to communicate with each other, their Thai friends, and people in the U.S. If you bring a smartphone from the U.S., you are free to use it but make sure it is unlocked from the U.S. network before you come. Most sites also have access to landlines either at work or through host families.

Unlike in the U.S., cellphones in Thailand are not charged for incoming calls. When Volunteers move to their assigned sites after training, they complete an emergency contact form with their name, address, telephone number (or the number of the nearest neighbor), and a map to their home, which is kept in the Peace Corps office in Bangkok for emergency purposes.

Many trainees and Volunteers in Thailand now use voice over Internet services such as Skype, Yahoo Voice, or others to stay in voice contact with family and friends back home.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Shops that provide Internet and email access exist in cities and rural towns throughout Thailand. The cost for access is 15–20 baht (less than \$1) per hour.

Most offices and schools have computers, which are in constant use, and many have Internet connections. Most computers in Thailand are PCs, although there are a few Macs. Many Volunteers bring laptops from home. Wireless Internet access (from your personal laptop) is becoming popular and is available in some of the bigger towns and cities. There are plenty of computer repair shops in Bangkok and most other large cities in Thailand. If you have a laptop, it is recommended that you consider bringing it with you and purchase insurance.

Housing and Site Location

Most Volunteer sites are in towns or villages that may be from one to six hours from the nearest city. With very few exceptions, only one Volunteer is placed in each site and the nearest Volunteer could be several hours away. You should come prepared to integrate yourself with your Thai community and

center your social life around friends and activities at your site. You will be able to get together with other Volunteers on the weekend and to collaborate with them on certain work projects but this will not be the majority of your time.

In villages and small towns, where most Volunteers live, homes have electricity and indoor plumbing, including toilets (normally “Turkish” or squat toilets) and cold-water showers (occasionally a hand pump is used to obtain the water). Drinking water must be either boiled or purchased, but is readily available. During pre-service training and the first month of service at site, trainees and Volunteers live with a homestay family.

Basic amenities (e.g., soap, shampoo, hair conditioner, lotion, sanitary napkins and tampons, towels, film, stationery, stamps, sodas, and instant coffee) should be available in provincial or regional centers, if not in your town. You should also be able to purchase small household electronics, such as an iron, rice cooker, fan, etc.

Living Allowance and Money Management

As a Volunteer, you will receive a monthly living allowance. Currently, the monthly living allowance is 7,500 baht (approximately \$215), which will be transferred to your bank account at the end of each month for the following month. Most Volunteers find this allowance to be adequate. Like Peace Corps Volunteers worldwide, those in Thailand are expected to live at a level commensurate with that of their Thai co-workers. This means that dinners out at expensive Bangkok restaurants or visits to spas designed for European tourists will not be possible on a regular basis. However, the allowance is certainly sufficient to enable you to purchase the basic necessities and to go to the movies or have an occasional night out. Because you will receive your living allowance only once a month, you will have to budget wisely.

Access to a U.S. dollar account is possible throughout Thailand via ATMs with Cirrus or Star networks. Bringing an ATM card will allow you to access funds for vacations, etc.

Food and Diet

The food in Thailand is extraordinary. A popular joke is that Thais are eating, talking about what they recently ate, or planning what to eat next.

The staple food is rice, so you will find a variety of rice (or noodle) dishes for all meals. For example, you might have boiled rice with some type of meat for breakfast, fried rice or noodles with or without meat for lunch, and boiled white or brown rice with curry or stir-fried vegetables for dinner. Breads, rolls, and doughnuts are available in almost all convenience shops (including 7-Elevens and AM/PMs). In these mini-marts, Volunteers can occasionally find cereals, spaghetti, and peanut butter. All kinds of vegetables and fruits are available in the markets year-round, and tofu can be found in most locations.

Food stalls in district towns offer reasonably priced cooked food and are open from early morning until late at night. Food stall vendors generally meet the Thailand Ministry of Public Health’s standards for sanitation and food handling.

Volunteers can cook for themselves, buying meat, rice, vegetables, and fruits from local fresh food markets at their sites. Food is relatively cheap and can be purchased comfortably with the monthly living allowance. Vegetarians can also eat well in Thailand, but some may find it difficult to maintain a strict diet, especially in some social contexts and due to the common use of fish and oyster sauce.

Transportation

The transportation system in Thailand is good and convenient. One can travel to and from sites to other towns, including Bangkok, via air-conditioned and non-air-conditioned buses or, on a few regional routes, by trains (with sleepers) or airlines. Transport within towns is typically by a covered pickup with two rows of seats or by bicycle. Car transportation arranged by a school or office is sometimes available to schools that are difficult to reach by bicycle. **Driving or riding as a passenger on a motorbike is strictly forbidden.**

Finding a consistent means of transportation can be challenging, especially in the early months of service. The Peace Corps will provide you with a monthly transportation allowance and a mountain bike and bicycle helmet for travel to offices and schools, for errands, and for pleasure. Thus, trainees and Volunteers are expected to be comfortable riding a bicycle for five to 10 miles per day. The bicycle will be your only mode of transportation during pre-service training (PST) for daily travel between homestay accommodations, language, and technical training sites. Because PST is usually in a large town and in villages, you may be riding along four-lane roads, as well as rough asphalt roads in the villages. **In both PST and in many sites, riding a bike is the only way for trainees and Volunteers to get around so it is extremely important that you are comfortable riding a bike on hot (95 degree) days from home to a work site.** Bike training for the local context will be provided during the first week in Thailand.

The Peace Corps requires that Volunteers wear helmets whenever they are on a bicycle. In addition to a helmet, Peace Corps also provides the following bike accessories:

- Water bottle
- Tire patch kit
- Headlight
- Taillight
- Bicycle tools
- Lock (key lock)
- Mudguards (fenders)
- Other bike accessories

Geography and Climate

Thailand is a tropical country with generally warm weather (averaging 84 degrees Fahrenheit or 29 degrees Celsius). The heat peaks in March and April (to about 95 F or 35 C), followed by the rainy season, which can last from May to November. On most days, the rains last from minutes to hours, but they are not the typhoon-driven rains of some other tropical countries. There are usually some cooler days in November, December, and January. A few Volunteer sites are located in the mountains of the north, where temperatures can drop to 59–68 F (15–20 C) in the cool season.

