

THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

C A M E R O O N



A PEACE CORPS PUBLICATION
FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS



January 2007



A WELCOME LETTER

Dear Prospective Peace Corps/Cameroon Volunteers,

As country director I want to congratulate you on being accepted to a great Peace Corps program that has been in operation since 1962. If I can toot our horn a little bit, you're coming to a great place. You are about to embark on a significant and rewarding experience. The people of Cameroon, along with the Peace Corps staff and Volunteers, look forward to meeting and working with you over the next two years.

Although Cameroon is geographically one of Africa's largest and diverse countries, there is much to do and to learn here. Cameroon is a bilingual country with more than 240 ethnic languages. French is the official language, but English is spoken in the western part of the country.

The Peace Corps is a great investment into your personal database and will have its rewards and its challenges. So, before your departure, please reflect honestly on your sense of commitment and motivation to work with the Cameroonians and help in their efforts to better their lives. Study this Welcome Book, the Peace Corps' *Volunteer Handbook*, and your Volunteer Assignment Description to learn more about the country, your assignment, and the policies that guide us all.

We ask you to come with an open mind, patience, and a sincere willingness to share in the hardships and simple joys of rural or provincial urban life. Serving in the Peace Corps requires an inordinate commitment to leaving behind much of what we become accustomed to as Americans. This includes daily comforts associated with our standard of living as well as possible cultural entrapments that we may seek to shed.

However, this also includes cherished social and political beliefs, civil liberties, and standards of safety we take for granted. Please take seriously the discussions regarding clothing—dressing in accordance with local professional standards is very important to being accepted in your work and community. Heed the messages regarding harassment and safety and security. Developing personal coping mechanisms and adopting a safe lifestyle are among the many challenges you will face as a Volunteer.

A Peace Corps Volunteer is considered a professional person who has accepted an invitation to undertake demanding work under difficult circumstances, and who has decided to contribute his/her time and skills on a voluntary basis. We welcome you and pledge to support you in this endeavor. Cameroonians in communities throughout the country await the opportunity to share their lives and aspirations with you.

We hope you are already studying your French so that you will soon be able to tackle the local language(s) that will also be spoken at your post.

Step on the plane. We will be here to welcome you.

Du courage!

James T. Ham (RPCV, Guinea 1996–98)

Country Director

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PEACE CORPS/CAMEROON HISTORY AND PROGRAMS



History of the Peace Corps in Cameroon

The Peace Corps entered Cameroon in 1962 with 20 Volunteers who came as math/science teachers. Peace Corps/Cameroon's program grew and diversified to include inland fisheries, credit union/cooperatives education, English, community forestry, health, and community development. Since then, approximately 3,000 Volunteers have served in Cameroon. Currently, there are four robust projects in Cameroon: education, health and sanitation, agroforestry, and small enterprise development. The common themes that run through all Peace Corps/Cameroon projects are impact, focus, counterpart involvement, Volunteer competence, and organizational professionalism. Through collaboration and good teamwork, the Peace Corps has made a difference in many aspects of life in Cameroon, one community at a time.

History and Future of Peace Corps Programming in Cameroon

Cameroon's agroforestry and permanent farming system project is a collaborative effort among the Ministry of Agriculture, various local NGOs, and the Peace Corps. Initially, its focus was conducting on-farm research and strengthening the link between Cameroon's agriculture research and extension. Currently, Volunteers work with individual farmers and farmer groups to identify agroforestry technologies that can address their needs, protect natural resources, and promote sustainable farming systems.

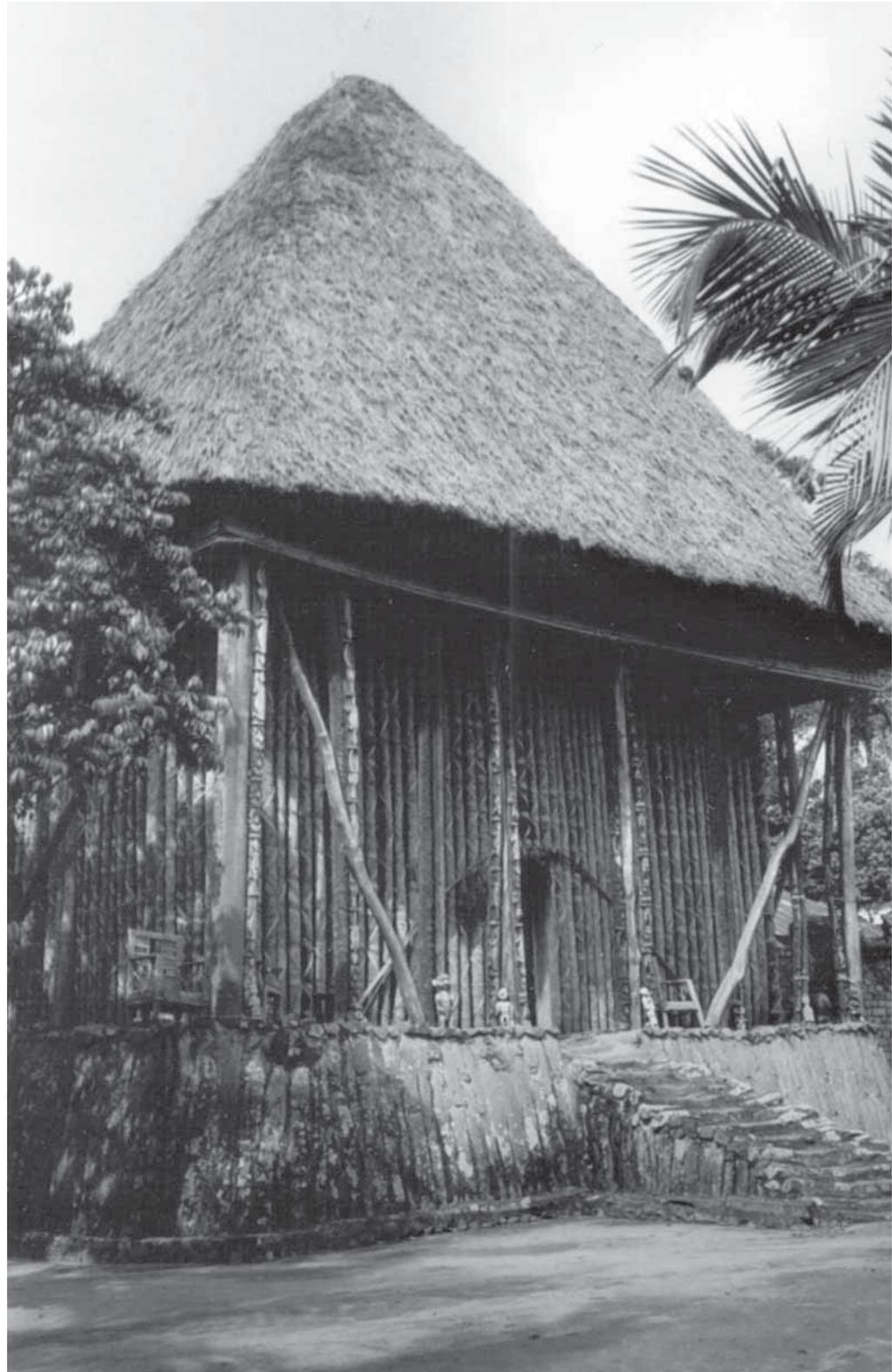
Peace Corps/Cameroon's health and water sanitation project focuses on health promotion, education, and prevention, which empowers individuals to take responsibility for their own health.

The education project remains a vital part of the Peace Corps programs. Volunteers are filling the void of trained teachers in areas such as computer literacy, math/science, physics, chemistry, biology, and English.

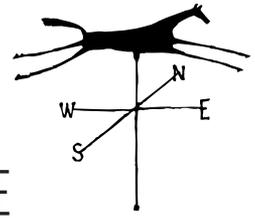
Economic empowerment through Peace Corps/Cameroon's small enterprise development initiatives focuses on improving the overall efficiency of financial institutions through training and technical assistance in management and business skill transfer. Volunteers provide technical assistance to financial institutions such as credit unions, community-based banks, and local non-governmental organizations. They are also kindling the entrepreneurial spirit through consultancy services to small businesses and individuals wishing to start or improve their business.

All Peace Corps Volunteers in Cameroon regardless of program area are involved in HIV/AIDS education. The AIDS pandemic strikes across all social strata in many Peace Corps countries. The loss of teachers has crippled education systems, while illness and disability drains family income and forces governments and donors to redirect limited resources from other priorities. The fear and uncertainty AIDS causes has led to increased domestic violence and stigmatizing of people living with HIV/AIDS, isolating them from friends and family and cutting them off from economic opportunities. As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will confront these issues on a very personal level. It is important to be aware of the high emotional toll that disease, death, and violence can have on Volunteers. As you strive to integrate into your community, you will develop relationships with local people who might

die during your service. Because of the AIDS pandemic, some Volunteers will be regularly meeting with HIV-positive people and working with training staff, office staff, and host family members living with AIDS. Volunteers need to prepare themselves to embrace these relationships in a sensitive and positive manner. Likewise, malaria and malnutrition, motor vehicle accidents and other unintentional injuries, 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 that you can continue to be of service to your community.



COUNTRY OVERVIEW: CAMEROON AT A GLANCE



History

Since the journey of Hannon the Carthaginian in the fifth century BC to Mount Cameroon, which he named the “Chariot of the Gods,” the country’s fortunes have been subject to many fluctuations. In 1472, sailors from Fernando Po entered the Wouri River estuary and were amazed by the abundance of shrimp; they named it Rio dos Cameroes, from which Cameroon got its name.

Portuguese settlers were followed by the Dutch and later by the Germans. The local inhabitants put up a stiff resistance to German penetration. At the beginning of the First World War, Allied troops ousted the Germans, and in 1918, the French and the British partitioned the colony. The eastern part, covering 80 percent of the territory, went to the French, and the western part went to the British. Henceforth, each of the two powers made its mark on Cameroon; the French opting for a policy of assimilation while the British adopted indirect rule.

When the winds of nationalism began to blow across Africa after the Second World War, the two colonies expressed a desire to be reunited. Reunification took effect soon after Ahmadou Ahidjo proclaimed the French zone independent on January 1, 1960. Cameroon became a united republic in 1972, and now has a presidential system of government.

The current government encourages development and a free-market economy. The number of state-owned industries that have been privatized in the last several years has increased significantly. During the past decade, a fledgling free press

has also been established. Cameroon's infrastructure, though not up to a developed nation's standards, is better than the infrastructures of its neighbors.

Government

President Paul Biya, who is also chairman of the Cameroon People's Democratic Movement, governs Cameroon. Ahmadou Ahidjo served as president from independence in 1960 until his resignation on November 4, 1982.

Cameroon is a republic comprising 10 provinces, which are divided into 58 administrative departments. The legal system is based on French civil law with a common law influence.

Cameroon has a National Assembly of 180 members serving five-year terms. Cameroon has undergone several political and constitutional changes since 1972. A multiparty system has been established and elections have become increasingly competitive. There are now more than 100 political parties in the country (several of which are represented in the National Assembly). The presidential term was recently changed from five years to seven years. Paul Biya was re-elected as president for the third time in 2004.

