

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

SAMOA



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

SAMOA MAP



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A WELCOME LETTER

Tālofa (greetings) and *malo* (congratulations) on being invited to be a Peace Corps Volunteer in Samoa. Having made it through the paperwork, interviews, medical and dental exams, and other aspects of the application process thus far, you must be excited to finally receive a formal invitation.

As to what awaits you here, Samoa's tremendous natural beauty and fascinating culture make the country an increasingly popular international tourist destination. But it is important that you not have unrealistic expectations, thinking you are coming to a tropical "paradise" where all will be easy, good, and fun. Although Volunteers here experience all of these things, Samoa's development environment presents significant challenges to the Peace Corps and to Peace Corps Volunteers. As with assignments anywhere in the world, Volunteers have to surmount obstacles, deal with mistakes and setbacks, be adaptable and resilient, wonder what the Peace Corps has gotten them into, think about what they have gotten themselves into, and summon reserves of patience, understanding, dedication, and perseverance.

Most Volunteers assigned to Samoa complete their service and highly value the experience. Peace Corps Volunteers in the past 40-plus years have contributed a great deal to Samoa's development and to building strong bonds between the United States and Samoa. Volunteers have touched the lives of so many Samoans that the people here have an extremely high regard for the Peace Corps. New Volunteers will become part of a very distinguished tradition.

As with any Peace Corps program, however, some Volunteers decide that the benefits of the experience are outweighed by the disadvantages, and they go home early. This is hard on them and the people and organizations they have been helping. In many ways, Samoa is a Pacific paradise, but Samoa has its own unique challenges. So please examine carefully both the positive aspects of Volunteer service here and the challenges and frustrations that you should expect. If anything raises warning flags to you, then I encourage you to seek out more information and to think long and hard so that you are confident that whatever decision you make—to accept or not accept the invitation—is the right one for you, the Peace Corps, and Samoa. **Accepting an invitation to serve as a Volunteer is a big responsibility.**

To find out more about the challenges and opportunities in Samoa, please consider carefully the information provided in this invitation kit. These materials are not all-inclusive and conditions here can change quickly, so consult other resources, too, such as the blogs of Volunteers in Samoa. Likewise, please contact your country desk officer at Peace Corps headquarters if you have further questions.

In Samoa, there is an expression, "O le ala i le pule ole tautua," which means, "The path to a leadership position is through service." Samoan chiefs, or matai, gain their titles through service to their families and communities. Once offered a title, the decision to accept comes only after deep reflection and consideration and is a serious commitment and responsibility. Peace Corps service parallels this tradition. Making a commitment to two years of Peace Corps service is a responsibility that should not be taken lightly.

If you decide this invitation to serve in Samoa is appropriate for you, there are many rewards awaiting you both in the opportunity to serve as well as in the rich opportunities for learning. The Volunteers who excel are those who are clear about their reason for joining the Peace Corps and who come with curiosity, an open mind, realistic expectations, and the energy and motivation it takes to dedicate themselves to two years of challenging and fulfilling work.

Eddie Stice
Country Director

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CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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

PEACE CORPS/SAMOA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS

History of the Peace Corps in Samoa

In 1967, after experiencing a devastating cyclone, Samoa invited the Peace Corps to the country. The first Volunteers worked in rural villages, leading health and hygiene projects for the Department of Health. These early Volunteers remain well known for the introduction of water-seal toilets.

The next groups to follow were civil engineers, architects, accountants, statisticians, and economic planners who served under the Public Works Department. One early Volunteer was the architect of the present Parliament building at Mulinu'u and the supporting offices of the Legislative Assembly. Volunteers also had a significant impact on infrastructure development, including the Faleolo International Airport terminal and school buildings. Some took up prominent executive positions in various government departments, such as acting directors of public works.

In health care, Volunteers have served as researchers in the effort to control the parasitic disease filariasis and have worked at the National Hospital as nutrition educators and dietitians. Other Volunteers have worked as small business advisers and as youth development workers.

The majority of Volunteers, however, have been classroom teachers and advisers with the Ministry of Education. They have helped build the capacity of local teachers by serving in classrooms, working directly with students and supporting the professional development of teachers. Volunteers have taught in a variety of subject areas, including business, computer studies, English, mathematics, and science. Many Samoans, including the current prime minister, have been touched by the Peace Corps and are happy to share stories about their favorite Pisikoa teacher, colleague, or friend.

Peace Corps Programming in Samoa

Peace Corps/Samoa's current program focus is on promoting English literacy in Samoan primary schools. The Primary School English Literacy Project was developed in close partnership with the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESCC) and was officially launched in fall 2012. As noted in MESCC's most recent strategic plan, "The English language has become the language of access to educational opportunities and subsequent economic choices." To promote English literacy development at the foundational level, MESCC requested the assistance of the Peace Corps. As Volunteers in the Primary School English Literacy Project, you will play an important role in helping Samoans develop the skills they need to succeed and thrive. You will not only build the English literacy skills of students but to help teachers incorporate student-centered teaching methods. You will also work to improve information and communication technology resources and to increase the community's involvement in literacy activities.

COUNTRY OVERVIEW: SAMOA AT A GLANCE

History

There are three primary island groups that make up Oceania in the Pacific: Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia. Samoa is in the heart of Polynesia. It comprises two main islands, Upolu and Savai'i, with two smaller inhabited islands, Manono and Apolima. It is believed that the first inhabitants of Samoa arrived some 2,000 years ago. Today's Samoans are the descendants of these early Polynesians.

Over the centuries, Samoans traded with neighboring Pacific islanders, mainly Fijians and Tongans. In 1830, the Rev. John Williams and his team from the London Missionary Society arrived in Savai'i bringing Christianity. It is said that Nafanua, the Samoan Warrior Goddess, predicted the arrival of the Christian missionaries. She said that this new religion would come from the sky and be accepted by Samoans. This may be one of the reasons the missionaries received a warm welcome upon arrival. The white foreigners were called "palagi" (pl: palangi) meaning "burst from the sky."

British, German, and American consulates were later established in Apia. By the 1890s, Samoa was divided between Germany and the United States. The former administered Western Samoa, while the latter retained control of Eastern Samoa, now known as American Samoa. When war broke out in Europe in 1914, New Zealand military forces occupied Western Samoa. In 1919, the League of Nations granted New Zealand a territorial mandate over Samoa. In 1920, a ship from New Zealand carrying people infected with Spanish influenza, docked in Samoa resulting in an outbreak that killed 8,000 people—or one in five Samoans. (In 2002, New Zealand formally apologized to Samoa for this incident.) In 1946, Samoa was made a United Nations Trusteeship under New Zealand. In 1961, a plebiscite (or referendum) showed overwhelming support for independence and, on January 1, 1962, Samoa became an independent nation and the first country in the Pacific to regain independence.

Government

Samoa's parliament is modeled after the British Westminster system. The country had a head of state, who was appointed for life at the time of independence. Upon his death in 2007, head of state appointments became five-year terms. The House of Representatives has 49 members, each serving for a five-year term. For over 20 years, the Human Rights Protection Party (HRPP) has dominated the local political sphere. The current prime minister, Tuilaepa Lupesoliai Sailele Malielegaoi, has been in office since 1998, and the current head of state, the titular head of Samoa, is His Highness Tui Atua Tupua Tamasese.

Economy

Samoa's economy is agriculturally based—primarily on the cultivation and exportation of crops such as copra (dried coconut), taro, cocoa, nonu, and coconut oil. The fishing industry has become an important part of the export economy in the past few years. Additional income is gained through small-scale factories. Tourism is a growing sector, which may soon replace all of the previously mentioned areas in terms of overall economic importance. Finally, remittances from Samoans living overseas play a considerable part in Samoa's economic growth and development. Overseas remittances and foreign aid have been a very large percentage of the total economy.

