

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# GUINEA



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION  
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



June 2011



# A WELCOME LETTER

Welcome to Peace Corps Guinea!

We hope that you accept your invitation! Should you accept, you will embark on an incredible experience. You will be challenged in multiple ways and you will persevere. You will make new friends of all ages and from all walks of life and form new family ties within Guinean communities and within Peace Corps. You will learn as much about yourself and what it means to be an American as you will about Guinea and what it means to be a Guinean.

To be successful, you will need to be resourceful, persistent, patient, flexible, and highly motivated. You must keep your sense of humor, and remind yourself from time to time why you decided to join the Peace Corps. After the initial excitement and charm of being in a new and interesting environment wears off, it is easy to become negative and critical, to succumb to the challenges and become worn down.

Fortunately, you will not be alone! The Peace Corps/Guinea staff is committed to providing you with the best medical, programmatic, and administrative support possible given the economic and social realities of Guinea, which are different from what you are used to in the United States.

Your fellow Volunteers will support you during your Peace Corps service. The bonds you make you will keep for life. They will be there to help you and to share their experiences. Your host communities will provide the most critical source of support. It is in the relationships that you build with your community that you will find the full meaning of your service.

During your nine-week pre-service training (PST) program you will learn two languages: French and the appropriate local language for your site. Learning the language will require persistence, patience, and hard work, but you will succeed. And you will find it immensely rewarding to greet people and talk with them in their native language. It is a good idea to start language practice, especially French, before you come to Guinea as this will facilitate your rapid acquisition of language once in-country.

Before your departure, please reflect on your commitment to the Peace Corps, and your motivation to work with Guineans and help in their efforts to better their lives. Peace Corps/ Guinea staff will do everything possible to make sure you have the tools—cultural, medical, programmatic, safety, and linguistic skills—required to succeed. But the determination and will to succeed will come from within.

As you read this *Welcome Book*, the *Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook*, and the Volunteer Assignment Description, you will learn more about Guinea, your assignment, and the policies and circumstances that guide our program. While you assimilate this information, decide if Peace Corps is right for you, if Guinea is right for you, and if your project assignment is right for you.

The Peace Corps staff, and your fellow Volunteers look forward to meeting and working with you.

Welcome to our Peace Corps family!

The Peace Corps/Guinea Staff

## NOTES



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Map of Guinea**

<b>A Welcome Letter</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Core Expectations</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Peace Corps/Guinea History and Programs</b>	<b>11</b>
History of the Peace Corps in Guinea	11
History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Guinea	11-12
<b>Country Overview: Guinea at a Glance</b>	<b>15</b>
History	15-18
Government	18
Economy	19
People and Culture	19-20
Environment	21
<b>Resources for Further Information</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle</b>	<b>29</b>
Communications	29-31
Housing and Site Location	31
Living Allowance and Money Management	31
Food and Diet	32
Transportation	32
Geography and Climate	32
Social Activities	33
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior	33
Personal Safety	34
Rewards and Frustrations	35

<b>Peace Corps Training</b>	<b>37</b>
Overview of Pre-Service Training	37-40
<i>Technical Training</i>	38
<i>Language Training</i>	39
<i>Cross-Cultural Training</i>	39-40
<i>Health Training</i>	40
<i>Safety Training</i>	40
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service	40-41
<b>Your Health Care and Safety in Guinea</b>	<b>43</b>
Health Issues in Guinea	43-44
Helping You Stay Healthy	44-45
Maintaining Your Health	45-47
Women’s Health Information	47
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit	47-48
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist	48-50
Safety and Security—Our Partnership	50-54
<i>Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk</i>	52-54
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime	54
Support from Staff	55-58
<i>Crime Data for Guinea</i>	55-56
<i>Volunteer Safety Support in Guinea</i>	56-58
Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Guinea	60
<b>Diversity and Cross-Cultural Issues</b>	<b>61</b>
Overview of Diversity in Guinea	62
What Might a Volunteer Face?	62-66
<i>Possible Issues for Female Volunteers</i>	62-63
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color</i>	63-64
<i>Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers</i>	64
<i>Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers</i>	64-65
<i>Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers</i>	65
<i>Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities</i>	65-66
<i>Possible Issues for Married Volunteers</i>	66

<b>Frequently Asked Questions</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Welcome Letters From Guinea Volunteers</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>Packing List</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Pre-departure Checklist</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Contacting Peace Corps Headquarters</b>	<b>99</b>



# CORE EXPECTATIONS

## FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS

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

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



# PEACE CORPS/GUINEA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



## **History of the Peace Corps in Guinea**

Peace Corps signed a cooperation agreement with the government of Guinea in 1962, which forms the basis for the current country program. The first Volunteers arrived in Guinea in 1963. However, in 1966, relations between the United States government and the government of Guinea soured, and the Guinean government asked Volunteers to leave. Peace Corps was invited back in 1969, but again relations between the two governments deteriorated, and Volunteers left in 1971. Soon after President Sekou Touré's death in 1984, Peace Corps was asked to return once again to Guinea. Peace Corps has maintained a presence in Guinea since 1986, although the program was briefly interrupted in 2007 due to civil unrest. After reopening in July 2007, the program was once again suspended in October 2009 following military violence in the capital. Peace Corps/Guinea reopened in late 2010 with a small group of Peace Corps Response Volunteers and Reinstated Volunteers and will invite its first official Volunteer training class in July 2011.

## **History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Guinea**

The mission of the Peace Corps in Guinea is to partner with the people of Guinea to provide Volunteers with meaningful assignments and the skills and support they need to promote sustainable progress in their communities. Existing projects address the top development priorities of the government, including: education, public health, agroforestry, and community economic development. Most Volunteers are

based in rural or semi-urban areas so they may reach those communities most in need of assistance.

Since 1963, more than 1,200 Volunteers have served in Guinea. No matter what sector they are in, Volunteers are much in demand by schools, health centers, cooperatives, and nongovernmental organizations; requests for Volunteers historically exceed Peace Corps' capacity to provide them.

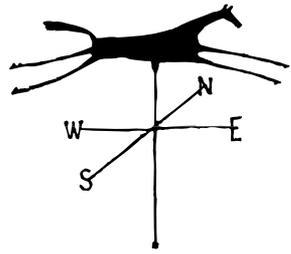
The development philosophy of Peace Corps/Guinea is to build capacity from the ground up; to empower people to improve the quality of their own lives. This philosophy prepares Volunteers to accompany community members throughout the complex process of addressing their development needs and reinforces the importance of sustainability and community engagement. Volunteers have the opportunity to share their background, experience, and compassion with their counterparts during the community development process.

The future for Peace Corps/Guinea is promising. With its first democratic elections successfully held in 2010, Guinea is currently transcending a challenging past with hope for a progressive future. Peace Corps Volunteers have the ability to play a pivotal role in this transition by reinforcing the capacity of youth, men, and women in communities throughout Guinea to address their own needs. Peace Corps/Guinea plans on rebuilding its program, slowly increasing Volunteer numbers over the next several years. During this rebuilding process, staff is focusing on quality improvement with the constant goal of ensuring a high performance program.

## NOTES



# COUNTRY OVERVIEW: GUINEA AT A GLANCE



## History

The geographical landmass commonly referred to today as the Republic of Guinea in West Africa has been inhabited for thousands of years. Prior to occupation by the French, many parts of the country and the people belonged to the empires of Ghana, Mali, and Songhai that prospered between 700 and 1400. Each of these West African powers have shaped and influenced the politics and culture of future generations of Guineans. While Guinea's history is rich and complex, it is perhaps more useful to focus on the country's more recent history.

### ***Guinea under French rule: 1898-1958***

Guinea's colonial period began with the arrival of the French in the early 19th century. The coastal region became a French protectorate in 1849. France's domination of the country was assured by 1898. Official French policy promoted the assimilation of French customs and language by local populations. This was based on the supposed "cultural superiority" of the French over indigenous people. As elsewhere in French West Africa, colonial rule in Guinea was characterized by neither assimilation nor association. Few Guineans were educated in either French language or culture.

While a French governor remained head of the territorial government, he was assisted by a government council chosen by a newly elected territorial assembly. Provision was also made for an African vice president to be selected from among the assemblymen. These changes favored political and social

progress in the colony and led to the creation of political parties that paved the way for self-determination and independence.