Cameroon is part of the drive for political reforms and democracy sweeping the continent. Because of Cameroon's poor economic state, however, its political stability is fragile, not unlike many other countries in Africa. Over the past decade, the transition to a democratic form of government has been marked by intermittent civil unrest and a continuing national debate on the future of the country. Peace Corps staff continually monitor the political situation to keep Volunteers informed. When nationwide elections were held recently the dominant party received the vast majority of the votes.

Economy

Agriculture is the mainstay of Cameroon's economy. It provides a living for 80 percent of the population, and accounts for about one-third of gross domestic product and for more than half of all export earnings. Cameroon is one of few net food exporters in Africa. Cocoa and coffee are the main cash crops. Other exports include timber, aluminum, cotton, natural rubber, bananas, peanuts, tobacco, and tea. While Cameroon is currently self-sufficient in food production, there is concern that this trend is not sustainable.

As in all African countries, income disparities are wide. Corruption is endemic. The state is still the biggest employer of labor. Privatization efforts underway in Cameroon are making significant improvements in services to the general population. The national electric company (SONEL), the national rail service (CAMRAIL), and the mobile telephone industry have all been privatized in the last couple of years. Telephone services have improved dramatically throughout the country, and cellular service now reaches many rural locations.

The economy grew from independence in 1960 until 1985. In 1986, prospects darkened with the collapse of world prices for Cameroon's major export commodities and with poor management of state funds. Since then, Cameroon, an African economic success story in the 1970s and early 1980s, has been in a crisis marked by a shrinking economy and serious money shortages. The declining economic situation has led to a substantial increase in crime. In 2006, Cameroon reached the "achievement point" in its negotiations with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other donors. This relieved the country of more than \$300 million in debt, which may now be used for development purposes.

People and Culture

Cameroon is a crossroads where many of the human and cultural features of sub-Saharan Africa are present. Its population is a mosaic of approximately 300 ethnic groups of Bantu, Sudanese, and Arab origins, the largest of which are the Bamiléké of the west, the Béti and Bassa of the south, and the Fulbé and Massa of the north.

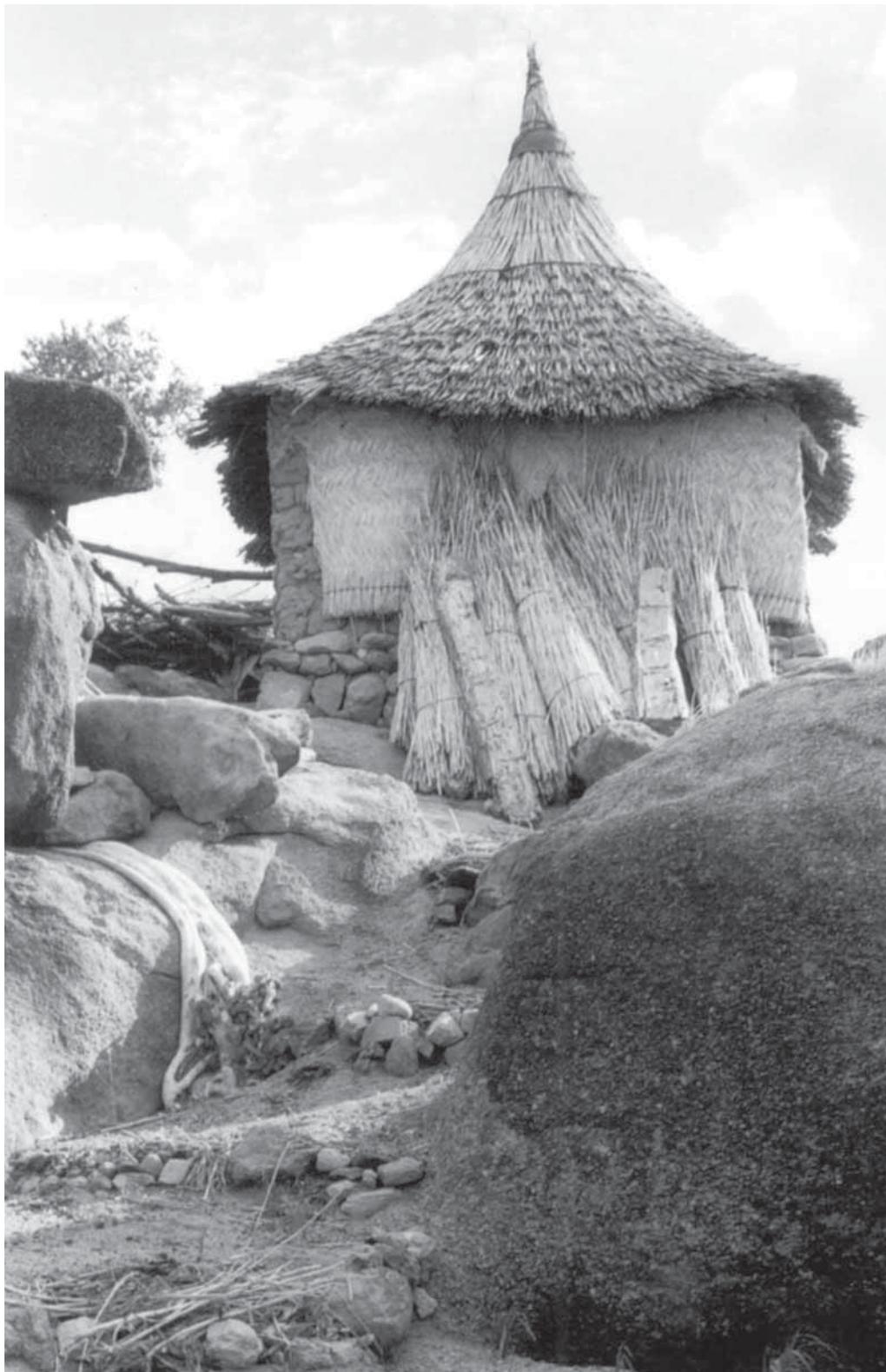
There are 239 languages spoken in Cameroon, including English, French, and pidgin. Of the total population of approximately 20 million, about 80 percent live in the French-speaking eastern part of the country, and 20 percent live in the formerly British western part. Cameroon is a bilingual country, with both French and English as the official languages.

Approximately 50 percent of the population is considered to be animist, 30 percent Christian, and the remainder Muslim. The largest Muslim concentration is in northern Cameroon. Despite its great tribal, linguistic, and religious diversity, Cameroon has made considerable progress toward integration and national unity.

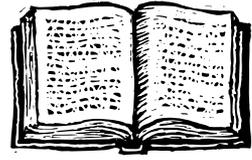
Environment

Cameroon is an elongated, triangular country situated at the juncture of West and Equatorial Africa. It extends from the Gulf of Guinea to Lake Chad and is a land of physical, climatic, and cultural contrast. Cameroon has been called an “Africa in miniature” because of all the variations—from desert to rain forest to grassland plateau to mountains to tropical beaches—in its geography. Dense forest and heavy rainfall cover the south—including the capital of Yaoundé. The western provinces feature a mountain range with steep slopes and a prolonged rainy season. A vast grassland plateau covers the north.

NOTES



RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION



Following is a list of websites for additional information about the Peace Corps and Cameroon 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.

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

General Information About Cameroon

www.countrywatch.com

On this site, you can learn anything from what time it is in Yaoundé to how to convert from the dollar to the CFA franc. You need to create a login and password, then just click on Cameroon and go from there.

www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations

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

www.state.gov

The U.S. State Department's website issues background notes periodically about countries around the world. Find Cameroon and learn more about its social and political history.

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

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

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

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

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

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

www.worldinformation.com

This site provides an additional source of current and historical information about countries worldwide.

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees

www.rpcv.org

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

<http://www.rpcvwebring.org/>

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

www.peacecorpswriters.org

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

Online Articles/Current News Sites About Cameroon

<http://hmnet.com/africa/1africa.html>

Site of the Africa Information Center

Recommended Books

1. Ardener, Edwin. *Kingdom on Mount Cameroon: Studies in the History of the Cameroon Coast 1500–1960*. New York: Berghahn Books, 1996.
2. Barley, Nigel. *The Innocent Anthropologist: Notes From a Mud Hut*. Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 2000.
3. Delancey, Mark. *Cameroon: Dependence and Independence*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1989.
4. Goheen, Miriam. *Men Own the Field, Women Own the Crops: Gender and Power in the Cameroon Grassfields*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996.
5. Smith, Mary-Ann Tirone. *Lament for a Silver-Eyed Woman*. New York: William Morrow, 1987.

Recommended Travel DVD about Cameroon

1. *Globetrekker Cameroon*. Pilot Productions. 2005.

Recommended Film about Cameroon

1. *Sisters-in-Law. 2005.* By Florence Ayisi and Kim Longinotto

Books About the History of the Peace Corps

1. Hoffman, Elizabeth Cobbs. *All You Need is Love: The Peace Corps and the Spirit of the 1960's.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2000.
2. Rice, Gerald T. *The Bold Experiment: JFK's Peace Corps.* Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.
3. Stossel, Scott. *Sarge: The Life and Times of Sargent Shriver.* Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2004.

Books on the Volunteer Experience

1. Banerjee, Dillon. *So You Want to Join the Peace Corps: What to Know Before You Go.* Berkeley, Calif.: Ten Speed Press, 2000.
2. Casebolt, Marjorie DeMoss. *Margarita: A Guatemalan Peace Corps Experience.* Gig Harbor, Wash.: Red Apple Publishing, 2000.
3. Dirlam, Sharon. *Beyond Siberia: Two Years in a Forgotten Place.* Santa Barbara, Calif.: McSeas Books, 2004.
4. Erdman, Sarah. *Nine Hills to Nambonkaha: Two Years in the Heart of an African Village.* New York, N.Y.: Picador, 2003.
5. Herrera, Susana. *Mango Elephants in the Sun: How Life in an African Village Let Me Be in My Skin.* Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1999
6. Hessler, Peter. *River Town: Two Years on the Yangtze.* New York, N.Y.: Perennial, 2001.

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



LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE



Communications

Mail

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. Mail takes a minimum of two to three weeks to arrive and may take up to six weeks. Some mail may simply not arrive, or may arrive with clipped edges because a postal worker has tried to see if any money was inside. The vast majority of letters arrive in decent time. Advise your family and friends to number their letters for tracking purposes and to include "Airmail" and "Par Avion" on their envelopes.

During training (your first 10 weeks in Cameroon) letters and packages should be sent to:

"Your name,"
Peace Corps Trainee
Corps de la Paix
B.P. 215
Yaoundé, Cameroon

Once you have finished training and are at your site, letters can be mailed directly to your new address there.

In the event of a serious problem, Peace Corps/Cameroon would notify the Office of Special Services at the Peace Corps headquarters in Washington, which would then contact your family. Advise your family members that in the case of a family emergency, they should contact the Office of Special Services in Washington. During normal business hours, the

number is 800.424.8580, extension 1470. After hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574.