Social Activities

You will spend much of your free time playing sports, eating, going to movies, attending Thai festivals and cultural events, and socializing with your Thai colleagues and neighbors. Dating as it is known in the United States will be noticeably absent. Your ability to adjust to and enjoy this kind of social life will be an important aspect of your success as a Volunteer.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

Dress

Appearance and personal presentation are extremely important in Thai culture. If you dress according to the standards below, you will have already gained a great deal of respect from your colleagues who will

appreciate your effort to show your professionalism and cultural respect. Although the standards may seem somewhat restrictive and different than what you are used to, they will genuinely set you apart as a well-integrated resident instead of a tourist and will help maintain the good reputation of the Peace Corps. The PST staff will guide you in learning how to make informed decisions about appropriate dress. A PowerPoint presentation with further details will be shared separately.

You will hear references to “*riap roi*,” a Thai term that means “appropriate and complete.” When used to refer to clothing, *riap roi* means appropriate professional clothing, which in Thailand is very similar to what teachers or office workers in America wear.

For men, this consists of the following:

- Collared shirts, button up or polo
- Nice pants with a belt
- Casual dress shoes. No sneakers or sandals for work days.

Male Volunteers should know that long hair, beards and moustaches, and earrings are not commonly worn by Thai men and are less culturally accepted, particularly in rural provinces. In many schools and offices, the principle, mayor, or other supervisor strongly prefers that their staff not have beards or tattoos. Peace Corps/Thailand strongly prefers that you abide by their preference.

For women, this consists of the following:

- Dresses or skirts with hemlines covering the knees. Skirts and dresses should be loose-fitting and modest. For example, maxi dresses are usually not appropriate. Some women can wear dress pants (not leggings or tight pants) at their work sites. Others work in schools which have a dress code of skirts only, so you should be prepared for either possibility. For many occasions in PST, skirts will be required.
- Blouses or polo-type shirts with sleeves and collars. Shirts need to have sleeves, as tanks or shirts that show shoulders are not appropriate. The neckline should be high.
- Clothing should not be sheer or see-through.
- Work shoes should be closed toe and should not look like sandals. Dressy sandals are not appropriate shoes for Thai workplaces. Closed-toed flats are ideal.

Multiple-pierced ears and body piercings are not commonly worn by either gender. Tattoos that are not discreet may also cause unwanted attention in rural areas of the country. Some people associate tattoos with criminal activities. If you have large tattoos, you may want to choose clothing that will cover them, especially for more formal work settings.

Volunteer Comment:

While it's easy to be frustrated with the dress code at first, it really helps you integrate into your community. As you travel around Thailand dressed *riap roi*, Thai people respect you and speak to you differently than the tourists.

—Currently serving PCV

Although you will see some Thais dressed less conservatively, following the dress standards will help you avoid unintentional offenses and incorrect assumptions on the part of Thais. In many cases, the schools and youth centers that have requested a Volunteer expect that Volunteer to act as a role model for local youth so expect the Volunteer to dress and behave according to their highest standards (no pressure!). However, every site is a little bit different and, once you are at your site, you will have enough knowledge of Thai culture to make informed decisions. Some offices wear jeans, others do not. Observe how respected colleagues are dressed in your workplace as a guide to professional dress in your school or office. It is not easy to shop for these clothes in the U.S., which has different standards. Additionally, you

can buy the kinds of clothing you will need in the markets locally. However, it can be harder to find pants for really tall men or women, large shoe sizes, or other very large sizes.

Professional Behavior

Peace Corps/Thailand is very serious about Volunteer professionalism, as each Volunteer represents the Peace Corps, so the image and reputation of the agency will meet expected standards. To be successful in Thailand, you will need to develop good relationships. It is disrespectful to the people of Thailand, to Peace Corps/Thailand, and to fellow Volunteers to act or behave in anything less than a professional manner. Trainees and Volunteers are expected to adhere to the following professional standards:

- Show respect for the people and culture of Thailand at all times.
- Observe local standards of behavior, dress, hygiene, and protocol.
- Comply with policies that ensure your safety and security.
- Strive to integrate into your community and Thai society, spending more time with Thai colleagues and counterparts than with other Americans and expatriates.
- Learn the local language as an ongoing responsibility during your entire service.
- If you choose to drink alcohol, only drink in a socially appropriate, culturally respectable, sensitive, and safe manner, respecting yourself, your country, the Peace Corps, and the people of Thailand.
- Behave as a professional colleague of your Thai co-workers, other Volunteers, and Peace Corps staff by resolving any differences through openness and respectful dialogue, avoiding gossip, rumor, or personalization of any conflicts.
- Be open and honest with Peace Corps staff about difficulties you face as a Volunteer or trainee, enabling a collaborative approach toward resolution of any problems.
- Recognize that you are a co-owner of the Peace Corps/Thailand public image, along with staff and the more than 5,200 Volunteers who have served in Thailand before you.

Peace Corps/Thailand emphasizes community integration and intentional relationship building as the most effective way for Volunteers to enter and be accepted into Thai communities. Feedback from Thai counterparts and supervisors also indicates that the first three months at site are critical, so Volunteers should be at their sites as much as possible to be viewed as a community member. **During the first 30 days** after swearing-in, Volunteers can only leave their sites if traveling with their Thai host family or with co-workers unless there is a specific need. Visitors are not allowed during the first three months of service.

Rewards and Frustrations

Most Volunteers find that the main challenges of service are not physical hardships or safety and security issues, but psychological stress caused by limited language, cross-cultural misunderstandings, and differences between Americans and host country nationals in values and expectations. Lack of structure in some situations and social pressure to fit into the role of guest, teacher, and community development worker are issues for many Volunteers. While frustrating, these challenges present opportunities for tremendous learning.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

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

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

Integrating into the community is one of the core competencies you will strive to achieve both in PST and during the first several months of service. Successful sustainable development work is based on the relationships you build by respectfully integrating into the host country community and culture. You will be prepared for this through a homestay experience, which often requires trainees to live with host families during PST. Integration into the community fosters language and cross-cultural learning and ensures your health, safety, and security.