People and Culture

The *Fa'a Samoa*, or "Samoan way of life," is the dominant social force. *Fa'a Samoa* includes the key values of *aiga* (family), *lotu* (church), *fa'alavelave* (ceremonial and family obligations), and *tautala Samoa* (Samoan language), among others. Samoan life revolves around the church and the family group. The *aiga* includes a wide group of relatives by blood, marriage, or adoption, and acknowledges one person as the head—the *matai*. A *matai* is the holder of a title, either a high chief or a "talking chief"—an

orator. Relations and interactions within the family are governed by love, respect, and reciprocity. The Samoan family is a communal entity where work, success, and reward are shared by all. There are specific roles played by each member of the family, especially in regard to the upkeep and welfare of the family. Males do the more physical work, such as cultivation of the land and fishing. Women do the domestic chores (e.g., cooking, keeping the house and lawns neat and tidy, and weaving). Church also plays a central role in Samoan village life. There is one or more church in every village, and villagers attend church at least once a week if not several times.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

General Information About Samoa State.gov

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

Gpo.gov/libraries/public/

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

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

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

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

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data

Data.un.org

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

Wikipedia.org

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

Worldbank.org

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

Data.worldbank.org/country

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

www.countrywatch.com/

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

www.samoa.travel/

The Samoan Tourism Authority's website has a wealth of information on Samoan life and culture, places to visit, events, maps, practical information, and things to do.

You can also search the Internet for "Peace Corps blogs Samoa" and find the blogs of Peace Corps Volunteers in Samoa, with links to other bloggers as well.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

RPCV.org

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

PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Samoa

UN.org/News/

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

VOAnews.com

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

www.samoana.org

Provides links to Samoan news, weather, and cultural information, along with brief language lessons

www.samoalive.com

This site's theme is "Bringing Samoans Together" and has links to various Samoa-related sites.

www.samoobserver.ws

The online link to Samoa's main daily newspaper. Note that the site is updated intermittently.

www.ewc.hawaii.edu/pidp-pi.asp

Website for the Pacific Islands Development Program (PIDP), offering daily news reports about the Pacific region.

www.meteorology.gov.ws

This is the official site for the Samoa Meteorology Division. Weather reports for Samoa are updated several times daily, and the site includes highlights of current weather-related news from the Pacific region and worldwide.

International Development Sites About Samoa

www.australianvolunteers.com/home

Australian Volunteers International

www.jica.go.jp/english/index.html

Japan International Cooperation Agency

www.mesc.gov.ws

The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture (MESC) website provides information for the general public, anyone involved in the Samoan Education System, and the stakeholders in sports and the cultural life in Samoa.

www.undp.org.ws

United Nations Development Programme, including links to the United Nations Volunteers Programme

www.unesco.org

United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization

www.sprep.org

South Pacific Regional Environment Programme

Recommended Books

1. Alailima (Calkins), Fay G. "Aggie Grey: A Samoan Saga." Honolulu: Mutual Publishing Company, 1988.
2. Anderson, Charles R. "Melville in the South Seas." Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1966.
3. Beaglehole, John C. "The Exploration of the Pacific." Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, third edition, 1983.
4. Calkins, Fay G. "My Samoan Chief." Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1971.
5. Figel, Sia. "Where We Once Belonged." New York City: Kaya Press; Kaya Press edition, 2003.
6. Stevenson, Robert Louis. "In the South Seas." Middlesex, England: Penguin Books Ltd., reprinted 1998.

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

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

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Dirlam, Sharon. "Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place." Santa Barbara, CA: McSeas Books, 2004.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. "Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience." Gig Harbor, WA: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Erdman, Sarah. "Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village." New York City: Picador, 2003.
4. Hessler, Peter. "River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze." New York City: Perennial, 2001.
5. Kennedy, Geraldine ed. "From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps." Santa Monica, CA: Clover Park Press, 1991.
6. Thomsen, Moritz. "Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle." Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).
7. Goyal, Rajeev. "The Springs of Namche." Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.

LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE

Communications

Mail

Your initial mailing address as a Peace Corps trainee is as follows:

“Your Name,” Peace Corps
Private Mail Bag
Apia, (Western) Samoa
South Pacific

Tell family and friends that U.S. postal workers often assume “Samoa” is American Samoa and try to send it there by adding a zip code. Adding “Western” or “Independent” in front of “Samoa” usually helps.

A staff member collects mail twice weekly and places it in Volunteer boxes located in the office. Mail transit between the U.S. and Samoa averages three weeks but can take up to two months.

Telephones

When Volunteers arrive in-country, they are provided funds to purchase a basic cellphone (current Volunteers recommend upgrading to a higher-end model). Bringing a cellphone from the U.S. is strongly discouraged as it likely will not work here, phones here are inexpensive, and phones here get lost, washed, or stolen on a regular basis.

Both pre-paid credit and monthly cellphone plans are available. The Peace Corps pays for a service that allows all Volunteers and staff to call each other without charge. While calling internationally costs about US\$.50 per minute, the phone companies typically offer promotions that charge for a few minutes despite talking an hour. Texting is quite inexpensive, both domestically and internationally, and promotions for bulk texting are also typical.

Cellular coverage throughout the islands continues to improve, but there are still a few locations where reception doesn't exist, and other areas where Volunteers may have to walk a short distance to get coverage.

Computer, Internet, and Email Access

Computer, Internet, and email services are available in Samoa. Apia and a few of the larger villages on Savai'i have Internet cafes and wireless hotspots. Internet access in many places on the islands is generally available via a cellular data plan. Internet service is most often charged by the MB down/upload, although some Internet cafes charge by the hour. A significant portion of a Volunteer's living allowance is for communications, as Internet service is expensive in Samoa.

Nearly every Volunteer brings a laptop computer, although it isn't required. The Tropics are hard on electronics; computers need to be protected against humidity, power surges, and insects. It is highly recommended that you purchase personal articles insurance for your computer and any other items of value.

The Peace Corps office has two desktop computers for Volunteer use in the Volunteer Resource Center in the office in Apia, although Internet access at the office is not free.

Housing and Site Location

Volunteers normally live in a private room in a family house though occasionally a Volunteer may have his or her own small, traditional thatched or cement house close to the host family's home. For cultural

integration and safety, it's vital for Volunteers to be associated with a host family. Although most Volunteers prefer their own house, the supply from villages is never enough to meet the demand, so you must be prepared for the probability of living in a private room in a family house. Although this arrangement can initially be stressful, it offers a safer environment for Volunteers and also greatly enhances Volunteers' ability to become more fluent in Samoan and more integrated into the culture and their village. You will likely develop a love and respect for your Samoan family and an appreciation for having a second family away from home.

Whatever the situation, the facilities usually are limited and modest although, all villages have fairly reliable electricity. There will be access to running water, either in the house or from a tap outside. Most homes have flush toilets, but a few will have water-seal latrines. The toilets and showers may be inside, but many are outside of the house. Some family villages still use separate cooking houses (*umukuka*) for cooking food.

Living Allowance and Money Management

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

Each trainee and Volunteer has a local bank account where his or her monthly living allowance is deposited. Currently included in the living allowance payment is \$24 each month for leave allowance. Volunteers accrue two days of vacation time for each month of active service after being sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. Since the amount of the vacation leave allowance is legally fixed in dollars, it must be adjusted monthly to the local currency. Therefore, the amount may vary slightly, reflecting a change in the exchange rate. ATM machines are available in Apia at the Westpac Bank, where you will have your account, and there is a Westpac branch office in Salelologa on the island of Savai'i. Your living allowance is sufficient to cover the purchase of food, transport, other essentials, and some entertainment for the month. You are encouraged to live on the living allowance provided to you by the Peace Corps. Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as their local counterparts so additional money you choose to bring with you from the U.S. should be reserved for vacation travel, not day-to-day living expenses. The ATM machines in Samoa with ANZ Bank also usually accept debit or check cards from U.S. banks.

Food and Diet

The diet in Samoa consists primarily of taro, breadfruit, yams, potatoes, rice, canned corn beef, fish, chicken soup, taro leaves, some fresh vegetables, and limited fresh meat. Typical fruits are papayas, bananas, coconuts, mangoes, and pineapples. In Apia, many Western foods are available much of the time, and rural Volunteers can stock up on these items when they are in town although they can be very expensive. Vegetarians can fare well in Samoa with patience and creativity. For strict vegans, it's harder, but still doable. Having a stash of peanut butter and crackers in your room or at the training site for those early adjustment days can help as longer-term strategies are developed.

Some Volunteers cook their own meals, perhaps eating only a Sunday dinner with their host family. Others eat many to most meals with their host families. Volunteers who eat meals with their family are expected to contribute groceries or make other contributions, as reciprocal generosity and sharing are vital aspects of Samoan culture. Some villages provide lunch for teachers; in others, Volunteers will need to bring their own lunch.