Telephones

Cellular telephones are popular in Cameroon and can easily be purchased in all major cities from under \$100. They do not function in all areas of the country, but service is spreading rapidly. Most trainees purchase a cellphone shortly after arrival in Cameroon. (Cellular telephones from the United States will not work in Cameroon unless they are GSM phones.) Some Volunteers bring satellite phones, which work well in most areas of the country. A few Volunteers have fixed-line phones in their homes.

The cost of calling the United States is very expensive (about \$3 a minute), several times more expensive than calling from the United States to Cameroon. Volunteers often make a short call to a friend or family member and have them return the call.

Computer, Internet, and E-mail Access

Over the past several years, Internet and e-mail services have sprung up throughout Cameroon.

At the Peace Corps office in Yaoundé, Volunteers have access to computers with high-speed Internet connections. Many people do bring laptop computers to Cameroon. If you do, you may spend a lot of time worrying about your equipment in transport and at home (not to mention the hassle of lugging it around), and parts may not be available. The choice is up to you. Peace Corps/Cameroon is unable to provide technical support to Volunteers who choose to bring a computer, nor will it reimburse you for any needed repairs. Computers and other high-value items also heighten your exposure to opportunistic theft. Make sure to have any high-value items insured as Peace Corps will not reimburse for loss or theft.

Housing and Site Location

During training, you will live with a Cameroonian family. After training, you are likely to have your own house in the community where you are posted. Volunteers are assigned to sites throughout Cameroon, which range in size from large cities to small villages. Your assignment will depend on the project, host country needs, housing availability, and your preferences. Cameroon's development needs are the first priority in posting Volunteers.

Arrangements for housing are made by the Peace Corps and depend on resources available in the community. You will have to be flexible in your housing expectations. The Peace Corps tries to ensure that Volunteers have lodging that allows for independence and privacy. You may, however, be lodged in a small, one-room hut within a family's compound. Your house may have walls made of concrete or mud bricks and a tin or thatched roof. A typical Volunteer house has a sitting room, a bedroom, and a cooking area. Some houses have inside toilets/shower areas while others have nearby pit latrines. About half of Volunteers have running water and/or electricity. Peace Corps/Cameroon provides items such as an all-terrain bicycle and helmet, a mosquito net, and a water filter. Upon your swearing in as a Volunteer, the Peace Corps will give you a modest settling-in allowance to purchase household necessities and furniture.

Some sites are very isolated (more than 50 kilometers from the next Volunteer), and traveling in and out can sometimes be difficult because of the poor quality of roads and infrequent public transportation. (Fifty kilometers can take anywhere from three to eight hours of travel time, depending on road conditions.) Other posts are short distances from one another and are near paved roads.

Living Allowance and Money Management

The local currency is the CFA franc, and the current exchange rate is approximately 515 CFA to the dollar. Volunteers receive a monthly living allowance of 160,000 CFA to cover their cost of living simply, but adequately, while serving overseas. The living allowance covers the cost of utilities, domestic help, household supplies, clothing, food, work-related transport and supplies, and modest entertainment and recreation expenditures. Housing is provided at no cost. In addition to a living allowance, you will receive \$24 each month as a vacation allowance. If you are requested by the Peace Corps to travel, you will be given additional money for transportation and lodging.

Volunteers open a bank account that is easily accessible from their site, and the living allowance is deposited quarterly into the account. Although credit cards can be used in large hotels in Yaoundé and Douala, they can rarely be used elsewhere in Cameroon. ATM machines that use the “Plus” network exist in nearly all provincial capitals. Identity theft, however, is a major problem in Cameroon, and an additional reason not to use credit, debit, or ATM cards in the country. For vacation travel outside of Cameroon, a credit card may be useful. Many Volunteers bring extra cash or traveler’s checks, which can be cashed for a fee at banks, for emergencies and vacation travel. A safe is available in the Peace Corps office for use by Volunteers. Note that the Peace Corps is not able to transfer personal funds from the United States to a Volunteer or trainee.

Food and Diet

If there is one country on the African continent that can be described as a land of plenty, Cameroon certainly deserves the title. Cameroon is the breadbasket for this region, and local foods such as millet, plantains, beans, cassava, cocoyams,

sweet potatoes, and okra, together with meats, fish, poultry, and seasonal fruits and vegetables, provide the bulk of the diet. However, food availability varies significantly by region—in the south and west of the country, a wide range of vegetables and fruits is always available. In the more arid north, variety is far more limited. Meats, fish, and poultry are generally available everywhere. Some of the villages in which Volunteers are posted have a weekly market, and others must depend on a neighboring market for various items. Some canned and imported Western foods and products will be available in towns where you live or in the larger provincial capitals, but they are expensive. Being a vegetarian should not pose a problem. However, the stricter you are in a vegetarian diet, the more challenging it will be. Cameroon's climate is generally favorable for vegetable gardening, and many Volunteers supplement what is available at the market with their own harvest. (Spices are among the few items not available in Cameroon, so you may want to bring some with you.)

Transportation

Volunteers use trains, buses, bush taxis, motorcycle taxis, bikes and occasionally planes. Public transportation in Cameroon is relatively reliable. Trains run from Douala to Yaoundé to the East and Adamaoua provinces each day. Bus routes run between Yaoundé, Douala, Bafoussam, and Bamenda. Planes are often late and frequently flights are canceled. Taxis are available and inexpensive in most major towns. Motorcycle taxis predominate in the Extreme North and North provinces and are increasing rapidly elsewhere in the country. Finally, minivans or “bush taxis” ply both paved and unpaved roads, bringing passengers and their belongings (including bunches of bananas, goats, pigs, etc.) to all but the tiniest villages.

Although available, travel is not always easy. Because of lack of road maintenance and the fact that some major routes have yet to be paved, transportation can be difficult and time-consuming—especially in the rainy season. Since the transport infrastructure is limited, every means is used to its fullest capacity. This can mean squeezing six or more people into a city taxi or bush taxi or sharing seats on the train.

You may have to rely on public transport to travel to major towns to do banking, post letters, use the Internet, etc. In doing this, you must take an active role in choosing the safest, most reliable transport. This means refusing to enter vehicles that are poorly maintained or driven by irresponsible chauffeurs and waiting for the “next car.”

Geography and Climate

Cameroon is a land of geographic and climatic diversity, with desert, rain forest, savanna, ancient and active volcanoes, and tropical beaches. The climate ranges from extremely hot and dry in the north, to cool in the central plateau, to humid and hot in the south.

It is best to bring clothing that will work in all these regions, as you will not know in advance where you will be posted. Clothing—new, used, and custom-made—is widely available in Cameroon, the latter at very inexpensive prices, so you can have many of your clothes made locally.

Social Activities

Forming relationships with members of your community will be challenging and gratifying. Cameroonians are hospitable and generous, and their extended family structure makes for an open-door policy and a welcoming attitude to visitors. Demonstrating an interest in the local culture will greatly

increase the integration process and help you establish credibility as a member of the community. You will find that your acceptance into the community will depend a great deal on your willingness to experience the Cameroonian lifestyle. The most satisfied Volunteers integrate into their communities while maintaining a good sense of who they are. They eat local food, speak the local language, and attend important village ceremonies such as baptisms, funerals, and marriages.

Drinking alcohol is often a part of the social fabric of Cameroon, which sometimes can create a more aggressive living or working environment. Although Volunteers are encouraged to socialize with Cameroonians and participate in ceremonies and festivities as a means of learning about the culture, it is advisable that drinking in public be limited to special occasions and after work hours. Volunteers need to be aware of the messages they send during their daily interactions in the community.

Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior

One of the difficulties of finding your place as a Peace Corps Volunteer is fitting into the local culture while maintaining your own cultural identity and acting like a professional all at the same time. It is not an easy thing to resolve. You will be working as a representative of a government ministry or a professional organization and as such you will be expected to dress and behave accordingly. Professional dress standards are high in Cameroon. Being neat and cleanly dressed is a sign of respect and pride.

A foreigner who wears unkempt or old clothes is likely to be considered an affront. Trousers (for men, and women in some regions), blouses/shirts, skirts (below the knee), and dresses are appropriate wear for work. If your dress is inappropriate (shorts, halter tops, short skirts, form-fitting or low-cut

blouses, dirty or torn clothing), you may not be readily accepted in your job, and for women, inappropriate dress and behavior will attract unwanted attention. Cameroonians are not likely to directly comment on your dress, but they are likely to think that you either do not know what is culturally acceptable or do not care. You should certainly bring at least one dressy outfit for important or ceremonial occasions.

The Peace Corps expects Volunteers to behave in a way that will foster respect within their community and reflect well on the Peace Corps and on citizens of the United States. You will receive an orientation to appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest, and you should be sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of your hosts.

Personal Safety

More information about the Peace Corps' approach to safety is outlined 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 (often 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 Cameroon Volunteers complete their two years of service without serious personal security incidents. The Peace Corps has established procedures and policies designed to help Volunteers reduce their risks and enhance their safety and security. These procedures and policies, in addition to safety training, will be provided once you arrive in Cameroon. At the same time, you are expected to take responsibility for your safety and well-being.

Rewards and Frustrations

You will certainly experience ups and downs during your time in Cameroon. One week, cultural and language differences will seem exotic, exciting, and inviting; the next week, you may see them as barriers to everything you want to experience and accomplish in Cameroon. You will need serious coping skills—humor, humility, and the ability to forge strong social connections—to get you through the difficult passes. You should expect hardship and difficulty to be part of your weekly routine and be aware that the Peace Corps staff will not always be there to help you through each cycle of ups and downs.

Particularly during the first year of service, many Volunteers feel very alone in their work because they lack the support one gets from working with people who share a common background. You may feel isolated by language and cultural barriers. Paradoxically, you also may feel that you are never alone, but are always on parade or under scrutiny. Even the few people who find this exhilarating at first eventually find it irritating and burdensome.

Your initial reaction to a new country is likely to be one of delight and curiosity, but working in a country is another matter. “Flexible time,” where “soon” can mean anything from 20 minutes to the next day or week, can become very frustrating. But eventually you will learn to turn the burdens into tools in your work; combining your own cultural baggage with the new culture, you will learn to both live comfortably and accomplish your objectives. Learning to function well in a community so vastly different from anything you have known in the United States is part of the challenge and magic of being a Peace Corps Volunteer.

It is not an exaggeration to state that every successful Peace Corps project begins by identifying a particular host country national who is competent, reliable, understanding, and

dedicated. This can be a long, slow, arduous task requiring many months of frequently frustrated efforts. A deep conviction that you share a common humanity with your host that transcends the cultural differences will be a big help. In the end, these relationships are the ones that will add tremendous meaning to your time here.

