

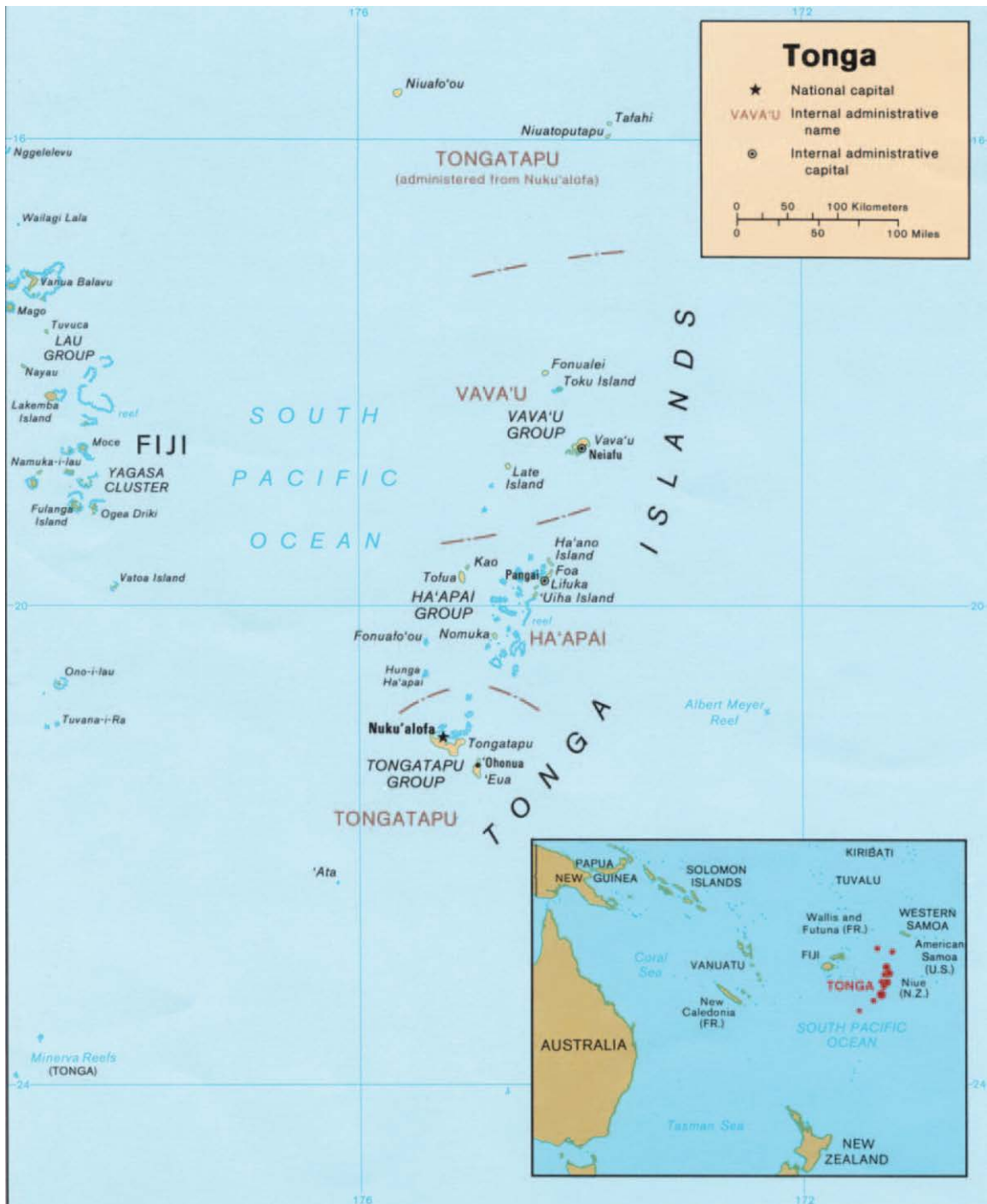
THE PEACE CORPS WELCOMES YOU TO

# TONGA



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

# TONGA MAP



*This map is used with permission from the State Department.*

## A WELCOME LETTER

Congratulations on receiving an invitation to serve in the island Kingdom of Tonga! If you decide to accept this invitation, you will embark on one of the most exciting and challenging experiences of your life. Peace Corps remains “the toughest job you’ll ever love.”

Since 1967, over 1,500 Peace Corps Volunteers have worked in the kingdom in various areas of development. In 2012, Peace Corps/Tonga changed from an expanded community education project to one that focuses on English-language literacy education for primary (and some middle) school students. Volunteers serve as “English literacy facilitators” in primary schools, most serving in rural villages with a few in larger towns. Volunteers use modern, student-centered methods to help children in grades three through eight develop speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills they need for success in higher grades and roles they will play as adults. Volunteers put a special emphasis on integrating English literacy activities with health education. In addition to teaching in classroom and extracurricular settings, Volunteers work with their Tongan colleagues (principals and teachers) to help schools implement the new national English literacy curriculum and otherwise adopt modern approaches to education. Volunteers also work with parents and other community members to strengthen community support for education and, as time permits, Volunteers help youth and adults (including parents) get access to literacy development opportunities.

As secondary projects, Volunteers are also active in a variety of development initiatives at the community level, especially youth leadership and healthy lifestyles activities.

If you decide to accept this invitation, you will have the opportunity to contribute to the future of Tonga’s children and communities and the strengthening of the country’s education system. You will also develop self-reliance and expertise in navigating other cultures, literacy and language education, project planning and evaluation, and other areas you can apply in many areas of your life in the future.

This book provides information you can use to familiarize yourself with Peace Corps/Tonga. We have prepared this document with care and thoughtfulness because we know a commitment of two years is not made easily.

On behalf of the Peace Corps staff and currently serving Volunteers in Tonga, please know that we are committed to making your experience meaningful, productive, and safe. We sincerely respect you for your commitment and are excited to welcome you to Tonga!

We look forward to seeing you soon in what Capt. James Cook described in 1777 as the “Friendly Islands.”

Eddie Stice  
Country Director  
Peace Corps Fiji, Tonga, and Samoa

## Table of Contents

A WELCOME LETTER.....	1
CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS .....	4
PEACE CORPS/TONGA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS.....	5
History of the Peace Corps in Tonga.....	5
Peace Corps Programming in Tonga.....	5
COUNTRY OVERVIEW: TONGA AT A GLANCE.....	6
History.....	6
Government.....	7
Economy.....	7
People and Culture.....	7
RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION.....	9
General Information About Tonga.....	9
Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees.....	10
Online Articles/Current News Sites About Tonga .....	10
International Development Sites About Tonga.....	10
Recommended Books.....	12
Books About the History of the Peace Corps.....	12
Books on the Volunteer Experience.....	12
LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE.....	13
Communications.....	13
Housing and Site Location.....	14
Living Allowance and Money Management.....	14
Food and Diet.....	15
Transportation.....	15
Geography and Climate.....	16
Social Activities.....	16
Professionalism, Dress, and Behavior.....	16
Personal Safety.....	17
Rewards and Frustrations.....	18
PEACE CORPS TRAINING.....	19
Overview of Pre-Service Training.....	19
Technical Training.....	19
Language Training.....	20
Cross-Cultural Training .....	20
Health Training.....	20

Safety and Security Training.....	20
Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service.....	21
YOUR HEALTH CARE IN TONGA.....	21
Health Issues in Tonga.....	22
Helping You Stay Healthy.....	22
Maintaining Your Health.....	22
Women’s Health Information.....	23
Your Peace Corps Medical Kit.....	23
Before You Leave: A Medical Checklist.....	24
SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH.....	26
Factors that Contribute to Volunteer Risk.....	26
Staying Safe: Don’t Be a Target for Crime.....	27
Support from Staff.....	27
Office of Victim Advocacy.....	28
Crime Data for Tonga.....	28
Volunteer Safety Support in Tonga.....	28
DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW.....	30
Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site.....	30
Cross-Cultural Considerations.....	31
What Might a Volunteer Face?.....	31
Possible Gender Role Issues.....	31
Possible Issues for Female Volunteers.....	32
Possible Issues for Volunteers of Color.....	32
Possible Issues for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Questioning/Queer, Ally (LGBTQA) Volunteers.....	34
Possible Issues for Volunteers with Disabilities.....	35
Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples.....	35
Possible Religious Issues for Volunteers.....	35
Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers.....	36
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS.....	38
PACKING LIST.....	43
PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST.....	46
CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS.....	47

## **CORE EXPECTATIONS FOR PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS**

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

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

# **PEACE CORPS/TONGA HISTORY AND PROGRAMS**

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

Peace Corps Volunteers have served in the Kingdom of Tonga since 1967. Early intakes were primarily engaged in teaching in primary and secondary schools. In 1982, Peace Corps/Tonga shifted its focus to more technical assistance for government ministries and sponsoring organizations, building capacity in agriculture and fisheries, public health, architecture and construction, environment, business and cooperatives, and youth development. Volunteers also began working in health cooperatives, in the mass media, and in energy-related areas.

