

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

Turkmenistan



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS

June 2011



A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Peace Corps Trainee:

Congratulations! I am very pleased that you have been invited to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Turkmenistan! I and the rest of the staff of Peace Corps/Turkmenistan look forward to accompanying you on the journey you are about to embark on. I am sure that we will learn much together and that we will have a profound and rewarding experience.

The Peace Corps staff and our partners in the Ministries of Education, Health, and Foreign Affairs anticipate your arrival and look forward to working with you. The staff of the health facilities to which you will be assigned, your host families, and many others throughout Turkmenistan also look forward to your arrival. Volunteers here have a significant impact on the lives of those they serve. You will find the Turkmen people to be warm and welcoming.

While I am confident that you will feel welcome here, I also know that Turkmenistan presents some unique challenges. This *Welcome Book* is designed to give you a balanced view of life and work in Turkmenistan, as well as an overview of Peace Corps/Turkmenistan's policies. It should help you examine some of the challenges you are likely to face and help you meet them. The Peace Corps/Turkmenistan staff is committed to providing support and will help you develop the tools you need to make your service a success.

Although many significant social, cultural, and economic changes are happening in Turkmenistan, those changes are most apparent in the capital city, Ashgabat. Change in rural areas is much slower and tradition and bureaucracy slow process of change there, which can be frustrating and can create challenges for Volunteers. But

the work you will be doing is very important and I'm sure that you, like most of the Volunteers who have served in Turkmenistan, will learn to be effective by working within the cultural context of your work and community. Some of you will be assigned to communities in which you will be the first Americans people have met. Others in your group will follow previous Volunteers and build on the work they have started and the relationships they have made. In all cases, your work will be challenging and sometimes frustrating. With persistence, good humor, and sincerity in your work, however, your service in Turkmenistan will be a rewarding and life-changing experience.

Our training team has developed a comprehensive pre-service training program that will provide you with the technical, cross-cultural, and language skills you need to be an effective development professional in Turkmenistan.

Sincerely,

Earl Wall

Country Director

Peace Corps/Turkmenistan

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CORE EXPECTATIONS

FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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/TURKMENISTAN HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan borders Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. While it may seem that the southeastern part of Turkmenistan is uncomfortably close to Afghanistan, trainees and Volunteers should know that during the ongoing military action in Afghanistan, there have been no troop movements or unusual military or clandestine activities on the Turkmen-Afghan border. The passage between the two nations is difficult, with a terrain consisting of inhospitable desert plateaus, and the area remains safe. The people of Turkmenistan have always had a warm and friendly attitude toward the Peace Corps, and there have been no signs of negative attitudes toward foreigners, including Americans, during the war in Afghanistan. In a policy statement regarding the war, the Turkmen president insisted that his country was neutral and would not get involved in any type of military action.

Some visitors are also concerned about the war in Iraq, which is near the region but does not boarder Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan prizes its neutrality and has no alliances with Iraq, so events there have not had, and are not likely to have, an effect on Turkmenistan or its policies.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: TURKMENISTAN AT A GLANCE

History

The former Soviet Union was once home to almost 60 million Muslims—the fifth largest Muslim population in the world. Most of that population now lives in the Soviet Union’s five former

Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan—which are the most isolated and least known of the 12 countries that make up the loose federation known as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

For centuries, the area that includes Turkmenistan was known as Turkestan, a vast territory half the size of the continental United States, which was part of a rich center of world trade. Caravans loaded with silks from Turkey and spices from China and India followed the Silk Road on their way to Asia Minor and Europe. The splendor of the area's art and architecture was impressive. H.G. Wells, in his book *Outline of History*, noted that in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., the region that now makes up Turkmenistan and Afghanistan was more advanced than parts of Western Europe.

With few natural boundaries, Turkestan was the target of a multitude of invaders, including Persian, Greek, Parthian, Chinese, Mongol, and Russian armies and bands of Turkic nomads. The Turkic invaders established a lasting presence and contributed to the building of nomadic and sedentary empires.

Long before the first raids by the Turkic tribes, and at least a millennium B.C., Iranian nomads settled in the region's river valleys to raise food crops and, later, cotton. In an area of little rainfall, irrigation was introduced early on, forming oases in the desert. As Chinese merchants passed through the area, they taught the Central Asian inhabitants to dig wells and provided them with iron for early metalworking industries. Knowledge of glassmaking came from the Roman Empire.

By the end of the 15th century, Central Asia was losing its prestige as an important trade route. Tribal feuds, economic decay, and Vasco da Gama's discovery of a seaway from Europe to India and China contributed to the collapse of trade in Central Asia. By the mid-16th century, Muscovite Russia, led by Ivan the Terrible,

began its expansion eastward and southward, controlling the region for the next 400 years. The Turkic nomads came to accept the Russian presence and eventually formed a truce with the Russians. They began to be educated in Russian schools and to serve in the czarist army, some rising high in rank. Still, some tribal leaders formed treaties of allegiance with Chinese and other Central Asian rulers and were undeterred from attacking Russian settlers who moved onto their soil. The struggle for political control of Central Asia continued through the 19th century. England, for example, realizing Russia's threat to its power in India, fought to gain favor with Central Asia's khans (rulers). While England eventually lost Central Asia, Russia never reached India.

After Russia absorbed Central Asia in the 19th century, the region, still called Turkestan but diminished in size, was governed by the czars as a single colony. Islam flourished and Turkestan intellectuals sought to reform their societies to make them competitive in the modern world. Foreign and domestic newspapers in Turkic languages, for example, circulated freely, encouraging a new ethnic awareness. This rebirth was cut short after 1917.

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, the Turkic people, believing they had been liberated from Russian oppression, applied for autonomy. It was denied, triggering rebellions and guerrilla warfare in the south. In 1918, at the height of the turmoil, a secret conference of the resistance mobilized local forces and declared a new state, the Turkestan Independent Islamic Republic. But the new republic never had a chance against Russian troops, and when the uprising was finally suppressed in 1925, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin moved quickly to prevent further pan-Islamic or pan-Turkic threats to communism. Turkestan was carved up, somewhat arbitrarily, into the five Central Asian republics, and the name disappeared from maps.

Turkmenistan was a relatively neglected republic under the Soviets, which made few investments in industry or infrastructure. Turkmen were also underrepresented in the leading ranks of the Communist Party. In the late 1950s, some Turkmen leaders called for more representation in the top posts, but Moscow responded by disbanding their party. Despite persecution, repression, and attempts by the Soviet regime to eradicate or distort past achievements, the Central Asians clung to their traditions and way of life.

Turkmenistan formally declared its independence from the Soviet Union on October 27, 1991, the 67th anniversary of the founding of the country, and it joined the CIS on December 21, 1991.

Government

The current political structure of Turkmenistan was set by President Saparmurat Niyazov, who led the country from independence in 1991 until his death in December 2006. President Niyazov, known as Turkmenbashi ("father of Turkmen"), cultivated Turkmen nationalism through the promotion of Turkmen language and the publication the *Ruhnama*, a book recounting Turkmen history and culture. Turkmenistan is officially recognized by the United Nations as a neutral state, and remains an oasis of relative stability in a region of social and ethnic unrest.

In February, 2007 Gurbanguly Berdimuhammedov was installed as president of Turkmenistan. Since he assumed the presidency, he has sought to strengthen relationships with neighboring countries, instituted improvements in the educational system, and begun a process of liberalization of the society by legalizing opposition political parties and allowing greater access to the Internet. In September 2009, President Berdimuhammedov visited the United States and addressed the United Nation's General Assembly.

Turkmenistan and the United States began developing political ties early on after its independence. President George H. W. Bush recognized the independence of Turkmenistan in December 1991, and formal diplomatic relations were established in late February 1992. The government of Turkmenistan has been a supporter of Peace Corps since the first Volunteer group arrived in September 1993. In April 1998, the President of Turkmenistan visited the United States in an official capacity, opening the doors for economic and cultural cooperation and understanding.

Economy

Turkmenistan has a centrally controlled “command” economy, and in the past several years, there has been only limited progress toward a market economy. The country has vast natural resources, and its economy is based primarily on natural gas and oil, which it sells primarily to Ukraine and Russia. However, it is forced to sell these at below world-market prices because of a lack of infrastructure needed to sell and transport these resources to other places. Other alternative pipeline plans are being studied and have recently gained favor with, and agreement from, the Turkmen government.

Recently, the country has also started growing wheat. While individual farmers have small plots of land for growing vegetables, government mandates require them to grow cotton and wheat for sale to the state.