One of the difficulties faced by some Volunteers is a lack of clarity in their role in development: To what extent are you an agent of change, and to what extent are you a respectful, conforming guest and fellow worker? The answer is not clear-cut because both motivations are relevant, and yet they are clearly contradictory. Whether you work in teaching or in community development, you will encounter an established traditional system, some of which may seem absurd, grossly inefficient, pointless, or superstitious. Do you oppose it or go along with it? If you oppose it, you will encounter resistance and hostility—often subtle, sometimes blatant. On the other hand, if you go along with the system, nothing changes and you feel useless. Volunteers who follow the latter course often rationalize their passivity with a statements like: “After all, we are not here to change things” or “Who is to say that the American way of life is any better than the host country’s?” There is no easy solution. Most Volunteers work out a flexible approach in which sometimes they oppose the system directly and sometimes they go along with it, hopefully without giving up the objective of imparting something of themselves in the process.

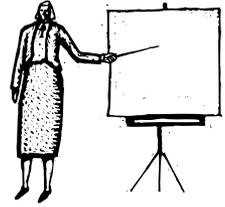
While it is possible that you will sail through every stressful situation without encountering any discomfort, that would be unusual. There are times for all Volunteers when the difficult conditions under which they live and work prove upsetting. Many experience intense feelings of discouragement and futility, especially during the first year of service. Things that seemed clear become unclear. The direction to take

seems obscured. You do not feel in control of a situation or a problem, and this can be frightening. These are the times when coping skills and your social support system are critical.

Having said all that, the rewards of Peace Corps service are immense. The very tangible rewards are the acquisition of language, technical, and cross-cultural skills that improve your ability to make your way anywhere in the world. In addition, your two years of overseas work experience gives you a significant advantage for future international work, as well as for many jobs based in the United States.

But it is the intangible rewards that are most gratifying to Volunteers—the cross-cultural understanding you gain from integration into a community for a long period of time and the deep relationships that surely come of that. Even for the veteran world traveler, these experiences will be deeper and more profound than any other travel adventure you have had. You cannot help leaving the Peace Corps with a broader worldview and a deeper understanding of the realities experienced by others around the globe. And you will never be understimulated by your environment. More important, while having this incredible experience, you will also have the profound satisfaction of making some small difference to an individual, a community, and a country.

PEACE CORPS TRAINING



Overview of Pre-Service Training

Pre-service training lasts from 10 to 11 weeks, depending on the project, and follows a community-based training methodology. This means that you will live in a Cameroonian village or town with a small group of other trainees and periodically come together in a common location for sessions with the members of your training class. While in training, you will conduct individual research and have formal language classes. Although pre-service training can be stressful as you try to learn new skills in a different and often confusing environment, a highly experienced training staff is available to help you.

Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Cameroon by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. Peace Corps staff, Cameroonian 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 Cameroon and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your technical sector's goals and will meet with the Cameroonian agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated by the training staff throughout the training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities and be a productive member of your community.

Language Training

As a Peace Corps Volunteer, you will find that language skills are the 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 the heart of the training program, and you must successfully meet minimum language requirements to complete training and become a Volunteer. Experienced Cameroonian language instructors teach formal language classes five days a week in small groups of four to five people. French, pidgin, and other local languages are also introduced in the health, cultural, and technical components of training.

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 that you can practice and develop language skills further on your own. Prior to being sworn in as a Volunteer, you will work on strategies to continue language studies during your two years of service. You would be well-served to begin building your French skills now. Among the books Peace Corps/Cameroon uses is *Essential French Grammar* by Seymour Resnick (Dover, 1979).

Cross-Cultural Training

As part of your pre-service training, you will live with a Cameroonian 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 Cameroon. 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 Cameroon. Nutrition, mental health, safety and security, 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 your service, there are usually three training events. The titles and objectives for those trainings are as follows:

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

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

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YOUR HEALTH CARE AND SAFETY IN CAMEROON



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

Health Issues in Cameroon

Major health problems among Peace Corps Volunteers in Cameroon are rare and are often a result of a Volunteer's not taking preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems in Cameroon are minor ones that are also found in the United States. These include colds, diarrhea, constipation, sinus infections, skin infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, sexually transmitted diseases, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Cameroon because certain environmental factors raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illness and injuries.

The most common major health concerns in Cameroon are malaria, amoebic dysentery, hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, schistosomiasis, and filariasis. Because malaria is endemic in Cameroon, taking antimalarial medication is mandatory.

You will be vaccinated against hepatitis A and B, meningitis A and C, tetanus/diphtheria, typhoid, and rabies. Thoroughly washing fruits and vegetables and boiling your drinking water can prevent amebic dysentery. Volunteers posted in provinces where filaria is hyperendemic are required to take filaria prophylaxis medication. You will be tested for schistosomiasis at the end of service.

It is critical to your health that you promptly report to the Peace Corps health unit for scheduled immunizations and that you let your medical officer know immediately of significant illnesses and injuries.

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 Cameroon, you will receive a medical handbook. You will also receive a medical kit with supplies to take care of mild illnesses and first-aid needs. The contents of the kit are listed at the end of 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 six-month supply of any prescription drugs you use, since they may not be available in Cameroon and it may take several months for shipments to arrive. If you take an out-of-the-ordinary prescription drug, you should check with the Peace Corps to see if it is included in the Peace Corps formulary or if it is available at all in Cameroon. Do not wait until you get to Cameroon to find out!

You will have a physical exam at midservice and at the end of your service. If you develop a serious medical problem

during your service, the medical officers in Cameroon will consult with the Office of Medical Services in Washington, D.C. If it is determined that your condition cannot be treated in Cameroon, you may be sent out of the country (commonly known as a medevac) 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 old adage “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” becomes extremely important in areas where diagnostic and treatment facilities are not up to the standards of the United States. The most important of your responsibilities in Cameroon is to take the following preventive measures:

Malaria. You will be serving in an area where malaria, a mosquito-borne disease, is prevalent. To suppress malaria, you must take an approved antimalarial drug, usually mefloquine. Mefloquine, which comes in 250 mg tablets, is taken on the same day once a week. Doxycycline is an antibiotic that can be used for malaria prophylaxis but is not as effective as mefloquine because not everyone remembers to take it daily. You will begin taking mefloquine before you leave the United States, unless there are contraindications. You must continue taking mefloquine throughout your service and for four weeks after you leave a malarial area. In addition, to eradicate any remaining malaria parasites you may have acquired, you must take another antimalarial drug when you leave Peace Corps service (primaquine, one tablet daily for 14 days).

Keep in mind that no single or combined malaria prophylactic regimen is 100 percent effective. Avoidance of mosquito bites is imperative! By using bed nets, wearing appropriate clothing, and applying insect repellent to exposed skin, you will greatly

reduce your risk of exposure to mosquito bites. Malaria can be effectively treated when prompt medical attention is sought, so you must always keep in mind the cardinal rule in malarial countries: Treat all unexplained fevers as malaria. You will also receive Malarone, a drug you can use while you contact the health unit. Malaria can be rapidly fatal in persons who have no natural immunity to the disease. Unfortunately, Volunteers who do not fully comply with Peace Corps recommendations occasionally contract malaria. You will be administratively separated if you refuse to take malaria prophylaxis.

Rabies. Rabies is present in Cameroon and in most other Peace Corps countries. Any possible exposure to a rabid animal must be reported immediately to the health unit. Rabies exposure can occur through animal bites, scratches from animals' teeth, and contact with animal saliva. Your medical officer will take into consideration many factors to decide the appropriate course of therapy necessary to prevent rabies. Rabies, if contracted, is 100 percent fatal. Peace Corps medical officers will provide all necessary rabies immunizations.

Injectable medications and immunizations. Injectable medications should be avoided unless given at the Peace Corps health unit or at a facility approved by your Peace Corps medical officer. There are risks of contacting HIV, hepatitis C, and other diseases if the equipment is not new and disposable.

All immunizations are given at the Peace Corps health unit or at another Peace Corps-designated facility. If you sustain a wound, a local facility might want to give you an immunization against tetanus. You will be fully immunized against tetanus at the start of your service for a period of at least five years, so that is unnecessary and potentially dangerous (some tetanus immunizations can cause serious allergic reactions). If in doubt about your need for a tetanus booster, contact your medical officer.

HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases. HIV is prevalent in Cameroon and increasing. As you know, HIV causes AIDS, an incurable, fatal disease. Other STDs, such as herpes, gonorrhea, and syphilis, are also common. Abstinence is the only certain choice for prevention of HIV and other STDs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active.

It cannot be overstated that unprotected sexual contact is extremely dangerous. The easy flow of alcohol in Cameroon negatively impacts responsible sexual behavior and consequently increases the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. You should not assume that any sexual partner (fellow Volunteer or Cameroonian) has been practicing safe sex in Cameroon; even longer-term relationships in Cameroon require adequate protection and constant vigilance in terms of safe sex. Volunteers are highly encouraged to use condoms throughout Peace Corps service, even after testing and even in a long-term relationship. If you have objections to practicing safe sex, you should not come to Cameroon. You will receive more information from your medical officer about this important issue.

Diarrheal illnesses. Diarrhea affects most Volunteers at some time during their service. Most cases are due to amoebas, giardia, or bacteria. These organisms are spread by consumption of contaminated food and water and are therefore preventable. A simple stool test helps the medical officer determine the cause of a case of diarrhea. You will be offered appropriate treatment following guidelines set by the Office of Medical Services.

Viral hepatitis. Hepatitis A and B are both endemic in Cameroon. Hepatitis A is highly infectious and spreads through the oral-fecal route. Hepatitis B is transmitted by exposure to blood and bodily fluids, primarily through sexual contact. All Volunteers are vaccinated against hepatitis A and B while in Cameroon.

Filariasis. Filariae are tiny worms that develop in humans, months after they are bitten by the filaria-carrying black fly, mosquito, or deer fly. The disease usually causes problems only after many years of chronic inflammation and scarring of involved organs and tissue. Filarial flies exist primarily in the South, Center, and East provinces of Cameroon. But filariasis has also been diagnosed in Volunteers in the Southwest, some parts of the Northwest, and the West provinces. Volunteers in endemic areas take regular prophylaxis medication. Your medical officer will determine whether you need to do so.

Dust. Dust is a problem during the dry season in Cameroon. It can produce chronic nasal congestion or watery nasal discharge. It can also lead to difficulty in breathing (wheezing) and watery, itchy eyes. If you have asthma, even if it is inactive, the dust, pollen, and molds in the atmosphere in Cameroon may exacerbate your symptoms.

Breathing difficulties. Breathing difficulties caused by allergies to dust or pollen may show up as wheezing or a dry, nonproductive cough during the night or after exercise. Volunteers with no history of asthma have developed wheezing in Cameroon. Allergies developed in-country will probably be resolved when you return to the United States. But it is still necessary to find out if there is an infectious cause for the difficulties and to treat any wheezing before the problem becomes severe.

Tuberculosis. Tuberculosis is a highly contagious, chronic bacterial disease that is widespread in Cameroon, and is spread by the sputum particles of individuals with open-lung tuberculosis. Although your chances of contracting tuberculosis in Cameroon are small, you will have screening tests for tuberculosis during midservice and close-of-service exams.

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

Your medical officer will present other appropriate preventive' Volunteers are expected to comply with therapies recommended by the Peace Corps health unit or referral facility.