In 1992, primary teacher trainers were reintroduced to Tonga. They were assigned to primary schools as teacher trainers and to the Curriculum Development Unit of the Ministry of Education to help teachers improve their methods of bilingual classroom instruction. As this new program evolved, Volunteers began serving as science teachers in secondary schools while others continued to teach English as part of a new national literacy curriculum at the primary-school level. During this time, the program expanded to include Volunteers working in economic development to build capacity in accounting and business advisory, environmental education, renewable energy, the development of habitats and national parks, and youth development.

In the mid-2000s, Peace Corps/Tonga introduced the business and organizational development (BOD) and community education (CE) projects. CE Volunteers worked with counterparts as teacher trainers at the primary school level to enable them to adopt new teaching and resource development methodologies. BOD Volunteers sought to build the capacity of government ministries, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), service providers, entrepreneurs, and community members in information technology, accounting, and other business practices.

## **Peace Corps Programming in Tonga**

Historically, over 1,500 Volunteers have worked in more than 30 areas of development sponsored by the Tongan government, private nonprofit organizations, and individual communities.

In 2009, Tonga shifted to a single project: Tonga Expanded Community Education Project (TECEP). It focused on both formal and nonformal education. Volunteers co-taught with schoolteachers English language, business education, industrial arts, teacher training, and information and communications technology (ICT) to primary, secondary, and tertiary school students. They designed instructional materials, organized extracurricular activities, and established schools as centers for community education throughout Tonga.

In 2012, Peace Corps/Tonga initiated a teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) program at the primary level, the English Literacy Project. This shift to a single, focused project is in keeping with the Peace Corps' worldwide emphasis on concentrating resources on priority host country needs. In addition to their work with students and teachers in the area of English literacy education, Volunteers typically work on other projects during their service, in such areas as youth leadership and healthy lifestyles. These projects evolve from community needs and Volunteers' personal interests and skills.

## COUNTRY OVERVIEW: TONGA AT A GLANCE

### History

It is widely accepted that around 3000 B.C., an Austronesian-speaking population known by archaeologists as the Lapita people migrated into the Pacific from Southeast Asia and were the early ancestors of today's Polynesians. Around 2000 B.C., the Lapita people abandoned their initial settlements and voyaged to the farthest eastern reaches of Polynesia.

Around 500 B.C., a second wave of voyagers, now known as Polynesians, settled the Tongan archipelago. Around A.D. 950, according to a myth, the supreme Polynesian god known as Tangaloa came down to Tongatapu and fathered a son by a lovely Tongan maiden. Their son, Aho'eitu, thus became the first Tui Tonga—king of Tonga—and launched one of the world's longest-running dynasties. The dynasty first ruled from the village of Toloa and then from the present-day village of Niutoua, home of the Ha'amonga 'a Maui Trilithon, an arch-like structure made of three stones marking the gateway to the royal compound.

Moving the capital to Lapaha on the shore of the island's interior lagoon about 800 years ago, they took advantage of a safer anchorage for the large, double-hulled war canoes. These were used to extend their empire as far as Rotuma and the Lau island group in Fiji, Tokopia in the Solomon Islands, present-day Wallis and Futuna, Niue, and Samoa.

Dutch navigators in 1616 were the first Europeans to view the Tongan archipelago and, in 1943, Tongatapu was first visited by the Dutch explorer Abel Tasman. Capt. James Cook visited the islands in 1773, 1774, and 1777. During his final visit, he was hosted on Lifuka by a powerful chief named Finau I. Cook was so impressed by this show of hospitality that he named the Ha'apai group "The Friendly Islands," the modern kingdom's motto.

The arrival of Wesleyan missionaries on Lifuka in the 1820s coincided with the rise of Taufa'ahau, a powerful chief who converted to Christianity in 1831. With the missionaries' help, he won a series of domestic wars. By 1845, he had conquered all of Tonga and declared himself to be the new Tui Tonga. In 1862, he took a Christian name and became King George I of Tonga. He created a Privy Council of his own choosing and established a legislative assembly made up of representatives of the nobles and commoners. This system was committed to writing in the Constitution of 1875, which still is in effect today. The assembly is known now as the Parliament. King George II signed a treaty with Great Britain in 1900, which turned Tonga's foreign affairs over to the British and prevented any further encroachments on Tonga by the Western colonial powers. Consequently, the Kingdom of Tonga was never colonized.

King George II was succeeded in 1918 by his daughter Queen Salote (her name is the Tongan transliteration of Charlotte), who reigned for the next 47 years. Queen Salote died in 1965 and was succeeded by her son, King Taufa'ahau Tupou IV. Under King Taufa'ahau, the International Dateline Hotel was built on Nuku'alofa's waterfront, and Fua'amotu Airport on Tongatapu was upgraded to handle jet aircraft, ushering in the beginning of Tongan tourism.

Following his father's death and his coronation in 2006, George Tupou V announced in 2008 that he would relinquish authority over Parliament, leading to Tonga's first democratic elections for Parliament in 2010. King George Tupou V is known for this accomplishment and won international praise for bringing democracy to Tonga. He died in March 2012 and was succeeded by his brother, King Tupou VI.



## **Government**

Since the adoption of its constitution in 1875, Tonga has been ruled by a monarch whose heirs are entitled to perpetual succession to the throne. The government consists of an executive branch headed by a Privy Council, the unicameral Legislative Assembly (or Parliament), and the judiciary.

The Privy Council assists the king in the discharge of his functions and is the highest executive authority. It is composed of the king, the cabinet, and the governors of Ha'apai and Vava'u. The cabinet of 12 ministers is appointed by the king.

The Legislative Assembly consists of nine representatives elected by the nobles, and 17 representatives elected by popular vote. Elections for the Legislative Assembly are held every three years. The judiciary consists of a Supreme Court (whose judges are appointed by the king), a Land Court, and a Magistrate's Court, with a right of appeal to a Court of Appeal in respect to land cases, civil cases, and sentences in criminal cases.

The past two decades have been a time of great change in Tonga, especially with regard to its international status. Tonga became a member of the Pacific Forum and the Pacific Conference, both important regional bodies. In 1975, Tonga developed economic and political ties with the European Economic Community with a variety of African, Caribbean, and Pacific nations. It became a full member of the United Nations in 2000, as well as a member of the World Trade Organization in 2007. The most obvious benefit to Tonga from its widening association with other countries has been the inflow of foreign aid from developed countries and international agencies. This aid has enabled the kingdom to improve social services and construct essential infrastructure.

## **Economy**

Agriculture and fishing are the mainstays of the Tongan economy. The main agricultural products are various types of taro, yams, cassavas, sweet potatoes, potatoes, bananas, watermelons, papayas, pineapples, mangoes, tomatoes, carrots, and cucumbers. The main cash crops are kava and vanilla beans. Recently, sea cucumber has become a major export to Asia.

Remittances from Tongans living abroad have played a significant role in the economy over the past few decades. The major imports are textiles, building materials, petroleum products, vehicles, and food items.

## **People and Culture**

Tongans have a well-developed sense of community based on a close-knit extended family unit and a close affiliation to their church. Members of Tongan families take care of one another almost unconditionally. One's immediate family includes grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins. In many cases, the entire family works together to plant, harvest, cook, and fish. Children typically live with parents or grandparents after marriage, and it is uncommon for single adult children to live independently of their families.

Religion is woven into almost every aspect of daily life. Tongans attend church regularly and bless each meal, meeting, and event with a prayer. Devoutly Christian, almost all Tongans belong to one of the 20 or so denominations in Tonga. About 43 percent of the population belongs to the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga, followed by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), the Roman Catholic Church, the Free Church of Tonga, and the Church of Tonga. Laws concerning the Sabbath are strictly upheld in Tonga, and virtually everything closes on Sundays, except for emergency facilities, bakeries (in the afternoon), and some tourist facilities.

Many elements of Tonga's rich traditional culture are still prevalent today, including the wearing of the *ta'ovala*, a decorative woven mat that is tied around the waist. There are certain *ta'ovala* or *kiekie* (for women) for each occasion, determined by the nature of the work one does and one's social status. Volunteers are usually given a *ta'ovala* by their host families, and wearing one in professional and religious settings earns Volunteers the respect of community members. In most work settings, you are expected to wear culturally appropriate clothing, especially at government ministries, in places of business, and in the classroom.

Another traditional element of Tongan culture that is still celebrated today is dance, which can be traced as far back as the 15th century. No celebration in Tonga is complete without some form of dancing, and impromptu dances are common to Tonga and other islands in the Pacific. The love of dancing gave rise to a custom called *fakapale*, or giving appreciation for artistry and performance. In modern times, the custom has expanded to include money tucked into a performer's costume, stuck to his or her legs or arms, or placed at his or her feet. Volunteers often participate in or observe Tongan dancing in their communities.