Peace Corps/Thailand'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 Volunteer.

Thailand's core competencies for all trainees include the following:

- Integrate into the community
- Facilitate participatory community development
- Exemplify professional Peace Corps service

Thailand's competencies for Youth in Development (YinD) Volunteers:

- Develop skills for asset-based youth development
- Support youth to live healthy lifestyles and prepare for family life
- Prepare youth for the world of work
- Engage youth as active citizens
- Support caregivers, parents, and communities to have a stronger relationship with their children

Thailand's competencies for Teacher Collaboration and Community Service (TCCS Volunteers):

- Facilitate improved teaching and learning skills and practices
- Build teaching and learning capacities in English
- Build teaching capacities in childhood literacy

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 PST 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 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 Thailand.

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 (so help me God).

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Thailand 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, Thailand 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 Thailand and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and will meet with the Thailand agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities, report your progress, and serve as a productive member of your community.

Language Training

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

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

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.

In order to help you prepare for your journey, the “Introduction to Language Training in the Pre-Service Training” and some pre-departure lessons are available for you to start learning and will be shared separately. Please review them.

Cross-Cultural Training

Cross-cultural training will provide opportunities for you to reflect on your own cultural values and how they influence your behavior in Thailand. You will also discuss the questions you have about the behaviors and practices you observe in Thailand, exploring the underlying reasons for these behaviors and practices.

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

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

Health Training

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

Safety and Security Training

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

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

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

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

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-

departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.



YOUR HEALTH CARE IN THAILAND

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

Health Issues in Thailand

Many of the health issues in Thailand are similar to issues in other developing countries—malaria, dengue fever, traffic accidents, etc. Advanced medical care and facilities are available mostly in Bangkok and major cities. As Peace Corps sites are mostly located in small cities or villages, it is important to stay healthy to prevent problems.

Certain areas in Thailand are endemic for malaria and prophylactic medication is required. Dengue fever is common. Thailand also has increasing rate of tuberculosis. Again, staying well-rested and hydrated, maintaining good nutrition, and following your medical officer's advice will prevent you from becoming seriously ill.

Thailand has an HIV prevalence rate of 1.1 percent, compared to 0.4-0.9 percent in the U.S. Spread of HIV and AIDS is always a concern. You will be trained to avoid high-risk behavior while you are here, and may be called on to transfer that knowledge as you work in your community.

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 Thailand, you will receive a country-specific medical handbook. You will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The standard contents of the kit are listed later in this section.

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

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

Maintaining Your Health

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

Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms,

tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Thailand during pre-service training.

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

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

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

Women's Health Information

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

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

First Aid Handbook	Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)
Ace bandages	Butterfly closures
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Calagel anti-itch gel
Adhesive tape	Condoms
Antacid tablets	Cough lozenges
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Decongestant
Antibiotic ointment	Dental floss
Antifungal cream	Gloves
Antihistamine	Hydrocortisone cream
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner	Ibuprofen
Band-Aids	Insect repellent

Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Lip balm
Oral rehydration salts
Scissors
Sore throat lozenges

Sterile eye drops
Sterile gauze pads
Sunscreen
Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

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

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

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs (of the current prescription) with you. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps Office of Health Services strongly discourages Volunteers from wearing contact lenses while overseas unless there is a true medical indication documented by your ophthalmologist. Contact lenses, particularly extended use soft contacts, are associated with a variety of eye infections and other inflammatory problems. One of the most serious of these problems is infectious keratitis which can lead to severe cornea damage which could result in permanent blindness requiring corneal transplantation. These risks of permanent eye damage are exacerbated in the Peace Corps environment where the Volunteer’s ability to properly clean the lenses is compromised due to limited access to sterile water as well as decreased effectiveness of cleaning solutions due to prolonged storage in unsatisfactory conditions. In addition, when bacterial eye infections occur, assessment and treatment within hours by a competent ophthalmologist is indicated. This is virtually impossible in the Peace Corps setting.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health-care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique

coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health-care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook. You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

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

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

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

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

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

Before you depart for Thailand there are several measures you can take to reduce your risk:

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

After you arrive in Thailand, 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 Thailand learn to do the following:

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

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime occurs in Thailand. 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 Thailand of which you should be aware:

- Theft: Property taken from Volunteers without use of force or physical contact (e.g., pickpocket on buses or in crowded markets)
- Burglary without PCV: Illegal entry into Volunteer's residence/homestay room/hotel room when Volunteers are not present
- Solicitation: Offer of illegal activity, such as drugs or prostitution
- Harassment: Bothersome behavior that violates the victim, such as stalking or name calling, or invasion of personal space
- Accidents: Mishaps involving a Volunteer riding a bicycle or as a pedestrian
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

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

Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety and security incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the

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

Office of Victim Advocacy

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

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

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

Email: victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov

Crime Data for Thailand

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

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

Please take the time to review this important information.

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

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

Volunteer Safety Support in Thailand

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

The Peace Corps/Thailand office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in

memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part to ensure that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

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

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

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Thailand'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 Thailand at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

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

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

Cross-Cultural Considerations

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

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

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

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Gender Role Issues

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

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them.

They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender roles in their host country and to understand how these gender roles can benefit or limit what females and males may or may not do. During their 27 months of service, Volunteers will further engage in gender trainings to understand better how their gender identity impacts who they are as females or males in the host country and how this perception influences their work and relationships.

In recent years, the proportion of female Volunteers in Thailand has reached close to 75 percent, including those who are married. Most female Volunteers experience a high degree of security in their communities and when they travel within the country. Physical harassment is not common, but precautions still need to be taken. The higher status of men compared with women can manifest itself in both subtle and not-so-subtle ways. For example, women are often expected to take on more work than men are, and they often do so. This can be frustrating for both female and male Volunteers. Additionally, young females may face an uphill battle to gain the respect of their male Thai counterparts as age and experience is often valued over youth and enthusiasm—especially for women.