Women's Health Information

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

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

Your Peace Corps Medical Kit

The Peace Corps medical officer provides Volunteers with a medical kit that contains basic items necessary to prevent and treat illnesses that may occur during service. Kit items can be periodically restocked at the Peace Corps health unit.

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 and Gatorade

Oral thermometer (Fahrenheit)

Pseudoephedrine HCL 30 mg (Sudafed)

Robitussin-DM lozenges (for cough)

Scissors

Sterile gauze pads

Tetrahydrozoline eyedrops (Visine)

Tinactin (antifungal cream)

Tweezers

Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist

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

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

If you wish to avoid having duplicate vaccinations, you should contact your physician's office, 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 Cameroon. You do not need to begin taking malaria medication prior to your pre-departure orientation.

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

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs with you—a pair and a spare. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace it, 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 Peace Corps 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 healthcare plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary healthcare 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 healthcare 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 preexisting conditions might prevent you from reenrolling 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 thefts 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. In addition, more than 84 percent of Volunteers surveyed in the 2004 Peace Corps Volunteer Survey say they would join the Peace Corps again.

The Peace Corps approaches safety and security as a partnership with you. This Welcome Book contains sections on: Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle; Peace Corps Training; and Your Health Care and Safety. All of these sections include important safety and security information.

The Peace Corps makes every effort to give Volunteers the tools they need to function in the safest and most secure 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 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.

Based on information gathered from incident reports worldwide in 2004, the following factors stand out as risk characteristics for assaults. Assaults consist of personal crimes committed against Volunteers, and do not include property crimes (such as vandalism or theft).

- Location: Most crimes occurred when Volunteers were in public areas (e.g., street, park, beach, public buildings). Specifically, 43 percent of assaults took place when Volunteers were away from their sites.
- Time of day: Assaults usually took place on the weekend during the evening between 5:00 p.m. and 2:00 a.m.—with most assaults occurring around 1:00 a.m.

- Absence of others: Assaults usually occurred when the Volunteer was unaccompanied. In 82 percent of the sexual assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied and in 55 percent of physical assaults the Volunteer was unaccompanied.
- Relationship to assailant: In most assaults, the Volunteer did not know the assailant.
- Consumption of alcohol: Forty percent of all assaults involved alcohol consumption by Volunteers and/or assailants.

Summary Strategies to Reduce Risk

Before and during service, your training will address these areas of concern so that you can reduce the risks you face. For example, here are some strategies Volunteers employ:

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of theft:

- Know the environment and choose safe routes/times for travel
- Avoid high-crime areas per Peace Corps guidance
- Know the vocabulary to get help in an emergency
- Carry valuables in different pockets/places
- Carry a "dummy" wallet as a decoy

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of burglary:

- Live with a local family or on a family compound
- Put strong locks on doors and keep valuables in a lock box or trunk
- Leave irreplaceable objects at home in the U.S.
- Follow Peace Corps guidelines on maintaining home security

Strategies to reduce the risk/impact of assault:

- Make local friends
- Make sure your appearance is respectful of local

customs; don't draw negative attention to yourself by wearing inappropriate clothing

- Get to know local officials, police, and neighbors
- Travel with someone whenever possible
- Avoid known high crime areas
- Limit alcohol consumption

Support from Staff

In March 2003, the Peace Corps created the Office of Safety and Security with its mission to “foster improved communication, coordination, oversight, and accountability of all Peace Corps’ safety and security efforts.” The new office is led by an Associate Director for Safety and Security who reports to the Peace Corps Director and includes the following divisions: Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security; Information and Personnel Security; Emergency Preparedness, Plans, Training and Exercise; and Crime Statistics and Analysis.

The major responsibilities of the Volunteer Safety and Overseas Security Division are to coordinate the office’s overseas operations and direct the Peace Corps’ safety and security officers who are located in various regions around the world that have Peace Corps programs. The safety and security officers conduct security assessments; review safety trainings; train trainers and managers; train Volunteer safety wardens, local guards, and staff; develop security incident response procedures; and provide crisis management support.

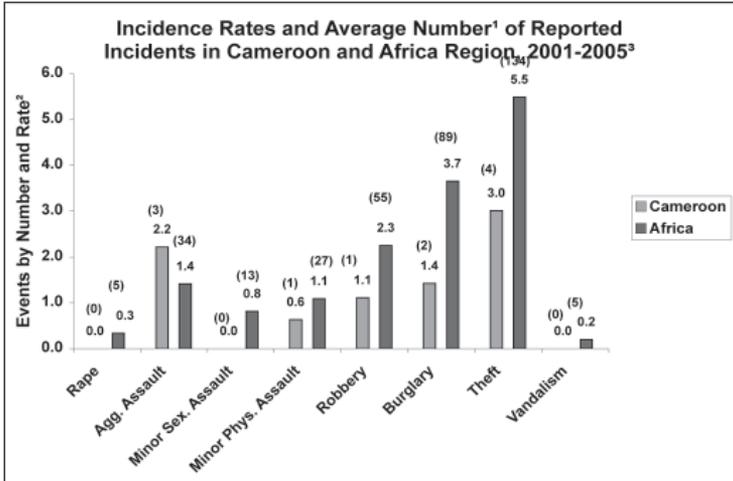
If a trainee or Volunteer is the victim of a safety incident, Peace Corps staff is prepared to provide support. All Peace Corps posts have procedures in place to respond to incidents of crime committed against Volunteers. The first priority for all posts in the aftermath of an incident is to ensure that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

provides support by reassessing the Volunteer's work site 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.

The country-specific data chart below shows the incidence rates and the average number of incidents of the major types of safety incidents reported by Peace Corps Volunteers/trainees in Cameroon as compared to all other Africa region programs as a whole, from 2001–2005. It is presented to you in a somewhat technical manner for statistical accuracy.

To fully appreciate the collected data below, an explanation of the graph is provided as follows:

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. An "incident" is a specific offense, per Peace Corps' classification of offenses, and may involve one or more Volunteer/trainee victims. For example, if two Volunteers are robbed at the same time and place, this is classified as one robbery incident.



¹The average numbers of incidents are in parenthesis and equal the average reported assaults for each year between 2001–2005.

²Incident rates equal the number of assaults per 100 Volunteers and trainees per year (V/T years). Since most sexual assaults occur against females, only female V/Ts are calculated in rapes and minor sexual assaults. Numbers of incidents are approximate due to rounding.

³Data collection for Cameroon began as of 2001

Source data on incidents are drawn from Assault Notification Surveillance System (ANSS) and Epidemiologic Surveillance System (ESS); the information is accurate as of 12/13/06.

The chart is separated into eight crime categories. These include vandalism (malicious defacement or damage of property); theft (taking without force or illegal entry); burglary (forcible entry of a residence); robbery (taking something by force); minor physical assault (attacking without a weapon with minor injuries); minor sexual assault (fondling, groping, etc.); aggravated assault (attacking with a weapon, and/or without a weapon when serious injury results); and rape (sexual intercourse without consent).

When anticipating Peace Corps Volunteer service, you should review all of the safety and security information provided to you, including the strategies to reduce risk. Throughout

your training and Volunteer service, you will be expected to successfully complete all training competencies in a variety of areas including safety and security. Once in-country, use the tools and information shared with you to remain as safe and secure as possible.

What if you become a victim of a violent crime?

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

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

If you do become a victim of a violent crime, first, make sure you are in a safe place and with people you trust and second, contact the country director or the Peace Corps medical officer. Immediate reporting is important to the preservation of evidence and the chances of apprehending the suspect. Country directors and medical officers are required to report all violent crimes to the Inspector General and the RSO. This information is protected from unauthorized further disclosure by the Privacy Act. Reporting the crime also helps prevent your further victimization and protects your fellow Volunteers.

In conjunction with the RSO, the OIG does a preliminary investigation of all violent crimes against Volunteers regardless of whether the crime has been reported to local authorities or of the decision you may ultimately make to prosecute. If you are a victim of a crime, our staff will work with you through final disposition of the case. OIG staff is available 24 hours-a-day, 7 days-a-week. We may be contacted through our 24-hour violent crime hotline via telephone at 202.692.2911, or by e-mail at violentcrimehotline@peacecorps.gov.

Security Issues in Cameroon

When it comes to your safety and security in the Peace Corps, you have to be willing to adapt your behavior and lifestyle to minimize the potential for being a target of crime. As with anywhere in the world, crime does exist in Cameroon. You can reduce your risk by avoiding situations that make you feel uncomfortable and by taking precautions. Crime at the village or town level is less frequent than in the large cities; people know each other and generally will not steal from their neighbors. Tourist attractions in large towns, for instance, are favorite work sites for pickpockets. The following are safety concerns in Cameroon you should be aware of:

Vehicle accidents are the single greatest risk to your safety in Cameroon. Volunteers are strongly encouraged to wear seat belts whenever available and to avoid riding in overcrowded public buses or vans. Because of the poor and dangerous conditions of roads in the interior of the country and the speed at which vehicles travel, Peace Corps/Cameroon has established a transportation policy that limits Volunteer travel to Yaoundé and the provincial capitals.

The homes of some Volunteers have been robbed in the past, and Volunteers will need to take the same precautions that they would take in the United States. The Peace Corps advises on proper home safety during training, and requires landlords to install deadbolt locks and other safety features in Volunteer homes.

In recent years, street crime has drastically increased in Cameroon, and a number of Volunteers have been victims. By far the most common incidents are petty thefts and burglary. Many of these incidents have taken place in Yaoundé and provincial capitals. There has also been an increase in violent crime using weapons (also in urban areas). Carjacking, particularly in Yaoundé and Douala, has also been reported. In rural areas, there is usually less crime; however, in some regions of the country there are incidents of road banditry.

Volunteers are required to wear a protective helmet whenever riding on a two-wheeled motorized vehicle or a bicycle. Failure to comply with this regulation will result in immediate administrative separation from the Peace Corps. This means you will be sent home. There is no appeal.

Physical and sexual assault occurs in Peace Corps countries worldwide, just as it does in the United States. You can avoid some of the risk by changing your own behavior. You will receive a thorough briefing on how to minimize this risk in

Cameroon. If harassment or assault occurs, the Peace Corps health unit staff is available to assist you. It is important that you report any incident to the health unit and receive appropriate care, including care for your emotional well-being. Medications are available to reduce your risk of pregnancy and infection with HIV after sexual contact, so it is important to contact the health unit immediately. The Peace Corps can also advise you about your options for prosecuting an attacker.

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. Only you can make yourself less of a target, ensure that your house is secure, and develop relations in your community that will make you an unlikely victim of crime. In coming to Cameroon, do what you would do if you moved to a new city in the United States: 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 Cameroon will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

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 than at their sites, where “family,” friends, and colleagues look out for them. While whistles and taunts are common on the street, this behavior can be reduced if you dress conservatively, avoid eye contact, 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. Limit time spent in urban areas and provincial capitals, and if it is necessary to be out after dark, travel in a group, never alone.

Preparing for the Unexpected: Safety Training and Volunteer Support in Cameroon

The Peace Corps' approach to safety is a five-pronged plan to help you stay safe during your two-year 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.