### ***National Sovereignty in 1958***

In 1958, Guinea was the first colony in Africa to gain its independence from France through an effort led by the country's first president, Sekou Touré. The decision by the newly formed Guinean government not to participate in the economic system proposed by French leaders for their former colonies led to a complete break in relations with France for years. As a result of this break with the West and ongoing political pressures of the Cold War, Sekou Touré developed close relations with Cuba, China, and the Soviet Union, and he instituted Marxist-socialist economic and political reforms. Touré's presidency was characterized by economic hardship and notorious human rights violations on one hand, and notable progress in Guinean culture and national pride on the other.

### ***The Era of Lansana Conté***

President Touré died in 1984 and a military coup was led by Guinean army Colonel Lansana Conté. The army formed a committee (Comité Militaire de Redressement National or CMRN) to run the country. This committee banned the Guinea Democratic Party (PDG), suspended the 1982 constitution, and dissolved the National Assembly. The CMRN also resolved to create a market-oriented economy and promised to encourage an open and pluralistic society.

A constitutional committee was established in October 1988, and a new constitution was put to popular vote at the end of 1990. The revised constitution received overwhelming popular support. This ended the first phase of the transition

to a democratically elected government promised by the army since its early days in power.

A second phase began in 1991 with the replacement of the CMRN by the *Conseil Transitoire de Redressement National*, or CTRN, which included more civilians than the CMRN. The CTRN served as a transitional government until presidential and parliamentary elections were held. General Lansana Conté was elected president in the country's first multiparty elections in 1993, and he was re-elected president in 1998 and 2003 (although these elections were not internationally recognized as being free and fair).

Lansana Conté's presidency was plagued by corruption at all levels of the administration, particularly during the last years of his office when his health had badly deteriorated. The country became increasingly politically and socially unstable with recurring union strikes, army mutinies, and failed political reforms. Upon Conté's death in December 2008, Guinea had virtually become a failed state.

### ***Moussa Dadis Camara's Episode***

Hours after Conté's death, a junta called CNDD (the National Council for Democracy and Development), headed by Captain Moussa Dadis Camara, took over power in a bloodless coup. Following initial support due to the relative stability the CNDD was able to maintain, Camara quickly became widely criticized for clinging to power. On September 28, 2009, the military opened fire on a peaceful political gathering organized to protest the CNDD's failure to move forward (as promised) with democratic elections. The massacre sparked unprecedented condemnation from the international community, followed by heavy sanctions and pressure.

On December 3 2009, Camara escaped an assassination attempt by his own *aide de camp* but was seriously injured.

Following treatment in Morocco, Camara has since lived in exile in Burkina Faso. General Sekouba Konaté assumed the interim presidency, opening the way to agreements that culminated in the establishment of a transitional government led by an opposition-appointed prime minister and the CNT (National Council of the Transition), tasked with revising the constitution and serving as Parliament in the interim.

The first round of presidential elections took place on June 27, 2010, and produced two leading candidates. Elections were largely recognized by the international community as free, fair, and peaceful, despite some logistical problems, irregularities, and allegations of fraud. The second and final election round was held in November 2010. Despite some tensions prior to the announcement of final results, the elections were largely peaceful, and the losing party accepted the results. In January 2011, Prof. Alpha Condé was sworn in as president of Guinea.

## **Government**

Guinea is a republic and the government is composed of three branches: executive, legislative, and judicial. The executive branch consists of an elected president and appointed civilian ministers; the legislative branch consists of the elected National Assembly; and the judicial branch has a supreme court. There is universal suffrage for Guinean citizens over the age of 18. Political parties were legalized in April 1992. Since 2009, the number of political parties has grown, with 24 fielding candidates for the 2010 elections.

The administration of Guinea is carried out on four levels, beginning at the top with the national government, followed by regions (8), prefectures (33), and sub-prefectures (100), also called rural development communities (CRDs). The president appoints officials to all levels of the country's highly centralized administration.

## **Economy**

Despite its mineral wealth, Guinea is one of the poorest countries in the world. The country's economy depends mostly on agriculture and the extraction of natural resources. Leading export crops are coffee, bananas, palm kernels, and pineapples. Guinea possesses between one-fourth and one-third of the world's known bauxite reserves and high-grade ore. The country ranks second only to Australia in ore production and is the world's largest exporter of bauxite. Mining is the most dynamic and important source of foreign exports, providing the majority of export revenues. There are rich deposits of iron ore, gold, and diamonds, but Guinea's underdeveloped infrastructure has prevented the exploitation of these available resources.

Industrial and commercial sectors are in the early stages of development. Significant economic liberalization has been achieved by reforms begun in 1984. There has been growth in the trade, agricultural production, manufacturing, and informal (i.e., street vendors and other small-scale entrepreneurial activities) sectors. However, many economic issues are unresolved, including creating a healthier environment for the growth of the private sector and better economic achievement.

## **People and Culture**

Guinea's population of approximately 9.5 million is growing at an annual rate of 2.8 percent. One-sixth of the population lives in Conakry, the capital, where the population is increasing at a rate of 5 percent per year. Forty-five percent of Guineans are under age 15. Life expectancy is 50 years, and child (under 5 years of age) mortality is 90 per 1,000 live births.

Both the ethnic configuration and the linguistic distribution of people in Guinea are a function of natural geographic divisions. Although there are more than 20 ethnic groups in the country, each geographic region has a predominant group that absorbs or influences the others in the region. In some cases, smaller ethnic groups are actually subdivisions of larger ones, with similar linguistic and cultural roots.

Lower Guinea (*Basse Côte*) is made up of the Susu, Baga, Nalu, Landuma, Tyapi, and Mikiforé people. Susu is the largest of these and represents about 15 percent of the population of Guinea. Middle Guinea (*Moyenne Guinée*) includes the Fulani people (*Peuhl* in French), who represent approximately 40 percent of this region's population, Djalonké (the original inhabitants of the Fouta Djallon), and Tanda. Upper Guinea (*Haute Guinée*) is made up of the Malinke, Djalonké, and Ouassoulounké. The Malinke account for about 30 percent of the population in Upper Guinea. Finally, the Forest Region accommodates the Kissia (*Kissi* in French), Loma (*Toma* in French), and Kpèlè (*Guerzé* in French). There have not been significant clashes among these ethnic groups, as intermarriages and the sharing of a similar culture have brought peaceful cohabitation.

Over the last few decades, conflicts in neighboring countries, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Côte d'Ivoire, forced more than 800,000 people to migrate to Guinea as refugees. Most of these refugees were women, children, and the elderly. The Guinean government contributed more than 1,000 troops to peacekeeping forces in neighboring countries. The signing of a peace accord between rebels and the Sierra Leonean government in November 1996 has provided stability over the past two to three years and nearly all the refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia have been repatriated.

## **Environment**

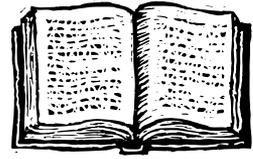
Guinea is located on the southwestern edge of the great bulge of West Africa, northwest of the equator. Guinea borders six other countries: Guinea-Bissau in the northwest, Senegal and Mali in the north and northeast, Côte d'Ivoire in the east, and Liberia and Sierra Leone in the south. Total land area is 98,400 square miles (246,000 square kilometers or approximately the size of Oregon). The Atlantic coastline includes 218 miles (352 kilometers) of mangroves and beautiful beaches.

The country's varied terrain is divided into four regions: Lower Guinea or Maritime Guinea, Middle Guinea or Fouta Djallon, Upper Guinea, and the Forest Region. Lower Guinea extends 30 miles (48 kilometers) inland from the shoreline. Beyond the coastal plain is the mountainous plateau region of the Fouta Djallon, with an average elevation of about 3,000 feet (915 meters). Upper Guinea features gently undulating savanna, broken by occasional rocky outcrops with an average elevation of 1,000 feet (305 meters). In the extreme southeast are the forested highlands. Mount Nimba in this region is the highest point in the country at 6,070 feet (1,850 meters).

Guinea is described as "the water tower of West Africa," and has considerable potential to generate hydroelectric power for industry and provide irrigation for agriculture. Principal rivers include the Bafing (the upper course of the Senegal River) and the Gambia, both of which start in the mountains of the Fouta Djallon and flow northeast over the country's borders. The Niger River and its important tributary, the Milo River, originate in the forested Guinea highlands.



# RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



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

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

## **General Information About Guinea**

### **[www.countrywatch.com](http://www.countrywatch.com)**

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Conakry to how to convert from the dollar to the Guinean franc. Just click on “Guinea” and go from there.