Transportation

Most Volunteers travel by bus. Buses in the main city of Apia are reasonably priced and readily available. Most run from 6 a.m.–6 p.m. Buses to rural villages are often crowded and generally uncomfortable but usually reliable. Taxis are plentiful and the fare can be split between riders. Buses in rural areas follow a timetable, unless there is a *falavelave* (special function or event). Volunteers who live on the island of Savai'i and plan to travel to the main town and wharf area of Salelologa for shopping or to Apia must allow at least two hours before the normal departure time, in case the bus leaves before scheduled. Also, ferries sometimes leave early, especially during the peak public holidays when they get crowded quickly.

Volunteers usually live within easy walking distance to their primary schools, but Peace Corps/Samoa will issue bicycles to Volunteers who need them as a principal form of work transportation. A bicycle helmet is issued to all Volunteers who receive a bicycle; helmet use is mandatory.

Volunteers are not allowed to drive a vehicle during their service, except in rare job-related or vacation situations, which require the country director's advance written approval. Motorcycle use is not permitted.

Peace Corps/Samoa office vehicles generally are not available to support a Volunteer's work (this support should come from a Volunteer's host agency), or for personal use, such as taking supplies, groceries, etc., from Apia to home and worksites.

Geography and Climate

The islands of Samoa lie about 1,600 miles northeast of New Zealand and about 2,600 miles southwest of Hawaii. The narrow coastal plains on the two main islands support most of the people, while the rugged interiors are covered by dense rainforests. The islands are fringed by coral reefs and lagoons. Sea breezes temper the tropical climate, and temperatures average in the mid-80s during the day year-round. Humidity is high, however, so the temperature can feel much hotter than what the thermometer indicates.

May through October is considered the cool, dry time of year in Samoa. Temperatures drop by an average of a few degrees and it only rains a couple of times each week. Nighttime temperatures during this period are generally very pleasant. The rainy season begins in November and you can expect some rain almost every day. Luckily, much of the rain comes at night. The temperatures are not that much higher than during the cooler season, but the additional humidity, in addition to the direct sunlight, can be intense. People tend to avoid being outside in the heat of the day. Cyclones (hurricanes) can also occur during the rainy season, although Samoa does not lie in the normal path of Pacific cyclones. On average, one to two strong cyclones hit every 10–11 years. The rainy season also brings occasional spells of hot and humid weather with little to no wind—although the southeast trade winds help cool the islands for much of the year.

Social Activities

Island life is fairly quiet and things move at a much slower pace than in the U.S. Social activities center around the family, the church, and the village (most Samoans living in Apia still maintain close relations with their villages). Village life is generally relaxed. Traditionally, the men go to the plantations in the early morning, while women tend the house and children, wash clothes, and gather shellfish at low tides. Families rest in the heat of the afternoon. In the late afternoon, fishing, yard work, sports (volleyball, rugby, cricket), and food preparation take place. Evenings are filled with prayer meetings (*lotu*), choir practice, easy conversation, bingo, evening strolls, dominoes, and the ubiquitous card game—*suiipi*.

In Apia, stores and offices are open from 8 a.m.–5 p.m. Monday through Friday, and stores are also open on Saturday from 8 a.m.–12:30 p.m. Few shops are open outside of these hours. Sundays are incredibly quiet, with most people attending church services and enjoying Sunday afternoon *to'ona'i* (traditional

umu feast) with their families. Only a handful of stores and restaurants open on Sunday. In the evenings and on weekends in Apia, activity options include going to the movie theater, dining at local restaurants, walking on the seawall, and dancing at local clubs.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

While the dress codes in villages have been changing, it's important to follow the norms of the majority of your counterparts and to dress at the more conservative end of the spectrum. Dressing appropriately will increase the chances of you being accepted as a serious professional. Dressing inappropriately or immodestly can damage your reputation and your ability to get things done at work and in the community. Your appearance reflects not only on you, but also on your host family, the Peace Corps, and other Volunteers.

During work, church, and village meetings, men typically wear a collared dress shirt, often in the “*aloha*” or “Hawaiian” style, and a *lava lava*, or “*ies*” in Samoan, which is a long (below the knee) wrap-around “skirt” with pockets that is very comfortable in the hot and humid climate. At home, men normally wear a more casual style of *lava lava* and a T-shirt, or a T-shirt and shorts.

During the work day, female teachers are required to wear a *puletasi*, which is comprised of a long wrap-around skirt and fitted blouse. You will be able to have these made once you arrive and will likely receive some as gifts. When not at work, women are still expected to dress modestly. Knee-length or longer skirts and dresses are appropriate, as are short-sleeved shirts, rather than tank tops or sleeveless shirts. When participating in outdoor sports or swimming (unless at a resort area), women wear long shorts or a wrap-around skirt with a T-shirt.

As far as male/female relationships go, you should exercise caution. The term “friend,” or *uo*, usually denotes something far different in Samoa than what it typically means in the U.S. In a village, you should not have friends of the opposite sex stay overnight in your home. If they want to visit you, it is best if your Samoan host family and neighbors make arrangements for their sleeping accommodations. Your family and neighbors may be curious to know just who your overnight visitors are, and there will always be talk about your lifestyle. Privacy in the U.S. sense does not exist in the villages: Everybody knows everyone's business here. Keep in mind that as a “son” or “daughter” to a host family, your behavior can “shame” them even if you do not feel you have done anything wrong by U.S. standards. Violations of village norms about pre-marital relationships and “proper” behavior can affect how your host family and work colleagues relate to you, perhaps making it harder for you to have a happy home life and productive work relationships. In extreme cases of village anger about the behavior of a Volunteer, it can require the Peace Corps to either transfer the Volunteer, or send him/her home.

In Apia, Volunteers are not as confined from a lifestyle perspective, but sound judgment in culturally sensitive matters is still required. The various nightclubs in the area may be an attraction to you, but do not go to or leave them by yourself. The best policy is to be in the company of at least one male friend or a small group of men and women. Bars can present sticky situations where tact is a useful tool. Some specific strategies in this area will be discussed during pre-service training. Samoa provides the perfect setting for living in the proverbial fishbowl. Your own personal discretion in keeping with your role as a Peace Corps Volunteer and good judgment in culturally sensitive areas should enable you to live in reasonable harmony within the *Fa'a Samoa*.

Personal Safety

More detailed information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is contained in the Safety and Security section, but it is an important issue and cannot be overemphasized. As stated in the Volunteer Handbook, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer entails certain safety risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment (oftentimes alone), having a limited understanding of local language and culture,

and being perceived as well-off are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Many Volunteers experience varying degrees of unwanted attention and harassment. Petty thefts and burglaries are not uncommon, and incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although most Samoa Volunteers complete their two years of service without incident. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help reduce the risks and enhance your safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Samoa. Using these tools, one can be empowered to take responsibility for his or her safety and well-being.

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

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

Rewards and Frustrations

Samoans have proudly maintained their culture despite the many external influences over the past 150 years. *Fa'a Samoa*, or the Samoan way of life, is still the basic framework for most activities. Concepts of time, work, privacy, property, family, and raising children can be very different from what you are used to, and can sometimes be a source of frustration and confusion. For example, when living with a Samoan family you may have little privacy and face stricter norms of behavior than previously. This can be especially true for women whose host families see their safety, well-being, and reputation as their personal responsibility.

After adapting to their new surroundings in Samoa, however, many Volunteers recognize that each culture has aspects that are both challenging and enriching. Many Volunteers find it difficult to let go of the positive aspects when they return to the States, such as Samoa's strong focus on family and generous hospitality.

At work, frustrations may include, for example, the prioritizing of family or cultural obligations over being at school. In addition, while corporal punishment is illegal in Samoa, the law is not regularly enforced and many teachers still use the practice.

On the other hand, the enthusiasm of your students and their thirst for learning will bring you a deep sense of satisfaction. With patience and humility, your relationships will strengthen and, these relationships, along with your personal growth and the knowledge that you have made a positive contribution, will be among your greatest rewards.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING

Overview of Pre-Service Training

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

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

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

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

During PST, you will live in a village with a host family. Immersion in village life will help you to learn the language and cross-cultural skills essential to living and working successfully in Samoa. PST lasts 10 weeks and is conducted in two phases. The first phase lasts seven to eight weeks and the second lasts two to three. The second phase will occur after you have had some time at your site and is designed to build on the skills and knowledge you gain during that time. Upon successfully meeting the training competencies and language standards, you will be sworn in as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

PST is designed to provide you with the foundation you need to begin integrating in your community, fulfilling your primary project responsibilities, and maintaining your health and safety. Throughout your service, it will be up to you to take the initiative to build on this foundation, seeking out resources as you need them, developing strategies to meet challenges, and reaching out for support when you hit roadblocks. The success of your performance during PST and beyond will be determined by your ability to be self-directed in your learning and to take responsibility for your achievements.