The Peace Corps/Cameroon office will keep Volunteers informed of issues that may impact Volunteer safety through Volunteer 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, Volunteers will be contacted through the emergency communication network.

Volunteer Training will include sessions to prepare you for specific safety and security issues in Cameroon. This training will prepare you to adopt a culturally appropriate lifestyle and to exercise judgment that promotes safety and reduces risk in your home, at work, and while traveling. Safety training is offered throughout your two-year service and is integrated into the language, cross-cultural, health, and other components of training.

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

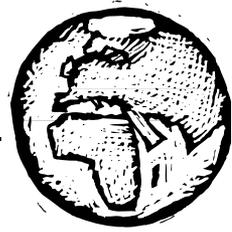
and to establish expectations of their respective roles in supporting the Volunteer. Each site is inspected before the Volunteer's arrival to ensure a safe and healthy work and living environment. Site selection is based on site history; access to medical facilities, communications, transportation, and markets; and project needs.

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Cameroon's **emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of medical emergency, civil or political unrest, or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit an emergency locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, Volunteers in Cameroon will gather 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 country director. The Peace Corps has established **protocols for addressing safety and security incidents** in a timely and appropriate manner, and it collects and evaluates safety and security data to track trends and develop strategies to minimize risks to future Volunteers.



DIVERSITY AND CROSS-CULTURAL ISSUES



In fulfilling the Peace Corps' mandate to share the face of America with our host countries, we are making special efforts to see 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 years. 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 Cameroon, as in other Peace Corps host countries, Volunteers' behavior, lifestyles, background, and beliefs will be judged in a cultural context very different from our own. Certain personal perspectives or characteristics commonly accepted in the United States may be quite uncommon, unacceptable, or even repressed in Cameroon.

Outside of the larger urban areas, Cameroonians have had relatively little direct exposure to other cultures, races, religions, and lifestyles. What is viewed as "typical" cultural behavior or norms may be a narrow and selective interpretation, such as the perception in some countries that all Americans are rich and have blond hair and blue eyes. The people of Cameroon 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 differences that you present.

To ease the transition and adapt to life in Cameroon, 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.

Overview of Diversity in Cameroon

The Peace Corps staff in Cameroon recognizes 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 cultures, backgrounds, religions, ethnic groups, and ages 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?

The information that follows was compiled by Peace Corps/ Cameroon Volunteers and staff and is intended to stimulate thought and discussion. It is important to recognize that these issues may or may not have an impact on your own Volunteer experience. Rather, they are here to make all Volunteers aware of issues that a particular group may have to deal with. As you read them, you might ask yourself, “How would I feel if that happened to me?” and “How could I help a fellow Volunteer if it happened to him or her?”

Possible Issues for Female Volunteers

Cameroon is a traditional, patriarchal culture. Although there are several women in positions of great influence in large cities and towns, the people of Cameroon in general have not had much experience with women who take on professional roles or who live independently of their families. Cameroonian male colleagues, supervisors, and acquaintances may make unwanted advances toward single women. This problem is less common for female Volunteers who have been accepted into their communities and who have built a network of female friends and counterparts. Learning to live and work constructively in the context of the differing status of women and men and standards of behavior (including sexual behavior) is probably the greatest challenge for female Volunteers in Cameroon. To address this issue Peace Corps/Cameroon has a Volunteer/staff committee that works on important issues of girls' and women's empowerment.

Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color

Cameroonians may make some stereotypic assumptions about Volunteers of color. They may not believe that you are American, commenting that "you don't look American." African-American Volunteers may be treated as Cameroonians according to local norms (which can be positive and negative). They may be asked if there really are black people in America and may be called a white person in the local dialect. Asian-American Volunteers are often considered Chinese even when they have a different ethnic origin. They may also be assumed to be martial arts experts and asked to demonstrate their expertise. Children and others may call Asian Americans "heehaw," a mutation of "*Ni Hao Ma*," a greeting in Mandarin Chinese.

Possible Issues for Senior Volunteers

Older Volunteers are usually accorded respect, since Cameroonian culture recognizes that wisdom and life experience come with age. Older Volunteers may experience difficulty, however, in obtaining support from and mixing with younger Volunteers. In contrast, Volunteers in their early 20s may find that they have to make an extra effort to be accepted as professional colleagues, since Cameroonians of that age often are still pursuing education.

Possible Issues for Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual Volunteers

Homosexuality is illegal in Cameroon and not publicly discussed or acknowledged except in very rare cases. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual Volunteers in Cameroon may feel that they have to hide their sexuality so as not to risk job effectiveness. In 2006, there was a major public crackdown on those believed to be behaving in homosexual activity. Dealing with constant questions about girlfriends and boyfriends, marriage, and children is something that many Volunteers face on a regular basis. Forming a support network of gay, lesbian, or bisexual friends may be difficult. Peace Corps/Cameroon works to ensure a supportive, tolerant, and safe community for all Volunteers and staff. You may find more helpful information at www.geocities.com/~lgbrpcv/, a website affiliated with the National Peace Corps Association that provides information on serving as a gay or lesbian Volunteer.

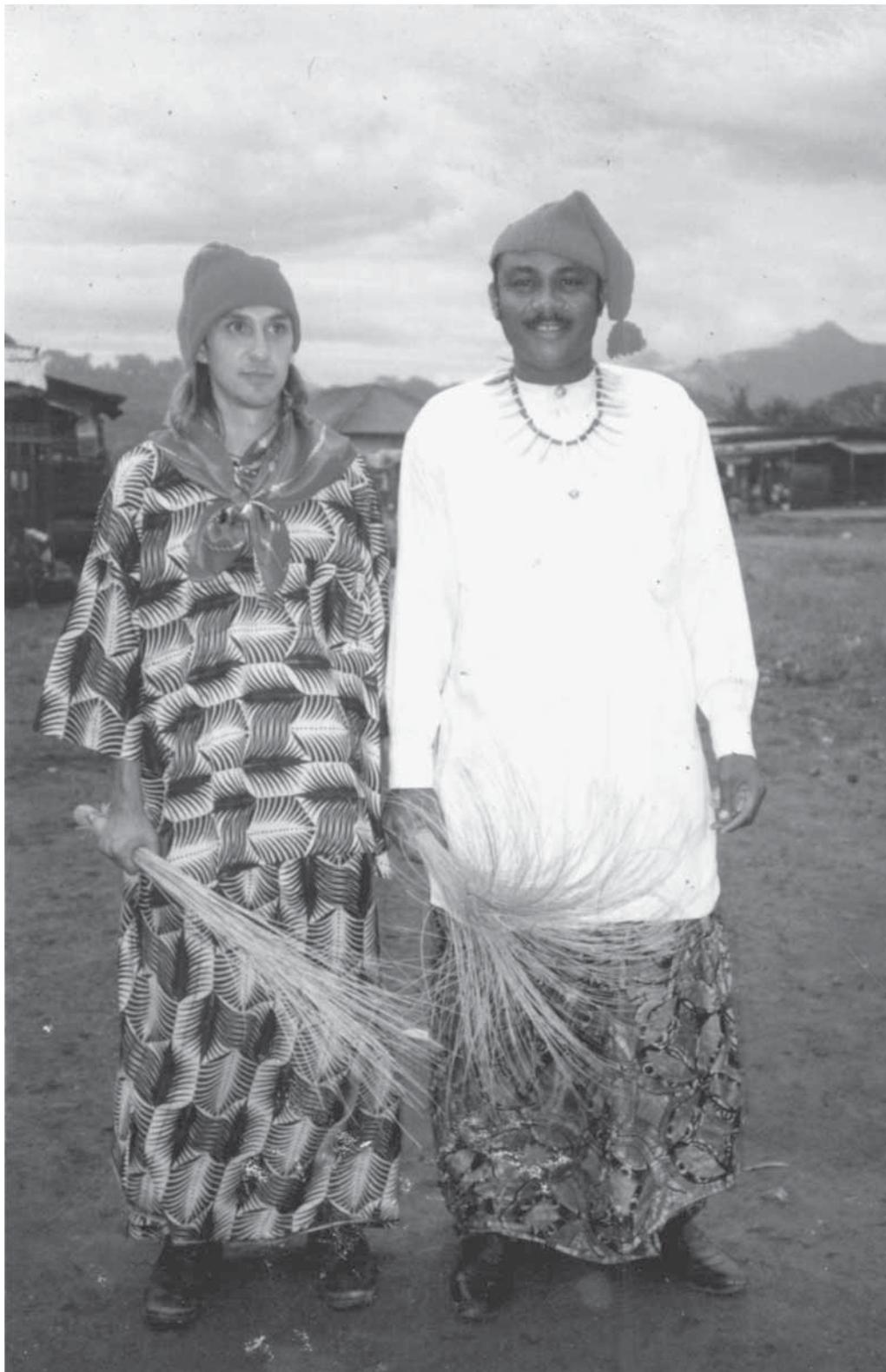
Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers

In general, Cameroonians are familiar with most Christian and Muslim traditions but have little familiarity with Judaism, Buddhism, Unitarianism, and other world religions. Cameroon, however, is an ethnically, religiously, and culturally diverse country and, as such, is tolerant of different religions. Cameroonians may not always agree with your beliefs, but it is unlikely that they will act negatively toward you because of them.

Possible Issues for Volunteers With Disabilities

While there is a large population of Cameroonians with disabilities, care and accommodation for these individuals are carried out informally and within the family or community. There is very little infrastructure to accommodate individuals 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 Cameroon without unreasonable risk of harm to yourself or interruption of your service. The Peace Corps/Cameroon staff will work with disabled Volunteers to make reasonable accommodations to enable them to serve safely and effectively.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS?

How much luggage am I allowed to bring to Cameroon?

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 those 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. The Transportation Security Administration (TSA) website has a detailed list of permitted and prohibited items. Go to: <http://www.tsa.gov/travelers/airtravel/prohibited/permitted-prohibited-items.shtm>.

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. In addition, do not pack important documents or valuables in your checked luggage; luggage may be delayed on the way to Cameroon, so make sure any essentials are in your carry-on bags.

What is the electric current in Cameroon?

In Cameroon, all appliances are powered with 220 volts (as is the case in most of Europe). However, there may be large fluctuations in power, and most appliances should be protected with a voltage regulator. These can be purchased throughout Cameroon.

How much money should I bring?

Volunteers are expected to live at the same level as the people in their community. They are given a settling-in allowance and a monthly living allowance, which should cover their expenses. Often Volunteers wish to bring additional money for vacation travel to other countries. Credit cards and traveler's checks are preferable to cash, but may not be as widely accepted. ATM cards are coming into much wider use in Africa and may also be beneficial while traveling. If you choose to bring extra money, bring the amount that will suit your own travel plans and needs.

When can I take vacation and have people visit me?

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

Will my belongings be covered by insurance?

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

Do I need an international driver's license?

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

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

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

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

Peace Corps trainees are not assigned to individual sites until mid-way through pre-service training. This gives the Peace Corps staff the opportunity to assess each trainee's technical and language skills prior to assigning sites, in addition to finalizing site selections with their ministry counterparts. If feasible, you may have the opportunity to provide input on your site preferences, including geographical location, distance from other Volunteers, or 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 provincial 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, extension 1470. After normal business hours and on weekends and holidays, the Special Services duty officer can be reached at 202.638.2574. For nonemergency questions, your family can call the country desk staff at the Peace Corps at 800.424.8580.