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

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

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

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

**[www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm](http://www.psr.keele.ac.uk/official.htm)**

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

**[www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm](http://www.geography.about.com/library/maps/blindex.htm)**

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

**[www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp](http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/infonation/info.asp)**

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

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

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

**Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees**

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

This is the site of the National Peace Corps Association, made up of returned Volunteers. On this site you can find links to all the 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 Guinea site:

**[www.friendsofguinea.org](http://www.friendsofguinea.org)**

**[www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org](http://www.PeaceCorpsWorldwide.org)**

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

**Online Articles/Current News Sites About Guinea**

**<http://allafrica.com>**

News about all of Africa (in English)

**[www.irinnews.org](http://www.irinnews.org)**

News site from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (in English)

**[www.boubah.com](http://www.boubah.com)**

Web portal with news about Guinea (in French)

**[www.aminata.com](http://www.aminata.com)**

Web portal with news about Guinea (in French)

**[www.jeuneafrique.com](http://www.jeuneafrique.com)**

This is the French Website, *Jeune Afrique* with news about Africa.

**International Development Sites About Guinea**

**[www.guinea-forum.org](http://www.guinea-forum.org)**

This is the site of the U.S. Agency for International Development's work in Guinea.

**[www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)**

This is the site of the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

## **Recommended Books**

### ***Books About the History of the Peace Corps***

Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960s*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.

Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

Meisler, Stanley. *When the World Calls: The Inside Story of the Peace Corps and its First 50 Years*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2011.

### ***Books on the Volunteer Experience***

Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.

Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience*. Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.

Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village*. New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.

Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze*. New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.

Kennedy, Geraldine ed. *From the Center of the Earth: Stories out of the Peace Corps*. Santa Monica, Calif.: Clover Park Press, 1991.

Thompson, Moritz. *Living Poor: A Peace Corps Chronicle*. Seattle, Wash.: University of Washington Press, 1997 (reprint).

## NOTES



# LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



## **Communications**

### ***Mail***

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. In Guinea, mail from the U.S. takes a minimum of three to four weeks to arrive in Conakry, and can take an additional two weeks or more to reach places outside Conakry. Peace Corps/Guinea collects all Volunteer mail from the post office, and will provide support to forward your mail to regional capitals. Some mail may simply not arrive or some letters may arrive with clipped edges because someone may have tried to see if any money was inside (these cases are rare, but do happen). Advise your family and friends to number their letters for tracking purposes, and to include “Airmail” and “Par Avion” on their envelopes.

Despite the delays, we encourage you to communicate regularly with your family. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. If a serious problem were to occur, Peace Corps/Guinea would notify the Office of Special Services at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, which would then contact your family.

Note that nothing of great value should be sent via international mail, since packages sometimes arrive with items missing. While marking a package “educational materials” may increase the odds that a given item will arrive intact, this

labeling should be reserved for books, magazines, and the like. You will be charged a customs and handling fee for all incoming packages, which varies depending on the contents of the package. Valuable items should be mailed via DHL, which is the quickest and safest means of sending things to Guinea. Please bear in mind that you will be responsible for clearance fees, which may exceed 100 USD.

While in Guinea, your address will be:

Volunteer Name, PCV

s/c Corps de la Paix

B.P. 1927

Conakry, Guinée

### ***Telephones***

The telephone system in Guinea can be unreliable, and calling the U.S. can be difficult and expensive. In the interior of the country telephone access is sporadic. In order to facilitate communication, Peace Corps/Guinea has signed a contract with a local telephone service provider (*Orange*) to create a cellular phone network for all its staff members, as well as Volunteers. Although not all Volunteers will have Orange network coverage at their sites, cellular phone network coverage (in general) is rapidly expanding. It is not possible to make collect calls or calls to toll-free numbers from Guinea. Note that Guinea is five hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (four hours ahead during Daylight Savings Time).

### ***Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access***

The infrastructure needed for electronic communications has progressed in Guinea. Access to email and the Internet is getting better in most of the country, although connection speed is oftentimes slow. The Peace Corps has installed computers for Volunteers to use at regional workstations and

at the Information Resources Center at the Peace Corps office in Conakry. While access can be difficult at times and will be intermittent throughout your service, many Volunteers create and post messages to websites and blogs. This is an excellent forum you might consider for sharing your experience with family and friends. Should you choose to create a website or blog, please refer to the guidance and Peace Corps policies in the *Volunteer Handbook*. Additionally, Volunteers should discuss the content of their blogs and websites with the country director

### **Housing and Site Location**

Before Volunteers arrive, Peace Corps/Guinea staff, in collaboration with local partners, identifies safe and secure Volunteer housing. Volunteer housing represents a community or partner organization contribution and, therefore, varies greatly depending on their means and norms. Your housing might be a two-room house made from cement with a corrugated tin roof or a mud hut with a thatch roof. Volunteers are generally located up to 50 kilometers from the nearest Volunteer or regional capital.

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

Peace Corps will open a bank account for you in Conakry when you arrive in Guinea, and will deposit your living and travel allowances (in Guinean Francs) into this account on a quarterly basis throughout your service. The Volunteer living allowance is intended to cover regular expenses such as food, transportation, and clothing. It should allow you to maintain a standard of living comparable to your Guinean counterparts.

Although credit cards and ATM cards can rarely be used in Guinea, they are widely accepted in neighboring countries and are convenient to have when traveling abroad.

## **Food and Diet**

Guinea's major food crops include millet, maize (corn), rice, manioc (cassava), groundnuts (peanuts), and palm oil. In addition, coffee, bananas, potatoes, and many other fruits and vegetables are cultivated for local consumption and export.

Rice is the staple food, regardless of region. Most Guineans consider a meal without rice incomplete! Rice is served with a variety of sauces, such as peanut sauce, several different leaf sauces, and "soup." If a family has the means, beef, chicken or fish may be added to the sauce.

The supply of fruits and vegetables varies according to the season and the region. Bananas are available year-round, but oranges, avocados, and pineapples are seasonal. Mangoes are available in the dry season.

## **Transportation**

Volunteers in Guinea primarily use public transportation, including taxis and buses, to get around. Volunteers are not allowed to drive motorized vehicles. Every Volunteer is issued a mountain bicycle (see the Packing List regarding bicycle equipment). Only those Volunteers with special authorization from the country director are permitted to ride as a passengers on their counterparts' motorcycles for work-related reasons, and must wear a Peace Corps-issued helmet at all times.

## **Geography and Climate**

Guinea has a tropical climate with two distinct seasons: a dry season from November to April and a rainy season from May to October. Annual rainfall varies from 170 inches in Conakry to fewer than 60 inches in Haute, Guinea. Temperatures also vary by region. On the coast and in the Forest Region, the

average temperature is 81 degrees Fahrenheit. In January, in the Fouta highlands, temperatures vary from 86 F to 95 F during the day, dropping below 50 F at night. In the dry season, midday highs of more than 100 F are not uncommon in Haute, Guinea.

### **Social Activities**

You will be invited to the major celebrations in your community, such as marriages and baptisms, which usually feature music and a feast for all participants. Burial and funeral rites are also important occasions to attend and show solidarity with bereaved members of your community. Religious holidays such as Ramadan, Tabaski, and Christmas offer additional opportunities to socialize with your community and learn about local customs and ways of life. Some communities also have dance halls (discos). There may be organized sporting events between youth associations in your community, especially those involving football. The best opportunities for socializing will come when you have made friends at your site.

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

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is adapting to the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity. It is not an easy situation to resolve, and Peace Corps can only provide you with guidelines. As a representative of Peace Corps, a U.S. government agency, you will be expected to dress and behave professionally. While some of your Guinean counterparts may dress in seemingly worn or shabby clothes, this is more likely a matter of economics than choice. It is likely that they are wearing their best. Much importance is placed on appearance in this culture, and you should always try your best to present a neat, clean, and professional appearance.

## Personal Safety

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

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

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

## **Rewards and Frustrations**

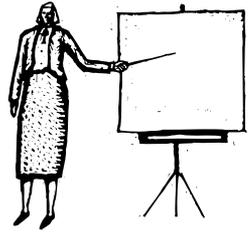
Although the potential for job satisfaction is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter numerous frustrations. Due to financial or other challenges, collaborating agencies may not always provide the support they promised. In addition, the pace of work and life in Guinea is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to change practices and traditions that are centuries old. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work; perhaps more than in any other job you have had or ever will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance or supervision. You might work for months without seeing any visible impact from your work. Development is a slow process. Positive progress may come over the course of many years. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, willingness to learn, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals without seeing immediate results.