Many daily necessities are subsidized by the government. Household gas, electricity, water and salt are free (based on minimum levels of consumption), and each farm cooperative worker has been entitled to a gift of five hectares of land. Unfortunately, the funding for these subsidies has dwindled to almost nothing because of a lack of sales revenue. An average Turkmen earns an equivalent of about \$212-\$240 U.S. dollars per month. As of January 1, 2010, Turkmenistan officially changed its currency, called Manat. There are 1,5,10, 20, 50, and 100 Manat

bank notes with a set exchange rate of 2.843 to \$1.00 (U.S.). The new Manat is worth 5,000 of the old Manat and in many markets, especially outside of Ashgabat, prices are still quoted in old Manat.

People and Culture

According to 2005 estimates, there are approximately 4.9 million people in Turkmenistan, the least populated of the Central Asian republics. The largest ethnic group is the Turkmen, constituting 77 percent of the total population. The three main minority groups are Russians, Uzbeks, and Kazakhs. There are also smaller numbers of Tatars, Ukrainians, Azeris, Armenians, and Baluchis (from areas of Iran and Pakistan).

Russians and Turkmen reside mainly in the southern and central regions of the country, while Uzbeks predominate in the east and northeast. In the west, there is a mix of Armenians, Azeris, Russians, and Turkmen. Turkmen are divided into five regional tribes that roughly correspond to the five Provinces (or Welayats), a division that is reflected in the design of the nation's flag.

The Turkmen are descendants of the Oghuz tribes who migrated to Central Asia around the 10th century A.D. By the 15th century, they had emerged as a distinct ethnic group, but were divided by tribal loyalties and territorial divisions. A strong sense of tribal loyalty remains today and is reinforced by different dialects. The three largest tribes are the Tekke in central Turkmenistan, the Ersary in the southeast, and the Yomud in the north and west.

Of the two primary cultural groups in Turkmenistan, the Russian population is a bit more Western in dress, lifestyle, and attitudes. Many Russian women, for example, wear Western-style clothing and makeup. The Turkmen population generally has a more traditional lifestyle, and the women wear long dresses, often with embroidered front pieces, and head scarves.

Even though boys and girls go to school together, the social life of an unmarried Turkmen woman is tightly controlled. Both men and women are allowed to choose their spouses to a degree, but they usually must be from the same tribe and meet the approval of the couple's parents. In the past, Turkmen families tended to be large, with four to six (or more) children, whereas Russian families rarely had more than two children. Recent data for Turkmen families indicate that the average is now three children.

Turkmen are friendly and warm people, though they may appear at first reserved on the surface. Volunteers enjoy both Turkmen and Russian hospitality and are intrigued by the differences in cultures.

Environment

Turkmenistan is dry with a desert terrain. Fortunately, most cities have trees and are quite green in spring and summer. There are four distinct seasons: winters can be snowy and cold with bitter winds; summer temperatures can reach as high as 130 degrees Fahrenheit (with low humidity); and spring and fall are rainy but pleasant.

In the wintertime, buildings often either have no heat or seem to be overheated—energy conservation is currently not an important issue. Central air conditioning does not exist in Turkmenistan, but many people purchase room-size air conditioner or small electric fans.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Turkmenistan and to connect you to returned Volunteers and other invitees. Please keep in mind that although we try to make sure all these links are active and current, we 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 experience, including comments by those who were unhappy with their choice to serve in the Peace Corps. These opinions are not those of the Peace Corps or the U.S. government, and we hope you will keep in mind that no two people experience their service in the same way.

General Information About Turkmenistan

www.countrywatch.com/

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in the TurkmenistanAshgabat to how to convert from the dollar to the TurkmenistanManat. Just click on Turkmenistan and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.state.gov

The State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find **Turkmenistan** and learn more about its social and political

history. You can also go to the site's international travel section to check on conditions that may affect your safety.

www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm

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

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

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

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

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

www.worldinformation.com

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

**Connect With Returned Volunteers
and Other Invitees**

www.rpcv.org

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

<http://www.friendsofturkmenistan.org/Members.html>

<http://www.rpcvwebring.org>

This site is known as the returned Peace Corps Volunteer Web ring. Browse the Web ring and see what former Volunteers are saying about their service.

www.peacecorpswriters.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites about Turkmenistan

www.eurasianet.org/turkmenistan.project/

The “Turkmenistan Project” is a website managed by the Open Society Institute. This site provides a weekly analysis of news and events in Turkmenistan.

www.turkmenistanembassy.org

The official website of the Turkmenistan Embassy in Washington, D.C.

www.turkmenistan.usembassy.gov/

Site of the U.S. Embassy in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, which contains links to other sites.

Recommended Books

1. Brummel, Paul. *Turkmenistan: The Bradt Travel Guide*. Bradt Travel Guides, 2006.
2. Edgar, Adrienne Lynn. *Tribal Nation: The Making of Soviet Turkmenistan*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004.
3. Hopkirk, Peter. *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*. New York: Kodansha International, 1992.
4. Kropf, John W. *Unknown Sands: Journeys Around the World's Most Isolated Country*. Dusty Spark Publishing, 2006.
5. Heron, Joan, Chai Budesh. *Anyone for Tea?* Baltimore, Md.: PublishAmerica, 2008.
6. Marozzi, Justin. *Tamerlane: Sword of Islam, Conqueror of the World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 2004.
7. Maslow, Jonathan. *Sacred Horses: The*

Memoirs of a Turkmen Cowboy. New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1994. 8. Niyazov, Saparmurat Turkmenbashy. *Rukhnama: Reflections on the Spiritual Values of the Turkmen*. Ashgabat: State Publishing Service Turkmenistan, 2001.

9. Remnick, David. *Lenin's Tomb: The Last Days of Soviet Empire*. New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1994. 10.

Stevens, Stuart. *Night Train to Turkistan: Modern Adventures Along China's Ancient Silk Road*. New York, N.Y.: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1988.

11. Thubron, Colin. *The Lost Heart of Asia*. New York, N.Y.: Harper Perennial, 1995

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 1960's*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.

5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thompsen, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

VALUABLE TIP: BOOKS—EVEN PAPERBACKS—ARE HEAVY, AND AS YOU START TO PACK, YOU WILL SOON KNOW THE VALUE OF AN OUNCE. PICK ONLY ONE OR TWO OF THESE BOOKS FOR YOUR JOURNEY. THEN COPY THESE BIBLIOGRAPHY PAGES, CIRCLE WHAT ELSE YOU WANT TO READ, AND LEAVE THE PAGES BEHIND WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS A GIFT WISH LIST. THE PEACE CORPS/TURKMENISTAN OFFICE ALSO HAS A LARGE LIBRARY OF BOOKS LEFT BY PREVIOUS VOLUNTEERS.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail: Few countries in the world offer the level of postal service considered normal in the United States. Mail has taken as few as two or three weeks to arrive in Turkmenistan, but it can take longer, especially around holidays. Some mail may simply not arrive. However, postal service has improved immensely in the past couple of years.

Your address while you are a trainee (your first 10 weeks in-country) will be:

“Your Name,” PCT
U.S. Peace Corps/Turkmenistan
PO Box 258, Krugozor
Central Post Office
Ashgabat, 744000
TURKMENISTAN

During training, your mail will arrive at the Peace Corps office and be delivered to you by the training staff. During your first few months in-country the absence of mail may be discouraging, so you might want to suggest that family and friends write to you even before you leave the United States.

Once you are assigned to your permanent site, you may have mail sent directly there or you may continue to have mail sent to the Peace Corps office if you wish. For larger items, padded envelopes are safer than boxes. Note that it is standard procedure for packages to be opened and inspected at the central post office. Therefore, we recommend that you not have irreplaceable or valuable items sent to you, as they can mysteriously disappear in transit.

Volunteers and staff traveling back home often offer to hand-carry letters to be mailed once they arrive in the United States, so you may want to bring a supply of U.S. stamps. While this is a great way to deal with the uncertainty of international mail service, you should not rely on this method, as it is a favor and your mail could sit for weeks in the Peace Corps office.

We strongly encourage you to write to your family regularly. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from Volunteers, so advise family and friends that mail service is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters or e-mail regularly. If a serious problem were to occur, the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services in Washington, D.C., would notify your family.

You may also want to advise your family and friends to number their letters or packages sequentially for tracking purposes (this will help you tell if any are missing, though they may arrive out of order). They should write "Airmail" and "Par Avion" on their envelopes.

Telephones: Long-distance communication via telephone is available but can be unreliable and expensive. Although Turkmenistan has direct-dial overseas access in some areas, in some international calls (except those to other CIS countries) still must be booked through an operator. If you are calling from outside Ashgabat, it may take longer to get a line and your conversation may be cut off after 15 minutes or so. The current rate for calls to America is approximately \$3.90 per minute. It is important for your family and friends to know that they should not always be able to reach you by phone quickly. Communicating by landline telephones within Turkmenistan may also be difficult at times, but is possible.