Technical Training

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

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

You will receive training specifically designed to help you meet the performance expectations of the Primary School English Language project. In order to prepare you to serve as an English language resource teacher in a Samoan primary school, you will receive technical training on methods and techniques for teaching English literacy, classroom management, cultural norms and standards of behavior for Samoan schools and teachers, assessment, and lesson and unit planning. You will also have two weeks of practice teaching in a Samoan primary school, one week each during phase one and two. During this time, you'll receive supportive feedback and guidance in order to strengthen and hone your abilities. By the end of PST you will have the technical skills you need to begin teaching in a Samoan primary school, skills you will refine and sharpen throughout your two years of service.

Language Training

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

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

Cross-Cultural Training

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

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

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

Health Training

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

Safety and Security Training

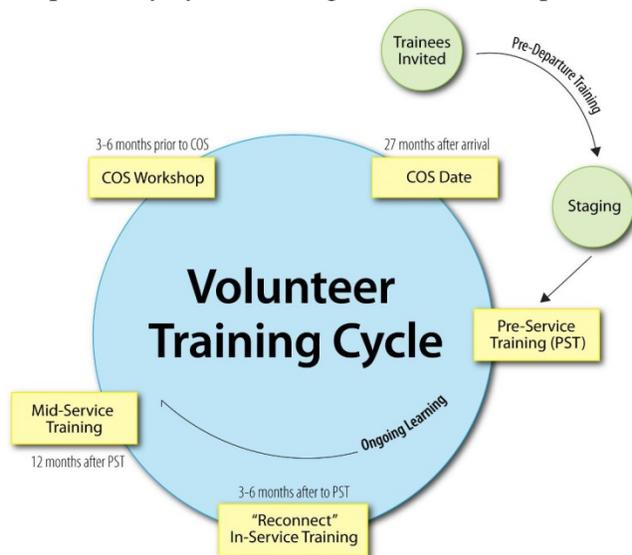
During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace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

Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

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

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

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



YOUR HEALTH CARE IN SAMOA

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 Samoa maintains a clinic with a full-time medical officer who takes care of Volunteers' primary health-care needs, including evaluation and treatment of most medical conditions. Additional medical services are also available in Samoa at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill and cannot receive the care you need in Samoa, you will be transported to a Peace Corps-approved regional medical facility. If the Office of Health Services (OHS) determines that the care is not optimal for your condition at the regional facility, you will be transported to the United States.

Health Issues in Samoa

The main health issues in Samoa for Peace Corps Volunteers are diarrhea, skin infections, and infections related to the upper respiratory system. Sexually transmitted infections (STIs) have also been on the increase in Samoa, thus HIV/AIDS awareness and STI prevention are emphasized. Volunteers can also be affected by mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue and chikungunya if there are in-country outbreaks. The Peace Corps provides protection such as insect repellent, mosquito nets, and preventive education.

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

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

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

Maintaining Your Health

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

- Use your Peace Corps-provided water filters at home and be careful about the water you drink elsewhere
- Thoroughly clean any skin wounds to prevent infection
- Protect yourself against diseases transmitted by mosquitoes, such as dengue fever
- Eat well and get some exercise
- Follow the lead of what Samoans and Peace Corps staff tell you to do to stay safe
- Stay positive and optimistic

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

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

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

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

Women's Health Information

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

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

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

Medical Kit Contents

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

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

Scissors
Sore throat lozenges
Sterile eye drops
Sterile gauze pads
Sunscreen
Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

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

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

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

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

contacts occasionally, please consider using single use, daily disposable lenses which do not require cleaning.

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

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH

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

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

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

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

Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk

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

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

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

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

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

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

The following are other security concerns in Samoa of which you should be aware:

- Petty theft is a common occurrence in Samoa and this includes neighborhood children pocketing interesting unattended items. Lock your doors when you leave your room at home or school, take care of your valuables, do not leave items unattended, and do not bring valuable items with you to places where you cannot ensure their safety.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

Staying Safe: Don't Be a Target for Crime

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

There are, for example, one or two night clubs in Apia where fights are known to break out late at night after people have been drinking. It is strongly recommended that you avoid these clubs and you will be given information about them during training.

Support from Staff

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

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

Office of Victim Advocacy

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

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy

Direct phone number: 202.692.1753

Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753

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

Email: victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov

Crime Data for Samoa

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

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

Please take the time to review this important information.

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

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

Volunteer Safety Support in Samoa

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

The Peace Corps/Samoa office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be

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

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

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

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW

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

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

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

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

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

Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site

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

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

Cross-Cultural Considerations

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

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

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

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

What Might a Volunteer Face?

Possible Gender Role Issues

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

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

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

Female Volunteers are likely to encounter challenges related to the differing expectations of behavior for women in Samoa. This is particularly true for single women and especially young, single women. Your safety, well-being, and reputation are the responsibility of your host family and of your village and this responsibility is taken very seriously. While in the village, your family will expect you to adhere to the same norms their daughters would adhere to—in other words, not bringing men to your house or to your room, not going out and about by yourself, and not drinking. Your behavior will reflect on both your village and your family. If your family fails to keep you safe or to protect your reputation, they may face repercussions from the village (e.g., fines). You may chafe under the relative lack of privacy and freedom of movement. However, adherence to the norms is essential if you are to live and work effectively in Samoa; and don't worry, you will have plenty of opportunities during your service to take "breaks" (i.e., going to the capital, going on vacation, having a weekend away at another Volunteer's village).

Volunteer Comments:

"Picture this: You're on your bike, tooling down the road, enjoying the scenery and sounds of Samoa, and suddenly, out of the blue, the serenity is broken by the howling call of, 'Hey, baby. I love you!' Talk about crashing back down to the reality of living here. There are several streams of thought on this topic and how to react to it. What I usually do is give them an irritated look, quickly followed by a smile, and tell them to stop in Samoan, '*Aua, Sole!*' This usually will stop them and also elicit a smile or laugh (which Samoans are quick to do), and it makes me laugh or smile as well."

"I've found it's useful to put yourself in the role of innocent little sister—particularly in the village. Some things, such as drinking a beer, might seem commonplace to us. However, in a village setting, it is often taboo for women to drink. While a villager will most likely allow you to drink, and even offer you a drink, accepting it may be looked down upon."

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

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

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

For Volunteers of color, the range of responses to their skin color may vary from the extremely kind to the very insensitive. In African and Latin American countries, host country nationals may say "welcome

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

Volunteers of color contribute a lot to educating Samoans about the diversity of American society. It would be untrue to say that “racism” does not exist in Samoa. While Samoans are very open to people of different colors, Asian-American and African-American Volunteers have experienced racial comments from time to time. Most of the remarks can be innocent enough, born out of ignorance and misunderstanding, perhaps resulting from how Americans of color are represented in the media. Helping Samoans to remove the stereotype that all Americans—especially Volunteers—are white helps a great deal.

Volunteer Comments:

“*Tālofa lava!* As an African American, I am often mistaken to be from Fiji, the Solomon Islands, or even Papua New Guinea. The new identity that the Samoan people have bestowed upon me is not an unwelcome one, but it does interfere with my Volunteer service at times.

“Historically, Pacific Island nations have not always been the best of friends. Wars, *fautasi* (long boat) competitions, and rugby matches have contributed to some of the noticeable affrays. Anyone entering into the Samoan monoculture is seen as a visitor and treated with respect. If you happen to resemble a Melanesian Pacific Islander, as I do, and not the typical American image, you may attract some attention. The attention is not always good.

“In the capital city of Apia, where I work and reside, my ethnicity is not often an issue, but while traveling in *kua* (rural areas), I often meet people, especially small children, who have never encountered an African American. Stares and finger pointing often occur when I am seen walking around the village. My usual response is a smile or a wave that puts the villagers at ease.

“Overcoming racial and cultural differences in Samoa was relatively easy. Keeping an open mind, a positive attitude, and a great sense of humor all contributed to my success in ‘bridging the gap’ between the two cultures.”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Samoa’s restrictive climate, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized and, in Samoa, “indecent between males” and sodomy are criminalized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only

to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Samoa is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at lgbrpcv.org. Additionally, the Peace Corps' LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at spectrum@peacecorps.gov.