Volunteer comment:

“As a trainee, I felt complimented as people remarked on my beauty, and other times I felt humiliated and treated more like a doll than a person.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

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

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

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In Thailand, the skin color of a Volunteer is frequently discussed openly. These instances can be turned into teachable moments for the Volunteer and the host country national, in which the Volunteer can ask questions surrounding perception and collaborate with respect to issues and projects at hand, while engaging in cross-cultural exchanges. All Volunteers, to include white Volunteers and those of color, should be mindful of the issues of race that are embedded in U.S. culture and within the culture in your country of service. These issues may significantly affect how Volunteers interact with fellow Volunteers and host country nationals. Being open and inclusive to everyone will improve your experience in interacting with fellow Volunteers and members of your host community.

Many Thais are not well-informed about the ethnic and racial diversity of the United States and expect Volunteers to be Caucasian. In addition, many Thais view lighter skin as more beautiful, a perception based more on an aesthetic bias than any racial prejudice and one that existed long before encounters between Thailand and the West. African-American Volunteers, in particular, should not take Thais' views

of skin color personally and should try to see them within this context. In addition, people in villages may have a difficult time seeing some people of color as Americans.

Unfortunately, in recent years, heroin smugglers have used West African nationals to smuggle drugs out of Thailand, which has led to a belief among some Thais that American blacks are African drug smugglers. Fortunately, professional and personal relationships between African-American Volunteers and their Thai counterparts have broken down these stereotypes.

Many Thais are not familiar with the term “Hispanic-American” or many of the countries in Central and South America. They may ask you what country you trace your ethnicity to and refer to you as that nationality rather than as American. You may have to remind Thai co-workers and friends that you are indeed an American. Thais have become aware of some Spanish-speaking countries through the media. Male Volunteers of Mexican descent may be affected by stereotypes stemming from the many boxing matches between Thai and Hispanic boxers. Volunteers of Cuban descent may be asked about Fidel Castro and Cuba. Colombian Americans may be asked about the violence associated with the drug cartels in South America.

All Volunteers of color may find that Thai co-workers initially do not respect your professional skills as much as they respect the skills of white Volunteers. However, most Volunteers find acceptance and respect once personal relationships have been developed and professional competence has been demonstrated. Speaking Thai and showing respect for Thai cultural norms will help, and providing information about your family and your life in the United States will assist in breaking down stereotypes. If you are shy, you may have some trouble allowing Thais to indulge their curiosity by touching your skin, hair, and clothes. Sharing pictures of your home and family in the United States is one way to help people get to know you as an American and as an individual.

It is common for Asian-Americans to be mistaken for Thais, which can have both benefits and drawbacks. One advantage is that Asian-Americans blend better into the community and, thus, may not receive as much unwanted attention in public. A disadvantage is that Thais may initially expect you to have the language skills of a native speaker. Thai friends told one Asian-American Volunteer that they were disappointed they did not get a “real American” as they had requested. This Volunteer also felt that her Thai co-workers initially valued her less than they valued Caucasian Volunteers because they thought an Asian-American was not very different from a Thai.

But once people know you are not Thai, you are likely to receive the same celebrity treatment that most foreigners receive in Thailand. If you are an Asian-American, Thais may ask you about your ethnic origin, wanting to know the country of your ancestors. Thailand is home to many Asian minority groups related to contemporary Chinese, Burmese, Khmer, and Lao peoples, many of whom lived in the area before there was a distinct country known as Siam (later Thailand). The small Vietnamese population arrived primarily in the 1950s, and most have remained in the northeastern Thai towns and cities where they took refuge.

Volunteer Comments

“At first I was afraid she would leave because everyone only talked about the color of her skin. But that is all finished now. She is a role model for all our teachers. We want her to stay for 10 years.”

—Principal in a school with an Asian American PCV

“Where are you from?”

“America.”

“You don’t look American. Where are you really from?”

“I’m really from the U.S.”

“Where are your parents from?”
“Taiwan.”
“So you’re Chinese.”
“I’m Chinese-American.”
“Your parents live in Taiwan?”
“They were born there, but now they live in the U.S.”
“But your parents work in Taiwan.”
“No, they live and work in the U.S.”
“You live in Taiwan?”
“No, I never lived in Taiwan. I lived in the U.S. but now I live in Thailand.”
“Do you work in Taiwan?”
“No.”
“Then who works in Taiwan?”

“Where are you from?” “Where are you really from?” “Where are your parents from?” I am asked these questions both in the U.S. and, once locals realize I am not Thai, in Thailand too. When I am first introduced to people in Thailand, they usually say, “But she doesn’t look American; she looks Thai.” Some would say, “She’s not really American.” Others might add, “Your parents are Asian. You’re not a farang. You’re Asian, like us.”

It got tiring explaining that I can be Chinese *and* American, first to my host family and co-workers, then the lady at the market, community members of fellow PCVs I visited, and every single other Thai person I met. I learned to say in Thai, “My ethnicity (chuea chaat ^{เชื้อชาติ}) is Chinese; my nationality (san chaat ^{สัญชาติ}) is American.” After I realized that natural-born citizenship is an unfamiliar concept in Thailand, I took the opportunity to explain this concept and the culture and diversity of the U.S.

Their questions are more out of curiosity than judgment. In general, rather than encountering disappointment, I found that Thais felt they were able to relate to me. I was more approachable to my naturally shy students because I looked like an older sister. Being Asian helped me integrate into my community. I could blend in when I wanted to but still enjoyed the respect Thais give Americans and teachers.

Before long, my co-teachers and community members began to tell my story for me. After a year at my site, I met a new teacher in my village. When he displayed the usual puzzlement about my ethnic background, my friend, the science teacher, immediately explained, “Debi is Chinese-American. In America, you can be both.”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Thailand’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Thailand is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQA Volunteer. More information about serving as an

LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbprcv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at spectrum@peacecorps.gov.

Thais do not usually view bisexuality and homosexuality as sinful or unnatural, and sexual acts between members of the same sex are legal. However, some gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers have found it necessary to adjust their behavior to be effective in their jobs and respected by members of their communities. Some choose to remain "in the closet" to Thai friends and co-workers at their sites, or to build relationships before discussing sexual orientation or gender identity. Others come out in their communities early on in their service and have no issues.

Physical contact in public between members of the same sex (such as linking arms while walking down the street) is a common way for Thais to show affection, and it is important for Volunteers to realize that such displays of affection likely are nonsexual in nature. Volunteers who are accustomed to being part of a large LGBT community in the United States may not get the support to which they are accustomed. However, LGBT communities exist in urban centers, such as Bangkok and Chiang Mai, and you will find significant support within the Peace Corps community.