Almost all Volunteers now use a cell phone. Many cellphones purchased in the States don't work in Turkmenistan. If your phone came as part of a plan, it probably won't work here. A basic Nokia

cellphone can be purchased here for about \$60 U.S. dollars and a SIM card costs about \$10. Airtime is prepaid.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access: Peace

Corps/Turkmenistan has four computers with Internet access solely for use by Volunteers and for limited use by trainees. Prior to being given access, Volunteers must sign a statement agreeing to abide by all rules and regulations governing the use of Peace Corps computers. Although the Peace Corps does not provide email accounts for Volunteers, you can set up free accounts with providers such as Yahoo!, Hotmail or Gmail. The Internet service is slow at the Peace Corps office and it may not be possible to upload pictures or videos on Facebook or send pictures via email.

Internet cafés with faster service are popping up in major cities in Turkmenistan. Some Volunteers will have weekly access to Internet cafés but many will only have limited access, for example once a month. It is a good idea to explain this to your family and friends so they do not worry if they do not hear from you often.

Housing and Site Location

Peace Corps/Turkmenistan requires that Volunteers live with host families for the first three months of service to better understand the cultural context within which they are living and working. Host families receive some training in safety and security for Volunteers and in issues of American diversity and values. Any change in host family or a move to an apartment or home after the required host family stay must meet Peace Corps safety and security standards and be approved by your Program Manager in advance. In some communities, it may not be culturally appropriate to live alone, particularly for women (of any age).

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is based on the premise that Volunteers are safest and most effective when they are fully integrated into their communities and have gained the trust and respect of the local people. Before making site assignments, the

Peace Corps considers site-specific information, input from host country sponsors (i.e., local schools, hospitals, or health facility directors), and trainees' skills, abilities, and special concerns (e.g., medical, health, and safety). This careful matching process aims to place Volunteers at the sites most in need of their type of assistance in the hope that this will result in a positive, rewarding experience for both Volunteers and the people of Turkmenistan. The Program Manager and Program Assistant are responsible for finding initial housing for Volunteers in coordination with host country site supervisors.

Living Allowance and Money Management

Volunteers receive four types of allowances. When you become a Volunteer, you will receive a one-time settling-in allowance in local currency that is roughly equal to one month's living allowance. It covers the cost of buying basic household items for your permanent site.

You will also receive a monthly living allowance in local currency, deposited regularly in a local bank account, to cover food, utilities, household supplies, clothing, recreation and entertainment, transportation, reading materials, and other incidentals. The amount of the living allowance is based on the local economy at your site and may vary by region. The amount is reviewed at least once a year through a market survey to ensure that it is adequate. While in some cases you may find that you receive more remuneration than your host country counterpart or supervisor, it is Peace Corps' intent that Volunteers live within similar means as ordinary local people.

You will receive a vacation allowance of \$24 per month of service. Finally, you will receive a quarterly travel allowance to cover the cost of transportation, lodging, and meals while traveling for official purposes (including program-related travel, medical travel, and travel to required trainings and Peace Corps events). The amount is established by the Director of Management

and Operations and is site and event-specific. Some extraordinary expenses above this allowance may be reimbursed on an individual basis.

Most Volunteers live comfortably in Turkmenistan with these four allowances. Volunteers are strongly discouraged from supplementing their income with money brought from home, as they are expected to live at the economic level of their neighbors and colleagues. However, many Volunteers do bring money to spend while they are on vacation and, as there are many interesting places to visit in the region, you may want to consider this. Others, however, make it a point of pride to take modest vacations their hard-earned vacation allowance.

Credit cards generally cannot be used in Turkmenistan (except, for instance, when purchasing airline tickets from foreign carriers or for getting a cash advance at the Turkmen Central Bank), but they are handy for vacation travel outside Turkmenistan. Another option to consider is a pre-paid debit card for use during travel. Traveler's checks cannot be cashed in Turkmenistan at this time.

All Volunteers set up local bank accounts either in the capital or at the branch nearest their site.

Food and Diet

Staple foods are available throughout the year. Imported foods are increasingly common, though they may not be the American or European brands you are used to and they are expensive.

Chicken, eggs, and milk are available but somewhat expensive. Meat can always be found, and fish is fairly common. Sour cream and locally made white cheese are available in most markets. Imported cheeses and ice-cream are becoming more widely available, but are costly. You will find an abundance of fresh fruits and vegetables, such as melons, grapes, pomegranates, and the ubiquitous eggplants, in the summer and fall. In the winter, you can generally find potatoes, cabbages, carrots, onions,

spinach, garlic, apples, mandarins, oranges, and peanuts. Tomatoes, cucumbers, and bananas are also available in the winter, but are expensive. Grains, nuts, and dried fruits (e.g., apricots and raisins) are always available, as are fresh herbs like red basil, mint, chives, dill, cilantro, and parsley. Markets in more rural areas tend to offer fewer items year-round than do markets in cities.

The traditional Turkmen and Russian diets rely heavily on rice, meat, and fat. Breakfast usually consists of tea, bread, and maybe butter or homemade jam. Dinner is usually the largest meal of the day. Schools serve inexpensive snacks to students and faculty.

Commonly served beverages include hot tea (both black and green), mineral water, compote (boiled and preserved fruit juice), and alcohol (i.e., vodka, cognac, beer, and locally produced wine). Champagne is often served on festive occasions. Some western-style beverages such as Coca-Cola, Coke-Lite, Fanta, and high-quality boxed juices are available.

Strict vegetarians may have difficulties adhering to their diet while in Turkmenistan because of the heavy reliance on animal products in the local diet and because of the constant social pressure to eat—and eat a lot. Your host family, for example, may be hurt if you refuse to eat their food. In addition, the meaning of vegetarianism often is not understood. Do not be surprised to hear someone say, for example, that a soup is “vegetarian” even though it was made with a meat broth or that a rice dish is suitable for a vegetarian because it was prepared with less meat on top.

You will have to take charge of your diet within the context of your host family’s expectations, for instance buying more fruits and vegetables. (This applies to all Volunteers, since most Turkmen do not share American views of what constitutes a healthy diet.) The Peace Corps/Turkmenistan staff can help explain your situation to your host family and can help you develop a strategy for maintaining your diet.

Transportation

There are a variety of transportation options in Turkmenistan. One benefit is that the national airline is subsidized, thus allowing people to fly to most major cities in Turkmenistan for about \$20, one-way. However, because of the limited Peace Corps stipend, most Volunteers take trains, taxis, buses, or marshrutkas (minivans) to travel from one city to another. On the whole, public buses are adequate and very inexpensive. Likewise, taxis are affordable and readily available. For your safety, Peace Corps recommends that you carefully determine the safety of the vehicles in which you ride as many vehicles are old and in disrepair. Guidance will be provided during your pre-service training on how to do this.

Geography and Climate

Turkmenistan is situated in the southwest of Central Asia. It is located north of the Kopet Dag Mountains, between the Caspian Sea in the west and the Amu Darya River in the east. Turkmenistan borders Uzbekistan in the north and east, Kazakhstan in the northwest, Iran in the south, and Afghanistan in the southeast. Slightly larger than California, the country has an area of 195,200 square miles (488,100 square kilometers).

The entire central region (four-fifths of the country) consists of the Kara Kum Desert, one of the largest sand deserts in the world. Its major rivers are the Amu Darya (aka Oxus), which flows north through the eastern region of the republic and empties into the Aral Sea; and the Murghap, which flows south into Afghanistan. The Kara Kum Canal, whose construction began in 1954, carries water from the Amu Darya to arid central and western regions that have no significant natural waterways. The canal is one of the main factors contributing to low water levels in the Aral Sea.

The average temperature in January is 25 degrees Fahrenheit (-4 degrees Celsius). The average temperature in July is 104 F (40 C), and can reach as high as 130 F (50 C) in southeastern Kara Kum. Precipitation is slight throughout much of the country, with

average rainfall ranging from only 3.2 inches (80 mm) in the northwest to about 12 inches (300 mm) in mountainous regions. Most rain falls in the winter and spring, so the hot summer months are dry.

Social Activities

Social life is quiet in Turkmenistan, though there are a fair number of bars, cafes, and restaurants in Ashgabat. While the places frequented by the small expatriate community in the capital are well above the means of Peace Corps Volunteers, local establishments are reasonably priced. There are a few theaters in the capital that present live plays and folklore productions. A few cinemas and a few DVD bars exist in Ashgabat and some other cities, and they sometimes show Western films dubbed into Russian. There are currently no English language cinemas anywhere in Turkmenistan. While drinking is permitted in Turkmenistan, public drunkenness is illegal. Some Volunteers will find the issue of alcohol consumption to be one of the most difficult to come to terms with during their time here. The people of Turkmenistan lose respect for those who become loud and obnoxious under the influence of alcohol. The Peace Corps also has strict policies about alcohol consumption.