## RESOURCES FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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

### **General Information About Tonga**

[State.gov](http://State.gov)

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

[Gpo.gov/libraries/public/](http://Gpo.gov/libraries/public/)

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

[lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/cshome.html)

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

[http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World\\_Statistics\\_Pocketbook\\_2013\\_edition.pdf](http://unstats.un.org/unsd/pocketbook/World_Statistics_Pocketbook_2013_edition.pdf)

United Nations resource book with 2013 statistical country data.

[Data.un.org](http://Data.un.org)

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

[Wikipedia.org](http://Wikipedia.org)

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

[Worldbank.org](http://Worldbank.org)

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

[Data.worldbank.org/country](http://Data.worldbank.org/country)

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

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinations>

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

Connect With Returned Volunteers and Other Invitees [RPCV.org](http://RPCV.org)

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

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

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

### **Online Articles/Current News Sites About Tonga**

[UN.org/News/](http://UN.org/News/)

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

[VOAnews.com](http://VOAnews.com)

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

[www.tongatapu.net.to](http://www.tongatapu.net.to)

“Tonga on the ‘Net” contains cultural information, stories, history, etc.

<http://www.tongaholiday.com/>

The Tonga Tourism Authority website provides general information, maps, pictures, and samples of traditional Tongan singing.

[www.tongastar.com/](http://www.tongastar.com/)

The site of the Tonga Star (in English and Tongan)

[www.nomoa.com/index.php](http://www.nomoa.com/index.php)

Current news and links about Tonga by Tongans

[http://www.matangitonga.to/article/global\\_index.shtml](http://www.matangitonga.to/article/global_index.shtml)

Current news about Tonga by Tongans

### **International Development Sites About Tonga**

[www.ausaid.gov.au/](http://www.ausaid.gov.au/)

Australia’s international aid agency

[www.c-spodp.org/Canada\\_Pacific/CanadaFund.htm](http://www.c-spodp.org/Canada_Pacific/CanadaFund.htm)

Canada Fund in the Pacific

[www.nzaid.govt.nz/programmes/c-tonga.html](http://www.nzaid.govt.nz/programmes/c-tonga.html)

New Zealand Agency for International Development

[www.usaid.gov/](http://www.usaid.gov/)

U.S. Agency for International Development

[www.undp.org/](http://www.undp.org/)

United Nations Development Programme

[www.sprep.org](http://www.sprep.org)  
South Pacific Regional Environment Programme

## **Recommended Books**

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

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

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

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

## **LIVING CONDITIONS AND VOLUNTEER LIFESTYLE**

### **Communications**

Few countries in the world offer the level of mail service considered normal in the United States. Mail usually takes a minimum of two weeks to arrive in Tonga and some mail may simply not arrive. Fortunately this is not a frequent occurrence, but it does happen. This is not meant to discourage you, but to prepare you for the realities of international mail service in the South Pacific. Despite the delays, you are encouraged to write to your family regularly and to develop a way of tracking letters—such as numbering them. Family members typically become worried when they do not hear from you, so it is a good idea to advise them that mail service is sporadic and that they should not worry if they do not receive your letters regularly. Besides, unless you are on an outer island, you will have regular access to email.

Your specific address during service will depend on your site location, which is determined during the training process. The main Peace Corps office in Nuku'alofa is here:

U.S. Peace Corps  
P.O. Box 147  
Nuku'alofa, Tonga, South Pacific

Volunteers who serve on Tongatapu, Tonga's main island, collect their mail from the Peace Corps office. Mail for Volunteers on outer islands is received at the Peace Corps office and forwarded to the islands via the local airline or the local ferry service once a week. Mail for Volunteers living in Vava'u, Ha'apai, and 'Eua can be sent directly to the post offices located on those islands.

Postal addresses for all post offices are provided upon arrival in-country. During your first six months of service, you can receive overseas packages without paying customs duties. Once you know your site location, you can advise your family and friends about the appropriate address to use.

### **Telephones**

Calling the United States from Tonga is expensive and only “unlocked” U.S. cellphones will work in Tonga.

Friends and family in the U.S. may call Volunteers. Most Volunteers do not have landline phones, but the Peace Corps will provide you with a cellphone upon arrival. To call the U.S. from Tonga, Volunteers must purchase Tongan telephone cards locally from service providers TCC or Digicel. There is neither a charge nor a monthly fee for incoming calls on mobile phones. Credit for cellphones (“pay as you go”) can be purchased at almost any small shop throughout the kingdom, even in places where there is no electricity.

### **Computer, Internet, and Email Access**

Many Volunteers choose to bring personal laptops to Tonga and are happy with their decision to do so. However, if you are thinking about bringing a laptop, please consider the following: Peace Corps/Tonga cannot guarantee the safety of your computer or replace it if it is damaged or stolen. Tonga's humid climate, ants, and dusty conditions can be hard on electronics.

Internet service is widely available in Internet cafes through the main islands of Tongatapu and Vava'u, but it is expensive to have Internet access installed in your home and the power supply experiences frequent surges. There are two computers with Internet access at Peace Corps/Tonga's main office in the capital city of Nuku'alofa.

Many of you might be thinking of creating websites or blogs as a way to communicate with your family and friends. If you are thinking of using this type of communication, you must speak with your country director first, as there is some very specific information you need to know before you get started.

### **Housing and Site Location**

Volunteers' host organizations are responsible for identifying and providing safe and suitable housing in accordance with the Peace Corps' criteria. Housing ranges from a one-room *fale Tonga* (traditional hut) with a thatched roof to a two- or three-bedroom wooden or cinderblock house with very basic furniture. Peace Corps/Tonga asks host agencies to provide private bath and toilet facilities; however, occasionally Volunteers may have to share facilities with a neighbor.

As access to electricity, running water, and other amenities varies widely, you will need to be flexible. Some Volunteers have electric lights and outlets, flush toilets, and running water in their homes. Others spend evenings reading by kerosene lamp, solar lantern, or candle, use a pit latrine, and collect water from a rain tank near their homes.

The Peace Corps will provide you with a solar lantern, a life vest, a bike helmet (if necessary), and an AM/FM radio. Once you become a Volunteer, you will receive a settling-in allowance to purchase additional household necessities.

Peace Corps staff members make site visits to Volunteers to provide ongoing support and to follow up on any housing or safety issues that arise. However, Volunteers are encouraged to contact staff if there are any safety-related improvements needed for their homes.

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

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

Peace Corps/Tonga will assist you in establishing a local bank account where his or her monthly living allowance is deposited. Currently, the living allowance is 722 *pa'anga* (TOP), roughly equivalent to US\$352.

A vacation allowance of US\$24 per month is added to your monthly living allowance. Also, toward the end of pre-service training, a one-time settling-in allowance of TOP1,050, roughly equivalent to US\$511 will be deposited into your account to buy basic household items when you move to your site.

If the Peace Corps asks you to travel, you will be given additional money for transportation and meals. The amount is established by the director of management and operations, based on the local cost of transportation and lodging.

Most Volunteers find they can live comfortably in Tonga with these allowances. While many Volunteers bring funds to cover the cost of travel during vacations, you are strongly discouraged from supplementing your income with money from home. You are expected to live at the same economic level as your neighbors and colleagues.



Credit cards can be used in a few establishments in the capital and are useful for vacations and overseas travel. Traveler's checks and personal checks can be cashed at a local bank for a small fee, but there are few retail establishments in Tonga that accept them.

### **Food and Diet**

Tongan meals consist of staple foods, such as yam, taro, sweet potato, cassava, fish, pork, and canned meats. Fresh fish can be purchased from markets and local fishermen throughout Tonga. On Sundays and for special occasions, Tongan families prepare food with an underground oven called an *'umu*.

Tongan food is generally considered bland by American standards. Root crops are boiled, baked, or fried and often served with salt at every meal. Onions, garlic, curry powder, soy sauce, and chili peppers are usually available, but seldom used in food preparation.

Your diet will vary depending on your site and personal preferences. In the capital and the town centers, you will find a reasonable variety of imported and locally grown foods. Bread, rolls, pastries, and ice cream are readily available in the city centers, but are unavailable in remote villages and outer islands. Noodles, flour, sugar, rice, eggs, butter, milk, canned fish, meat, seasonal fruits, and a few basic vegetables are available in most small shops on the main islands. The living allowance is sufficient to buy some imported fresh and canned fruits and vegetables to take to remote sites.

It is possible but difficult to maintain a vegetarian diet in Tonga with some potential cultural challenges. A meal without meat is considered incomplete and inadequate by Tongan standards. This makes it difficult to explain why one would choose a vegetarian diet. When living with or visiting Tongan families, you will be offered traditional foods; Volunteers are encouraged to try local cuisine out of respect for their hosts.

Visitors usually eat only with selected members of the family, with children eating in a different place. It is common practice in Tonga to eat with your hands. Eating and drinking while standing or walking is not considered appropriate, even though you may see others doing this.