NOTES



WELCOME LETTERS FROM CAMEROON VOLUNTEERS



From a health education Volunteer:

Congratulations! As Cameroonians like to say, “Nous sommes ensemble.” No, it’s actually not Greek. For those of you who have never uttered a French word, or for those who have had four years in high school but have had amnesia since, it means “We are together.” It’s a pretty cool saying if you really think about it. Just imagine the significance of the adventure you are about to endeavor! Each person has their own reason(s) for wanting to join the Peace Corps, but then there are experiences that many Volunteers share, like living in a different country, away from family and friends for two years, learning a new language (or two), eating foods that you thought you’d never eat or never knew existed, or just comparing the joys and difficulties of work and daily life. These common experiences connect us to one another, so the friends you come to know, whether in your village, at work, or in your travels around Cameroon, in a sense become your family. We are all definitely together—trainees, Volunteers, staff members, counterparts.

As trainees, no doubt you have got a billion questions you want answered and have tried to imagine what life is going to be like for the next two years, both as a trainee and as a potential Peace Corps Volunteer in Cameroon. The three months of training will come upon you like a whirlwind. Everything is thrown at you and you’ve got to juggle them all at once—medical issues, French language tests, homework assignments, cultural activities, technical information, getting used to the food, etc. It can all be a bit overwhelming at times, but I’m sure that there are good reasons behind the madness.

Once training is over and you get posted to your own village, a new learning experience starts all over. For the next two years, you will make this your own experience,

balancing between work and leisure, friends and foe, or just simply deciding which is the worse of two evils—*couscous de manioc or baton de manioc* (don't worry, give them time and they become "acquired tastes"). Your ability to adapt, your confidence and patience, and your sense of adventure will make for a fun and rewarding service. Certainly there will be peaks and valleys, but in my opinion, the joys of effort and of trying to help people make it all worthwhile.

Here's a glimpse of my own experiences thus far. I live in the beautiful small village of Nakpassa II with about 150 Kako villagers. My house is constructed of mud bricks, a cement floor, and aluminum roofing, and has more than enough room to make life in the bush very comfortable. I prefer to do most things myself, like carrying my own water, cutting the weeds with a machete, and preparing my own foods. There is no electricity or running water, so I don't worry either about blowing all the money I get (ha!) on blenders and things like that or about paying utility bills. Anyway, bucket baths are not so bad! I go to a small nearby market when it is open every Saturday and see what's available. Some weeks I eat great and other weeks I have to be very creative! In my area, there's a lot of meat and manioc.

Work is great! There are plenty of challenges and obstacles to overcome, but work is rewarding nonetheless. I have to ride my bike to work because both the health center and the hospital I work at are somewhat distant. There are so many little villages in this area and they are very spread out, so I do most education sessions and meetings in the individual villages. At other times, I collaborate with a nearby Catholic mission at their health center. I'm also trying to do some projects like constructing water sources. Since I'm in a very underdeveloped area, there is always work that can be done.

For leisure, I work in my garden, play soccer with the villagers, read, try to build some things with wood, and shoot the breeze with my neighbors. Although my site is somewhat remote, I don't feel isolated. I enjoy my site and feel really fortunate about my experiences thus far.

My only advice is to keep things simple and try to bring things you really love or need like a camera and lots of film to capture all of your adventures! You can easily buy other things in Cameroon.

Good luck, have a wonderful experience, and courage!

—Chau Trinh

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From a small enterprise development Volunteer:

ZELE! Wyembe! Salut! "Welcome!" are just a few of the salutations that I hear in my very eclectic community of Makenene. Located in the Center Province, this village finds itself at the crux of five economic centers in the southern region of the very swiftly evolving country of Cameroon. I affectionately refer to it as "Party Central" due to the vibrant atmosphere of the main crossroad at the entrance to the city. It is there that I live and work.

My name is Sheri Robinson. I hail from Chicago. Here in Cameroon, I work with a community bank known as the Mutuelle Communautaire de Croissance (or CM2 for short). It is one of the four microcredit organizations with which our program is affiliated. I serve as technical counsel for our own bank, but my role encompasses so much more. That is the only thing that is common to the Volunteer experience. Everything else runs the gamut. The community banks can be located in a four-story building with air conditioning, or a mud-brick building with wood benches and dirt floors. Your housing could be a six-room house with a gazebo and flower garden, a quaint three-room cottage in a family compound, or quite possibly a second-floor apartment with a balcony. The population you work with could be mainly farmers, cocoa and coffee traders, or entrepreneurs trying to start up their own store, restaurant, or Internet cafe. That is part of the charm of this experience—every day brings a new surprise, a new challenge, and often a new success.

As a small enterprise development Volunteer, your tenure in-country will include things that are not part of the typical Peace Corps experience. For instance, it is assumed that you will have electricity and running water at your post or at least a nearby well and a fancy latrine. You will be expected to dress in business casual attire, be well groomed, and go to work every workday. But (and please excuse the pun) it's not just a job, it's an adventure. How you impact your microcredit institution and the community it serves depends mainly on you. Take myself, for example—I came from a technical background at a multinational company that developed computer applications. Our major method of communication was e-mail, which was also how we shared information. Here, I take a local taxi to the next town over to access a phone. Most of my information comes from our program's resource center and training materials, or in a handwritten letter delivered by a taxi driver. My village has no library, no newspaper stand, and maybe four audible radio stations. I am responsible for holding classes on credit and agribusiness concepts—field management techniques and animal husbandry. This, from the queen of fast food and canned veggies?!

I will admit that it was a bit intimidating at first. But I am getting the hang of it. I now know that marketing activities and lack of information are my community's biggest problem.

I now know that microcredit programs that also offer management and technical assistance can improve reimbursement rates. I know that messages about stopping the transmission of AIDS should increase in the latter part of the year because this is the high economic season—and the time when the spread of the disease is more prevalent. I know that you should keep a flashlight, a few candles, and a battery-powered calculator on hand if you don't want to be totally immobilized by an electricity outage. I learned that, using small tomato sauce cans, one can make an oven out of a large cooking pot. And I learned that if you heat a third of your water for five minutes, your bucket bath can be a MUCH more pleasurable experience.

Life here in the beautiful hills of Cameroon is exciting,

challenging, and every bit worth it. I am sure that I speak for my entire program when I say that we look forward to welcoming you here as you begin what will undoubtedly prove to be one of the most exciting and fulfilling experiences of your life.

—Sheri Robinson

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From an agroforestry Volunteer:

As tempted as I am to use the word “typical” in this introductory letter to you, I won’t do it. Words of warning: there are no “typical” agroforestry Volunteers, no “typical” villages, and consequently no “typical” daily work patterns that Volunteers follow in accordance with their interpretations of how agroforestry can best match their communities’ interests and needs.

So have you just signed yourself up for two years of completely indefinable development work in the middle of the African bush?

Well, no, not exactly. But how you define this work and your role in the community, and thus create your monthly work plans and daily work schedules, will (hopefully) be a continually evolving process. This means you need to bring a serious predisposition to flexibility in addition to a serious day planner—preferably one with those really big blocks so you can cross stuff out and revise a whole lot.

Here are some details of my experiences that might help provide a little definition to this professed ambiguity:

I live in the tiny village of Wack, situated at the foothills of mountains, in the savanna region of the Adamaoua Province in northern Cameroon. Since my arrival at Wack in December 2000, I have met many people who are interested in working with me to try out some of the agroforestry techniques that we are promoting. How Volunteers find these interested people and promote these ideas varies considerably. Some people might find that they are able to establish a rather structured Western approach where they can simply tell the

village chief they want to have a meeting. He orders everyone to show up at the designated time and the villagers actually show up (though perhaps at *l'heure africaine*) for the Volunteer to hold the meeting. At the meeting, the Volunteer explains the concepts of agroforestry and signs up interested, experimental-minded folks for appointments to start a tree nursery and visit their farm.

As for myself, I have found that the “drive-by” is often the most effective approach. This means that I might be whizzing back home from someone’s farm or a neighboring village on my bike when I am forced to screech on the brakes because there is someone in my path flailing their arms about and yelling,

“La femme blanche! Madame! Arrête! J’ai des questions à vous proposez ...”

And so they ask me, “Why are you here? What is agroforestry?” How can they get me to come help them also start a tree nursery like their neighbors did? Just like dominoes

In addition to spending a lot of time in the bush or in the fields being happily dirty and physically exhausted from the agroforestry work, there are other work situations I find myself in that sometimes require clean and neat attire. Like holding educational sessions on AIDS and condom use in a primary school or village meeting room with the local elites, or alongside the highway in front of my friend’s boutique and some curious truck drivers, or outside the primary school/dance hall at midnight with kids attending the rare community ball.

So, like I said, each agroforestry Volunteer interprets his or her role differently. You might find yourself teaching the water cycle to teenagers in your environmental education class, or planting fruit trees with your women’s group, or designing a road sign to help some commercial nursery owners increase their market. You’ll definitely find yourself eating a whole lot of couscous, saying “*je ne comprends pas*,” hiking through your beautiful surroundings, shaking a lot of hands, asking a lot of questions, answering a lot of really expected as well as totally bizarre queries about “*l’Amerique*,” learning from mistakes, sweating, and wishing you had brought that day planner.

—Kathleen Lawlor

From a math/science Volunteer:

Congratulations on being invited to serve with Peace Corps/Cameroon. By joining the Peace Corps, you are about to begin one of the most challenging experiences of your life. I have been here since June 1999. Cameroon is a wonderful country to be serving in. It is extremely diverse and full of culture. Adjusting to my new life wasn't easy and there are still days when I wonder what I am doing here, but the joys and smiles I have experienced far outweigh the hardships.

A typical day in Enyoh, my rural village in the Northwest Province, begins when the roosters decide it's time to start the day. My college sleep habits had to quickly change. After doing some household work, I make my way to the Government Secondary School, which for me is a short, five-minute walk. There, I teach biology to the equivalent of seventh-, ninth-, and 10th-grade students from the surrounding 10 villages. The smallest class I teach is 76 students and my largest is 103.

In general, the students are very respectful and receptive to your ideas. But you never really know what is going to happen in a class with that many teenagers. This adds to the excitement and challenge of teaching here. My school doesn't have much as far as resources. There are classrooms with walls and a roof, chalkboards, and benches for students to sit on, but that's about it. Only recently did we even build an office for the principal.

Besides biology, I have also become the sports teacher. Several days of the week after school, I go with the students (all 400+ of them) to the field, where I organize soccer and handball games and run with them. As frustrating as it is to take attendance and control so many students, I love it. I am able to interact with them outside the classroom and do fun activities like camp songs and games like senior says and leapfrog.

Although I am a teacher, teaching is only a small part of what I do in Cameroon. Much of my time is spent interacting with staff members and those in the community. I've been welcomed here not as a stranger but as a member of a family.