Outside the capital, night life is more limited. The people of Turkmenistan find entertainment mostly through private parties in their homes. Their hospitality is genuine, and you will be invited to many homes after you become known in your community. Special occasions such as birthdays are often celebrated with lavish dinners. Some Volunteers have found it challenging dealing with the constant pressure to consume food and alcohol (usually vodka or cognac) at social events, including meetings with work supervisors and counterparts.

Because of the lack of Western-style diversions, many Volunteers become prolific readers or take up hobbies. The Peace

Corps/Turkmenistan office has a large library of English-language books left by past Volunteers, and book, music and video exchanges and referrals are a Volunteer tradition.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

The people of Turkmenistan take much pride in their personal appearance. To gain the acceptance, respect, and confidence of Turkmen co-workers, it is essential that you dress and conduct yourself professionally, whether at your workplace or visiting the Peace Corps office. Dress standards for foreign aid workers are generally conservative and modest. Women are expected to wear casual skirts or dresses at work (except during physical labor) and men are expected to wear long trousers for activities other than sports or labor. Everyone's shoes are always shined and their clothing ironed.

Out of respect for the Turkmen people and culture, Volunteers are not allowed to display body (except earrings) piercings (including nose, tongue, eyebrow, and navel rings) and tattoos during their service. Men are not allowed to wear earrings or have long hair or ponytails. If you do not remove your body rings and cut your hair before you arrive in Turkmenistan, you will be asked to do so before we place you with a host family during training. Adhering to these rules is a test of your motivation and commitment to adapting to your new culture. If you have reservations about adhering to them, you should consider the level of flexibility required to be a successful Volunteer and re-evaluate your decision to serve in Turkmenistan.

It is not Peace Corps' intention to be unnecessarily controlling, but it is necessary that you understand that how you behave and dress will not only influence the local people's attitude toward you, but reflect on both the United States and the Peace Corps. You can lose respect in the workplace by acting or dressing inappropriately in the Turkmenistan culture. Because communication in the local culture tends to be indirect, it may be unlikely that you will be told when they think you are acting or

dressing inappropriately or doing something wrong. Reactions may come in more subtle ways, such as lack of consideration for your ideas, mistrust of your professional abilities, or excluding you from certain activities.

You will receive an orientation to appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest and, thus, must be sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of your hosts. You need to be aware that any behavior that jeopardizes the Peace Corps' mission in Turkmenistan or your personal safety cannot be tolerated and can lead to "administrative separation," which is a decision by the Peace Corps to terminate your service. The *Volunteer Handbook* contains more information about the grounds for administrative separation. The balance of one's habits and preferences in the US with practices necessary for acceptance in Turkmenistan constitutes the challenge that marks a successful Volunteer.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the "Health Care and Safety" chapter, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the *Volunteer Handbook*, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture, and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Turkmenistan Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help you reduce your risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Turkmenistan. Using these tools, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

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

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

Rewards and Frustrations

Although the potential for job satisfaction in Turkmenistan is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. Because of financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies do not always provide the support they promised. In addition, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old, just because they are recommended by a foreigner. Some of the factors that could contribute to apparent low levels of motivation on the part of some Volunteer counterparts involve difficulties with the government or local police, which tends to view foreigners with suspicion. It can often be difficult to get permission for even simple projects and counterparts may be hesitant to be seen as contributing too eagerly to projects of which their supervisors may disapprove. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your

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

Because Turkmenistan was once a Soviet Republic, authorities seem to have carried over some of the practices of monitoring and restricting the movements of people. For example, in 2009 several Turkmen students were refused exit visas to attend the American University in Bulgaria. This was very frustrating for some Volunteers, as among them were students they had tutored. There are several border regions of the country that are considered "restricted" areas. All foreign visitors to these areas must obtain a special visa for entry. If a Volunteer has a desire to travel to a restricted area, Peace Corps staff will assist him or her in obtaining a visa. If Volunteers are away from their sites for more than three days, they must report their whereabouts to the local migration officials. Volunteers must also get permission from the government if they plan to travel with five or more fellow Volunteers. Volunteers need to report overnights away from their site to their Counterparts, host family, and the Peace Corps office itself. While these restrictions are often frustrating to navigate, it is important to note that authorities do not restrict the movements of the Volunteers they simply want to know about them.

To overcome these difficulties, you will need maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Turkmen are hospitable, friendly, and warm people. The Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge as well as in moments of success. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Turkmenistan feeling that they have gained much more than they gave during their

service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful Volunteer.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

The primary goal of pre-service training is to prepare you for the first three to six months of Volunteer service. By the end of training, you will not be fluent in Turkmen, or understand everything you want to know about your primary assignment, but you will have enough knowledge and skills to get started. Pre-service training is designed to help you meet challenges as they arise and adapt to unanticipated occurrences. During training, you will also receive important information regarding administrative aspects of Volunteer service, such as financial matters and Peace Corps policies.

Community-based training facilitates your integration into your community and work by helping you learn cultural adaptation skills, begin to develop good working relationships with host country colleagues, to be safe, and to gain the skills needed to carry out your projects and activities independently. You will be given many opportunities to demonstrate your skills during training so you can see and evaluate your progress. Training is not only preparation, however. Community-based training allows you to begin living as Turkmen live, and will give you experiences with a family and in a community with which to compare your later assignment. As a trainee, you are required to attend all training sessions; optional events, such as certain outings, parties, and specially called meetings, will be clearly stated as such.

Your input and your commitment to participate and study are critical. Experiential and self-directed learning, as well as other principles of adult learning, are the key elements of pre-service training. You, your fellow trainees, and trainers will have input into the weekly training agenda based on your individual and group training needs. You will be encouraged to facilitate and lead sessions, will work side by side with current Volunteers and host country counterparts to learn from their knowledge and experiences, and will engage in self-study and one-on-one

tutorials. You will also go on field visits and meet with representatives of the ministries, health facilities, schools, and donor organizations appropriate to your assignment. Midway through training, you will meet the person you will work with at your assigned site and visit the site with this counterpart.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Turkmenistan 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, Turkmenistan 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 for Health Volunteers will include health-related sessions, while TEFL Volunteers will learn aspects of teaching English that will enable them to modify EFL curriculum to new settings. Both sets of Volunteers will learn about the history of Turkmenistan, and approaches to development and community needs analysis. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Turkmenistan agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

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

language classes five days a week in small groups of five to seven 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 work on strategies to continue language studies during your service.

All trainees will learn Turkmen during pre-service training as it is the dominant language in the country. Some trainees may find that learning Russian or a little Uzbek will help them be more successful at their permanent sites. Peace Corps will assist you if there is a need for you to learn a second language during your service.

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Turkmenistan host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in Turkmenistan. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families, and come back to visit them during their two years in country.

Cross-cultural and community development training will help you improve your communication skills and understand your role as a facilitator of development. You will be exposed to topics such as community mobilization, conflict resolution, gender and development, nonformal and adult education strategies, and political structures.

Health Training

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

Safety Training

During the safety training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention and about your individual responsibility for promoting safety throughout your service.

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their commitment to Peace Corps service while increasing their technical and cross-cultural skills. During service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

- *In-service training: Provides an opportunity for Volunteers to upgrade their technical, language, and project development skills while sharing their experiences and reaffirming their commitment after having served for three to six months.*
- *Midterm conference (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 the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.*

The number, length, and design of these trainings are adapted to country-specific needs and conditions. The key to the training system is that training events are integrated and interrelated, from the pre-departure orientation through the end of your service, and are planned, implemented, and evaluated cooperatively by the training staff, Peace Corps staff, and Volunteers.

YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN TURKMENISTAN

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 Turkmenistan maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer, who takes care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Turkmenistan at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region or to the United States.

Health Issues in Turkmenistan

Major health problems among Volunteers in Turkmenistan are rare and are often the result of a Volunteer's not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems encountered by Volunteers include colds, diarrhea, sinus infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, STDs, adjustment disorders, and alcohol abuse. These problems may occur more frequently or be compounded by life in Turkmenistan because environmental factors in the country raise the risk of or exacerbate their severity.

The most common major infectious disease concerns in the country are tuberculosis, dysentery, hepatitis, and giardia. You will be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B; meningitis; tetanus/diphtheria; typhoid and rabies. Skin tests (PPD) for tuberculosis will also be given.