All women will have to deal with questions or teasing about boyfriends, marriage, and sex. All men will have to deal with questions about American women and girl watching, and they may be pressured by co-workers to visit brothels. During pre-service training, trainees are encouraged to think through these issues and plan possible responses.

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

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

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

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

Thais' respect for others extends to individuals with disabilities, and the country has made efforts to help disabled individuals have productive jobs and lives. One example is the tradition of blind massage therapists in Thailand. In addition, schools are beginning to mainstream those with disabilities into regular classrooms.

Volunteers with disabilities need to be aware of the rigors of the Peace Corps/Thailand program during both training and service. Trainees and Volunteers are expected to use their own transportation (bicycle) to get to the various training venues and workplaces. **Any special accommodations needed during training and when at one's site, such as an alternative to travel by bicycle, should be made known during the placement process in the United States, prior to arrival in Thailand.**

Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples

Before committing to Peace Corps service, couples should consider how different degrees of enthusiasm about Peace Corps service, adaptation to the physical and cultural environment, and homesickness will affect their lives. It can be helpful to recognize that your reactions to these issues will change throughout your service, and you may not always feel the same as your partner. You and your partner will have different jobs, different schedules, and difference societal pressures. One partner may learn the language faster than the other or have a more satisfying assignment. This can create competition and put different kinds of stress on each person. Anticipating how these pressures will affect you and your partner differently throughout your service can help you remain a source of support for each other. Making friends with other Volunteers is a critical part of fitting into the larger Volunteer culture and can also be a good way to expand your support network.

While couples will live together during their service, they will have to live in separate towns and separate host families during pre-service training. This is a stressful time for most Volunteers, and it can be helpful to discuss in advance how you will deal with this potential separation. Your partner can be an important source of stability but can also add stress to your training experience. You may feel torn between traveling to visit your partner and focusing on your training, your host family, and friends you have made at your training site.

Couples often face pressure from host country nationals to change their roles to conform better to traditional Thai relationships. Thai men and women alike will often not understand American relationship dynamics and may be outwardly critical of relationships that do not adhere to traditional gender roles. It is also helpful to think about how pressures to conform to Thai culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both. Same-sex couples will also have this challenge as Thai people may expect one person in the couple to fill the “male” role and the other to fill the “female” role.

When viewing Thai gender roles and expectations from an American perspective, there is clearly a double standard. Men may face questions (sometimes joking and other times serious) about the number of minor wives they have. It is not unusual for men to receive invitations to visit prostitutes or to take a second wife, often in front of their partner. On the other hand, if a woman seeks to go out somewhere on her own or seeks to establish her individual identity as a Volunteer independent of her partner, the host community may have difficulty accepting that both individuals are separate and equal. It is important for couples to understand from the beginning the stressors that they could likely face in their service.

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

A high degree of religious tolerance exists in Thailand. Volunteers who refrain from drinking for religious reasons find that once this message is conveyed to their counterparts, it is typically respected and honored. Keep in mind that the Peace Corps prohibits proselytizing by Volunteers.

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

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

Older Volunteers are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps’ program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for 50+ Volunteers, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A 50+ Volunteer may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older

Volunteer for advice and support; some find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some 50+ Volunteers may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

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

Thai government workers are subject to a mandatory retirement age of 60 (with exceptions for some with specialized skills), so Volunteers over 60 will have Thai co-workers who are younger than they are. Thais give great respect and importance to senior family members, and senior Volunteers often receive similar deference and respect, though this does not necessarily translate to greater respect for their professional competence or technical knowledge. Your co-workers may smile, nod, and appear to agree with you when the opposite is true, perhaps because they do not want to offend you.

Although many people older than 50 are joining the Peace Corps, most of your fellow trainees are likely to be under age 30. Generally, 50+ trainees are warmly accepted by other trainees; still, there may be times when you miss interacting with people of your own age, especially in social situations.

The Thai language trainers recognize the different learning styles and needs of older language learners and will endeavor to provide the most suitable training for older trainees. However, it will be important for the trainee to communicate his/her own learning style to their trainers and work together to adapt the language training to meet those needs.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Thailand?

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

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

What is the electric current in Thailand?

The current electrical current is 220V and the cycle is 50Hz. The sockets in Thailand will take both the flat and round prongs but an adapter may be necessary. Adapters can easily be found in Thailand.

How much money should I bring?

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

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

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

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Thailand do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

What should I bring as gifts for Thailand friends and my host family?

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

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

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

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

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

How easy is it to call home from Thailand?

It's quite easy to call the U.S. from Thailand. During the first week of training, you will be given allowances to purchase a cellphone. Additionally, Skype, Facetime, and other online means of communication are options to keep in contact with people from home when Internet is available.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

Peace Corps/Thailand will provide you with funds to purchase a cellphone during pre-service training as it is a safety and security requirement, so there is no need to bring your own. Some Volunteers choose to bring their own smartphone. It will need to be unlocked in order to buy a SIM card and use in Thailand. This is up to each individual Volunteer's personal preference.

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

Internet shops exist near most Volunteers' sites, either in their community or within an hour's travel. Internet access is very cheap and is a common mode of communication used by Volunteers, who communicate regularly by email with both Peace Corps staff and friends and family back home. Please note that during the 10-week pre-service training, Internet access will not be readily available. Most Volunteers find that having their own laptop computer is extremely useful for both their work and for personal communications. Most can connect their laptop to Wi-Fi in offices or cafes.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM THAILAND VOLUNTEERS

Dear invitees,

By now you are preparing to be part of a legacy in Thailand that began in 1962. Becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer is an honor that comes with the responsibility of representing ourselves well in another country, as well as representing the United States of America. I've been in Thailand as a Youth in Development Worker for 18 months now and the variety of experiences I've had has been almost unimaginable. Going to temples for cultural activities, weddings, and funerals, helping other Volunteers at their sites, and working with local government agencies such as administrative organizations, community hospitals, and schools has been both challenging and inspiring. During my first 90 days of service I focused on learning about my community's resources and challenges, and meeting people that were in positions to either support youth activities or co-lead youth activities with me. I built relationships with government officers, village leaders, nurse volunteers, teachers, monks, local experts, retirees, and more. While it's true that villagers have a better understanding of my community than I do, on the other hand, one of my favorite aspects of being a Volunteer is connecting resources to develop projects and having a vision to benefit youth that otherwise might not exist.