I can hardly go anywhere without someone greeting me with a handshake or a smile or inviting me to share a cup of *mimbo* or a meal. The people are what have truly brought happiness into my service here in Cameroon.

There is no single “Peace Corps experience.” About the best advice I can give you is to come with an open mind and a positive attitude. These will surely help you make your Peace Corps experience an enriching one. Accept the fact that you will forget to pack something and that you will face difficulties and challenges that you never expected. But remember that the Peace Corps (and life in general) is 10 percent what happens to you and 90 percent how you react to what happens to you. As you prepare to leave home, try not to worry too much. Spend time with friends and family and eat a good number of home-cooked meals. I look forward to meeting all of you and wish you a safe trip.

—Mike Garcia

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From an English language Volunteer:

Congratulations on your invitation to join Peace Corps/ Cameroon. Time is counting down, and soon you'll find yourself flying over the Sahara Desert and landing in the pleasant climate of Cameroon.

Notice I said pleasant. You think Africa, and you think sweltering heat, right? Not always so in Cameroon. I have spent the past two years in the mountains of the West Province, where I wear a sweatshirt to walk to school and can even see my breath in the mornings and the evenings. I live in a small village called Fokoue, and it's beautiful. On my way to school, I watch the clouds roll in over the villages below, nestled between rolling hills and green mountains. I had expected blazing hot desert, or sticky humid rain forest (which some people get), but got chilly, breathtaking mountains instead.

The heavy rainy season is from about May to October, and it pours like nothing I've ever witnessed in the United States. I put out a bunch of buckets to catch water (for cooking, cleaning, bathing, and drinking) and they fill up in minutes. I like sitting on my porch with a book, watching the rain pour down and fill my buckets with much-needed water. The first big rain is always best; it means the dust will get stamped down, and I won't have to carry water on my head from the market for a week. The rain is only inconvenient when I get stranded at school and have to trudge home in the mud. I have yet to master the proper technique for walking, and still tend to splatter mud all over the back of my pants. Don't plan on wearing white.

I teach 16 hours a week, which doesn't sound like a lot, but it certainly feels like a lot. Lessons have to be prepared and papers have to be graded—two monotonous tasks. Each classroom is stuffed with over 60 students.

In the evenings, I hang out with my colleagues and we play a lot of Uno, which they love (I make them say the colors in English, just for practice), and Yahtzee, we discuss the latrines we're building at school (which the Peace Corps is helping fund), they fill me in on the latest gossip, and sometimes we eat dinner together. On evenings like these I've tried new foods like *boa* (tastes like turkey), fried locusts (kind of like potato chips, only the antennae get stuck between my teeth), and *gumbo* (okra sauce). These are the moments that are waiting for you in Cameroon. I don't mean the experiences, because it's true, everyone's experience is different. Maybe you'll live in the desert, and maybe your colleagues would rather learn how to make banana bread than play Uno. Who knows? But you do have precious moments waiting for you that will make your Peace Corps service forever a part of who you are.

I could write pages about the amazing things and the horrible things, because there are plenty of both. (Bush taxis, for example, are horrible. Way crowded. Watching a traditional dance, on the other hand, is incredible.) But I won't; I'll just

advise you to bring some warm clothes, a deck of Uno, some boxes of mac and cheese if you don't think you can stomach locusts (you'll learn), and most importantly, a good attitude (be ready for anything and everything). I'll see you soon.

—Amy DeBisschop

From a small enterprise development Volunteer:

Salut (hi) from my home in the beautiful town of Kribi, located on the coast of Cameroon's south province. I'd like to congratulate you on your decision to join the Peace Corps and to assure you that you're coming to a terrific country.

Standing in your shoes a year and a half ago, I had romantically—and I now realize somewhat sadistically—imagined myself living in a dwelling that lacked electricity and running water, located in an isolated town somewhere in the wilds of Cameroon. Fast-forward to today and I am instead in a two-bedroom house with running water and (occasionally erratic) electricity, in a bustling town of 40,000 inhabitants. My hometown boasts paved roads, hotels, restaurants, Internet access (chances are that as an SED Volunteer you will be posted in or near a town with access), cellphone coverage, the beach, and a robust business community.

I spend much of my spare time swimming in the ocean or biking around the surrounding area and have a great bunch of local friends whom I hang out with. Also, as you'll find, Cameroon is an incredibly diverse and fascinating country with much to offer the adventurous Peace Corps traveler.

My primary function as an SED volunteer is serving as technical advisor to a community bank called La Mutuelle Communautaire de Croissance, or MC2 as the locals call it. In this capacity, I try to ensure greater professionalism, sustained profitability, and increased transparency and accountability, as well as to keep my institution focused on our mission of alleviating poverty. In addition to these responsibilities at the

bank, I work with entrepreneurs and salespeople in town, trying to transfer management, finance, and marketing skills to them. Invariably, your job description will vary somewhat from mine, as Volunteers tend to find their own niche and identify their own areas of greatest impact.

Cameroon can be a tough place to do business, and the greatest frustrations that I encounter stem from the bureaucracy and corruption that pervade daily life. Sometimes it seems hopeless! Still, I can honestly say that after over a year here, things are starting to fall into place. I have realized great satisfaction from helping people start viable, profitable businesses and from pushing my bank to achieve its potential. To sum things up, I can promise you that you will encounter great frustration as an SED volunteer in Cameroon. However, if you are patient and if you persevere, I can also promise you great fulfillment.

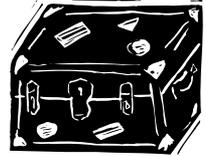
Good luck to you all!

—Zal Devitre

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PACKING LIST



This list has been compiled by Volunteers serving in Cameroon and is based on their experience. Use it as an informal guide in making your own list, bearing in mind that experience is individual. 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 always have things sent to you later. As you decide what to bring, keep in mind that you have an 80-pound weight restriction on baggage. And remember, you can get almost everything you need in Cameroon. Shirts and dresses, for example, can be custom-made in Cameroon for less than \$10.

Luggage should be flexible and lockable. Frameless backpacks and duffel bags are very practical choices. Remember that you will be hauling your bags in and out of taxis and trains and often lugging them around on foot. The most important qualities are that they be durable, lightweight, and easy to carry. Bring receipts for any equipment (cameras, radio/cassette player, etc.), as these help in case of a robbery, and officials sometimes ask for them at the airport.

General Clothing

- Professional clothes, slacks, button up shirts, blouses and skirts (women). You should have business casual clothing
- Casual clothes for informal and after work occasions
- Pictures of clothes you might want to have made
- Good-quality cotton shirts in dark colors (the dust in the air during the dry season and the sediment in the water year-round quickly cause light-colored clothing to become permanently discolored)
- Plenty of good-quality underwear, boxers, socks, and bras
- Sweater

- Rain jacket
- Two more formal outfits (female teachers in particular should bring several nice-looking dresses they can wear in the classroom until they can have some clothes made in-country)
- Durable jacket (i.e., jean jacket or fleece)
- Shorts
- Bathing suit or swimming trunks
- Hats or baseball caps

Shoes

- One pair of comfortable dress shoes
- One pair of sandals for general use (e.g., Texas) and another pair for work
- One pair of running shoes
- One good-quality pair of work or hiking boots (especially agriculture and water and sanitation Volunteers)
- Waterproofing lotion for leather boots

Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items

- Antibacterial wipes or hand sanitizers (useful when traveling)
- Any vitamin supplements or herbal remedies you take other than multivitamins, which are provided by the Peace Corps
- Items that smell good, like lotions, incense, soaps, and sachets
- A three-month supply of all prescription drugs you are currently taking
- Two pairs of prescription eyeglasses (if you wear them), plus straps and repair kit
- Sunglasses
- Hair clips and ties

- Initial supply of toiletries (if you have favorite brands, bring enough to last two years)
- Sanitary pads (the Peace Corps supplies tampons, but they may not always be the size you want)
- Hair-cutting scissors
- Makeup and nail polish (hard to find and expensive locally)

Kitchen

- Measuring cups and spoons
- Plastic storage containers and Ziploc-style bags of assorted sizes (large containers are good for organizing items such as medicines, film, and clothing)
- Good kitchen knife and knife sharpener
- Swiss army knife or Leatherman tool (very important to many Volunteers)
- Favorite recipe book
- Packaged mixes (sauces, salad dressings, soups, soft drinks)
- Favorite spices
- A variety of open-pollinated (recyclable) vegetable seeds, if you like to garden

Miscellaneous

- 12 passport-size photos (make sure to have them in hand when you arrive; Peace Corps/Cameroon will need them the day after you arrive for in-country documents)
- Anything that will make you happy and feel at home (personal touches)
- Map of Africa and/or Cameroon (those available here are not very accurate)
- Travel-size games, such as Yahtzee, Scrabble, and Uno, as well as playing cards

- Art supplies (paints, brushes, paper, colored pens, crayons)
- Books (each Peace Corps satellite office has a library, but classics are hard to come by)
- A favorite writing utensil, with replacements or refills
- Stationery and an assortment of greeting cards
- U.S. stamps (returning Volunteers can take mail home for you)
- Addresses of people you may want to write
- iPod, Walkman, MP3 player, Diskman, etc. (with speakers)
- As much music as you can pack
- Head cleaner for cassettes
- Weekend-size backpack
- Bandannas
- Superabsorbent “swimmer’s” microfiber towel (small and great for traveling)
- Sleeping bag (good for overnight stays at other Volunteers’ homes)
- Bicycle shorts and gloves (a helmet, repair tools, and an under-seat bag are provided by the Peace Corps)
- Heavy-duty duct tape
- Compact flashlight (e.g., Maglite)
- Concealable money pouch or belt
- Plastic water bottle for travel (e.g., Nalgene)
- Rechargeable batteries and battery charger
- Reliable watch (durable, water-resistant, inexpensive)
- Travel alarm clock
- Combination padlocks
- Solar-powered calculator
- Good-quality portable umbrella

- High school grammar books and literary anthologies
(for English teachers)

Note: Some Volunteers suggest boxing up excess things you can't bring with you that your family can ship it later.



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 (telephone number: 800.424.8580, extension 1470; after-hours duty officer: 202.638.2574).
- 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 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 healthcare during Peace Corps service overseas, it is advisable for people who have preexisting 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

- 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



The following list of numbers will help you contact the appropriate office at Peace Corps headquarters with various questions. You may use the toll-free number and extension or dial directly using the local numbers provided. Be sure to leave the Peace Corps toll-free number and extensions with your family so they have them in the event of an emergency during your service overseas.

Peace Corps Headquarters

Toll-free Number: 800.424.8580, Press 2, then
Ext. # (see below)

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

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/Local Number
Responding to an Invitation	Office of Placement Africa Region	Ext. 1850	202.692.1850
Programming or Country Information	Desk Officer E-mail: cameroon@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2320	202.692.2320
	Desk Assistant E-mail: cameroon@peacecorps.gov	Ext. 2319	202.692.2319

For Questions About:	Staff	Toll-free Extension	Direct/ Local Number
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 9-5 EST 202.638.2574 (after-hours answering service)

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