Overcoming these difficulties will require maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. Guineans are warm, open, and hospitable people, and the Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during challenging times, as well as in moments of success. Judging by the experience of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Guinea feeling that they gained much more than they gave during their service. With a commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will enjoy your Peace Corps service.



# PEACE CORPS TRAINING



## Overview of Pre-Service Training

The goal of pre-service training (PST) is to provide Volunteers with the skills needed to be successful and resilient at site. You should be able to rely on Guinean counterparts, friends, and your community, rather than fellow Americans, as your primary support group. By the end of training, you will develop the skills necessary to integrate rapidly into your community and a clear understanding of your role as a Peace Corps Volunteer in your project and in the overall development of Guinea.

The PST program has four major components: language, technical, cross-cultural, and medical (which includes personal safety and security). The overall training program is designed to integrate as many of these components as possible into simultaneous training sessions.

PST is based in Dubreka (a semi-urban town about 35 miles/50 kilometers north of Conakry) and its surrounding villages. During training, you will live with a Guinean family. Peace Corps' language and cultural facilitators will live in the community with you (approximately one per three trainees).

Trainees and Volunteers in Guinea consistently rate the host family experience as the most challenging and meaningful aspect of training. The challenge lies in adapting to the basic living conditions of a Guinean family and communicating before you've become comfortable in French and your local language. You will have a private room with a bed and a mosquito net. Toilet facilities usually consist of an outdoor pit

latrine and bathing is done with water in a bucket in outdoor stalls—under the sun or stars! You will eat breakfast and dinner (and lunch on Saturdays and Sundays) with your host family. We ask your family to feed you local food and to treat you as a family member, not to give you special treatment.

### ***Technical Training***

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

Each sector—education, public health, agroforestry and community economic development—has designed a training curriculum based on the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to be a successful Volunteer. Technical training combines formal/theoretical sessions with hands-on activities in the community in order to give trainees practical experience prior to going to site. Examples of hands-on community activities include model school teaching, public health educational discussions in collaboration with local

health agents, collaborating with local agricultural groups to initiate a garden or tree nursery, and working with local business owners to develop improved managerial practices.

### ***Language Training***

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are key to personal and professional satisfaction during your service. These skills are critical to your job performance, they help you integrate into your community, and they can ease your personal adaptation to the new surroundings. Therefore, language training is at the heart of the training program. You must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Guinean language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups. As your level in French advances, you will also learn the local language (Pulaar, Maninka, Soussou, Kissie, Kpele, Loma, and others) most commonly spoken at your site.

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

### ***Cross-Cultural Training***

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Guinean host family. This experience is designed to ease your transition to life at your site. Families go through an orientation conducted by Peace Corps staff to explain the purpose of pre-service training and to assist them in helping you adapt to living in

Guinea. Many Volunteers form strong and lasting friendships with their host families.

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

### ***Health Training***

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

### ***Safety Training***

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

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

In its commitment to institutionalize quality training, the Peace Corps has implemented a training system that provides Volunteers with continual opportunities to examine their

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

- *In-service training (approximately 10-14 days)*: 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 approximately three months.
- *Reconnect (approximately one week)*: 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 (approximately three days)*: Prepares Volunteers for the future after Peace Corps service and reviews their respective projects and personal experiences.

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, Volunteers, and Volunteer partners.

Volunteer training is considered an ongoing process. In addition to trainings offered by the Peace Corps, Volunteers are expected to continue self-directed learning activities throughout their service, utilizing local and Peace Corps-provided resources. Volunteers are provided technical learning materials and have the opportunity to pursue language tutoring at their sites



# YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN GUINEA



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 Guinea maintains a clinic with two full-time Peace Corps medical officers (PCMOs), who take care of Volunteers' primary health care needs. Additional medical services, such as testing and basic treatment, are also available in Guinea at local hospitals. If you become seriously ill, you will be transported either to an American-standard medical facility in the region (typically South Africa, Senegal or England) or to the United States.

## **Health Issues in Guinea**

Major health problems among Volunteers in Guinea are rare, and most often the result of Volunteers not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems in Guinea are those also found in the United States, such as: colds, diarrhea, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and emotional problems. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Guinea because certain environmental factors here raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illnesses and injuries.

Guinea is considered a tropical country and there are many diseases found here that do not commonly exist in the U.S. Among these, amoebas, schistosomiasis, and malaria are the most common.

Because you will be serving in an area where malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, is prevalent, it is mandatory that you take an approved anti-malarial drug, usually Mefloquine (Larium). Mefloquine is currently known to be the best prophylaxis available, and it is safe and generally well tolerated. Some Volunteers (fewer than 5 percent) experience side effects such as upset stomach, nightmares or blurry vision. These side effects can almost always be eliminated by simple measures (e.g., taking the Mefloquine with or following a meal, taking it in the morning or at bedtime, or dividing the dose by taking half a tablet twice a week rather than a single tablet once a week). If Mefloquine is not advised for an individual due to a specific medical condition, the alternative prophylactic regimens Doxycycline and Malarone are available to Volunteers. The PCMO will assist you in determining the best prophylactic regimen. Before switching your malaria prophylaxis you must discuss it with your medical officer.

Rabies does exist in Guinea. If you decide to keep a dog or cat, it is your responsibility to make sure it is vaccinated against rabies. Exposure to rabies can occur through animal bites or scratches and from contact with animal saliva. You will receive three preventive rabies shots during training. Any possible exposure to a rabid animal during service must be reported to the PCMO immediately

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

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

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 Guinea will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Guinea, you may be sent out of the country for further evaluation and care.

## **Maintaining Your Health**

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

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

Abstinence is the only certain choice for preventing infection with HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. 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 STDs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

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

Emotional resiliency is vital for Volunteers serving in Guinea. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As a Volunteer, you will confront difficult realities and issues on a very personal level. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might die during your service from several medical causes like malaria, malnutrition, difficult delivery, motor vehicle accidents or other unintentional injuries. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, domestic violence and corporal punishment are problems a Volunteer may confront. You will need to anticipate these situations and utilize supportive resources available throughout your training and service to maintain your own emotional strength, so you can continue to be of service to your community.

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

## **Women's Health Information**

Pregnancy is treated in the same manner as other Volunteer health conditions that require medical attention but also have programmatic ramifications. The Peace Corps is responsible for determining the medical risk and the availability of appropriate medical care if the Volunteer remains in-country. Given the circumstances under which Volunteers live and work, it is rare that the Peace Corps' medical and programmatic standards for continued service during pregnancy can be met. Due to the medical infrastructure and the risk of malaria in Guinea, no Volunteer will be allowed to stay in Guinea if she becomes pregnant.

Feminine hygiene products are available for you to purchase locally. The medical unit will also provide you with some emergency supplies. If you require a specific feminine hygiene product, please bring a six-month supply with you and plan to have additional supplies sent through "care packages."

## **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

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

### ***Medical Kit Contents***

Ace bandages

Adhesive tape

*American Red Cross First Aid & Safety Handbook*

Antacid tablets (Tums)

Antibiotic ointment (Bacitracin/Neomycin/Polymycin B)

Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner (Hibiclens)

Band-Aids

Butterfly closures

Calamine lotion  
Cepacol lozenges  
Condoms  
Dental floss  
Diphenhydramine HCL 25 mg (Benadryl)  
Insect repellent stick (Cutter's)  
Iodine tablets (for water purification)  
Lip balm (Chapstick)  
Oral rehydration salts  
Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)  
Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)  
Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)  
Scissors  
Sterile gauze pads  
Tetrahydrozaline eyedrops (Visine)  
Tinactin (antifungal cream)  
Tweezers

### **Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist**

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

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

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, contact your physician's office to obtain a copy of your immunization record and bring it to your pre-departure orientation. If you have any immunizations prior to Peace Corps service, the Peace Corps cannot reimburse you for the cost. The Peace Corps will provide all the immunizations necessary for your overseas assignment, either at your pre-departure orientation or shortly after you arrive in Guinea. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to departure; you will receive your first dose of malaria prophylactic during staging.

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

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

Note: The medical office in-country maintains a supply of common brand and generic medicines. It does not supply specific brands of medicines or hygiene products without specific doctor's orders stating a particular medical reason. If you have a need for specific medications (brand names), you must bring doctor's orders for them.

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination.

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

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

## **Safety and Security—Our Partnership**

Serving as a Volunteer overseas entails certain safety and security risks. Living and traveling in an unfamiliar environment, a limited understanding of the local language and culture, and the perception of being a wealthy American are some of the factors that can put a Volunteer at risk. Property theft and burglaries are not uncommon. Incidents of physical and sexual assault do occur, although almost all Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal safety problems.