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 Turkmenistan, you will receive a medical

handbook. At the end of training, you will receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed later in this chapter.

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

You will have physicals at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem during your service, the medical officer in Turkmenistan will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Turkmenistan, 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 ...” 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 Turkmenistan is to take the following preventive measures described below.

Tuberculosis is present in the country, so it is important to stay away from people who are constantly coughing and have signs of tuberculosis infection and to regularly ventilate your room and your office. You will be given the PPD skin test at midservice and at the end of your service and any time it is indicated.

Rabies is prevalent throughout the country, so you will receive a series of immunizations when you arrive in Turkmenistan. Be wary of all unknown animals, and if you are exposed to an animal that is known to have or suspected of having rabies, inform the medical officer at once so you can receive post-exposure booster shots. Many illnesses that afflict Volunteers worldwide are entirely preventable if proper food and water precautions are taken. These illnesses include food poisoning, parasitic infections, hepatitis A, dysentery, Guinea worms, tapeworms, and typhoid fever. Your medical officer will discuss specific standards for water and food preparation in Turkmenistan during pre-service training.

As in the US, abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. You are taking risks when you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risks, 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 STDs. 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

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for

determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work in Peace Corps countries, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met.

If feminine hygiene products are not available for you to purchase on the local market, the Peace Corps medical officer in Turkmenistan will provide them. If you require a specific product, please bring a three-month supply with you.

Note that pregnancy is also a men's health issue. Male Volunteers who father children have specific rules and guidelines to which they must adhere. Male Volunteers who father children must discuss the issue with the country director to determine the appropriate course of action regarding continuing their service. More information about this is contained in the *Peace Corps Manual*.

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

Acetaminophen 400 mg (Tylenol)

First Aid & Safety Handbook

Ibuprofen 400 mg (Advil)

Aquatabs (water purification tablets)

Multivitamins

Electrolyte tablets (replacement for rehydration)

Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)

Pepto-Bismol tablets

Ace bandages
Adhesive tape
American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook
Antacid tablets (Tums)
Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)
Band-Aids
Butterfly closures
Calamine lotion
Cepacol lozenges
Condoms
Dental floss
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)
Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)
Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Lip balm (Chapstick)
Oral rehydration salts
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)
Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)
Scissors
Sterile gauze pads
Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)
Tinactin (antifungal cream)
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

If there has been any change in your health—physical, mental, or dental—since you submitted your examination reports to the Peace Corps, you must immediately notify the Office of Medical Services. Failure to disclose new illnesses, injuries, allergies, or

pregnancy can endanger your health and may jeopardize your eligibility to serve.

If your dental exam was done more than a year ago, or if your physical exam is more than two years old, contact the Office of Medical Services to find out whether you need to update your records. If your dentist or Peace Corps dental consultant has recommended that you undergo dental treatment or repair, you must complete that work and make sure your dentist sends requested confirmation reports or X-rays to the Office of Medical Services.

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Turkmenistan. 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.

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps discourages you from using contact lenses during your service to reduce your risk of developing a serious infection or other eye disease. Most Peace Corps countries do not have appropriate water and sanitation to support eye care with the use of contact lenses. The Peace Corps will not supply or replace contact lenses or associated solutions unless an ophthalmologist has recommended their use for a specific medical condition and the Peace Corps' Office of Medical Services has given approval.

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

Safety and Security—Our Partnership

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 almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

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

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

- You communicate concerns that you have to Peace Corps staff

This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety that all include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest way possible, because working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter.

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

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

- Leave valuable objects in U.S.
- Leave copies of important documents and account numbers with someone you trust in the U.S.
- Purchase a hidden money pouch or "dummy" wallet as a decoy
- Purchase personal articles insurance

After you arrive in Turkmenistan, 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 Turkmenistan learn to:

- Choose safe routes and times for travel, and travel with someone trusted by the community whenever possible
- Make sure one's personal appearance is respectful of local customs
- Avoid high-crime areas
- Know the local language to get help in an emergency
- Make friends with local people who are respected in the community
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Turkmenistan. You can reduce your risk 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.

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

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While

the factors that contribute to your risk in Turkmenistan 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 Turkmenistan will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

Volunteers have occasionally reported instances of harassment, such as being called derogatory names, receiving overt sexual comments, and having children throw small rocks at them. Strategies for dealing with harassment are discussed during pre-service training.

Volunteers have also been targets of sexual assault in Turkmenistan. Alcohol consumption and cross-cultural differences in gender relations are often associated with sexual assaults, and the assailant is often an acquaintance of the Volunteer. Volunteers who take seriously Peace Corps/Turkmenistan's training regarding sexual assaults will minimize their risk. Volunteers are urged to report all assaults and threats of assault to the Peace Corps medical officer so that staff can respond with appropriate support. Note that sex outside of marriage is not looked upon favorably in Turkmenistan and may jeopardize both your safety and your ability to develop mutually respectful relationships in your community and at your job.

Homosexual behavior is technically illegal in Turkmenistan, and the rights of gays and lesbians are not protected under the Turkmenistan Constitution, so gay and lesbian Volunteers have to practice discretion. The Peace Corps is committed to providing support for all Volunteers regardless of sexual orientation.

Turkmenistan has a very hospitable culture, and making house visits is highly encouraged. When you are at somebody's home, the host will often offer you an alcoholic drink, usually vodka. Alcohol use impairs judgment and must be consumed responsibly. Many incidents of harassment and assault among Volunteers are related in some way to use of alcohol.

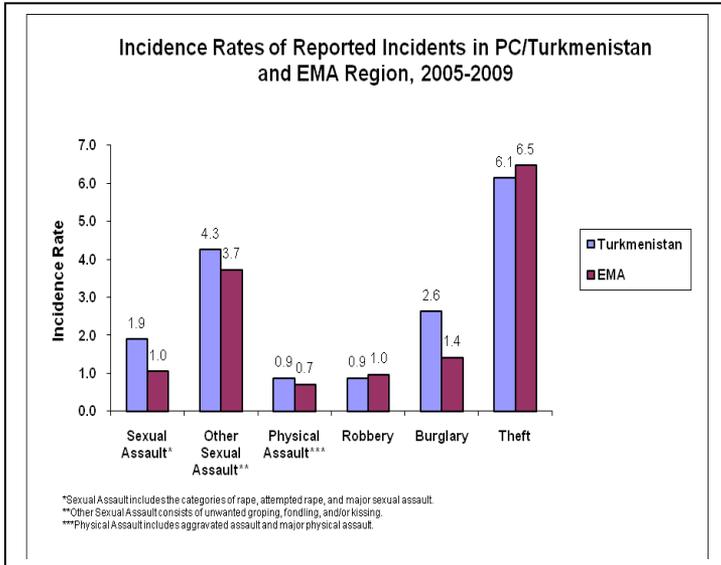
Support from Staff

If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure the Volunteer is safe and receiving medical treatment as needed. After assuring the safety of the Volunteer, Peace Corps staff response may include reassessing the Volunteer's worksite and housing arrangements and making any adjustments, as needed. In some cases, the nature of the incident may necessitate a site or housing transfer. Peace Corps staff will also assist Volunteers with preserving their rights to pursue legal sanctions against the perpetrators of the crime. It is very important that Volunteers report incidents as they occur, not only to protect their peer Volunteers, but also to preserve the future right to prosecute. Should Volunteers decide later in the process that they want to proceed with the prosecution of their assailant, this option may no longer exist if the evidence of the event has not been preserved at the time of the incident.

Crime Data for Turkmenistan

The country-specific data chart below shows the average annual rates of the major types of crimes reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Turkmenistan compared to all other **Europe, Mediterranean and Asia Region** programs as a whole. It can be understood as an approximation of the number of reported incidents per 100 Volunteers in a year.

The incidence rate for each type of crime is the number of crime events relative to the Volunteer/trainee population. It is expressed on the chart as a ratio of crime to Volunteer and trainee years (or V/T years, which is a measure of 12 full months of V/T service) to allow for a statistically valid way to compare crime data across countries.



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

If you are the victim of a serious crime, you will learn how to get to a safe location as quickly as possible and contact your Peace

Corps office. It's important that you notify Peace Corps as soon as you can so Peace Corps can provide you with the help you need.

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

Few Peace Corps Volunteers are victims of violent crimes. The Peace Corps will give you information and training in how to be safe. But, just as in the U.S., crime happens, and Volunteers can become victims. When this happens, the investigative team of the Office of Inspector General (OIG) is charged with helping pursue prosecution of those who perpetrate a violent crime against a Volunteer. If you become a victim of a violent crime, the decision to prosecute or not to prosecute is entirely yours, and one of the tasks of the OIG is to make sure that you are fully informed of your options and help you through the process and procedures involved in going forward with prosecution should you wish to do so. If you decide to prosecute, we are here to assist you in every way we can.