Because of the stigma against the LGBTQ community in Samoa, being out in one's host community and with other host country nationals could potentially compromise a Volunteer's ability to serve safely; both LGBT Volunteers and host country nationals are at risk for harassment and assault. Volunteers who are used to being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity in the U.S. may find it challenging to adjust to living and working in a country with laws and cultural norms very different from the U.S. Please be aware that being discreet about your sexual orientation or gender identity can be emotionally taxing.

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

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

Volunteer Comments

“For gay and lesbian Volunteers, living in Samoa can be difficult. The laid-back, Pacific Islander way of life can be deceptive; many Samoans are unaccepting of gay and lesbian individuals. Most Volunteers, including myself, choose to be closeted in our villages, but I have found important sources of support amongst Peace Corps/Samoa staff and many of my fellow Volunteers.

“Before choosing to serve in Samoa, LGBT applicants and nominees should know that you will constantly (from strangers and friends alike) get questions and jokes about an opposite-gender partner. As an LGBT Volunteer, you will feel isolated, you will be frustrated, and you will face many more challenges than any Samoans and even many of your fellow Volunteers realize, but you will also challenge yourself personally and professionally and you will see all around you the real, tangible effects of your hard work.”

Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities

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

Volunteers with disabilities may receive stares of curiosity as some Samoans may not consider staring to be inappropriate. The government of Samoa has put an emphasis on increasing services for people with disabilities and on improving education for students with special needs. These efforts are beginning to lead to greater awareness, understanding, and positive change.

Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples

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

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

Couples often face pressure from host country nationals to change their roles to conform better with traditional Samoan relationships. Samoan men and women alike will often not understand American relationship dynamics and may be outwardly critical of relationships that do not adhere to traditional gender roles. It is also helpful to think about how pressures to conform to Samoan culture can be challenging to men and women in very different ways. Considering how your partner is being affected and discussing what, if any, aspects of your relationship should be changed can help reduce stress for you both.

Volunteer Comments

“Age is revered in Samoa. Some young Volunteers have found it harder to be taken seriously because of their age. Even though I am a young Volunteer, being a married woman has increased my status. Also, I believe that the Samoan men at my school are less hesitant to work with me because I am already married and there will be no rumors about our relationship when we work together.”

“My husband is the cook in the family and has also sewn clothes for himself and me. He takes some gentle ribbing at his school over these tasks, but nothing to make him uncomfortable. In general, the response to his sewing and cooking is surprise and admiration.”

“I have never had any issues related to my marital status. Personally, I appreciate being able to share this experience with my husband. I come home to a sympathetic ear and source of support every night, which has made my service that much easier.”

Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

As Samoa is a Christian country, Volunteers may have trouble integrating if they do not attend church on Sundays; being known as an atheist or not attending church can affect one’s acceptance into a village and, thus, a Volunteer’s ability to further all three of the Peace Corps goals. Sunday observance in Samoa is enforced, especially within the villages. Volunteers, despite their religious beliefs or affiliations, often find that participation in certain church services or activities, like singing in the choir, are useful for community integration and can be viewed as another aspect of the cross-cultural experience.

For those who do not attend church services, be conscientious of doing any activities outside or inside the home that could be interpreted as being disrespectful of the holy day. Probably the biggest complaint Volunteers have about religion in Samoa is the large donations made by villagers, including the poorer families, to support their local church and pastor. Volunteers often believe that the money donated to the church is more needed by families for things such as improved nutrition, better education of their children, home improvements, business development, etc., or needed to support the village school and village improvement projects. Although some Samoans also are starting to agree with this sentiment, Volunteers must recognize that this matter is very sensitive and should refrain from making their thoughts public in their village.

Volunteer Comments

“Even though my site doesn’t have my preferred denomination, going to the available church services on Sundays quickly became an important part of my weekly routine. Religion is such an integral part of Samoan culture that it’s almost impossible to integrate into your community without going to church. Being involved in church-related activities (choir, youth group, and women’s volleyball team, etc.) was the foot in the door I needed to start my community integration process. Joining the church groups or simply just showing up at church makes you feel like a part of your host community and that feeling makes your service much more fulfilling and worthwhile.”

Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers

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

Older Volunteers are often accustomed to a greater degree of independence and freedom of movement than the Peace Corps’ program focus and safety and security practices allow. Pre-service training can be particularly stressful for older Volunteers, whose lifelong learning styles and habits may or may not lend themselves to the techniques used. A 50+ Volunteer may be the only older person in a group of Volunteers and initially may not feel part of the group. Younger Volunteers may look to an older Volunteer for advice and support; some find this to be an enjoyable experience, while others choose not to fill this role. Some 50+ Volunteers may find it difficult to adapt to a lack of structure and clarity in their role after having worked for many years in a very structured and demanding job.

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

Volunteer Comments

“Being a senior Volunteer in Samoa has both pluses and minuses. Although only 61, I’m considered an old woman here, which translates to respect. That means others carry things for me and I generally get the best seat on the bus. The downside is that Samoans are reluctant to challenge or correct what I say or do. By building relationships, they’ve begun to treat me as a peer and tell me when I’m doing something wrong or they think my ideas won’t work.

“The living conditions can be challenging. There is a lot of walking and sitting/sleeping on cement floors. Doing laundry in a bucket means a lot of bending and lifting. The upside is that between the chores, walking a mile and a half each way to get groceries, and the readily available snorkeling, I’m in the best shape of my life.”

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Samoa?

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

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

What is the electric current in Samoa?

240 volts, 50-cycle. Anything electric from the U.S. must have a transformer to change the local 240-volt, 50-cycle electricity to 110-volt output safe for appliances. If the electrical device lists input as AC 100-240V ~ 50-60Hz, then it will most likely work in-country without a transformer. However, all U.S.-made electrical appliances will require a plug adaptor of the Australian/New Zealand configuration regardless of their compatibility with voltage and cycles. The power supply in Samoa is not always steady and surge protectors are recommended for use with all electrical devices that could be damaged in a power spike. Surge protectors (for Australian/New Zealand plugs) are sold in-country at a reasonable price.

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.

Peace Corps/Samoa Volunteers who work in schools are expected to take their vacation days only during school breaks. If the school system keeps its three-term per year schedule, the first-term break of two to three weeks is from mid-May to early June, the second break of two weeks is from mid- to late September, and the third break at the end of the school year lasts from approximately after the first week in December to the last week in January. The first-term break in a Volunteer's first year also is filled with an early service conference (in-service training). Volunteers also will need to attend a midservice conference at the end of January before their second year at a school begins, and a short close-of-service conference during the September break late in their second year of service.

If you are visited by family and friends during the school year, you are expected to continue to work at your school during the normal school day. You can spend time with visitors after school, on weekends,

and at your school, where your visitors will be warmly welcomed. It's also a great opportunity for you to involve your visitors in Second and Third Goal activities.

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

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

Do I need an international driver's license?

Volunteers in Samoa do not need an international driver's license as 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 Samoan 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. Volunteers have recommended buying toys from a dollar store:

“You cannot go wrong and you will make the children in your training family very happy.”

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 rural villages and are usually within a one to two bus or taxi ride from another Volunteer. Some sites in Western Savai'i require a 10- to 12-hour trip on a bus, boat, and then a bus again to the capital.

How can my family contact me in an emergency?

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

How easy is it to call home from Samoa?

Most Volunteers can call home easily on their mobile telephones, although they might have to walk a short distance in their village or slightly outside it to reach a spot with the best coverage. Increasingly, many Volunteers are calling home using Internet phone services, such as Skype, from local Internet cafes,

wireless hotspots in Apia, or by using their own dial-up Internet connections at their sites. Remember that calls, especially collect ones, from Samoa to the U.S. are expensive.

Should I bring a cellphone with me?

Many phones, even ones that claim to be the appropriate GSM for Samoa, will not work in-country (including iPhones). As your phone will most likely disappear or break at least once during service, it is a bad idea to bring an expensive phone from home. Also, the phones in-country are cheap and disposable. Local cellphone service is pre-paid, easy to acquire, and text-ready. The settling-in allowance that you will receive upon swearing in as a Volunteer includes an amount for a simple, locally available mobile telephone. Since the swearing-in ceremony occurs at the end of your pre-service training, most trainees use personal funds (approximately \$60) to buy a mobile telephone as soon as they arrive in the country. However, most Volunteers find that they have to cut back on cellphone time due to their modest living allowance, and usually text or make extremely brief calls to each other to stay in touch. Most Volunteers regularly receive calls from overseas with very little trouble. Some Volunteers also have landlines installed, for both calls and Internet access.