### **Transportation**

Volunteers may bring bicycles from home or buy them locally, though the quality of locally available bicycles is not good by American standards. If a Volunteer brings a bike from the United States, he or she is responsible for the transportation costs (usually airline fees) from the Volunteer's home of record to Tonga. Distances are reasonable for bike travel in Tonga, and the low traffic density is conducive to bicycling. Bicycling provides opportunities to get to know local communities and surrounding countryside, as well as to get some good physical exercise. Peace Corps/Tonga issues helmets to Volunteers who own bicycles or you may bring your own. Note: Wearing a helmet is mandatory for bicycle use.

Local buses and taxis run on Tongatapu, Ha'apai, and Vava'u and tend to be reasonably priced. Travel among islands is by air, boat, or both. A commercial airline has regular flights from the main island to the other major islands of Tonga, and inter-island ferries provide service to outer islands, large and small, throughout Tonga.

For safety reasons, Peace Corps/Tonga prohibits Volunteers from owning, driving, or riding on motorcycles and from owning or driving private cars for any reason. Violation of these policies may result in the termination of your Volunteer service.

## **Geography and Climate**

The Kingdom of Tonga consists of 171 islands, 36 of which are inhabited, and is spread over 144,000 square miles (360,000 square kilometers) of ocean. The total land area is only 268 square miles (670 square kilometers), about the size of Memphis, Tenn. About 77 percent of the total land area is arable—the highest percentage in the world. The highest point in the island groups is Kao, which rises to over 3,300 feet (1,000 meters).

Tonga lies west of the International Date Line, which was bent to include Tonga in the same time zone as its neighbors. For this reason, Tonga is one of the first countries in the world to welcome each new day.

The islands of Tonga were formed on top of two parallel submarine ridges. Between the two ridges is the shallow Tofua Trough, which is 31 miles (50 kilometers) wide. Along the western ridge are many volcanoes, most of which are dormant. Kao, Late, Fonualei, and Tafahi are the remains of cones formed after violent volcanic eruptions millions of years ago. The ocean west of these ridges is known as the Tonga Trench. It is 1,860 miles (3,000 kilometers) long and 62 miles (100 kilometers) wide and extends from Samoa to the southeast of New Zealand. At one point the trench descends to 35,617 feet (10,793 meters), the second deepest trench in the Pacific Ocean.

‘Eua, on the eastern ridge, is one of the oldest islands in the Pacific. ‘Eua has steep cliffs on its eastern side and is home to one of the last remaining rain forests in Tonga.

Tonga’s climate is mild to hot, humid, and moderately wet. Although the temperature varies little, there are distinct wet and dry seasons. The wet season, which also brings cyclones, is from November to April, with average temperatures of 77–81 degrees Fahrenheit. The dry season is from May to October, with temperatures of 71–75 F (at night, it can get as cool as 60 degrees). The climate of northern Tonga (e.g., Niuatoputapu and Niuafu’ou) is about 5 degrees hotter than the rest of Tonga and has more rainfall.

The islands’ beaches and reefs are home to numerous species of fish, starfish, crabs, and other shellfish. Porpoises, sharks, sea turtles, and migrating humpback whales can be seen in the waters around Tonga. The only land mammal native to Tonga is the flying fox.

## **Social Activities**

Tongans are very social and enjoy team sports. Rugby is the national sport, and most villages also have competitions in volleyball, basketball, table tennis, soccer, and tennis, which are almost exclusively male sports. Women play netball, field hockey, and sometimes volleyball and soccer. Movies, videos, card games, and dances are also major forms of recreation. Men gather to drink kava root juice, converse, and sing late into the night. Families have picnics on the beach for special occasions, and feasting is an appropriate way to celebrate anything and everything in Tonga.

Men traditionally build boats, canoes, and houses and are proficient in woodcarving. Women traditionally weave mats and baskets and make *tapa* (cloth made of the bark of the mulberry tree), dolls, and flower necklaces.

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

Modesty is very important in Tonga and Tongans take pride in their appearance. By law, Tongan men over age 16 must wear shirts in public places, and many do not even take off their shirts in their own homes. Most Tongan women do not wear short skirts, sleeveless tops, or low-necked dresses outside their homes. Pants are not considered appropriate for women in certain areas. Except when worn as athletic wear or while working in the garden, shorts are considered improper on women, especially outside the

capital. However, shorts may be appropriate as swimwear, and women do wear them at home and in public under wraparound skirts.

Please review the packing list carefully. Volunteers often bring clothes to Tonga that are too casual for their work assignment. Men are expected to dress similar to their male counterparts at school, in the office where they are assigned, or in the village. This often means wearing a *tupenu* (wraparound cloth skirt), *ta'ovala* (mat worn around the waist), and ironed shirts with collars. Sometimes, wearing a tie and a dark suit jacket is appropriate.

Likewise, women are expected to dress like their female counterparts at the schools, in the offices where they are assigned, or in the villages. This typically means wearing long dresses, skirts (at least midcalf in length), and tops that provide modest coverage. Sleeveless shirts are never appropriate, nor are short dresses. However, it is possible to purchase long wrap skirts to wear underneath short dresses. Tongan women frequently do this when their skirt or dress is not long enough by cultural standards. T-shirts are not appropriate for work assignments, though you may certainly wear T-shirts inside your house.

You also will need black clothing during your service in Tonga. Black is generally the prevailing color seen throughout the village and the city and is always appropriate. Black clothing is especially important for formal events, such as funerals.

Black *tupenus*, a traditional wraparound skirt, or pants and black collared shirts for men are appropriate. All male Volunteers will purchase tupenus in Tonga, as will most female Volunteers. Long, solid black dresses or skirts with a black blouse or jacket are appropriate for women.

**To gain the acceptance, respect, and confidence of community members and colleagues, it is essential that you dress and conduct yourself professionally.** The Peace Corps expects you to behave in a way that will foster respect toward you in your community and reflect well on the Peace Corps and on the United States. You will receive an orientation about appropriate behavior and cultural sensitivity during pre-service training. As a Volunteer, you have the status of an invited guest and, thus, must be sensitive to the habits, tastes, and taboos of your hosts. Behavior that jeopardizes the Peace Corps' mission in Tonga or your personal safety may lead to a decision by the Peace Corps to terminate your service. Refer to the Volunteer Handbook for more information about the grounds for administrative separation. In the words of a Volunteer, "Dressing appropriately and speaking Tongan are the easiest ways to gain the respect of the Tongans. These two things can make the difference between getting by and thriving."

### **Personal Safety**

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

Each staff member at the Peace Corps is committed to providing Volunteers with the support they need to successfully meet the challenges they will face to have a safe, healthy, and productive service. Volunteers

and families are encouraged to look at safety and security information on the Peace Corps website at [peacecorps.gov/safety](http://peacecorps.gov/safety).

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

### **Rewards and Frustrations**

Although the potential for job satisfaction in Tonga is quite high, like all Volunteers, you will encounter frustrations. Because of limited resources, co-workers and community members may not always provide optimum support. In addition, the pace of work and life is slower than what most Americans are accustomed to, and some people you work with may be hesitant to accept new ways of thinking or doing things. For these reasons, the Peace Corps experience of adapting to a new culture and environment is often described as a series of emotional peaks and valleys.

You will be given a high degree of responsibility and independence in your work—perhaps more than in any other job you have had or will have. You will often find yourself in situations that require an ability to motivate yourself and your co-workers with little guidance from supervisors. It may be difficult to capture the tangible and intangible impact of your work immediately. Development is a slow process. Progress is often sustained only after the combined efforts of several Volunteers over the course of many years. You may also face periods of isolation.

While you are likely to be placed in a community or on an island within an hour's walk, bike ride, or boat ride from another Volunteer, there will be limited opportunities to gather with the majority of your fellow Volunteers. You must possess the self-confidence, patience, and vision to continue working toward long-term goals with remote peer support.

Another source of frustration for Peace Corps Volunteers is the use of corporal punishment in schools. Even though corporal punishment is forbidden in the Tonga education system, it still occurs in some schools. While some parents oppose this strongly, others consider it an effective way of discipline.

To overcome these difficulties and differences, you will need to exercise maturity, flexibility, open-mindedness, and resourcefulness. The Peace Corps staff, your co-workers, and fellow Volunteers will support you during times of challenge, as well as celebrate with you during moments of success. Judging by the experiences of former Volunteers, the peaks are well worth the difficult times, and most Volunteers leave Tonga feeling they have gained much more than they sacrificed during their service. If you are able to make the commitment to integrate into your community and work hard, you will be a successful Volunteer and develop meaningful, long-lasting friendships.

# PEACE CORPS TRAINING

## Overview of Pre-Service Training

The Peace Corps uses a competency-based training approach throughout the continuum of learning, supporting you from arrival in Tonga to your departure. Pre-service training (PST) is the first event within this continuum of learning and ensures that you are equipped with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to effectively perform your job. Pre-service training is conducted in Tonga by Peace Corps staff, most of whom are locally hired trainers. Peace Corps staff measure achievement of learning and determine if you have successfully achieved competencies, including language standards, for swearing-in as a Peace Corps Volunteer. On average, nine of 10 trainees are sworn in as Volunteers.