Crimes that occur overseas, of course, are investigated and prosecuted by local authorities in local courts. Our role is to coordinate the investigation and evidence collection with the regional security officers (RSOs) at the U.S. embassy, local police, and local prosecutors and others to ensure that your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under the laws of the country. OIG investigative staff has extensive experience in criminal investigation, in working sensitively with victims, and as advocates for victims. We also, may, in certain limited circumstances, arrange for the retention of a local lawyer to assist the local public prosecutor.

In conjunction with the RSO, the OIG does a preliminary investigation of all violent crimes against Volunteers regardless of whether the crime has been reported to local authorities or of the decision you may ultimately make to prosecute. If you are a victim of a crime, our staff will work with you through final disposition of the case. OIG staff is available 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week. We may be contacted through our 24-hour violent

crime hotline via telephone at 202.692.2911, or by e-mail at violentcrimeline@peacecorps.gov.

Volunteer Safety Support in Turkmenistan

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

The Peace Corps/Turkmenistan 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 in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

Volunteer training will include sessions on specific safety and security issues in Turkmenistan. 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/Turkmenistan'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 Turkmenistan at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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

DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES

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

Our diversity helps us accomplish that goal. In other ways, however, it poses challenges. In Turkmenistan, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyle, background, and beliefs are judged in a cultural context very different from their own.

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

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Turkmenistan, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with

these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

Overview of Diversity in Turkmenistan

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Although women in Turkmenistan work in most areas of the work force, this should not be taken as evidence of equality of the sexes, as traditional attitudes toward women prevail. The greater influence of women in the workplace has much of its roots in the Soviet system, and there has been a return to conventional roles for women since independence, especially at home and in social settings. As a female Volunteer, you will probably find that host families and colleagues will be more concerned about the hours you keep, your dress, and the friends with whom you associate (males in particular) than they will be for male colleagues. You will have to adapt to these concerns.

Volunteer Comments

“As a woman, I was a little apprehensive about serving in a Muslim country. I anticipated that being female would be a distinct disadvantage. Fortunately, this was not the case. This, in part, may have been due to the fact that I am over 50 and have a fair amount of gray hair. As an older Volunteer, I felt I had many advantages over the younger women. I felt respected by all Turkmen, from the smallest children to the village elders. I know that the younger female Volunteers had more problems. While in training, the ‘fresh out of college’ Volunteers were frequently harassed by schoolboys. The boys would throw rocks at the younger trainees, follow them, and taunt them as they walked home from our training.”

“I believe being a female Volunteer in Turkmenistan is more difficult than being a male Volunteer. The challenge lies in the societal gender roles and double standards, but along with the challenge are great rewards. I lived in a small village and enforced self-imposed limits on contact with men. As a result, I formed very deep bonds with the women of my community. They would talk, share, laugh, and confide in me about health problems, spousal abuse, and drugs. I say ‘self-imposed’ limits because, as an American, I was not expected to conform to the same rules and roles as local women. But I found that by doing so, I was better able to integrate into my community. Traditional Turkmen culture is nowhere near as strict as the culture of their neighbors to the south. Women don’t cover their faces, they go to school, and they work. Despite being a woman, my host mother was a very strong and influential person in the community. The director of my house of health (clinic) was a woman doctor. Two of the three doctors at my workplace were women.”

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Homosexuality is not generally accepted in Turkmenistan. Although there undoubtedly are homosexuals and bisexuals in the country, there is no visible gay community, and finding local gays

who live openly is unlikely. If you are accustomed to being open about your sexual orientation, you should be prepared for some feelings of isolation at home and in the workplace. The Peace Corps/Turkmenistan staff is prepared to do all it can to provide support to homosexual and bisexual Volunteers.

Volunteer Comments

“Gay and lesbian Volunteers seem to have difficulties because they miss being with other gays and lesbians. Turkmenistan has gays, of course, but they are much more discreet than American gays. I lived in a rural village and was pleased that during conversations with the female nurses in my clinic, they all acknowledged that there are gay and lesbian Turkmen. As in America not too long ago, Turkmen gays and lesbians tend to be ‘in the closet.’ Volunteers in the cities have a better chance of meeting people who are more accepting of different lifestyles.”

“There is a small gay community in the capital. Their lifestyle is very secretive and they keep to themselves. I’ve decided to not associate with them to avoid raising suspicion. Everyone seemed to know one another, and gossip travels quickly.”

“Living a ‘white lie’ is, unfortunately, a part of everyday life here. In the beginning, the idea of not completely sharing my life with host country nationals appeared to be something I could tolerate. However, as time passes, I have started to build close friendships and would prefer to share my life with my friends on a more personal level. To avoid rejection and social problems in my village, I have chosen to keep my lifestyle to myself. And to put a stop to the constant questions about my love life (everyone wants to know why someone in his mid-20s has not married yet), I have begun to say that a close Volunteer friend of mine is really my girlfriend. This has put a stop to uncomfortable questions.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

As a disabled Volunteer in Turkmenistan, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. In Turkmenistan, as in other parts of the world, some people may hold prejudicial attitudes about individuals with disabilities and may discriminate against them. Furthermore, there is little of the infrastructure to accommodate individuals with disabilities that has been developed in the United States.

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

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

Most of the population is Sunni Muslim. Though Islam is widely practiced, there is significantly less of a fundamentalist influence in the country than in some other Islamic countries. Consumption of alcohol is common and Turkmen are not as strict as other Muslims in observing daily prayers and religious holidays, though pilgrimages to religious sites are common. Islam in Turkmenistan also features elements of Sufi mysticism and shamanism. In June 1991, the Turkmen Supreme Soviet adopted a Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations, and the Constitution declares the country a secular society. However, the only two religions that are openly practiced are Islam and Russian Orthodox. There are no Protestant churches, Catholic churches or synagogues in Turkmenistan. Volunteers need to remember that discussions about religion could be problematic and that proselytizing of any kind is strictly against Peace Corps policy.

Volunteer Comment

“Turkmen people are proudly Muslim, but they are not strict in the practice of it. People seem to be free to choose how religious (praying five times a day, fasting during Ramadan) or nonreligious (drinking vodka and eating pork) they want to be. No one ever tried to convert me to Islam, except in jest. I am a practicing Christian, and I wore a gold cross every day during my service. Most people were less concerned with it being a cross than being gold. Turkmen are familiar with Christianity through the Russians and Armenians who live in Turkmenistan. I never had to explain my beliefs and my community had no problem with me actively practicing my beliefs. On Christmas and Easter, I tried to be around other Volunteers.”

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

There is a great respect for age in Turkmenistan. In the workplace, everybody is likely to ask you for your opinion. You may receive less harassment in the streets than younger colleagues and at meetings or on a public bus people will often offer you a seat. They will also offer to carry things for you. Members of your host family may try to do your laundry, cooking, or cleaning. To avoid an “overload” of respect, you will need to be flexible and understanding of local cultural norms while also demonstrating that you are an independent person who is willing and able to contribute to various tasks.

Volunteer Comments

“My life in Turkmenistan is totally different from the younger Volunteers’ lives. I can remember my host family saying that I was not a ‘girl’ but a ‘mama.’ They treated me with such regard, kindness, and love. The children in the family were told to watch and take care of me, that I was the ‘grandmama.’ And because I

was older, I was invited to do things that the younger Volunteers were not. The 'buying' of a bride, the accepting of the bride, the gifts to be considered, the sadakas (ritual meals) that were offered—I was allowed to partake in all of this. I sometimes felt I was 'dragged' into these things, but looking back now, I realize how really wonderful it all was. My host mom was 40 (my own daughter was 40), and she took the responsibility of my being there very seriously. I was required to wear the longer dresses (never pants, jeans, or shorts) and never, ever was to show my arms. When my host grandfather died, I was immediately taken to mourn and weep with the elders and the mullahs. But my role as the older daughter was also really defined. I was allowed to greet the elders in place of my host family aunts and uncles. Being older, I was often asked by the village people for advice. I felt more like a celebrity than a Volunteer. I worked very hard at that, too. I feel that I did what was expected and requested of me. My family would always say how pleased they were with my actions. I was asked to help with the care of the two babies in the family, and once while I was there, my 'parents' even went away and left me in charge (scary, huh?).”

