

Dear Prospective Volunteer: Please give this letter to your family and ask them to hold on to it for as long as you are in Guatemala.



Communicating With Your Peace Corps Volunteer While Overseas

April 24, 2013

Greetings from the Guatemala Desk in Washington, D.C. It is with great pleasure that we welcome your family member to the 2013 Peace Corps/Guatemala training program. We receive many questions from Volunteers and family members regarding travel plans, sending money, relaying messages and mail, and general correspondence inquiries. As we are unable to involve ourselves in the personal arrangements of Volunteers, we would like to offer you advice and assistance in advance by providing specific examples of situations and country-specific best practices in managing communication concerns.

1. **Written Communication.** The mail service in Guatemala is not as efficient as in the U.S. so it is important to be patient when sending or waiting to receive letters. It can take 4 to 6 weeks for mail coming from Guatemala to arrive in the United States via the Guatemalan postal system. When sending letters please use the U.S. postal service because companies like DHL or FedEx do not deliver to post office boxes. Below is the address you can use for Peace Corps trainees (a new address will be provided by the Volunteer once he/she moves to the permanent assignment site):

***PCT Jon Doe
Cuerpo de Paz
Apartado Postal 66
Antigua Guatemala
Sacatepequez 03001
Guatemala
Central America***

Volunteers often enjoy telling their stories when they write home. This is one of the most exciting elements of serving as a Volunteer. Anecdotes in letters might describe recent illnesses, lack of good food, isolation, transportation challenges, and many others. *While the subject matter is good reading material, it can sometimes be misinterpreted, exaggerated, or lacking explanation of the local context.* Please also note that there are two Peace Corps Medical Officers at the Peace Corps office in Guatemala. In the event of a serious illness, the Volunteer is sent to an approved medical center where care is managed by our trained Medical Officers. If Volunteers require medical attention that is not available in Guatemala, they are medically evacuated to a nearby country (in most cases, Panama) or the United States. Fortunately, these are rare circumstances.

Please be aware that some Volunteer sites are very remote and communication will at times be irregular or infrequent. If for some reason your normal communication pattern is broken and you do not hear from your family member for an unusual amount of time, you can contact the **Counseling and Outreach Unit (COU) at Peace Corps/Washington at 1-(855) 855-1961, option 1, then extension 1470.** Also, in the case of an emergency at home (death in the family, sudden illness, etc.), please do not hesitate to call **COU** immediately, so that we can inform the Volunteer. You may call the above number during regular business hours, as well as after hours and weekends. Tell the

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operator your name, telephone number, and the nature of the emergency and the Duty Officer will return your call.

2. Telephone Calls. Telephone service in Guatemala is relatively good and service in and out of Guatemala to the United States is mostly reliable and can be fairly inexpensive. During training, your family member may have scarce access to email, but some of the host training families may have phones in either their homes or at a nearby location. Trainees will be assigned cell phones from Peace Corps during the first month in Guatemala and are then able to communicate relatively frequently with families and friends. During service, Volunteer access to email and cellular phone service should be available, however cannot be guaranteed at all times.

The Guatemala Desk maintains regular contact with the Peace Corps office in Guatemala through phone calls and email. However, these communications are reserved for business only and cannot be used to relay personal messages. All communication between family members and the Volunteer should be done via international mail, email, or personal phone calls-- unless there is an emergency and you cannot reach your family member.

3. Sending packages. Please avoid sending packages to your family member during the initial nine (9) week training. The trainees will have access to most everything they need in Guatemala. In order to receive a package, there are heavy customs taxes that your family member will have to pay, and there is no guarantee that the package will arrive. Once a Volunteer is in their assigned 2-year site and they have a local post office box, small padded envelopes with inexpensive items are the best option for sending care packages.

We hope this information is helpful to you as your family member is serving as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Guatemala. We understand how frustrating it can be to communicate with a family member overseas and we appreciate your using this information as a guideline. Please feel free to contact us at the Guatemala Desk in Washington, D.C. if you have any further questions. Our phone numbers are 1-855-855-1961, option 1, then extension 2521, or locally at (202) 692-2521.

Sincerely,

Michael McGuire
Desk Officer | Guatemala
202.692.2521
Guatemala@peacecorps.gov