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

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

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

Pre-service training in Tonga is conducted by representatives of Tongan organizations, former Volunteers, and/or training contractors. The length of PST varies, usually ranging from eight to 12 weeks, depending on the competencies required for the assignment.

Throughout service, Volunteers strive to achieve performance competencies. Initially, PST affords the opportunity for trainees to develop and test their own resources. As a trainee, you will play an active role in self-education. You will be asked to decide how best to set and meet objectives and to find alternative solutions. You will be asked to prepare for an experience in which you will often have to take the initiative and accept responsibility for decisions. The success of your learning will be enhanced by your own effort to take responsibility for your learning and through sharing experiences with others.

Woven into the competencies, the ability to communicate in the host country language is critical to being an effective Peace Corps Volunteer. So basic is this precept that it is spelled out in the Peace Corps Act:

*No person shall be assigned to duty as a Volunteer under this act in any foreign country or area unless at the time of such assignment he (or she) possesses such reasonable proficiency as his (or her) assignment requires in speaking the language of the country or area to which he (or she) is assigned.*

## Technical Training

Technical training will prepare you to work in Tonga by building on the skills you already have and helping you develop new skills in a manner appropriate to the needs of the country. The Peace Corps staff, Tonga 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 Tonga and strategies for working within such a framework. You will review your project's goals and objectives and

will meet with the Tonga agencies and organizations that invited the Peace Corps to assist them. You will be supported and evaluated throughout training to build the confidence and skills you need to undertake your project activities, report your progress, and serve as a productive member of your community.

### **Language Training**

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

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

### **Cross-Cultural Training**

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

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

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

### **Health Training**

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

### **Safety and Security Training**

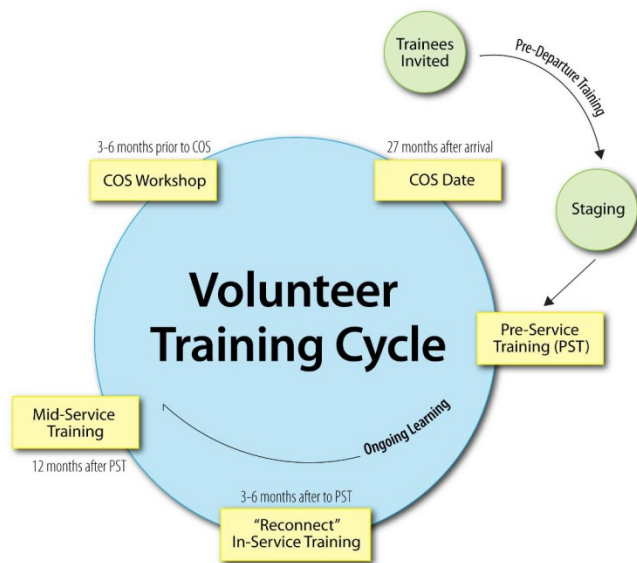
During the safety and security training sessions, you will learn how to adopt a lifestyle that reduces your risks at home, at work, and during your travels. You will also learn appropriate, effective strategies for coping with unwanted attention, how to identify safety risks in-country and about Peace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

## Additional Trainings During Volunteer Service

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

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

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



## **YOUR HEALTH CARE IN TONGA**

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

### **Health Issues in Tonga**

Major health problems among Volunteers in Tonga are rare and are often the result of Volunteers failing to take preventive measures to stay healthy. The most common health problems are minor ones that are also found in the U.S., such as colds, diarrhea, sinus infections, headaches, dental problems, minor injuries, sexually transmitted infections, emotional problems, and alcohol abuse. These problems may be more frequent or compounded by life in Tonga because certain environmental factors in the country raise the risk or exacerbate the severity of illnesses and injuries. Malaria is not present in Tonga, nor is rabies, though there are many stray animals. Typhoid, dengue fever, measles, and tuberculosis are endemic.

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

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

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

### **Maintaining Your Health**

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

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

Abstinence is the most effective way to prevent infection with HIV and other STIs. You are taking risks if you choose to be sexually active. To lessen risk, use a condom every time you have sex. Whether your



partner is a host country citizen, a fellow Volunteer, or anyone else, do not assume this person is free of HIV/AIDS or other STIs. You will receive more information from the medical officer about this important issue.

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

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

### **Women's Health Information**

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

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

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

### **Your Peace Corps Medical Kit**

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

#### **Medical Kit Contents**

First Aid Handbook	Decongestant
Ace bandages	Dental floss
Acetaminophen (Tylenol)	Gloves
Adhesive tape	Hydrocortisone cream
Antacid tablets	Ibuprofen
Anti-diarrheal (Imodium)	Insect repellent
Antibiotic ointment	Iodine tablets (for water purification)
Antifungal cream	Lip balm
Antihistamine	Oral rehydration salts
Antiseptic antimicrobial skin cleaner	Scissors
Band-Aids	Sore throat lozenges
Bismuth Subsalicylate (Pepto-Bismol)	Sterile eye drops
Butterfly closures	Sterile gauze pads
Calagel anti-itch gel	Sunscreen
Condoms	Thermometer (Temp-a-dots)
Cough lozenges	Tweezers

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

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

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

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

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

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

If you wear eyeglasses, bring two pairs (of the current prescription) with you. If a pair breaks, the Peace Corps will replace them, using the information your doctor in the United States provided on the eyeglasses form during your examination. The Peace Corps Office of Health Services strongly discourages Volunteers from wearing contact lenses while overseas unless there is a true medical indication documented by your ophthalmologist. Contact lenses, particularly extended use soft contacts, are associated with a variety of eye infections and other inflammatory problems. One of the most serious of these problems is infectious keratitis which can lead to severe cornea damage which could result in permanent blindness requiring corneal transplantation. These risks of permanent eye damage are exacerbated in the Peace Corps environment where the Volunteer's ability to properly clean the lenses is compromised due to limited access to sterile water as well as decreased effectiveness of cleaning solutions due to prolonged storage in unsatisfactory conditions. In addition, when bacterial eye infections occur, assessment and treatment within hours by a competent ophthalmologist is indicated. This is virtually impossible in the Peace Corps setting. If you feel that you simply must be able to use your contacts occasionally, please consider using single use, daily disposable lenses which do not require cleaning.

If you are eligible for Medicare, are over 50 years of age, or have a health condition that may restrict your future participation in health-care plans, you may wish to consult an insurance specialist about unique coverage needs before your departure. The Peace Corps will provide all necessary health care from the time you leave for your pre-departure orientation until you complete your service. When you finish, you will be entitled to the post-service health-care benefits described in the Peace Corps Volunteer Handbook.

You may wish to consider keeping an existing health plan in effect during your service if you think age or pre-existing conditions might prevent you from re-enrolling in your current plan when you return home.

## **SAFETY AND SECURITY IN DEPTH**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

After you arrive in Tonga, you will receive more detailed information about common crimes, factors that contribute to Volunteer risk, and local strategies to reduce that risk. For example, Volunteers in Tonga learn to do the following:

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

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

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

- Being in an island environment, lots of people travel by small boats. Water safety and transportation can be dangerous and will affect your safety if you become complacent. During your time in Tonga you will be instructed on how to live around the water while still being respectful of it.
- Being a foreigner, you may be subject to harassment which may be benign or serious. Learning to speak the local language, integration into your community, and cultural sensitivity are all keys to diffusing harassment and will enable you to avoid and escape threats to your personal safety. Please note: sexual harassment is not a crime in Tonga.
- While whistles and verbal harassment based on race or gender may be fairly common on the street, this behavior may be reduced if you abide by local cultural norms, dress conservatively, and respond according to the training you will receive.

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

Because many Volunteer sites are in rural, isolated settings, you must be prepared to take on a large degree of responsibility for your own safety. To reduce the likelihood that you will become a victim of crime, you can take steps to make yourself less of a target such as ensuring your home is secure and developing relationships in your community. While the factors that contribute to your risk in Tonga may be different, in many ways you can do what you would do if you moved to a new city anywhere: Be cautious, check things out, ask questions, learn about your neighborhood, know where the more risky locations are, use common sense, and be aware. You can reduce your vulnerability to crime by integrating into your community, learning the local language, acting responsibly, and abiding by Peace Corps policies and procedures. Serving safely and effectively in Tonga will require that you accept some restrictions on your current lifestyle.

### **Support from Staff**

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

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

### **Office of Victim Advocacy**

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

Contact information for the Office of Victim Advocacy  
Direct phone number: 202.692.1753  
Toll-free: 855.855.1961 ext. 1753  
Duty phone: 202.409.2704 (available 24/7, call or text)  
Email: [victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov](mailto:victimadvocate@peacecorps.gov)

### **Crime Data for Tonga**

Crime data and statistics for Tonga, which are updated yearly, are available at the following link: <http://www.peacecorps.gov/countrydata/tonga>  
Please take the time to review this important information.