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

It is hard to anticipate exactly what African, Asian, or Hispanic Americans will face as Volunteers, since there is so little exposure to people with these backgrounds in this area of the world. However, while all foreigners stand out, Volunteers of color may face special challenges. Stereotypes exist here, just as they do in the United States. But harassment of foreigners, particularly of women, is common, so not all difficulties Volunteers of color face should be presumed to be the result of one's ethnic background. In addition, ethnic identification is an important aspect of the culture, and the papers that all Turkmen carry identify them by their place of origin (e.g., “Turkmen,” “Russian,” “Azeri,” or even “Jewish.”). Some Asian-American Volunteers report frustration that Turkmen don't see them as "American." African-American Volunteers may face children wanting to touch their skin or hair.

Some children in the rural areas have never been exposed to African Americans; therefore, the PCV will often feel as if he or she is "living in a fishbowl." Although most Volunteers, including African, Asian, or Hispanic Americans, have an overall positive experience, harassment, sometimes extreme, in many forms exist—including harassment related to race.

Trainees and Volunteers of color report it is not uncommon to hear a Russian (also used by Turkmen) word derived from, and with a similar sound to, the "N" word. The speaker's intent may or may not be malicious, but it is shocking and disconcerting, especially for new trainees. Some Volunteers have also reported that they have been photographed against their will, presumably because of the novelty.

Volunteer Comments

"We had one black Volunteer living in the Lebap region. I thought, 'Oh, this is going to be tough for him.' But I was so wrong. He reported that he was immediately embraced by his community. To his credit, he learned Turkmen very well and very quickly, and I think that greatly impressed the local people. Turkmen love it when foreigners can speak their language."

"I was one of only two African-American Volunteers in Turkmenistan. There were stares and giggles, which were quite disconcerting. Many people believe you are from Africa. Most people have been very nice and have opened their homes to me. Many people believe there are no races other than Caucasians living in the United States. I really believe my presence is an educational experience for the community. I would do it again. People here are very hospitable; they want to meet and get to know you."

“Because Turkmenistan is in Asia, many people assumed I was native to the country. When I spoke, they were often taken aback to learn I was a foreigner. Sometimes it was nice to travel in anonymity under the guise of being a local. Many of my Volunteer colleagues received constant attention because everyone knew they were foreigners. On the other hand, it was tiring to have to prove that I was really American. But on the whole, once people get to know you, they judge you as an individual.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Turkmenistan?

Most airlines have baggage size and weight limits and assess charges for transport of baggage that exceeds those limits. The Peace Corps has its own size and weight limits and will not pay the cost of transport for baggage that exceeds these limits. The Peace Corps' allowance is two checked pieces of luggage with combined dimensions of both pieces not to exceed 107 inches (length + width + height) and a carry-on bag with dimensions of no more than 45 inches. Checked baggage should not exceed 80 pounds [or 100 for countries with cold weather] total with a maximum weight of 50 pounds for any one bag.

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

What is the electric current in Turkmenistan?

The electric current in Turkmenistan is 220 volts. If you bring any appliances with you, a small, universal power converter would be very helpful. A surge protector is also highly recommended. Note: some "power" strips designed for 110-volt use may not function with 220-volt power.

How much money should I bring?

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

preferable to cash. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

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

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Turkmenistan 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 Turkmenistan friends and my host family?

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

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until after they have completed pre-service training. This gives Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital. There is at least one Volunteer based in each of the regional capitals and about five to eight Volunteers in the capital city.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

The Peace Corps' Office of Special Services provides assistance in handling emergencies affecting trainees and Volunteers or their families. Before leaving the United States, instruct your family to notify the Office of Special Services immediately if an emergency arises, such as a serious illness or death of a family member.

During normal business hours, the number for the Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension

1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

Can I call home from Turkmenistan?

Yes. Although there is direct-dial access in some regions of the country, in most areas international calls (except those to other CIS countries) must be booked through an operator, which can cause significant delays in placing calls. The current rate for calls to United States is approximately \$3.90 per minute; there are no discounted periods.

Should I bring a cellular phone with me?

It depends. Nearly all Volunteers's live within cell phone range. If your phone was purchased as part of a packaged plan, it probably won't work here. SIM cards are sold here for about \$10 to foreigners (\$3.50 for locals) and air time is prepaid and added to the card. A basic Nokia cell phone without the SIM card runs about \$60.00. That same phone is probably cheaper in the states.

Due to a cell phone company change in 2010 that affected all cell phone users in the country, cell phone and landline access is suddenly spotty and frustrating, and certain Volunteers rely on a chain of contacts from work counterparts, host family members and neighbors to get telephone messages.

Will there be email and Internet access?

Should I bring my computer?

Internet cafés are now available in major cities. Some Volunteers are placed up to three hours from a major town so it is a good idea to explain this to family and friends so they do not worry when they do not hear from you often. Most Volunteers bring a netbook or laptop computer, and 3G wireless is increasingly available in some, but not all, areas of the country. Volunteers are responsible for insuring and maintaining the computers themselves; the Peace Corps will not replace stolen computers and strongly encourages those who bring them to get personal property insurance. Because of the high value of laptops, owners significantly increase their risk of becoming a victim of crime. You probably will not find the same level of technical assistance and service here as you would at home, and replacement parts could take months to arrive. Gaining Internet access via your laptop is an increasing possibility, but varies entirely on to which region and city you are assigned. If you bring a laptop, be sure to buy a surge protector, as electrical lapses and surges are common. Despite the risks, most Volunteers are very happy they brought their laptops. They are able to use them for clinic and classroom work, pre-writing emails (thus saving Internet time), store photos, and watch DVDs.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM TURKMENISTAN VOLUNTEERS

Welcome new Peace Corps Turkmenistan volunteers!

Congratulations on making it here! I know some of you may have waited months or years, and now that you're reading this letter it means that you're going. No more waiting! Turkmenistan is full of awesome surprises and a calm but hardworking way of life that can't be found in the US. Don't worry that you haven't met any Turkmen before- you'll meet hundreds once you get here. They're the most hospitable people on Earth (according to my own personal book of world records).

Each of you brings along valuable skills and histories that will impress and help people here. But before you can work on improving the quality of life here, Peace Corps will give you Turkmenistan-specific knowledge. It's like camp- full of field trips, good times with Americans and host families, and lots of exploring Turkmen culture. After training, you finally get to "save the world".

That's where volunteer life begins.

I do community health work in a county hospital with family doctors and gynecologists. It's impressive with x-ray machines, a physical therapy department and a prenatal education room (that's where I work!).

There's still a lot to help out with, though. Hygiene, heart health and prenatal education are my focus. Every day I take blood pressure readings for pregnant women while they wait for their gynecologist.

Along with that, I keep them occupied with learning about anemia, contraception and nutrition. The best part of every week is teaching a health club for English students 10-18 years old. At

home I do a lot of chatting with my family and English tutoring. They surprise me every day: last week fresh lychee and mangoes brought from China, this week my brother jumps out from behind a door in a full-out shimmering pharaoh costume. I gotta love them.

Living in Turkmenistan is a roller coaster of surprises. You will truly grow and help others. Even if it is only one person you help, they will remember you the rest of their lives. Come without expectations. Pack smart. Enjoy your last month with family and close friends! Live American like you've never lived before: eat an avocado, drink some real coffee and watch a movie in a theater!

We look forward to meeting you all!

Ellyse G., T-18B

First and foremost, Congratulations!

We are all so happy to have you here with us. I wonder what's running through each of your minds. I still remember, on the night our group arrived in Ashgabat, my imagination was running wild as I watched the lights of the city shining up through the airplane windows from the darkness below. All I could think about was what all the parts looked like that weren't lit up: the homes, the schools, the people, their lives, everything. I'm sure you've been told this and that, just as I had, but you too probably have no clear idea what to expect.

I can't predict the specific experiences that will amaze you here or the emotions that will overwhelm you, nor would I dare to tell you if I could. You will have all of us, each other, and the members of your community. Together, we'll share certain experiences, but the overall term of service is yours and yours alone. During this

time, you will have the opportunities to inspire your students, improve your communities, and leave an impression that will continue to be felt and talked about years after you leave.

I am an English teacher at a city school in Bayramali in the Mary (pron like “Marie”) Region. I teach lessons and workshops with each of the six English teachers at my school, as well as a dozen other clubs each week for students or teachers to attend outside of their regular lessons. The clubs allow my students to have fun with their education in a way they seldom encounter in their lessons. I have found a lot of people, both children and adults, with a wide range of language abilities but a similarly sincere desire to learn English. The availability of both resources and committed pupils vary from sight to sight, but there is room for improvement everywhere.