My daily routine begins by riding my bicycle to the local administrative office. Usually there are no youth there, but this is still valuable time because the primary function of this office is community development. Local experts and budgets to support youth activities can be available, and co-planning with these counterparts is important. The second half of my day I alternate between two schools where I co-teach life skills classes, help teachers improve English teaching skills, and develop activities for the student council. My youth activities don't always go according to plan, and I'd say that being flexible is one of the keys to success for Volunteers.

Other aspects of service that I greatly appreciate include my fellow Volunteers and the Peace Corps staff. Volunteers are various ethnicities, ages, and orientations—seemingly all walks of life! What a great opportunity it has been to collaborate on youth projects while sharing a sense of humor about the ups and downs of life in the Peace Corps. Fellow Volunteers can be a family of sorts too and, just like any family, sometimes there are clashes of ideas and personalities. But try to remember that often they are your first line of support during trying times and can offer timely words of encouragement. During training it doesn't take long to realize that the Peace Corps staff is amazing, but that doesn't mean the training is easy. It can be difficult and even confusing, just like work can sometimes be for Volunteers at sites. Overall, the comprehensive nature of the training we receive from the Peace Corps staff in terms of culture, technical, and language is second to none.

Finally there is Thailand itself with much to explore, but where to start? For me it's seeking out new foods, learning about Thai culture, and taking trips to the city, sea, or mountains. Even simply going for a bike ride in my village can be the beginning of a great adventure, and it's also a good way to make friends. Building relationships is another key to success for Volunteers, and I like to focus on what Thais and Americans have in common: appreciating natural beauty in the environment, wanting a healthy life for family, and being a happy person. *Sabai dii mai?* Are you happy? In the "Land of Smiles" I think this just might be what's most important. Cultivate your own wellness and happiness first, and the rest will follow.

Welcome to Thailand!

—Jason Wilson, PCV 126

Hear, hear!

You made it through the computer application, medical appointments, and numerous emails. That's over!

Now comes the time when you start planning in earnest. It's good to prepare before you arrive. Find out what prior trainees packed but didn't need. So much is available in Thailand. Volunteer blogs as well as visitor and expat blogs provide lots of personal insight into Thai culture and physical surroundings. Of course, nothing beats first-hand experience because we all look at the world differently.

As a TCCS Volunteer, I work out of one school. I work with a few teachers, assisting them in building their English instruction skills. We also meet once a week and create lesson plans that we teach together. My typical day consists of waking up early Monday–Friday to do 30 minutes of yoga before I head out on my bike for a three-mile ride to my school. I have an area at school that I use for an office. The students arrive fairly early to play, sweep, and clean the school buildings and grounds. The school day begins at 8 a.m. with school announcements outside. My counterpart and I had created my schedule so that I would have at least one free period each day to take care of paperwork, computer needs, etc. I created a staff English lunch club where we meet one day a week, to eat together and attempt to practice English. This is a perfect opportunity to socialize, as eating is a very social event for Thai people. As part of my community project, I currently tutor local students and adults, on the weekend, in English speaking skills and I will soon start teaching business English to local merchants, during the week.

PST was challenging for me. Though, I have found that the language and culture classes have initially prepared me for my current undertaking. I even incorporate some of the PST training techniques in my teaching, training, and tutoring.

Your upcoming training will be demanding and rigorous in both mental and physical ways. One of the sources for the mental challenge is that before you know it, you will be living in an initially foreign country. Living with an initially foreign family in an initially foreign village. Once again, before you know it, the country, your host family, and your village will become more familiar. One physical challenge you are about to experience will be the heat and the exercise that you will find yourself engaged in.

You are about to meet the men and women with whom you will train for the following months of your commitment. You may have heard it before and you will hear it numerous times, but these people (trainees) will become part of your support system. Even die-hard introverts will find support within the training group.

Accepting a position as a Peace Corps trainee/Volunteer means that you are an individual who is willing to give of yourself. This is not something that everyone is willing or capable of doing. Embrace that distinction.

If there is one sentence that I can communicate to upcoming Peace Corps trainees it's this: It all works itself out. There's no need to stress and become overly frustrated with a situation or a process. You too will survive. Enjoy. Ask for help when you need it. Make memories, take lots of pictures and be prepared to have your picture taken often!

“What we do for ourselves dies with us. What we do for others and the world remains and is immortal.”
—Albert Pine

—Terisa Tribble
TCCS 127

Congratulations! You're an invitee to amazing Thailand: the land of smiles. Through the endless hoops of paperwork you're finally here reading this welcome letter—hopefully excited, likely nervous, and understandably a bit breathless. We all were too.

In a short time, you'll be landing on Thai soil. Some of you have never stepped out of the country before, let alone into a land 8,614 miles away. You will see things that will amaze you, perplex you; you'll run into situations that can be terrifying or aggravating, but also captivating moments of complete beauty and truth. Those will make it all worth it. Keep your mind open, and savor the thrills of strange, cultural collisions. Eat some fried bugs, use a squat toilet, ride a grumpy elephant—and have fun with it. You may or may not be doing some of those things because everyone has it differently. Take me as an example.

I'm writing this letter to you from a small, extended primary school in Nan province, where I am a TCCS Volunteer. There's no Internet at the house I share with my host mom, the village post-woman, in a rural mountain village. Life here is simple. Every weekday I bike to school around 7:30 a.m. and co-teach English for four hours a day. The school has 184 students and 15 teachers. I work extensively with the two English teachers. As of right now, I help teach every grade. School ends at 3:30 p.m., but usually I tutor kids or plan lessons with my counterparts until 4 p.m. After that, I go home and run a few miles before the sun drops to a glimmer, peeking through the golden hills of corn. After a shower, my host mom and I (and sometimes some neighborhood kids) have a home-cooked dinner, ranging from central region favorites such as drunken noodles or Hainanese chicken rice, to local dishes such as spicy pork salads, bamboo shoot curries, and sticky rice. To wrap the day up, I crawl into bed and open a book or catch up with a friend before drifting to sleep.