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

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

This *Welcome Book* contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety that all include important safety and security information to help you understand this partnership. The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest way possible, because

working to maximize the safety and security of Volunteers is our highest priority. Not only do we provide you with training and tools to prepare for the unexpected, but we teach you to identify, reduce, and manage the risks you may encounter

### ***Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk***

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

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

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

After you arrive in Guinea, 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 Guinea learn to:

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

- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Avoid going out late at night
- Limit alcohol consumption

As you can see from this list, you must be willing to work hard and adapt your lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target for crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Guinea. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that place you at risk and by taking precautions.

The following present security issues specific to Guinea.

**Unwanted Attention:** Volunteers attract a lot of attention both in large cities and at their sites, but they are likely to receive more negative attention in highly populated centers, and away from their support network (“family,” friends, and colleagues) who look out for them. While whistles and exclamations may be fairly common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, abide by local cultural norms, and do not respond to unwanted attention. In addition, keep your money out of sight by using an undergarment money pouch, the kind that hangs around your neck and stays hidden under your shirt or inside your coat. Do not keep your money in outside pockets of backpacks, in coat pockets, or in fanny packs.

**In Conakry:** 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. In addition, tourist attractions in large towns are favorite worksites for pickpockets. Volunteers should exercise additional caution when visiting Conakry; you may not travel by foot at night and should arrange for transportation ahead of time.

**Travel:** One of the two most dangerous aspects of Volunteer service in Guinea is public transportation (the other is malaria). Do not travel in taxis that appear unsafe (during

pre-service training, you will participate in a session on strategies for selecting the safest transportation option available). In addition, do not be afraid to speak to a driver who is driving too fast or in an unsafe manner. Risks increase greatly when traveling after dark. Traveling at night is not allowed by Peace Corps policy except in case of emergency.

**Security at Home:** Volunteer homes have been burglarized in the past. To reduce the risk of a break-in, assess your house carefully for adequate protection against burglars. Peace Corps/Guinea will work with Volunteers to ensure that their housing is safe and secure. In some cases, you will need to use your settling-in allowance to have necessary modifications made to your house.

**Identification:** Volunteers are regularly asked for ID by local authorities. You will receive a Peace Corps and Guinea-issued ID; always carry these with you.

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

You must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. You can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your home is secure, and develop relationships in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Guinea 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 Guinea will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

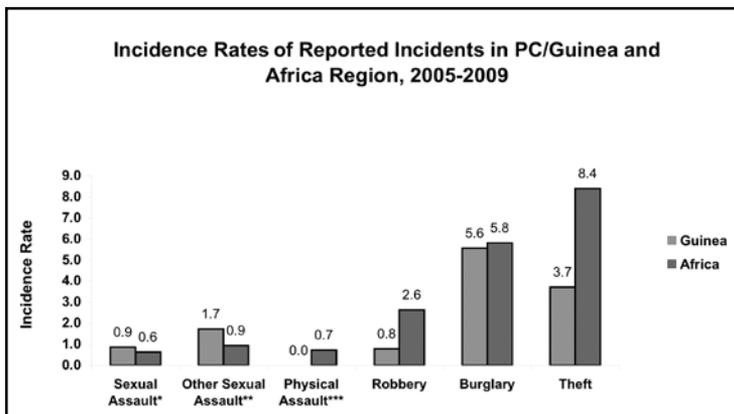
## **Support from Staff**

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

## ***Crime Data for Guinea***

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

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



\*Sexual Assault includes the categories of rape, attempted rape, and major sexual assault.

\*\*Other Sexual Assault consists of unwanted groping, fondling, and/or kissing.

\*\*\*Physical Assault includes aggravated assault and major physical assault.

If you are the victim of a crime, you will decide if you wish to pursue prosecution. If you decide to prosecute, Peace Corps will be there to assist you. One of our tasks is to ensure you are fully informed of your options and understand how the local legal process works. Peace Corps will help you ensure your rights are protected to the fullest extent possible under Guinean law.

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

### ***Volunteer Safety Support in Guinea***

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your service and includes the following: information sharing, Volunteer training, site selection criteria, a detailed emergency action plan, and protocols for

addressing safety and security incidents. Guinea's in-country safety program is outlined below.

The Peace Corps/Guinea office will keep you informed of any issues that may impact Volunteer safety through **information sharing**. Regular updates will be provided in Volunteer newsletters and in memorandums from the country director. In the event of a critical situation or emergency, you will be contacted through the emergency communication network. An important component of the capacity of Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part in ensuring that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

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

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

## NOTES



# DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



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

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

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

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Guinea, you may need to make some temporary, yet fundamental compromises in how you present yourself as an American and as an individual. For example, female trainees and Volunteers may not be able to exercise the independence available to them in the United States; political discussions need to be handled with great care; and some of your personal beliefs may best remain undisclosed. You will need to develop techniques and personal strategies for coping with these and other limitations. The Peace Corps staff will lead diversity and sensitivity discussions during pre-service training and will be on call to provide support, but the challenge ultimately will be your own.

## **Overview of Diversity in Guinea**

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

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

### ***Possible Issues for Female Volunteers***

Female Volunteers who are single are often considered an oddity by Guineans because most Guinean women, particularly in rural areas, are married, some with children, by the time

they are 20. Single women also face what in the United States would be considered inappropriate advances from Guinean male colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances. Strategies to deal with these issues are discussed in training, and the Peace Corps staff can offer help in resolving any problems. These problems become less common once Volunteers have been accepted into their communities and have built a network of female friends and co-workers.

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

Volunteers who belong to minority ethnic groups will generally not experience overt biases. However, Guineans may make some stereotypical assumptions based on someone's background. For example, many Asian-American Volunteers are considered experts in Chinese or kung fu, and African-American Volunteers may be mistaken for a Liberian or Sierra Leonean because of an Anglicized French accent.

Caucasian Volunteers may be annoyed by local terms for "white people" such as *toubab*, *porto*, or *foté*, but should understand that they are not pejorative. Even educated, middle-class Guineans are also sometimes referred to by those terms. Once Volunteers become known in their towns, children's curiosity and name-calling diminish.

### **Volunteer Comment**

"Although being a minority will affect the nature of your stay in Guinea, life here will probably not be any more or less difficult for you. There are benefits and difficulties, ranging from being a minor celebrity to not sticking out as much as other Americans—this, of course, depends on the type of minority one is and the time of day. You will face a variety of challenges, but, at the same time, you will be coming in with useful life skills that you picked up as a visible minority in

America. The fishbowl effect and issues of cultural identity or relativity will not be new. *Bon courage!*”

### ***Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers***

Volunteers in their early 20s sometimes find they have to make an extra effort to be accepted as professional colleagues, since Guineans of the same age often are still pursuing an education. Older Volunteers, in contrast, are automatically accorded respect, since Guinean culture recognizes that wisdom and experience come with age.

### ***Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers***

Homosexuality is not publicly acknowledged or discussed in Guinean society. Although gay and lesbian Volunteers generally choose not to be open about their sexual orientation, they have successfully worked in Guinea.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“As a Volunteer, along with all the feelings of community and belonging, you will probably, from time to time, experience feelings of loneliness, being out of place, and being something of an oddity. If you are gay, lesbian, or bisexual, chances are you’re no stranger to being made to feel this way. Unfortunately, those feelings can be intensified here. I have found my group to be extraordinarily tight, close, and open-minded and have gotten nothing but support from them. What’s missing, however, is complete understanding. I’ve not found other gay, lesbian, or bisexual Volunteers to discuss this with, so though my friends are perfectly willing to hear me out whenever I need or want to talk, I’ve not found anyone who really knows what I’m feeling and going through. In my site, the question of my sexuality has never been raised. The idea that I’m anything other than straight

doesn't seem to have occurred to anyone, and I've chosen not to challenge that assumption. As I'm not here looking for love, but rather am here to work, whether I'm gay or straight is not really an issue. Fielding the all-too-frequent inquiries as to why I'm not yet married and wouldn't I like to become the fourth Mrs. Mamadou Camara is, not surprisingly, somewhat uncomfortable, but I have to imagine that that's not so pleasant for the heterosexual Volunteers among us, either. So, I guess what I'm trying to say with all this is: The Peace Corps can be difficult, and being gay can make it somewhat more difficult. Or, looking at it another way, being gay can be difficult, and being in the Peace Corps can make it somewhat more difficult. However, because of the universal support and acceptance from staff and Volunteers alike, it has not been at all unbearable or anywhere close to making me regret having chosen to come here."