What’s really special about being a Peace Corps Volunteer in Turkmenistan is that we are, literally, the only Westerners in this country who have the training, resources and access to integrate into, and explore the depths of, Turkmen culture from within the community. Working on the ground will test your mettle, challenging you to reveal just how strong and flexible you can be. It won’t always be easy, but at the end of each day, week, or month, you will emerge more capable than before. I hope you use each day to explore all those things about this country that one couldn’t learn from the window seat of an airplane passing overhead.

Come with an open mind and an open heart, expect anything and absorb everything. The greatest hope I have for you is that you will eventually look at your surroundings through eyes that aren’t entirely American, and aren’t quite Turkmen; that you will learn to observe anything without making quick judgments. If you continue to work towards that, I trust you’ll find the strength and understanding you need to make it.

You're coming to Turkmenistan, T-19's, and I'm looking forward to meeting you here.

Cheers,

Preston R., T-18

PACKING LIST

This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Turkmenistan 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! The other tricky part is that you won't know if your placement will be in an urban or rural setting. Styles of dress vary dramatically between the major cities and the villages. Training sites will be in villages, so it is important for female trainees to pack long, ankle-length dresses. While you can buy almost any type of clothing here, keep in mind that good quality garments are expensive. You won't find a cheap fleece jacket here and you won't find brands like North Face. So make sure to bring your favorite high quality items.

You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can always have things sent to you at the Peace Corps office. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have a 100-pound weight limit on baggage.

Dress is very important in Turkmenistan. The popular image of a Peace Corps Volunteer in sandals and a T-shirt with a university logo is inappropriate here. Fair or not, people are judged by the way they dress in Turkmenistan, much more so than in the United States. Your colleagues will dress as professionals and for you to do otherwise will be considered disrespectful. If you come to work inappropriately dressed, your colleagues and clients (e.g., students or clinic patients) will probably not say anything to you directly but may talk unfavorably about you to others. Following the lead of your co-workers will help you gain acceptance and respect in your community and in your development work.

Female Volunteers in Turkmenistan usually wear mid-length to long dresses or skirts at work, though pants may be acceptable in some areas. Long dresses or skirts are needed during training. Tops can be short-sleeved, but should be modest. "Modest" does

not mean frumpy or baggy. Their clothing can be colorful and often decorated with beads, embroidery or rhinestones. You should bring at least one versatile dressy outfit for social events in the capital with other Volunteers. Fashionable clothing can be bought in Ashgabat or made by a local dressmaker.

Male Volunteers are expected to wear pressed chinos or dress slacks with a shirt and tie, and shined professional-looking shoes are a must. Consider buying some of your professional clothing in Ashgabat. The quality and style may not be equal to that found in American brands (though several high-quality European manufacturers have opened outlet stores here for excess inventory), but they are the same clothes your local colleagues will be wearing. However, if you are very tall or large, you may not find the sizes you need.

Both male and female Volunteers should bring “house clothes.” Turkmen always change clothes when they leave the house and as soon as they get home. Men often wear a T-shirt or sweatshirt and sweat pants. Women wear a dress and a sweater. Female Volunteers may be able to wear pants at home, but it is not guaranteed, especially during training. A long skirt is ideal. It doesn’t have to be stylish, but it should be comfortable.

Many types of appliances and electronics are available in Turkmenistan (including reasonably priced blow-dryers, irons, and “boomboxes”), and buying them locally eliminates the need to bring a voltage converter. Standard batteries of varying quality are also available. Do not bring items of great sentimental or monetary value, such as expensive jewelry, radio transmitters of any kind, or military surplus clothing.

General Clothing

- Mix-and-match clothes for layering, such as solid-color turtlenecks
- Winter coat, gloves and hat for cold weather
- Sun hat or baseball cap
- Long underwear—silk is lightweight, easy to clean, and warm
- T-shirts (without wording or pictures about controversial issues such as politics, drugs, and sex)
- Two pair of jeans
- Underwear and socks for every season
- Sports and fitness clothing and supplies (there are tennis courts in some cities); for jogging, lightweight pants are better than shorts, which are inappropriate to wear in most places other than a gym; women should bring clothing that is not too tight and does not reveal skin
- Bandanas and handkerchiefs
- Swimsuit

For Men

- Sport jackets or suit (for special occasions)
- Several pairs of nice slacks
- Several shirts with collars
- A few nice sweaters
- Ties

- Dark dress socks (for dress shoes)

For Women

- Several skirts or dresses with hems ankle-length (fuller is better because you will sit on the floor a lot)
- Several nice blouses and shirts (short-sleeved tops are fine)
- A couple of pairs of nice slacks (which can be worn as professional clothing in some places)
- A shorter skirt or dress for evenings out (Turkmen women *rarely* wear miniskirts)
- Bras and full and half slips to last two years (preferably cotton)
- Nylons or tights (thicker ones are great for cold weather)
- Variety of longer scarves (Turkmen women wear fashion scarves both on the head and as an accessory)

Shoes

- Dress shoes—for men, loafers are practical because they can be slipped off easily when entering a home; for women, comfortable, low-heeled pumps are recommended; Volunteers who will be on their feet a lot might consider black sneakers that look like dress shoes
- Sneakers
- Hiking boots and/or walking shoes

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Enough deodorant, soap, and other toiletries to last you through pre-service training (many of the brands available

in Ashgabat will be familiar to you, but if you require specific brands, you may want to bring more)

- Makeup
- Fragrant powders, body lotions, or perfume (when showers are scarce)
- Contact lens solutions, which the Peace Corps does not provide, if you wear contacts
- A three-month supply of any prescription medications you take, to last you until the Peace Corps can order them for you (a six-month supply, if possible, is even better as the mail here can be slow)
- Two pairs of eyeglasses, if you wear them (replacements may take a long time to arrive from the United States); consider bringing a repair kit
- Hand sanitizer
- Sunscreen (the Peace Corps provides SPF 15)
- Favorite nutritional supplements (Peace Corps provides multivitamins)

Kitchen

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

- Lots of plastic storage bags (you can pack stuff in them)
- Peanut butter (but local varieties are available)
- Packaged mixes for sauces, salad dressings, and soft drinks

- Your favorite spices
- French coffee press (instant coffee is readily available, and regular coffee is sometimes available in Ashgabat)

Miscellaneous

Here are some other items to consider bringing (optional):

- World map
- Musical instrument(s)
- Key chain with mini-flashlight
- Subscriptions to favorite magazines
- Small, inexpensive tool kit
- Laptop
- External hard drive or flash drive
- Small, durable flashlight with extra batteries
- Watch (durable, water-resistant, and inexpensive) with extra batteries
- Sleeping bag with stuff sack (for camping and traveling in cold weather)
- A durable water bottle (e.g., Nalgene)
- Pillowcase
- Laundry bag
- Camera (35 mm compacts or digital cameras are best because they are more inconspicuous during travel). APS film is not available here, but 35 mm can be widely developed and prints and CDs from digital cameras can be made in most large towns.
- Money belt or holder
- Internal frame backpack or small overnight bag
- U.S. postage stamps for mail carried by people traveling back home
- Swiss Army knife or “Leatherman” tool
- Bath towel, hand towel, and washcloth
- American gifts (for all ages)
- Good Russian-to-English and English-to-Russian dictionaries

- Small scrapbook of photos from home (picture sharing is important in Turkmenistan and a lightweight scrapbook can be easy to carry for sharing when “guesting”)Luggage straps and luggage locks (for use in storage)
- Games such as playing cards, Uno, Scrabble, Trivial Pursuit, chess, and Frisbee

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

The following list consists of suggestions for you to consider as you prepare to live outside the United States for two years. Not all items will be relevant to everyone, and the list does not include everything you should make arrangements for.

Family and Friends

- Notify family that they can call the Peace Corps' Office of Special Services at any time if there is a critical illness or death of a family member (24-hour telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470).
- Give the Peace Corps' *On the Home Front* handbook to family and friends.

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

- Make arrangements to maintain life insurance coverage.
- Arrange to maintain supplemental health coverage while you are away. (Even though the Peace Corps is responsible for your health care during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have pre-existing conditions or older Volunteers 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 absentee ballots forwarded to you overseas.

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.

- Execute a Power of Attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, extension 1770.
- Place all important papers—diplomas, certificates, 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: 800.424.8580, Press 2, then Ext. # (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 Ext	Direct/Local
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement	x1840	202.692.1840
Country Information	Matheu Schwenk Desk Officer/ mschwenk@peacecorps.gov , turkmenistan@peacecorps.gov	x2427	202.692.2427
Plane Tickets, Passports Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Sato Travel	x1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	x1845	202.692.1845

Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse x1500	202.692.1500
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Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor	800.544.1802
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Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Financial Operations x1770	202.692.1770
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Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions	Office of Staging x1865	202.692.1865
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Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.

Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services (24 hrs day) x1470	202.692.1470
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