This is my life in Nan. It may turn out to be drastically different from the experiences you will have. No matter if you are placed in the mountainous North, the “rice bowl” Central plains, the coastal South or populous Northeast, Thailand will offer each of you your own unique adventures. And because of it, you'll soon find that two years here will fly by before you know it!

Be sure to read your core expectations, and then live them. There will be days that they can be difficult to follow. Nobody can promise you an easy service, appreciation from those you work with, or a clear path to success. But everything will be all right. Seize each day one at a time and grow through the hardships. Embrace your new Peace Corps family. Every group is blessed with an incredible diversity of ages, experiences, and personalities. Some of the Volunteers will become some of your closest friends and mentors. They'll help you get through the rough patches and you will emerge stronger for it.

A wise Volunteer once told our group, “If you ask me if I can do this for two years, I can't answer that. But I can tell you, I can do it for one more day.” So for every new day, break down the cultural barriers. Let the giggling children chase you, the weathered grandmothers smile at you with their broken teeth, the curious villager pepper you with questions about your home, loves, and spirit. Prepare to be humbled by some of the kindest, gentlest souls you will ever meet. Share your lifestyle and heart with the locals and laugh at your differences or similarities. I still remember when my host mother asked me, “Do foreigners have dreams?” or when neighborhood kids gasped in shock watching me eat tomato soup, imagining that it was a bowl of pure ketchup. Leave a positive imprint on those you will touch, be it child, educator, or government worker, and you will already be a successful Volunteer. Sow peace, love, and new perceptions of what it means to be an American in your little garden of Thailand. You will be planting the seeds of trees whose shade you may never sit under, but that others could. And above all, enjoy this extraordinary yet challenging journey. Group 128, welcome to Thailand.

From one Volunteer to (soon-to-be) another,
—*Wunpiti Vinotai*
TCCS 127

Welcome to Thailand, Peace Corps invitees,

I am sure by now you have received the much anticipated letter of invitation to come and serve as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the beautiful country of Thailand, AKA the land of smiles. You are probably in the process of preparing yourself both physically and mentally for the upcoming experience of serving as a PCV. It is difficult to put into few words what your experience here in Thailand will be as you begin your training. But I will do my best to sum it up in a manner that will give you an idea of what to expect especially in pre-service training.

PST is composed of language learning, cultural immersion, medical, and anything else that you need to know about Peace Corps/Thailand will be thrown in from time to time. PST is probably going to be the busiest and most challenging 10 weeks of your Peace Corps experience. But fear not because the staff are there for your support and they have invested a good amount of time to ensure that your transition is a smooth one. However, there will be challenges. Your experience will begin by moving in with a local family that probably speaks little to no English. You will bike every day to and from a designated location from Monday to Friday where your language and cultural training will take place. You will be in small groups with your fellow trainees.

I would suggest that during these 10 weeks you focus on acquiring as much language as possible by talking with your teachers and most importantly your host family. Your cultural immersion continues on long after you get to your site of service. So be flexible during this period because it's going to be quiet a ride and don't forget to have a smile on your face. One of the main components of your cultural immersion is relationship building. As a YinD Volunteer, this is very important because we are out in the community most of the time forging new relationships. My suggestion for conversation starters is showing pictures of your family, where you are from, and maybe know one or two simple songs that you can teach on the spot: The kids love that. Moreover, sometimes you just need to sit down and people will approach you because 1) you are a foreigner, and 2) they want to know all about you. So get used to being stared at and asked personal questions pretty much all the time. Between training and cultural immersion, you will be introduced to other topics such as medical and safety and security tips.

Peace Corps/Thailand takes medical, safety, and security concerns very seriously. Throughout your 10 weeks of training, you will be briefed on any medical concerns and there are systems in place for your immediate evacuation in case of a security issue. So rest assured that any concerns you may have during your time here, your safety and well-being is priority number one.

So fasten your seatbelts because this ride is about to get bumpy. I can, however, promise you that it gets less bumpy over time because you have an incredible support system here starting with current PCVs. Whatever happens along the way, hold on tight and don't let go because at your day of swearing in, I can assure you that you will have the feeling of having achieved something of value, an experience that will forever stay with you. So welcome to the Peace Corps/Thailand, family where your next adventure begins.

—*Kodjovi Gbeblewou*

Youth in Development (YinD) Volunteer, Group 127

Sawatdeeka, Peace Corps/Thailand invitees!

Congratulations on being invited into the newest generation of Thailand trainees and welcome to the Peace Corps/Thailand family! I know it will all seem overwhelming for a while to come, but you are in for a truly unique and life-changing experience! Before I came to Thailand, it was completely impossible

to imagine what being a Peace Corps Volunteer here would be like. Not only does your experience depend a lot on your site placement (which you'll be dying to find out for what will feel like an eternity!), it also depends highly on who you are. As with anything worth doing, what you get out of it is directly related to what you put in. It will be what *you* make it, but that is not to say that it will always be exactly what you want it to be. You will need to maintain an open mind on so many levels, not only in terms of integrating into a new culture but also toward your own purpose, abilities, limitations, needs, reactions, expectations, and potential. I have lived in Thailand for seven months now and continue to be completely amazed at how all of my impressions and conclusions constantly turn out to be not exactly true or not always so.

The magical thing about the Peace Corps is that while we all run into similar situations and challenges working within our communities, your particular path of personal development during your service will be uniquely yours. It has a way of pushing you in exactly the areas you need to be pushed in and forcing you to discover happiness in forms you never knew existed. I couldn't possibly describe exactly what that will look like for you as an individual, and can't wait to see you find out for yourself!

The most wonderful part of Peace Corps/Thailand is absolutely the Peace Corps staff and your fellow Volunteers, who will become like family to you as you bond over this highly unusual shared experience. Put in the time to get to know them early on: You're going to need each other later!