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

Nearly every Volunteer chooses to bring a computer, as it can be a valuable asset, so computers are highly recommended. Computers can be used for work, email, watching DVDs, and sometimes Internet access. The Peace Corps also has a system of computerized reporting on Volunteer activities and accomplishments. Some Volunteers have telephone lines installed in their residences and obtain dial-up Internet access accounts from local ISPs. Others purchase digi-modems, which connect laptops to the mobile telephone network.

If you do not already have a laptop, it is much less expensive and more convenient to buy one in the United States and bring it with you. Computers are very expensive in Samoa, and the choice is limited. It also is very expensive to ship computers from the U.S. to Samoa. It is recommended to get a relatively inexpensive one since the hot, humid, and often salty air are hard on electronics, and you might need funds later to replace it. As a general rule, don't bring anything that you would be heartbroken to lose, have stolen, or broken. The Peace Corps strongly recommends purchasing personal articles insurance to protect your equipment. If you come without a computer, there are two computers at the Peace Corps office in Apia for Volunteers to use. Some computers also are available to use at Internet cafes, schools, and some village "Tele-Net" centers.

Internet access is available through a variety of means. There are several Internet cafes in Apia and others are becoming more widely available in other parts of the country. The same is true of wireless "hotspots." Some Volunteers install a landline and access the Internet through old-fashioned dial-up modems. Others purchase an Internet-access USB modem and rely on the mobile telephone network. Internet is even available in the computer centers of some rural villages and schools. Some Volunteers have some access to the Internet all of the time, some Volunteers have it most of the time, and others have it infrequently at their sites or during visits to places where it is more often available. For a small fee per MB used, Volunteers also can access the Internet from the two computers assigned to Volunteers in the Peace Corps/Samoa office. The exact type and amount of Internet access depends on a Volunteer's location in the country and his or her requirements and interests.

The Volunteer living allowance includes a small for monthly Internet access. Because Internet access costs are very high and the living allowance is relatively small, you should be prepared to spend a lot less time online than you probably did in the U.S.

WELCOME LETTERS FROM SAMOA VOLUNTEERS

Dear Invitees,

Before I came to Samoa, I had little teaching experience. On my first day here as a primary school literacy teacher I was, quite simply, overwhelmed. I had so many different emotions. I had the biggest smile on my face because everyone was incredibly welcoming and my students were so excited and so happy; however, behind my smile, I kept asking myself, “Can I really do this?” Well, it might have taken me almost a year to realize this, but the answer to that question was “Yes.” Yes, I can do this. One of the biggest and cheesiest lessons I’ve learned here is that nothing is impossible. Things will be difficult and sometimes they will be so difficult that you’ll just want to give up, but nothing is impossible.

During my first year of teaching in Samoa, my principal (for personal reasons) did not come to school for almost an entire term. As a result, I was asked to take over her year 5 class. I thought that this must be some sort of practical joke. Sometimes I find myself struggling to teach literacy. How was I supposed to teach subjects like math, science, and health? I’ll admit, sometimes it was a struggle for both me and my students. But through this crazy adventure, I learned many lessons. I learned that literacy doesn’t just have to be about the alphabet and stories of puppies and playgrounds: You can incorporate literacy into any subject, even math! I learned that it takes time to build strong relationships with your teachers, but once you do, you and your teachers can accomplish so much more. And finally, I learned that even if you are struggling or having a rough day, your students can turn that right around. When you see a student (who has been labeled “slow” by all other teachers) come in and he wants to read and he wants you to give him extra activities, that’s not a good day, that’s a great day.

They say that Polynesian people are some of the happiest people in the world and I have discovered, even on the hardest days here that this “Samoaan happiness” is truly infectious. In Samoa you will surprise yourself. You will face your share of obstacles but throughout the course of this wonderfully crazy adventure, you will realize that you are a lot stronger than you ever thought you were.

—*Kate Brolley, Group 84*

The days are long and hot. The work is draining. But I don’t regret coming to Samoa for a moment. I’ve only been at my school for eight weeks, and I can already see the impact. I teach 10 reading groups twice a week, Monday through Thursday. On Fridays, I pull out 12 of my lowest performing students for 15-minute one-on-one sessions.

Fridays are my favorite day by far. The students come into my room beaming with excitement to work with me. We do several warm-up drills with letter sounds and then build up to reading three-letter words. After they have been successful with single words, I give the students the chance to read a basic book. So far, I’ve had three students go from reading zero words at the beginning of the term, to reading an entire book on their own. The look on their faces when they finished their first book was one of confidence and excitement. I love seeing my students improve and it gives me the motivation to keep planning the best lessons I can. I’m optimistic that all of my students will be able to read by the end of the year.

—*Jennifer Sargeant, Group 85*

I am currently drawing a world map on a wall at my school. I should have known from the beginning that this would be a cause for students to gather. Every day I am there, I have students sitting and standing around me, watching me draw the map and making comments on how smart I must be to be able to draw it. Some sit there as long as I do, just watching. I kid you not, one day someone sat there eating popcorn. I

felt like a movie. They ask me questions about the countries I am drawing, and I show them where Samoa is and what it looks like compared to Australia and New Zealand. Samoan students are so curious about everything. They don't get a lot of variety in their lives, so bringing someone from a different country to their village for two years is quite the commotion. Some days I want to scream seeing another student gathered around me or yelling goodbye to me from the road. But then I see how excited they are just to see a map of the world, and I realize that my being here gives them opportunities for things they might not have had otherwise. Even the simple act of showing them their country on a map expands their view of the world and is one step closer to creating world-wise citizens. And to me, that is what the Peace Corps is all about.

—*Rebecca Haas, Group 84*

When starting a new job, the tendency is to try to prove yourself. You want your co-workers and boss to know that you can handle the demands of the job. The Peace Corps is no different. Within the first few days of teaching at my new school I quickly realized that I had a problem. I was trying to teach my small groups but kept getting interrupted by students who were passing by the room. They would try to get our attention by shouting, knocking on the door, and making noises. I figured I could handle the situation by myself by shooing the students away and hoping that the novelty of the new *Pisikoa* (Peace Corps Volunteer) would wear off. My plan did not work.

One day a few weeks into the term, the “mob” outside the door kept growing and growing and the students began throwing things into the room to get our attention. It was impossible to teach and I was very frustrated. The students in my small group knew I was upset. I explained to them that I was sad because I came all the way from America to teach and I cannot do my job with all of the distractions.

Within minutes after dismissing my small group, two of my co-teachers were at my door asking me if I was OK. At first I was confused by their sudden concern. They then told me that the students in my small group came back to their classes and told them that I was crying. I explained to the teachers that I was not crying but was sad that our group kept getting interrupted. They both assured me that they would tell the principal the next day and that this problem would be solved.

From time to time there is the occasional student or two who will distract our small groups but for the most part, my groups have been interruption-free from that day on. Additionally, my need for their help formed a bond between me and my co-teachers. They were both very happy to help me. Since that day, we check on each other in the morning. I will stop by their classroom or they will stop by to see me. When your family and friends are literally on the other side of the world, there is no better way to start the day than with a reminder that there are people around who are looking out for you.

Part of proving yourself in the Peace Corps is recognizing when you need help and having the courage to ask. Had I asked for help when I first noticed the problem instead of trying to handle things myself, it would have saved me a lot of frustration and I could have developed friendships with my co-teachers sooner.

—*Marcia Smith, Group 85*

We've all heard the saying: “The Peace Corps is the toughest job you'll ever love.” I'm sure that doesn't mean a lot to you now, as it didn't to me when someone first told me that well-circulated phrase. Now I understand, however, just how simultaneously difficult and rewarding my work here is. Waking up every morning in a hot mosquito net, hearing my Samoan name 300 times before school even starts, adjusting to strict cultural norms, and not being able to control certain aspects of my daily life is certainly a trying experience. Not to mention the illiteracy rates and the general apathy in regards to education—those are

equally discouraging. However, that is precisely why our purpose here is so compelling and why Peace Corps/Samoa needs us. In spite of the innate challenges, I find our project incredibly rewarding and fulfilling. Watching a student, who barely knew the alphabet at the beginning of the term, now reading his first words is an incredible feeling. In a mere 10 weeks working at my school, I have seen immense progress in not only the literacy rates of my students but in their confidence levels. My Samoan counterparts are also seeing the difference and are adopting more student-centered learning styles. The impact we are making will reverberate through future generations. At the end of the day, the rewards far outweigh the costs.