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

Guinea is, for the most part, a Muslim country (the exception is in the Forest Region, where Christians and animists are more numerous). Being of a different religion is not a problem, as Guineans are very tolerant. They may not always agree with your beliefs, but they will not act negatively toward you because of them. The main surprise is if a Volunteer says that s/he does not have a religion.

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

As part of the medical clearance process, the Peace Corps Office of Medical Services determined that you were physically and emotionally capable, with or without reasonable accommodations, to perform a full tour of Volunteer service in Guinea without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of service. The Peace Corps/Guinea staff will work with disabled Volunteers

to make reasonable accommodations for them in training, housing, jobsites, or other areas to enable them to serve safely and effectively.

As a disabled Volunteer in Guinea, you may find that you face a special set of challenges. Physically challenged Volunteers will be treated initially with curiosity. Those who require ambulatory devices will encounter obstacles to mobility because there are no ramps or lifts on public transportation or in buildings. But those who serve will ultimately win respect and be considered role models.

### ***Possible Issues for Married Volunteers***

In general, married couples serving in Guinea earn additional respect and appreciation from their communities, as they are viewed as more “responsible” than their single Volunteer peers. Couples also provide support for one another and can organize complementary work-related activities. Due to this inherent support system, however, married couples may need to make an extra effort to integrate in their communities. They may also encounter comparisons and/or traditional assumptions in terms of their mutual roles. Due to this, however, male Volunteers oftentimes have a unique opportunity to demonstrate the various roles they play in their household, including cooking, fetching water, going to the market, etc.

## NOTES



# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



The following section addresses common questions. For additional information, contact information for various resource people is located at the end of this *Welcome Book*.

## **How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Guinea?**

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

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

## **What is the electric current in Guinea?**

It is 220 volts and approximately 50 hertz.

## **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 require permission from your Country Director. The Peace Corps is not able to provide your visitors with visa, medical, or travel assistance.

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

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

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

Volunteers in Guinea do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by taxi. Rural

travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking.

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

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

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

Peace Corps sites are assigned to trainees during 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 counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, and living conditions. However, keep in mind that many factors influence the site selection process and that the Peace Corps cannot guarantee placement where you would ideally like to be. Most Volunteers live in small towns or in rural villages and are usually within one hour from another Volunteer. Some sites require a 10- to 12-hour drive from the capital.

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

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

Office of Special Services is 800.424.8580; select option 2, then extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at the above number. For non-emergency questions, your family can get information from your country desk staff at the Peace Corps by calling 800.424.8580.

### **Can I call home from Guinea?**

Cellular phone coverage is increasing quickly throughout Guinea and may allow you to call home from areas not far from your site. Currently, there are several companies that provide reliable service to many parts of Guinea, including regional capitals and some small towns. Otherwise, Volunteers can call home fairly easily from Conakry and regional capitals.

### **Should I bring a cellular phone with me?**

If you bring a cellular phone, be sure that it will work on the (GSM) frequency used in Europe, which is what is used in Guinea. You can also purchase a cellphone inexpensively once you arrive in Guinea.

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

The climate and environment in Guinea are very hard on electrical equipment. Additionally, if you do bring a laptop or other electronic device, it will be difficult to keep it charged as the electricity in Guinea is of poor quality and intermittent, if available at all. Electronic devices, especially computers, are also seen as valuable items and may increase the risk of theft. There is Internet and email access in many larger cities as well as Peace Corps' Information Resources Center in Conakry and regional workstations.

## NOTES



# WELCOME LETTERS FROM GUINEA VOLUNTEERS



Dear Peace Corps Guinea Invitee,

On behalf of all Peace Corps/Guinea Volunteers past and present, I'd like to extend you our congratulations on being invited to the Peace Corps/Guinea program. If you have been researching Guinea since receiving your invitation, then you are probably aware that in October 2009, the Peace Corps/Guinea program was forced to suspend its operations due to political instability in the country. However, it is our hope that with the recent elections and the re-opening of the program, Peace Corps Volunteers can once again start making a difference in their respective communities.

As for packing tips, I'll leave that to the more comprehensive packing list you'll receive and just say that when in doubt, bring it. I was very happy that I brought a laptop computer, but after two years the heat, dust, and overall wear and tear have all but killed it. My Solio's dead, I dropped my iPod in the laundry water (it still works, kinda), and I blew out my Chacos playing basketball. In short, don't be afraid to bring certain items with you, but understand that most of what you bring will be in sad shape by the time you leave.

Arrival to Guinea and the subsequent training program is going to be a very stressful time for you. Therefore, I recommend giving yourself plenty of time before you leave the States to relax, spend time with friends and family, eat well, and, of course, pack. If you finish work a day before you jump onto the plane for Philadelphia you are probably going to feel more overwhelmed by the transition than you should have to.

You are about to embark on what will hopefully be one of the most formative experiences of your life. You will be challenged to adapt to a culture completely different from your own in the context of a country that after more than 50 years of independence is still struggling to overcome dire poverty and its tragic effects. Make no mistake, Guinea is not a country for the faint of heart. Roads here are broken and unmaintained, making many especially difficult during the rainy season. Electricity, running water, and Internet are luxuries usually a few hours away from most Volunteers' sites. Each year, many children go hungry and die from easily preventable diseases. I don't mention these things to scare or intimidate you, but rather to impress upon you the idea that Guinea's people are some of the least fortunate of the less fortunate and your presence in their country will mean more to them, and therefore more to you, than in most other places.

The limits of your patience, your compassion, and your commitment will be tested in countless ways. But it is through this process that you will grow as a person and push those limits to heights you could have never imagined possible. Through dancing, laughing, and crying with those you will come to know and love, you learn as much about yourself as you do about the community around you.

Welcome to the Peace Corps family and the toughest job you'll ever love.

—Mike Conway

.....

Welcome to Guinea! Everyone here in Peace Corps/Guinea is so excited for your arrival.

Your mind might be racing as you read information about Guinea and Peace Corps life in general, trying to turn words into images of your daily life for the next two years. It can be a stressful time as you figure out how to prepare, especially when Internet searches for Guinea mostly yield information about Guinea pigs instead of a resource-rich West African nation. The best advice I can offer is to take it slowly. Take

time with family and friends and try not to stress about packing too much.

As for packing, you'll only need basic toiletries for the first three months while you are in training. After that, you'll have access to the grocery stores and markets in regional capitals and the capital, where you can find some Western brands (Dove, Nivea). Peace Corps will provide you with a medical kit (sunscreen, bug spray, chap stick, Band-Aids, etc.), so don't waste space on that stuff unless you are picky about your sunscreen, for example. You can also buy clothes here (tailored from African fabric or Western clothes on the street), but you should bring enough for pre-service training. I recommend bringing underwear, athletic capris (if you like to run, hike, bike, etc.), solid-colored cotton shirts, and a pair of jeans. You might also occasionally dress up to go out to a nice dinner in the capital or go out dancing for the night. I'm really glad I brought: a headlamp, pocketknife, shortwave radio, running shoes, my camelback, contacts and makeup when I want to dress up, music, and food items. I bike a lot at site, so I wish I had brought a gel seat cover and saddle bags for my bike. Each regional capital has a library of books, so only bring a few that are meaningful to you or that you are dying to read. I would bring American dollars to leave locked in the safe in the capital for vacations, airplane ticket purchases, etc. Some Volunteers also bring a credit/debit card or checkbook for vacations.

The training period is an intense nine weeks of living with a homestay family, getting to know your fellow Volunteers, and attending daily sessions in language (French and local language at various levels), cross culture, safety and security, health, and your technical area (community economic development, public health, education, or agroforestry). Training is an eye-opening, exhausting, and exciting introduction to Guinea. After being sworn in as a Volunteer, your life will change dramatically. While you may struggle to find personal time during training, life at site is full of time to read, write, reflect, and integrate into your community.

Communication with friends and family at home during training is very limited, and letters are best! Communication once you arrive at your site may improve. Most Volunteers in larger towns have cellphone reception or a phone center where they can receive calls. Some Volunteers receive calls from friends and family in the regional houses or in Conakry during their visits. There is also Internet access most of the time in cyber cafes in the regional capitals and in the Conakry office. The regional workstations and Conakry have electricity, so some Volunteers in rural sites recharge electronic equipment (digital cameras, iPods, MP3 players, etc.) there. Some Volunteers bring solar chargers or battery-powered electronics. If you do want to bring an item of value, first imagine it getting broken or stolen.