In the coming months you will receive tons of information and tasks as you go through the process of preparing for your departure. Relax, take it one day at a time, you will get through it all eventually. Rest assured you will be taken excellent care of throughout the process of adjusting to your new home in Thailand. Pre-service training will be an intense and challenging time (and also so much fun), but you will be supported by each other and by the amazing staff, who seem to understand our needs even better than we do ourselves sometimes.

I highly recommend that you try to look at whatever materials you can for Thai language learning as early and often as possible. Don't get frustrated if it doesn't stick, just exposing yourself to it as much as possible will work wonders for you once formal classes start. The Peace Corps' language instruction program is fantastic, but there's only so much a human brain can absorb in 10 weeks' time: Start early!

I do not recommend spending a lot of time trying to figure out what your life in Thailand will be like (I know, it's *impossible* not to try to do that), it will only give you expectations and a false sense of knowledgeability. Embrace the cluelessness! If you can't manage that, join the "PCV Thailand 128" Facebook group, connect with current Volunteers, and wallow in speculation. Most importantly, enjoy your life for the next several months! Eat all your favorite foods and spend time with all your favorite people. Start collecting things that make you happy (photos, music, books, movies, food). I can't wait to meet you in Thailand!

—*Emily Schell*
Youth in Development (YinD) Volunteer, Group 127

PACKING LIST

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

When you are packing for Thailand keep in mind a few things:

- a) It's hot
- b) It's rainy
- c) You will be biking a lot
- d) Women may be able to wear pants in some sites but you should pack assuming you will need to wear skirts much of the time.
- e) There will be many events where you will want a very nice, business casual, "riap roi" outfit

General Clothing

- Two or three polos
- Sweatshirt or fleece top
- Long sleeve shirt (for protection from sun but also for cool nights)
- Three to five pairs of socks
- One lightweight jacket/raincoat
- One or two belts
- Hat
- Handkerchiefs (to keep dust out of mouth while biking, wetting down to cool off, and mopping up sweat)
- Sunglasses
- Sneakers
- Flip-flops/sports sandals (e.g., Teva or Chacos)

Females

For training and at your work site:

- Four to six business casual skirts
- Seven to 10 button-down dress shirts (either short or long sleeve, light colors)
- Two or three pairs of dress pants (black, grey, or khaki)
- Closed-toed shoes with a back strap that look more like dress shoes than sandals (e.g., Toms or flats by Crocs)

Biking/workout/casual clothing:

- Three or four loose-fitting capris or long, baggy shorts
- Three or four T-shirts or workout shirts with sleeves
- Two or three pairs of jeans or casual pants
- Four or five casual T-shirts or thick-strap tank tops

Outfits for special occasions:

- Funerals: All black, such as black dress pants or knee-length skirt and black button-down blouse
- Meeting dignitaries, host family, counterparts, and swearing in: Professional outfit, skirt that hits the knees, button up blouse, and blazer
- One pair of dress shoes (pumps, low heel, or flat closed-toe shoes with back strap)

Other things you will want to bring:

- Two or three casual dresses (with sleeves, knee-length or longer, and no plunging neckline)
- Bathing suit (a one piece is best, but bathing suits are available for rent in most places)
- Lots of underwear in breathable fabrics
- At least six sports bras and six regular bras
- Jewelry (if you wear it)
- Lightweight scarf

Males

For training and at your work site:

- Four or five dress pants (black, grey, khaki)
- Seven to nine button-down dress shirts (either short or long sleeve)
- One or two neck ties
- Dress shoes

Biking/workout/casual clothing:

- Three to five pairs of shorts
- Three to five T-shirts or workout shirts
- Three to five pairs of jeans or cargo pants

Other things you will want to bring:

- Swim shorts
- Lots of underwear (cotton is preferable)

Other notes on clothing:

- All clothing should be clean and neatly pressed. During PST shoes should be casual dress shoes with a back or flats. Once you get to your site, you will be able to observe and ask questions about appropriate (*riap roi*) clothing and shoes. Consider shoes that you can slip on and off easily, as shoes are usually removed before entering a home or office.
- After hours: For both men and women, T-shirts and jeans are fine to wear, and shorts that reach the knee can be worn when working out. Thais do not generally wear shorts in public, except in very relaxed situations. Tank tops are not recommended, as they do not have sleeves and reveal too much. When you are in your own home, however, what you wear is up to you.

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Contact lenses and lens solution (available in big cities, but you can bring them from home)
- Two pairs of glasses
- Deodorant (only roll-on is available here)
- Cosmetics (available here but many have a bleaching component; if you look, you can find products without whitening the skin)
- Quick-dry travel towel (This is a must. REI, L.L. Bean, etc., have really great ones.)

Notes about toiletries:

- They are available here, but if you have favorite products, bring them with you.
- Tampons or alternative sanitary methods, e.g., Diva cups, are difficult to find in Thailand; you should bring a two-year supply from home.

Electronics

- Smartphone from the U.S. (if you have one; unlocked and can use a SIM card)
- Headphones

- Camera and charger
- Small alarm clock (or use the alarm on a cellphone)
- Lightweight computer (you can buy a computer here but it may have poorly manufactured parts and/or stolen software)
- One USB drive/micro-storage device/external hard drive, to save technical and language training materials that will be provided to you at PST
- Tablet or iPad
- A voltage converter—if you are bringing any electronics

Miscellaneous

- Small backpack for weekend travel
- Swiss Army knife or Leatherman tool
- Games (e.g., Scrabble, Uno, or cards)
- A small photo album with pictures from your life in the U.S., such as your American house, seasonal photos, and places you have visited
- Souvenirs from home to give as gifts (e.g., magazines, coins, postcards, stamps, cool pens, flat/small gifts, etc. that are easy to carry)
- Durable water bottle and insulated bottle (for coffee, e.g., Thermos, Klean Kanteen, Hydro Flask) that are easily washable
- Contact information for resources in America (former employers, school loan information, colleges, organizations, etc.), which can be useful for obtaining materials during service or for applying for jobs near the end of service
- Teaching materials from the U.S. (for TCCS Volunteers), or wait and ask folks to mail things later when you know what you need
- Access to some U.S. funds, for vacation or must-have purchases

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

Family

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

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

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

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

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

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

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Brian Persse Desk Officer	ext. 1184 Thailand@peacecorps.gov	202.692.1184
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.544.1802
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704