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

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

### **Volunteer Safety Support in Tonga**

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

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

Peace Corps to keep you informed is your buy-in to the partnership concept with the Peace Corps staff. It is expected that you will do your part to ensure that Peace Corps staff members are kept apprised of your movements in-country so they are able to inform you.

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

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

You will also learn about Peace Corps/Tonga's **detailed emergency action plan**, which is implemented in the event of civil or political unrest or a natural disaster. When you arrive at your site, you will complete and submit a site locator form with your address, contact information, and a map to your house. If there is a security threat, you will gather with other Volunteers in Tonga at predetermined locations until the situation is resolved or the Peace Corps decides to evacuate.

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

## **DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION OVERVIEW**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Diversity and Inclusion at Your Site**

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

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



## **Cross-Cultural Considerations**

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

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

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

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

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

### **Possible Gender Role Issues**

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

During the pre-service training, trainees receive an introduction to gender awareness in their country of service, and examine their own thinking about gender roles and how this thinking has impacted them. They then learn how to analyze development projects using a gender lens to better understand gender

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

### **Volunteer Comments**

“It is essential for everyone to cast aside their understanding of what it means to be a woman (or man) in America and instead embrace the reality of being a woman (or man) of this world.”

“There may be moments when you want to just be one of the guys and join the volleyball game, or go to the bush, but consider what is appropriate as a female Volunteer whenever you are making even the simplest of decisions. There are always gender-specific activities and group activities, so be aware of that and make the best choices at all times. I have seen that all my choices carry back to myself, the Peace Corps, and Americans as a whole, so be smart and be involved.”

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

Tonga has a traditional, patriarchal culture. Although women have achieved high rank in government ministries, people at the community level have not had much experience with women who take on professional roles or who live independently from their families. Most women in Tonga do very little on their own and generally travel, even if it is just to the corner shop to buy flour, with at least one other person. This does not mean female Volunteers cannot live or do things on their own, but they need to be aware that the community where they live may view their behavior as strange.

Many Tongans have large, robust figures, which are considered desirable in traditional Tongan culture, although perceptions are changing. Slender women may be told they are too skinny, while larger women may be told they are fat, which is intended as a compliment.

Female Volunteers in Tonga often receive an inordinate amount of attention from Tongan men. Flirting, ogling, catcalls, and a certain amount of protective behavior by host family and community members are common. Females are often asked about their marital status and whether they would like to marry someone locally. Most of the attention is good-natured and can be fended off with humorous replies.

Because Tongans do not engage in friendships with members of the opposite sex, it is culturally inappropriate for a female Volunteer to entertain a man (or men) alone in her home, whether the man is Tongan or another Volunteer. Her community is likely to view such a situation as a romantic or sexual relationship. Female Volunteers in Tonga have occasionally had people peep in their windows or appear in their homes without invitation or warning.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“Being a single female living alone is very strange to Tongans. My neighbor said it was *faka’ofa* (pitiful) for a woman to live alone. One of the plusses and minuses of this is that people want to always make sure you’re not lonely or feeling homesick. Sometimes it’s nice that people are available to talk to at every second and sometimes I just want me time.”

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

Volunteers of color sometimes, but not always, have a different Peace Corps experience than white Volunteers. Because of limited exposure, some foreign nationals will expect to see U.S. citizens who are white. Cultures of the world do not typically envision the States as a place of rich diversity with various

culturally acceptable perspectives, personalities, and characteristics. Thus, a Volunteer of color may be questioned as about their U.S. citizenship.

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

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

Some African-American and Asian-American Volunteers have been annoyed or frustrated when Tongans tell them they “look just like we do.” An Asian American may be called *mata’i Siapani* (“Japanese eyes”) or *mata’i Siaina* (“Chinese eyes”). African-American Volunteers are sometimes referred to by Tongans as *nika*, but without the offensive connotation associated with the similar American slur. However, when Volunteers become known to their communities, being of color has not negatively impacted their ability to serve effectively.

Some Asian Americans may hear *Siaina* or *Siapani* mixed with some mock Chinese words called out to them from across the street or whispered to a friend. The name-calling can be ignored, but it may represent ignorance of, or discomfort with, diversity. Most Tongans cannot distinguish between the Chinese immigrants and Asians from other countries, so all Asians, including Asian Americans, tend to be grouped with the Chinese immigrants. This also makes Asian-American Volunteers potential targets for ethnically motivated crimes. Bars that might be acceptable for other Volunteers might be unsafe for you. Above all else, use common sense. That said, ethnic prejudice against Asians in Tonga is complex. A number of Chinese immigrants have worked hard to adopt the Tongan language and to integrate effectively. During the Nuku’alofa riot on November 16, 2006, some Chinese immigrants were protected by Tongan friends and neighbors. Also, as much as some Tongans complain about Chinese stores and business practices, these stores are increasingly popular and arguably essential to the economic well-being of the kingdom.

To be an effective Asian-American Volunteer, it will be necessary to integrate into the community. Let people know what a Peace Corps Volunteer is, that you come from America, and what your Volunteer

work is. Adopting the native Tongan attire will also immediately identify you as someone who is trying to learn about and respect the Tongan way of life.

### **Volunteer Comment**

“Tongans may not initially think you are American, which can lead to awkward questions. They tend to think of Western-world foreigners as white only. Don’t take it personally. Tongans just really aren’t exposed to much diversity.”

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

For LGBTQ Volunteers: Given Tonga’s traditional values, sexual orientation and non-conforming gender identities might not be discussed openly. In some cases, the LGBTQ community may be stigmatized. Mindful of the cultural norms and country-specific laws, the decision to serve openly is left to each individual Peace Corps Volunteer. Many LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to be discreet about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity within their host communities. Some LGBTQ Volunteers have chosen to come out to community members, with a result of positive and negative reactions, while some have come out only to select Peace Corps staff and Volunteers. Dealing with questions about boyfriends, girlfriends, marriage, and children may, at times, be stressful for LGBTQ Volunteers. You may find that Tonga is a less open and inclusive environment than you have previously experienced. Please know, however, that Peace Corps is supportive of you and Peace Corps staff welcomes dialogue about how to ensure your success as an LGBTQ Volunteer. More information about serving as an LGBTQ Volunteer is available at the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Peace Corps Alumni website at [lgbprcv.org](http://lgbprcv.org). Additionally, the Peace Corps’ LGBTQ employee resource group, Spectrum, can be reached at [spectrum@peacecorps.gov](mailto:spectrum@peacecorps.gov).

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

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

Tongan sexual mores are fairly strict, and unmarried males and females are kept relatively more separated than is the norm in the U.S. Gay male relationships are very discreet, though not totally uncommon. In Tonga, there is a concept called *fakaleiti*, whereby boys are raised as girls and take on the appearance and social responsibilities of women. This is often done in households that do not have a female child to help with chores around the house. Fakaleitis in Tonga may or may not be associated with homosexuality, though gays are usually associated with fakaleiti. Male Volunteers who engage in typically female-dominated chores in Tonga are often met with laughter and called fakaleiti. Such laughing and joking tends to be harmless, as fakaleitis have long been an accepted part of the Tongan culture. You will learn more about this cultural phenomenon during pre-service training.

Gay relationships in Tonga are not well researched and documented, but the frequency and explicitness of jokes and references suggests a prevalence that has not been openly acknowledged. Though not necessarily connected, many Volunteers observe Tongan males to be comfortable with holding another man’s hand or walking down the street with their arms around another man’s shoulder.

Lesbianism in Tonga is nearly invisible. (People may say it is nonexistent.) Discussions of it are often responded to with derision or disbelief. This can pose unique challenges for gay women serving in Tonga, especially related to effectively coping with the cultural norms around sexuality.

While cross-dressing for men is acceptable, there are laws against sodomy, so having a same-sex partner can cause issues with friends, colleagues, and even possibly the law. It is best to be discreet about this until you can better assess the mood of the community.

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

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

Tongans generally treat people with disabilities with respect. The main challenge will be that the accommodations you may be accustomed to having in the United States may not be available locally.

### **Possible Issues for Volunteer Couples**

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

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

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

### **Volunteer Comment**

“The fact that both husband and wife are working in the same sector (probably at the same school) can breed an unexpected sense of competition, judgment, frustration, disappointment, and distrust. Because your spouse is dealing with the exact same pressures as you are, and she/he may not be able to be there for you when your pressures mount. It's hard and annoying and heart-

wrenching and also amazing and life-affirming and will ultimately bring you so much closer together. Hang on for a very wild ride!”

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

The overwhelming majority of Tongans are Christian, and attending church and observing holy days are important activities in every community. On Sundays, for example, recreation is forbidden by law. Regardless of their own faith, many Volunteers choose to attend church to show respect for local customs and to develop relationships in their communities. Volunteers of every religious/spiritual persuasion are encouraged to recognize the church as an important community institution.