After reading this *Welcome Book* cover to cover numerous times, I was still struggling to get a picture of what my experience might be like. Now I realize it's because every Volunteer's experience is completely different from the next. My closest Volunteer neighbor is only a 40-minute bike ride away, but she would describe her experience differently than I would. She lives in a large town, while I live in a small village. She shares a yard with a local official, his two wives, and their children, while I live alone. She works in community economic development, while I'm an agroforestry Volunteer. She has electricity and a spigot in her front yard, while I use candles and carry water jugs across town. In my village last week I walked to two weddings and came home heavy-handed with gifts of food, planted cashew seeds in our reforestation area, talked with women in the market as I bought my weekly produce, sold coffee seeds to local farmers, found the hole in my fence and chased my puppy around town, made fudge and gave some to my local tailor whose brother died, read a few books and thought about graduate school, weeded my garden, learned some new phrases in the local language, and distributed young moringa trees to families in my village to improve nutrition.

A week at your site may be completely different! No matter where you're placed, you won't be serving alone in a rural

village for two years, cut off from other Volunteers like many prospective Volunteers envision. Volunteers travel to the capital, Conakry, every three months for a quarterly visit. We also visit our regional capitals monthly. These visits give us time to talk about our experiences, make work connections, stock up on supplies (food, personal, and work items), and communicate with people back home.

Good luck with the packing and goodbyes. We are excited to welcome you into our family.

—Ashley Massey

.....

Congratulations and welcome to the coolest country that no one has heard of! It hardly seems like it's been over two years since I got my invitation package. I remember the feeling of excitement—or was that anxiety?—as I prepared to head out to a strange and foreign land. A million questions are probably running through your mind right now. The truth is, for 90 percent of these, you will have to wait until you arrive in Guinea to find the answers, but maybe we can answer some of the other 10 percent.

To start with, Guinea is beautiful, diverse, and booming with culture! To live here for two years is a once-in-a-lifetime experience that you will never duplicate, nor will you ever forget it! Awesome! Great! But let's get back to these questions that neither a guidebook, nor your grandfather can answer. Like, what makes Peace Corps/Guinea so amazing? What will make me happy during my two years here? What will be the hardest parts of my service? How can I feel like I've made a difference?

Of course, the answers to these questions differ from person to person, so all I can do is tell you about my experiences as a community economic development (CED) Volunteer over the past 22 months. I live in a Prefectural capital town called Goauval, in a brick house with a tin roof that has no

electricity or running water. Projects I have worked on include building and distributing water filters, teaching English at the local high school, and increasing HIV/AIDS awareness. One of my favorite projects was organizing small counseling groups of local women to introduce business strategies such as basic accounting, marketing, stock management, and linking markets. These experiences, while very challenging, brought a roller coaster of emotions, as well as a tremendous sense of reward.

Most Volunteers now look back and say if they had to do it all over again that Guinea would still be their first country of choice. While everyone has their own reasons for saying this, the reasons that make my experience so great come down to two things. First is the ability at a personal level to offer hope for the country of Guinea itself. Guinea is among the most underdeveloped nations in the world. It is one of the very few stereotypical Peace Corps programs left today. Most roads are unpaved; there is no electricity in many of the biggest cities. Many people outside of the capital still live a very simple, yet difficult life. The striking contrast of what we as Americans take for granted slaps you square in the face and makes every day an adventure! Guinea's educational system is also severely underdeveloped. You could have no greater impact on the average Guinean life than by offering simple improvements in the quality and consistency of their education. This alone has given me a rewarding experience during my time in Guinea.

The second reason is the other Volunteers I have had the pleasure to know. Joining Peace Corps/Guinea is a self-filtering process that attracts interesting and adventurous people. As you start, you'll be in places with anywhere from 25 to 40 other trainees that may include CED, public health, agroforestry, and education Volunteers. I can confidently tell you that after two years you will look back and think of these people as extremely close friends. The bonds I have built here have not only helped me throughout my service in Guinea, but I know will continue to be important to me

when I return to the U.S. It is important for you to know that you will not be alone on this journey. While your experience will be unique from other Volunteers, you will share a rare understanding with other Volunteers that will help and bind you all to a mutual mission. You will be able to count on this help when you need it most. Being a Volunteer is very difficult and sometimes you just need to sit down and spill your guts to another American. Building these relationships for me has been an absolute invaluable part of my service.

Finally, a remarkable part about your upcoming service is how much your concept of hardship will change. Before I came to Guinea, I thought that the hardest part of my two years here would be the lack of water and electricity. This was not at all the case. I very quickly got used to getting water from a pump every day and reading by candlelight at night. In fact, I actually came to enjoy living at this much simpler level. The greatest challenges are often ones you don't consider before you get here. One of my biggest challenges has been transportation. Trips are long and sometimes it is difficult to find transportation to take you where you need to go. Another challenge has been the heat. Depending on where you are in the country, you can experience anything from a humid tropical climate to an arid desert climate. These extremes can take their toll on you physically.

Finally, the work that we do is also, at times, very challenging. It can be difficult to find motivated people to help you with a project. Many times a project simply does not work out exactly the way you've planned it. When I've had these problems with work, I try to remember that success can have more than one definition. Sometimes a project that did not work out well is still a success because what you've learned can be applied to the next project. Or, the seeds of what seemed like a worthless effort later became a breakthrough for just one individual. Whatever challenges you may find in Guinea, be assured that you will have the proper training and support to deal with them.

Thinking about it now, it's hard to believe how much everyone grows throughout their service. I know that right now you have a lot running through your head and that is completely normal. If you have come this far in the process, you have already proven yourself to be brave and dedicated and those are two important qualities for all Volunteers. I personally love Guinea and feel like joining the Peace Corps has been the best decision of my life thus far. The Volunteers are very excited to meet you and *du courage!* You will be here before you know it!

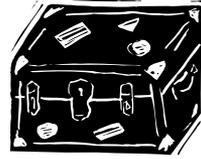
—Taylor Tinney

.....

## NOTES



# PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Guinea and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that everyone has his/her own priorities. There is no perfect list! You obviously cannot bring everything we mention, so consider those items that make the most sense to you personally and professionally. You can also have things sent to you later (although mail is unreliable, and postage from the U.S. to Guinea is expensive). As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that the Peace Corps has an 80-pound weight restriction on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Guinea.

In general, you should pack enough clothes to get you comfortably through the three months of pre-service training and use the rest of the space to pack things that are most important to you. You can have clothes custom-made in Guinea at a very reasonable cost, and there are markets in Guinea with used clothing from other countries.

## **General Clothing**

For women, appropriate work clothing is a dress, pants or a skirt (dresses and skirts must at least cover your knees, even when sitting). Slips must be worn with anything transparent. For men, appropriate work clothing is a nice pair of jeans or slacks (especially for teachers), a button-down shirt, and nice-looking shoes. Short-sleeved button-down shirts are acceptable, but we recommend at least one long-sleeved shirt because it does get cold during certain times of the year. All clothes should be clean and in good condition. For teachers,

T-shirts with writing and jeans are generally unacceptable for the classroom (and these are available in the local market at cheaper prices than in the U.S.).

Keep in mind, most Volunteers have clothes locally made during their service.