—Stephanie Wallace, Group 85

Afio Mai! (Welcome!)

When I first got off the plane in Samoa in October 2009, I thought to myself, “Can I just go back on the plane and go home? There is no way I am going to endure the heat here for over two years.” I figured it was worth a try, since I did spend months filling out applications, getting medical clearances, and playing the waiting game. Boy was the wait worth it, and I finally got used to the heat, as much as the Samoans are.

Living in a different culture can be difficult at times, but the beauty of Samoa is you will always have family nearby. I love living with my Samoan family, as I know I always have people who love me nearby. They look out for me, and even though it is strange asking permission from my parents to go places, since I had been living on my own for eight years, it is nice to know they care. I also have an amazing Peace Corps family there for me at all times. I know both families will be there for me for the rest of my life.

Being in the Peace Corps has many advantages, as not only are you helping out in your community to better the country of Samoa, you also have the opportunity to better yourself. I have learned so much about myself, while learning about the people in my community.

Samoa is a wonderful place to live. We have beautiful beaches, spectacular blowholes, and many fun volleyball games to join. When you walk around a village, people are always quick to invite you in for a cup of Samoan cocoa or tea.

Samoans truly are the friendliest people in the world, and there is no better place to spend your service as a Peace Corps Volunteer.

—Lillian Watson

Peace Corps Volunteer (2009–13; extended for a third year of service)

Dear Invitees,

Welcome to Peace Corps/Samoa! This letter is the first of many welcomes you’ll receive once you arrive in Samoa. You will be draped in flower necklaces, serenaded by Samoan songs, served traditional *ava* and, best of all, surrounded by laughing Samoan faces. They, and we, are so happy you will be serving here for the next two years.

When I received my welcome book, I remember being excited, curious, and scared. Maybe some of you can relate. Leaving family, friends, jobs, and hot showers is no small feat. Yes, becoming a Peace Corps Volunteer asks a lot. But, I can assure you, it gives back in abundance. The people of my village have welcomed me into their homes, shared their food, and taught me their dances. I even have students who thank me for teaching them every day—in English. As a Volunteer, I have learned a new language, adopted a dog, climbed waterfalls, made lifelong friends, Jazzercized with the Women’s Committee, and

watched students leap from stumbling through the ABCs to reading “The Cat in the Hat.” Life as a Volunteer has certainly been tough at times, but it has also been rich with rewards I could never have imagined when I first read my own welcome book.

Your two years of service will hold challenges, to be sure, but it will also be rich, with kind people, growing opportunities, and good memories. So welcome and good luck!

—*Kaelin O’Connell*
Peace Corps Volunteer (2009–11)

PACKING LIST

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

General Clothing

Clothes should be lightweight, easily washable, quick drying, and the less ironing, the better. Cottons or cotton blends are cooler and more comfortable than most synthetics. Most synthetics do not breathe, hold in moisture, and create breeding grounds for bacteria and fungi. However, some Volunteers are finding that clothing made of synthetic, breathable material that wicks away moisture is very comfortable and keeps them dryer and they prefer it to cotton. Many manufacturers produce this material, just be sure it is described as “breathable” and “wicking.” Don't bring leather items (e.g., shoes or journals) because they get moldy quickly.

Modesty, neatness, and presenting a professional appearance are important. For work, including every day for most teachers, and formal occasions, women wear *puletasis*, which is a fitted blouse and long skirt, while men wear button-down shirts with an *ie faitaga*, which is a pocket *lava lava* (wraparound skirt). For other everyday use, especially in the villages, a neat T-shirt and *lava lava* (less formal than a men's pocket *lava lava*) are worn. Clothes can be made or purchased inexpensively in-country. A *lava lava* ranges from \$5–\$10, an *ie faitaga* \$10–\$15, and *puletasis* start around \$30 and cost more depending on the quality of fabric and style. Also, there are a few secondhand stores where clothes can be purchased cheaply (\$3–\$5). When trying to make the luggage weight limits, do not stress over clothing: Less is the way to go.

For Men and Women:

- One or two canvas, web belts (no leather and no metal grommets, as those will mold and rust and ruin your clothes)
- Five to six pairs of modest shorts (knee-length preferable; cargo shorts work well, but are difficult to wash and dry by hand). Board shorts are highly recommended by male Volunteers because they dry quickly but their length is considered too short for females in villages. Some female Volunteers use bicycle or spandex shorts under their *lava lavas*, especially when exercising.
- Four to six T-shirts for around the house and non-work occasions (dark colors are recommended as they do not show the dirt and stains as much).
- One long-sleeved shirt for breezy evenings
- One or two pairs of lightweight pants (khakis or jeans) for informal occasions or travel (both women and men wear *lava lavas* almost all of the time)
- Lighter-weight warm clothes (if you plan to travel to New Zealand or Australia; or plan to have these shipped when you need them; also can be purchased cheaply at secondhand stores in Samoa or in Auckland)
- Athletic clothing for sports and leisure. Rash guards are recommended for surfers and frequent snorkelers, scuba divers, and swimmers.
- Two towels (the quality is not the same as in the U.S.; one quick-dry towel is convenient for carrying around in your backpack when traveling). Micro-fiber towels are recommended.
- Good sun hats for protection against sunburn and skin cancer. If you are particularly sun sensitive, bring a durable, wide-brimmed hat. For others, hats of various styles are available here, but the selection of styles and sizes will be limited.

- Rain jacket and/or umbrella. Some prefer umbrellas, as rain jackets can get hot. Others prefer breathable rain jackets that can be put over a small backpack to protect a laptop, etc. Umbrellas purchased locally usually break quickly; many Volunteers go through two a year. Rain jackets can be purchased locally, but they are generally of the nonbreathable style. Thick, black umbrellas also are good for sun protection, which is customary here.
- One pair of sweat pants for the occasional cooler, rainy evening
- A few pairs of socks (for sports and if you plan to visit colder places like New Zealand)

For Women

- Nicer T-shirts or collared blouses, that cover the shoulders, for casual work situations and running errands, are also useful to mix and match with skirts and lava lavas.
- Tank tops for exercise inside or sleeping. They are not worn in public by Samoan women, as they are considered too revealing and immodest.
- Bras and underwear can wear out very quickly here, and the local selection is not very good. So if you have favorites, bring along a good supply (some Volunteers recommend bringing a two-year supply). You can also plan to have someone ship you replacements later if you need them. Cotton or wicking sports bras work best; avoid synthetic fabrics. Boxers work well under lava lavas.
- One half-slip or one long slip (for white *puletasis*).
- A white top and modest white skirt for White Sunday (which happens within a week of your arrival), where you will need to wear all white to church.
- Board shorts and a rash guard T-shirt, as the normal swimwear for Samoan women is T-shirts, shorts, and lava lavas. Any swimwear that is more revealing isn't culturally appropriate in a village. One or two-piece bathing suits are acceptable in tourist areas, away from your village.
- One or two outfits for travel to restaurants or nightclubs occasionally in Apia or while on vacation (something you like and will feel good in).

For Men

- Three or four short-sleeved collared shirts (polo or button-down)
- One short-sleeved, white dress shirt for church functions, particularly for your first White Sunday celebration in October, (can also get one in-country or may be given one by your host family)
- One tie for formal occasions (primarily for church-related functions; can be purchased in-country)
- Two-year supply of underwear. Cotton boxers are recommended and bring plenty as they are hard to find here. (Packing half of the underwear in a sealed bag and opening after a year helps preserve them.)
- Undershirts are handy for wearing under white church clothes, but otherwise are not worn often.
- Two to four pairs of board shorts (quick-drying and lightweight), which also are recommended as swimwear.
- One to two pairs of cargo shorts (lightweight is better)

Shoes

- One pair of good flip-flops or sports sandals (the latter will provide more support, stability, and security, and can be worn for some athletic/sports activities, light hiking, etc.). Inexpensive rubber and plastic flip-flops can be purchased in-country, but are less durable.
- One or two pairs of running/walking shoes (depending on your exercise habits and level of comfort using flip-flops and sport sandals for daily walking and exercise; avoid leather)
- One pair of reef shoes, if you are serious about poking about tide pools, rocky beaches, snorkeling, surfing, etc.
- Non-leather hiking shoes, if you are planning to trek in New Zealand on a holiday (or plan to buy an inexpensive pair when you get there)

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

You can find most toiletries and necessities in Samoa, but if you prefer certain brands, bring them with you. Deodorant is widely available in-country, but the quality varies, so you may want to bring some extras with you or have some mailed later.