Volunteers who are worried about the religious/spiritual nature of this participation can consult with their peers or Volunteers from previous groups on how to tactfully work in a church-dominant society while maintaining one’s own beliefs. Many Volunteers who have been particularly concerned about this aspect of serving in Tonga have observed that attending services is a way of showing respect for local customs and helps develop relationships in their communities.

### **Volunteer Comments**

“Religion is a massive part of Tongan culture. Even if you are not a religious person, having a presence in your community’s church on Sundays is vital to your community integration.”

“Tonga is generally a conservative and rather religious country. It is important be yourselves while you are here, within respectful limitations. What I mean by that is, maybe before you never attended church or did not belong to a particular church, however, here it is good to be mindful of the traditions and try your best to immerse yourself in Tongan culture when you can. Attending church as a visitor does not have to necessarily be a spiritual activity for you, but can rather be thought of as partaking in an important custom.”

### **Possible Issues for 50+ Volunteers**

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

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

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

Respect and courtesy are extended to both male and female elders in Tonga, and older Volunteers are likely to be given places of high honor. Out of respect for their age, Tongans often discourage older Volunteers from physical activity and exertion.

## **Volunteer Comments**

“There are upsides and downsides to being a 50+ volunteer in Tonga. On one hand, Tongans revere their elders and are especially respectful to older teachers, which could make your school situation much easier than a younger teacher who would have to work harder to gain that foundation of respect. However, living in Tonga includes some amount of physical discomfort that could be more difficult for an older Volunteer. Sickness is very common, you basically have to walk everywhere, and living conditions can sometimes conspire to make you as uncomfortable as possible. Any older Volunteers should weigh health concerns and standards of comfort against their desire before they make their decision.”

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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

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

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

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

The current in Tonga is 220 volts, 50 cycles, with variations. The variations can be extreme at times, so be prepared to take protective measures for any electronic equipment you bring. Many Volunteers in Tonga have electricity in their homes at least some of the time, including that produced by solar power or gas generators. Most Volunteers placed on the outer islands have electricity between specific evening and nighttime hours while a few have no electricity.

### **How much money should I bring?**

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

### **When can I take vacation and have people visit me?**

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

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

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

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

Volunteers in Tonga do not need an international driver's license because they are prohibited from operating privately owned motorized vehicles. Most urban travel is by bus or taxi. Rural travel ranges from buses and minibuses to trucks, bicycles, and lots of walking. On very rare occasions, a Volunteer may be asked to drive a sponsor's vehicle, but this can occur only with prior written permission from the



country director. Should this occur, the Volunteer may obtain a local driver's license. A U.S. driver's license will facilitate the process, so bring it with you just in case.

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **How easy is it to call home from Tonga?**

It is possible to purchase a local telephone card to call the United States. Some Volunteers use Skype for their communication with family and friends back home.

### **Should I bring a cellphone with me?**

Tonga has two mobile phone systems. The only mobile phones compatible with the systems here are tri-band phones, which utilize SIM cards. Most mobile phones from the U.S. are not compatible. Peace Corps/Tonga provides all Volunteers with a basic cellphone. If you do bring a phone from home, you will have to pay a fee to have it "unlocked" from the U.S. system before it can work in Tonga.

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

There is email and Internet access at businesses in larger towns, at the Peace Corps office on the main island Tongatapu, and possibly through your host organization. Because of weaker telephone and electrical infrastructure in outlying areas, Volunteers in rural sites may be limited to sending and receiving email on their occasional visits to the capital or city center of their island group. Some Volunteers have brought laptop computers, but they are responsible for insuring and maintaining these computers.

Be aware that you will probably not find the same level of technical assistance and service in Tonga as you would at home and that replacement parts could take months to arrive. (See the earlier Living Conditions and Volunteer Lifestyle section for more information.)

## WELCOME LETTERS FROM TONGA VOLUNTEERS

*Malo e lelei!*

Congratulations on your invitation to work in the Kingdom of Tonga! I hope your Google search of Tonga and its beautiful beaches have made you excited to be a part of the next group of the long established Peace Corps/Tonga Volunteers!

Although a small island nation, Tonga has gained its nickname as The Friendly Islands for a reason. By choosing to Volunteer in Tonga, you will gain insight into a strong and proud culture with a group of people excited to share it with you. You will learn to don flip-flops (or bare feet), a *tupenu* and *ta'ovala* (long skirt worn both by men and women), and a quick-to-laugh attitude. You will gain Tongan language, self-proclaimed Tongan families, and an ability to slow down to “Tongan time.”

As English language facilitators, you will get the chance to work with teachers and students in primary schools throughout Tonga to help improve the teaching of English, Tonga’s second national language. You will have Pied Piper moments as you’re trailed by curious students, who in turn will become your best teachers. The laughter of children may very well become part of the backdrop of your service, especially if you are one of the many Volunteers who live on a school compound. You may also help with healthy lifestyle activities, library, physical education, tutoring older students in English, helping with Camp GLOW/GROW youth leadership activities, and any other variety of projects you are interested in.

Community is an important aspect of Tongan culture and you will quickly be taken “under the wing” of various families in your village. You will be taken ‘*eva* (wandering), placed in front of piles of food at a *kai pola* (feast), invited to the weekly Sunday meal of *lū* and root crop, not to mention the many other things you may partake in because, “Well, when in Tonga ...” Your neighbors, teachers, and students will take it upon themselves to make sure that you are well fed and have plenty of company. They will be quick to bring you food or send a child to check on you.

In my (almost) two years in a rural village on a small island off the main island of Tongatapu, I have found myself both overcrowded and lonely, busy and not at all, confused and content, in tears and laughing so hard my cheeks hurt. However, the ability to adapt yourself into village life, and create yourself a home away from home (as you all will!) outweighs any of the harder moments. By the end of your two years, you will wonder how you possibly didn’t know of the location (or existence) of Tonga prior to your service.

With that, I hope you gather up your enthusiasm, your sense of humor, your willingness to learn and make a fool of yourself, and join us in the lovely Kingdom of Tonga. Your fellow Volunteers, future students and villagers can’t wait to meet you!

*‘Ofa atu!*

—Chiara Collette  
Tonga Group 77 (2012–14)

Dear Invitees,

*Mālō e lelei!* Congratulations on reaching this stage of the application process and receiving your invitation to join Peace Corps/Tonga! Tonga really is special among Peace Corps posts due to our long history and small number of Volunteers. Oh, and we're in a tropical paradise. You have lucked out!

Here in Tonga you will be joining a diverse and talented group of PCVs who will become like a second family; an outstanding local staff who will keep you safe, prepare you to work, and teach you Tongan; and local host families who will take you in like one of their own (and feed you ... a *lot!*). Eventually you will move to a rural village or small town to work in a Tongan elementary school as an English language facilitator. And *that* is when you meet the most important people of all: your adorable, hilarious, and amazing students.

As an English language facilitator, you will be working together with Tongan teachers to focus on student-centered teaching and helping to improve the English instruction at your school. Don't worry if this sounds intimidating; you will be trained by Peace Corps staff, and the current PCVs will be there to support you and share the insights they've gained during their year(s) of service. In my experience, the key is really to build your relationships with students and teachers over time. Something as simple as joking and eating with your teachers can make your professional relationship much more fruitful.

Peace Corps service will be a unique experience. It will take you through the full range of emotions, and place you in situations you often don't expect. You will laugh, cry, laugh-not-to-cry, and cry from laughing so hard. (You will also learn to cry on command, as is expected when you give "thank you" speeches at feasts!) Your fellow PCVs will have your back through it all, and together you will grow tremendously.

Finally, a word about flexibility: Bring lots. The phrase "Well, I guess" has become a personal mantra for me: "Well, I guess I'm going to this feast." "Well, I guess my neighbor just gave me 20 pounds of potatoes." "Well, I guess I have to get up and dance in front of 150 people." Yes, the struggle is real, but the journey is amazing. Despite all the difficult or ridiculous moments I've had (all the times my bus has inexplicably turned around, or wild pig chases have derailed my class), I have been humbled by the friendliness and generosity of the people in my village and Tonga in general. The Peace Corps is known and respected here, and you will be well taken care of.

So enjoy your time at home and safe travels on your way to the Pacific. We can't wait to welcome you to our family!

*'Ofa atu,*

—Peter Gray  
Tonga Group 77 (2012–14)

*Oh, Tonga!* If I had a dollar for every time I said this in the past 20 months, I would be a rich woman. I utter this in moments of pure joy; I utter this in moments of utter frustration. If only I had the words to convey how perfectly those two little words sum up how I feel about my service in Tonga. That probably seems strange to you now, but just wait. You will find yourself saying this at some point in your service here in the beautiful Kingdom of Tonga. It's an inside joke with Volunteers you will soon be a part of. Know your teammates here in the kingdom anxiously await your arrival!