### ***For Men***

- Two- to three-week supply of cotton underwear
- A few pairs of athletic socks (most of the time Volunteers wear open-toed shoes with no socks)
- One nice outfit (business casual—Khakis, button down shirt, and tie—for conferences and meetings); for education Volunteers, bring a couple of nice outfits appropriate for teaching
- One to two pairs of jeans
- Two pairs of casual pants (travel style pants with zippered pockets or zip-off pants are great)
- Two to four T-shirts (easy to buy locally if you need more during your service) in colors that easily match everything
- One long-sleeved shirt
- Two to four pairs of shorts, including at least one that can be used as a swimsuit
- One sweatshirt or sweater
- Five or more bandannas (for dusty taxi rides)
- A light raincoat

### ***For Women***

- Two- to three-week supply of cotton underwear
- Five to eight bras, including a few sports bras (good bras are unavailable locally)

- A few pairs of socks (Volunteers typically wear open-toed shoes with no socks)
- Three nice outfits appropriate for teaching, conferences, and meetings
- Two or three casual long dresses (cotton is best; sleeveless is OK, but spaghetti straps are not)
- Two or three casual long skirts (that cover your knees, even when sitting)
- One or more pairs of jeans or pants (agroforestry Volunteers tend to wear pants more than skirts, while teachers wear skirts)
- Two to four cotton shirts (can be bought in Guinea)
- Two or three short-sleeved, button-down or polo-type collared shirts (especially important for teachers)
- One sweater, sweatshirt, or flannel shirt
- Two swimsuits (hard to buy in Guinea)
- A pair of long shorts if you plan to participate in sports
- Hats or caps for sun protection
- Five or more bandannas (for dusty taxi rides)

## **Shoes**

- One pair of nice shoes for professional settings (two for teachers; nice sandals with no heels are acceptable)
- One pair of sneakers/running/walking shoes and/or light, waterproof hiking boots (especially useful for natural resource management Volunteers)
- One pair of sturdy sandals (e.g., Chacos or Tevas) (Note that Peace Corps Volunteers receive a 50 percent discount from Chacos)
- Purchase a pair of light flip-flops in Guinea for the shower or around the house

**Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items** *(all basic toiletries are available in-country, but if you are partial to a certain brand/type, please bring plenty of it and definitely bring enough to get through the first three months of training)*

- Deodorant (American brands can be hard to find)
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- Mouthwash with fluoride
- Vitamins (PC provides a generic multi-vitamin and vitamin C)
- Face wash; face scrub or mask
- Moisturizers, lotions
- Shampoo, conditioner, and soap
- Brush and/or comb
- Razor blades (enough for your normal shaving routine)
- Some makeup
- Nail polish and remover
- Tweezers
- Sunscreen (this is included in your medical kit)
- Travel toothbrush and soap holders
- Nail clippers
- Pumice stone
- Travel towel
- Feminine hygiene products
- Small bottles of gel hand sanitizer

**Kitchen**

- Spatula
- Good-quality can opener
- One or two good-quality kitchen knives (paring knife, chef knife, serrated knife)

- Swiss Army-type knife or Leatherman-type tool (remember to pack in checked luggage)
- Garlic press
- Two sturdy water bottles (e.g., Nalgene Sigg; small mouth water bottles are easier to use during transport)
- Vegetable peeler
- Plastic food storage containers
- Ziploc type plastic bags (some large, some small)

## **Food**

To make the transition from your U.S. diet to Guinean food easier, here is a list of recommended snacks and condiments to bring. Much of this should be used during training to supplement your diet. Foods can also be sent via care packages and you can get a wide range of things like tuna, tea and spices in-country.

- Snack bars (cereal, nutrition, energy, etc.)
- Trail mix/dried fruit
- Your favorite sugary snack (gum, candy, chocolate that won't melt)
- Powdered drink mixes
- A good source of protein (beef jerky, tuna, tofu)
- Tea
- Macaroni and cheese (boxed)
- Any spices you particularly enjoy (many spices are available in-country)

## **Bike Gear**

You will be issued a mountain bike, and for most Volunteers it is their primary source of transportation, so bring:

- Helmet that fits well. NOTE – you are required to wear a helmet while riding your bicycle. If you have a receipt, Peace Corps will reimburse you for up to \$30. Peace Corps has some helmets as well.
- Bring any bike gear you use and love—pump, gloves, multi-tools, water bottle, etc. PC will provide a pump, multi-tool and lock but it won't be as nice as what you may be used to.

## **Miscellaneous**

- Peel-and-seal letters, small padded package envelopes, and U.S. stamps (travelers to the U.S. are frequently willing to hand-carry small envelopes)
- Some pens and pencils
- Frisbee, volleyball, football, etc.
- Playing cards
- Photos from home
- Journal
- Watch (waterproof)
- Calendar/planner
- Post-it notes
- Art supplies (e.g., markers, colored pencils, glue, glitter, construction paper, sketch books, coloring books)
- Tape player, Walkman, iPod, MP3 player, or CD player with mini-speakers (most music sold in Guinea is on cassettes)
- Shortwave radio (Save yourself money and space and buy a battery powered one in Guinea for starting around \$5)

- Camera with additional memory. It will be difficult to download a digital camera on a regular basis, so be sure to bring an extra memory card (or a card with lots of memory) and appropriate batteries for your camera(s) or adaptor for 220-volt plugs
- Good-quality headlamp and flashlights with extra batteries
- Small alarm clock (essential for teachers)
- Batteries for your electronics and camera (batteries from the U.S. last longer and AAA type batteries are harder to find; you might also consider bringing a solar battery re-charger as electricity may be nonexistent depending on your site)
- Personal pictures/photos
- A good book or two (there is also a supply at all regional Peace Corps facilities)
- Calculator (for teachers but most cellphones will have one)
- Musical instrument (if you play one)
- Tape (duct and scotch types)
- Tent, sleeping bag, hammock, and travel mosquito net (a regular mosquito net is provided by the Peace Corps for your use)
- Good-quality sunglasses
- A few things that will make you feel happy or luxurious (like foot or face scrubs)
- Pillow (pillows are sold locally, but the quality varies)
- Sewing kit
- Earplugs (if you are a light sleeper)
- Credit cards/some extra money for vacation travel (Travelers Checks are hard to change and Euros are more widely accepted in West Africa than dollars, but bring a mix of both. Large denominations, \$50/\$100 are better, although some Visas to neighboring countries cost \$131 in exact change)

- Something that reminds you of home
- Something that makes you happy

### **Packing It All**

- Hard suitcase/large duffel bag (with wheels if possible)
- Camping backpack
- School/day pack
- Good-size purse
- Money belt
- Luggage locks/combination locks

Backpacks are best for traveling. Find one that can fit enough stuff for trips lasting longer than 4-5 days but that isn't overly large.

### **A Few Notes**

- Check all electronics you plan to bring and be sure to bring spare batteries.
- The Peace Corps/Guinea Volunteer libraries are good; you don't need to bring enough books to read for two years.
- Only bring a large supply of toiletries if you are really particular about something, otherwise, you can find everything you need in-country. Do bring enough for your first three months, though.
- Limit clothes. **REALLY**. You'll probably wear lots of locally-made clothing. Clothes are inexpensive in Guinea, and, in addition to tailors, and an abundance of cloth, there is a large selection of used clothing available in most towns, including a variety of T-shirts, jeans, etc.

- Photos are sensitive to the elements, so choose the ones you bring carefully; make copies or don't bring any you don't want to have ruined or lost. Likewise, it isn't advisable to bring anything you are not willing to lose or have broken. Leave your most precious possessions at home.
- Don't buy too much, only items you really like.
- Finally, don't stress! Have fun! You'll probably pack some crazy stuff you won't use while you are here, but that's OK—everyone does!
- Limit yourself. Eighty pounds is a lot of stuff and you don't need it all.



# PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST



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

## Family

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

## Passport/Travel

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

## **Medical/Health**

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

## **Insurance**

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

## **Personal Papers**

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

## **Voting**

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

## **Personal Effects**

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

## **Financial Management**

- Keep a bank account in your name in the U.S.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service.
- Execute a Power of Attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 800.424.8580, extension 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:** 800.424.8580, Press 2, then  
Ext. # (see below)

**Peace Corps' Mailing Address:** Peace Corps  
Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters  
1111 20th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20526

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/Local Number</b>
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Africa Region	Ext. 1850	202.692.1850
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer nwilliams@peacecorps.gov guinea@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2318	202.692.2318 800.424.8580

<b>For Questions About:</b>	<b>Staff</b>	<b>Toll-free Extension</b>	<b>Direct/ Local Number</b>
Plane Tickets, Passports, Visas, or Other Travel Matters	Travel Officer (Sato Travel)	Ext. 1170	202.692.1170
Legal Clearance	Office of Placement	Ext. 1845	202.692.1845
Medical Clearance and Forms Processing (including dental)	Screening Nurse	Ext. 1500	202.692.1500
Medical Reimbursements	Handled by a Subcontractor		800.818.8772
Loan Deferments, Taxes, Readjustment Allowance Withdrawals, Power of Attorney	Volunteer Financial Operations	Ext. 1770	202.692.1770
Staging (Pre-departure Orientation) and Reporting Instructions <i>Note: You will receive comprehensive information (hotel and flight arrangements) three to five weeks before departure. This information is not available sooner.</i>	Office of Staging	Ext. 1865	202.692.1865
Family Emergencies (to get information to a Volunteer overseas)	Office of Special Services	Ext. 1470	202.692.1470 (24 hours)



# PEACE CORPS

Paul D. Coverdell Peace Corps Headquarters

1111 20th Street NW · Washington, DC 20526 · [www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov) · 1-800-424-8580