- If you are particular about what you shave with, consider bringing an ample supply with you, as what you like might not be available here. Shaving cream is available in-country.
- Contact lens solution (for those authorized in advance by the Office of Medical Services to bring contacts); solution is available in-country but is very expensive. Hand-sanitizer gel is nice, especially if you wear contacts. This will help prevent eye infections, especially for Volunteers living in villages, where hand soap is not always available. The Peace Corps does not provide contact lens solution.
- Individually wrapped antiseptic/antibacterial wipes (like those you would get at a restaurant) or small bottles of leave-on antibacterial soap are great to keep in your pocket or purse, as hand soap and toilet paper are not always standard in bathrooms, kitchens, etc.
- Quality hair ties and clips (difficult to find here, so bring plenty of extras)
- A plastic container or dish to store bar soap while traveling.
- Tampons (if you want to use them; not currently sold in Samoa). You can also have someone mail you some later.
- Face wash
- Nail clippers

Electronics

- Rechargeable batteries (AA and AAA) and charger. Batteries die very quickly here. The ones you can purchase at the markets are not of the same quality, so they do not last very long. (Some Volunteers suggest IC3 rechargeable batteries. They charge in 15 minutes and can be recharged thousands of times.)
- Laptop computer with at least two USB ports. Computers are a great tool for work and one with a DVD player is even better. The climate here is hard on computers, so it's not recommended to buy the latest, greatest, and most expensive model. The Peace Corps/Samoa office uses HP computers and Microsoft software, so for the greatest ease of file and information exchange and compatibility, a Windows computer is preferable to a Mac.
- A waterproof digital camera
- An MP3 player and speakers (look for speakers that are durable and outdoor-friendly)
- An AM/FM radio and/or shortwave radio (available here, but expensive) that runs on rechargeable batteries or has a wind-up internal generator feature. These are vital for receiving news updates in case of emergencies such as cyclones, tsunami warnings, etc., in case telephone and text communication with the Peace Corps/Samoa office are disrupted. In some cases, the Peace Corps will send messages to Volunteers through AM/FM radio.
- USB key/flash drive
- Flashlight or headlamp. Volunteers suggest Maglite brand as they withstand the humidity pretty well. Flashlights with an internal, wind-up generator are not recommended.
- External hard drive filled with new music, movies, and TV shows. These can be used to swap media with other Volunteers or store your own in the case of a computer problem.

Kitchen

Most items can be found in Samoa, but range in quality and price. Most people get by on what they can buy here, and if they find they really need something that they cannot get here, they have it mailed to them later.

- Plastic bins for storing food (readily available here, but quality varies and prices can be high)
- A good kitchen knife and perhaps a knife sharpener (pack in your checked bags)

- Favorite spice mix (common spices are generally available here)
- Can opener (available, but can be expensive and poor quality)
- Zip-close bags (various sizes)
- Favorite recipes and/or a cookbook (but it may be hard to find all of the ingredients)
- A small French press or any other kind of small, non-electric coffee maker (such as a cone filter and filter holder). Most coffee here is instant, although ground coffee is now available in Apia grocery stores. (Volunteers say the quality is not good and recommend bringing your own and having it included in any care packages mailed to you by family and friends.)
- For tea drinkers, there is plenty of standard black tea, with green, oolong, and herbal teas becoming a bit more common. If you drink chai tea, bring some with you as the quality in-country is not good. If you prefer loose tea, bring it and a tea ball.
- Peanuts are readily available, but any other kind of nut can be expensive and hard to find. If nuts are essential to you, ship some yourself or ask someone to send you care packages.

Miscellaneous

- A book about your state or hometown area with lots of pictures
- Small bag for weekend or overnight trips. A sealable, dry bag also is useful for storing computer, camera, etc., while traveling.
- Swiss Army knife/Leatherman tool (pack in your checked bags)
- Wristwatch (water-resistant)
- Locks for luggage
- Posters
- Sunglasses with strong UV protection is a must! Volunteers also have suggested that even if you use contacts, it's a good idea to bring a pair of prescription sunglasses. Otherwise, if you experience problems with your contacts and have to temporarily use eyeglasses, you will not be able to wear sunglasses.
- Sturdy, durable plastic water bottles. Aluminum and stainless steel bottles get too hot in the sun.
- Games, cards, Frisbee, hobby equipment, etc.
- Address book
- Paperback English dictionary and thesaurus
- English Bible to read at church (avoid leather covers) if you typically do so in the U.S.
- Duct or Gorilla tape
- Putty (to use for mounting pictures)
- Basic tools (available here, but expensive); allen wrenches are very useful for bikes.
- Dryer sheets (keeps stored clothes from smelling of mildew)
- Bed sheets (twin or double size; available in-country, but expensive and different quality than in the U.S.)
- Snorkeling gear (consider a rash guard if you plan to spend a lot of time in the water; it also helps protect you from sunburn and coral scrapes)
- Goggles if you like to swim
- Travel sewing kit
- Safety pins
- Books. The Peace Corps office has a large library for you to use, but if you bring a few with you, it will be appreciated by Volunteers already here.
- Magazine subscriptions. Most U.S. magazines will deliver internationally, but at a higher rate, and delivery can sometimes be slow and irregular.
- Pictures of your family, friends, and home (very important—your new Samoan friends will want to see what your family is like)

Special Notes

- You will probably exchange gifts with your host family at the end of training. Expensive gifts are not necessary. Suggested items include inexpensive perfumes and T-shirts or hats with logos (e.g., sports teams, U.S., your state, university names, etc.) or that have to do with “The Rock.” American items such as flags, posters, pens, and pencils are wonderful. A tourist book or wall calendar of where you live is always fun.

Care Package Considerations

The mail varies greatly, depending even on where you send it from the U.S. Some tips for getting mail here a little more quickly and smoothly follow.

- Mail comes twice a week so there is no point in having something shipped next day or express mail.
- The smaller the box, the better. Up to 12 x 12 x 6 seems to do well. The larger the box, the more time it takes, the more beaten up it is, and the more appealing it is to others.
- Be sure a customs form is filled out and accompanies the package. Otherwise, it gets held up.
- Be sure “Western Samoa” is on the label and the U.S. post office is clear on where it is going. Postage should not be at domestic rates; otherwise, it may go to American Samoa, where it may be sent back to the U.S. or never arrives.
- Consider writing, “God is Watching” or “God Bless This Package” on the box as a safety precaution.
- If sending a package with valuable goods by mail, insure it or, better yet, find someone to personally carry it to Samoa.
- Faster is not always ... well, faster. Airmail packages can get here in three weeks or three months. If someone wants to send you something timely (e.g., for a birthday or Christmas), he or she should send it very early, airmail or otherwise. Note that Christmas is horrible for sending packages. If your loved ones want to send a Christmas gift, be sure they send it early or let them know you are OK if it arrives in February or later.
- Pack boxes well. Anything that can rattle in the box can get broken. If the smallest box available still has air spaces, hard candy makes great packing material (hint, hint). Avoid using foam peanuts; Samoa is a small country and trash accumulates quickly.
- Put anything you would hate to have come out of the packaging in a zip-close bag.
- Use the flat-rate boxes through the U.S. Postal Service. They are cheap and easy and it doesn't matter how heavy the items in them are.
- Don't panic! Mail usually arrives just fine, it just takes a while.

PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

Family

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

Passport/Travel

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

Medical/Health

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

Insurance

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

Personal Papers

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

Voting

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

Personal Effects

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

Financial Management

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

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

CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

For Questions About	Staff	Toll-free extension	Direct/Local
Responding to an invitation	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Country information	Rachel Goldstein Fiji, Samoa, Tonga	ext. 2519 Desk Officer rgoldstein@peacecorps.gov	202.692.2519
Plane tickets, passports, visas, or other travel matters	CWT SATO Travel	ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal clearance:	Office of Placement	ext. 1840	202.692.1840
Medical clearance and forms processing (includes dental)	Screening Nurse	ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical reimbursements (handled by a subcontractor)			800.544.1802
Loan deferments, taxes, financial operations		ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Readjustment allowance withdrawals, power of attorney, staging (pre-departure orientation), and reporting instructions	Office of Staging	ext. 1865	202.692.1865
<i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks prior to departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>			
Family emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas) 24 hours	Counseling and Outreach Unit	ext. 1470	202.692.1470
Office of Victim Advocacy		ext. 1753 24 hours (call or text)	202.692.1753 202.409.2704