Serving as a Volunteer here in Tonga is truly a unique and special experience. Peace Corps Volunteers have been here for nearly 50 years. The Peace Corps is a widely known and well-respected organization here in Tonga. I find that many people who don't know me well on the island simply refer to me as "the Tu'anuku Peace Corps." I am proud to bear this distinction. The people we have the privilege to serve are kind, generous, and eager to teach us Volunteers the "Tongan way." It is never easy to give yourself so completely to a people you have never known, but you will have unlimited opportunities to try. It took me many, many, tries to really surrender myself to this new way of life, but doing so has been one of the greatest accomplishments of my life. I have a family here now. I have a group of people I trust and love. I have students who have forever imprinted themselves on my heart. I feel blessed to have had a service like this.

As wonderful as Tonga is, serving here will also be one of the biggest challenges of your life. I know it was for me. But you are not alone. You will feel that way as you say goodbye to everything you know and love. Know though, that you will soon be a part of a new family. Tongans love to embrace you and make you one of their own, especially if you are willing and open to the experience.

My only piece of advice: Let this all happen at your own pace. Take your time. The Tongan people are patient. Unlike most other Volunteers in my group, I didn't know the name of every person in my village until, well, just a few months ago. In my first few months at site, I made it a goal to make a friend. One friend. My first friend is still my best friend here. I often refer to her as "my Tongan mother." She helped me learn how to take care of myself here, how to speak better Tongan, how to understand the ways of her people. She guided me every step of the way in my growth as a Volunteer. Little things like escorting me to new community events, telling me how to dress, stopping by every day just to chat and make sure I was feeling OK. They made a world of difference for me. One friend. One lifeline. One strong connection to the rest of my community. It was all I needed to help me really make living in this tiny little village so far from home possible.

Tonga is now my home. I love my job here. I feel useful and productive. I am proud of the things our current groups are accomplishing. I am proud of the Tongans we work with for taking risks and trying new things with us. I am excited you are now a part of our team. Welcome to Tonga Group 79!

—Abby Kloberdanz  
*Tonga Group 77 (2012–14)*

## PACKING LIST

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

### General Clothing

Hand-washing and Tongan weather are hard on clothing, so any clothing you bring will probably wear out. Lightweight, fast-drying clothing (polyester or nylon) is nice because it will not fade or stretch as much as cotton blends.

Dressing in a culturally appropriate manner is important, especially on outer islands. In professional settings, male Volunteers are expected to wear what Tongan men wear—a *tupenu*, a solid-color wraparound garment (purchased locally), with a dress shirt. During leisure time, Tongan men typically wear the same things men wear in the U.S. (e.g., below-the-knee shorts or slacks and T-shirts). Female Volunteers are expected to wear dresses or skirts that are midcalf or longer in both professional settings and during leisure time. If the dresses/skirts are not long enough, long wraparound underskirts are available locally. Excessively tight clothing is also culturally inappropriate. At home, women often wear loose-fitting slacks, capris pants, or below-the-knee shorts. In general, women should always cover their shoulders and knees and should not wear shorts except for swimming or exercising. Additionally, you should not be able to see your armpits or midriff when raising your arms.

Following are some specific clothing suggestions and recommendations:

- One sweatshirt or fleece (it can get chilly in the winter)
- Lightweight rain jacket
- Black clothing to wear to funerals or to show mourning
- Swimsuit or board shorts for vacations
- Underwear (with sturdy elastic) and exercise socks
- High-quality sport sandals (e.g., Teva, Chaco, or Reef Walker), nice sandals for special events, sneakers, hiking boots if you are planning on hiking in Tonga or other countries, and shoes for staging in the U.S.

### For Men

- Six to eight light T-shirts (exercise shirts made of wicking fabric are especially helpful)
- Jeans and lightweight pants (khakis or nylon). (You will be wearing a traditional tupenu every day to work and church.)
- Several lightweight, collared, short-sleeved, dress shirts and nice polos (enough for work and church, for every day but Saturday)
- At least one tie and a long-sleeved shirt to go with it
- Basketball or running shorts for your own house or exercise
- Shorts that go to at least your knee for going out on evenings and weekends

### For Women

Note: all dresses and skirts should be at midcalf or ankle length and blouses should not be sleeveless, see-through, or have bare midriffs

- At least three black outfits: either a dress with sleeves or a skirt and top

- Casual dresses or mix-and-match skirts and blouses (for work, walking in public, and church)
- Underwear, bras, and sports bras (wicking fabric [e.g., Coolmax] is effective)
- Undershirts or camisoles for sheer blouses
- One or two pairs of capris or lightweight long pants; jeans for colder weather
- Bike shorts for modesty and comfort under skirts (remember that Tonga is very humid)
- Board shorts for swimming in public places. (Swimsuits can only be worn at resorts in Tonga.)

### **Personal Hygiene and Toiletry Items**

- Towels (lightweight, quick-dry ones are preferable to thick ones due to hand-washing and drying time); travel towel (micro-fiber)
- Initial supply of your favorite shampoo, deodorant, perfume, etc. (Offensive odors are particularly objectionable in Tongan culture.) Deodorant is available in Tonga, but the quality is poor.
- Cosmetics, if you wear them (local products are generally not good quality)
- Six-month supply of tampons or pads (tampons are not always available in Tonga, and they are expensive)
- Hand sanitizer and liquid body wash
- Vitamins, preferred medications (like ibuprofen), or dietary supplements
- Baby powder or talcum powder
- Small mirror
- Contact solution supply for six months if you wear contacts. It's not available everywhere in Tonga and is very expensive.
- Razors (bring a few to start with, you can get cheaper quality ones here)

### **Kitchen**

(Many of these items can be found in Tonga, but are of lower quality.)

- Swiss Army knife, Leatherman, or other utility tool (pack in your checked luggage)
- Sharp kitchen knife (pack in your checked luggage)
- Nonstick frying pan
- Sturdy manual can opener
- A French press or stove-top espresso maker (if you like coffee); instant coffee is available here, but decaf coffee is not.
- Measuring spoons and cups
- Spices/hot sauce
- Vegetable holder (three-basket, hanging)

### **Miscellaneous**

Luggage: Lockable rolling duffel bags work best. Please keep in mind that you should be able to manage all of your luggage without the assistance of others. You may also want a smaller bag to use for your pre-service training homestay.

- Small backpack or shoulder bag
- Sheets (double flats are most useful)
- Sturdy water bottles (at least two; e.g., Nalgene or CamelBak)
- Digital camera. Also consider an underwater camera and/or extra memory cards and batteries.
- Flashlight or headlamp (LED preferred) and/or reading lamp/book light
- Mask and snorkel or swimming goggles
- Small sewing kit
- Rechargeable batteries and charger (Batteries are available, but are generally of poor quality and there is no way to properly dispose of them.)

- MP3 player (e.g., iPod) or small boombox and small speakers
- Bicycle (Some Volunteers recommend bringing one because of the poor quality of local brands; others say it is not worth the added weight.) If you decide to bring a bicycle, then a bicycle tool kit and inner tubes are recommended. The Peace Corps will provide a helmet.
- Laptop computer. If you already own one, it may be worth bringing, as many Volunteers find it very helpful to have one. Conditions are hard on computers, but insurance is available. Most locations have electricity, though a small number of assignments are in locations that have electricity only at certain times or not at all.
- Electrical adapters to allow you to plug a laptop and power chargers into 220 volt outlets (the same as Australia)
- External hard drive for easy computer information storage and transportation and to share media with other Volunteers
- Sunglasses
- Sun hat or visor
- Ear plugs
- Extra pair of glasses
- School supplies (e.g., highlighters, index cards, stapler and staples, glue sticks, rubber bands, paper, laminating sheets, etc.)
- Waterproof zippered plastic bags to help protect valuables and to keep clothes and important papers dry
- Hammock (for camping or for in your house)
- Tent (if you plan on doing any camping)
- Travel alarm clock
- World map (great for entertaining the local kids or teaching at schools)
- Duct tape
- Games (anything you can pack easily, including a deck of cards)

### **What Not To Bring**

- Don't bring anything made from leather, including shoes, belts, and wallets. They will mildew in the humidity.

## PRE-DEPARTURE CHECKLIST

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

### Family

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

### Passport/Travel

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

### Medical/Health

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

### Insurance

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

### Personal Papers

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

### Voting

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

### Personal Effects

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

### Financial Management

- Keep a bank account in your name in the United States.
- Obtain student loan deferment forms from the lender or loan service. Information about loan deferment is at [peacecorps.gov/loans](http://peacecorps.gov/loans).
- Execute a power of attorney for the management of your property and business.
- Arrange for deductions from your readjustment allowance to pay alimony, child support, and other debts through the Office of Volunteer Financial Operations at 855.855.1961 ext. 1770.
- Place all important papers—mortgages, deeds, stocks, and bonds—in a safe deposit box or with an attorney or other caretaker.



## CONTACTING PEACE CORPS HEADQUARTERS

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

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

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

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