



HAITI



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Geography

Time: GMT-5.

Haiti is situated in the Caribbean and comprises the forested mountainous western end of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. Its area includes the Île de la Gonâve, in the Gulf of the same name; among other islands is La Tortue off the north peninsula. Haiti's coastline is dotted with magnificent beaches, between which stretches lush subtropical vegetation, even covering the slopes which

lead down to the shore. Port-au-Prince is a magnificent natural harbor at the end of a deep horseshoe bay.

The climate is Tropical, with intermittent rain throughout the year. Much cooler temperatures exist in hill resorts and there is a high coastal humidity. **Required Clothing:** Tropical, lightweight wear; rainwear and warm clothing for hill regions.

Political Background

The native Taino Amerindians—who inhabited the island of Hispaniola when it was discovered by COLUMBUS in 1492—were virtually annihilated by Spanish settlers within 25 years. In the early 17th century, the French established a presence on Hispaniola, and in 1697, Spain ceded to the French the western third of the island, which later became Haiti. The French colony, based on forestry and sugar-related industries, became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean, but only through the heavy importation of African slaves and considerable environmental degradation. In the late 18th century, Haiti's nearly half million slaves revolted under Toussaint L'OUVERTURE. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first black republic to declare its independence in 1804.

Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. After an armed rebellion led to the forced resignation and exile of President Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE in February 2004, an interim government took office to organize new elections under the auspices of the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Continued violence and technical delays prompted repeated postponements, but Haiti finally did inaugurate a democratically elected president and parliament in May of 2006.

Economy

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with 80% of the population living under the poverty line and 54% in abject poverty. Two-thirds of all Haitians depend on the agricultural sector, mainly small-scale subsistence farming, and remain vulnerable to damage from frequent natural disasters, exacerbated by the country's widespread deforestation. While the economy has recovered in recent years, registering positive growth since 2005, four tropical storms in 2008 severely damaged the transportation infrastructure and agricultural sector.

A GDP of \$11.59 billion (2008 est.), Haiti suffers from high inflation, a lack of investment because of insecurity and limited infrastructure, and a severe trade deficit. Haiti's average annual income of about US\$500 per head is the lowest in the western hemisphere; moreover, vast disparities exist between the incomes of rich and poor. The World Bank estimates that 85% of the people live below the absolute poverty line.

Haiti joined the Caribbean trading bloc CARICOM as a provisional member in 1997 and became a full member in 2002.

Society & Culture

Population: 9,035,536; Ethnic Groups: black 95%, mulatto and white 5%; Language: The official languages are French and Creole. English is spoken in tourist areas. Religion: The official religions are Roman Catholicism (75%) and Voodooism (70%); most Haitians practice both. Voodooism is a polytheistic folk religion, manifested by a series of complex ritual drawings, songs and dances. It is an African religion, and not incompatible with a shared belief in Christianity. There are Protestant minorities.

The weight of the past bore heavily on the daily lives of all Haitians in the 1980s. The country's legacy of slavery and French colonization had left a lasting imprint on the culture. In the past, members of the upper class cherished Franco-Haitian culture because the French language and manners separated them from the masses whom they wished to rule. At the same time, former slaves created a peasant culture, but always in the shadow of their urban superiors. Haiti's dual cultural heritage resulted in negative attitudes toward Haitian peasant life, particularly toward the Creole language, traditional marriages, and voodoo, the folk religion. The recent emergence of a middle class has only exacerbated the debate over what should be considered "true" Haiti.

Haiti has a long and storied history and therefore retains a very rich culture. Haitian culture is a mixture of primarily French, African elements, and native [Taíno](#), with some lesser influence from the colonial Spanish. The country's customs essentially are a blend of cultural beliefs that derived from the various ethnic groups that inhabited the island of Hispaniola. In nearly all aspects of modern Haitian society however, the European and African element dominate. Haiti is world famous for its [distinctive art](#), notably painting and sculpture.

Communication

Telephone: Country code: 509. There are no area codes. The internal service, operated by *Telecommunications d'Haiti (Teleco)*, is reasonable. There are telephone booths in the towns which take cards.

Mobile Telephone: No roaming agreements have been declared. Handsets can be hired locally.

Internet: Internet cafes can be found in towns and cities.

Post: Airmail to Europe takes up to one week. The main post office in Port-au-Prince, Cité de l'Exposition, is in place d'Italie. **Post office hours:** Mon-Fri 0800-2000, Sat 0830-1200. Letters posted after 0900 will not be despatched until the following working day.

Media: Radio is Haiti's most important source of information. There are more than 250 private radio stations. **Press:** The two main dailies, *Le Matin* and *Le Nouvelliste*, are published in French. *Haiti Progres*, also in French, is published weekly.

Money

Currency: Gourde (HTG) = 100 centimes. Notes are in denominations of HTG500, 250, 100, 50, 25, 10, 5, 2 and 1. Coins are in denominations of HTG5 and 1, and 50, 20, 10 and 5 centimes. Most establishments price items in the unofficial currency, the Haitian Dollar (1 Haitian Dollar = HTG5). US currency also circulates.

Currency Exchange: US Dollars are accepted and exchanged everywhere. Other foreign currencies are accepted for exchange only by some banks.

Credit/Debit Cards and ATMs: Credit cards are widely accepted. At least one local bank chain has ATMs in Port-au-Prince, but they are frequently out of order and there have been reports of overcharging accounts.

Banking Hours: Mon-Fri 0900-1300 and 1500-1700. Some banks open Sat 0900-1300.

Transportation

Getting Around by Air: There are scheduled routes, operated by *Caribintair*, between Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien, Hinche and Jérémie. Reservations should be double-checked as delays and cancellations are common. Planes may be chartered.

Getting Around by Road: Traffic drives on the right. There are all-weather roads from Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haïtien and Jacmel. **Bus:** Services depart from Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haïtien, Les Cayes, Jacmel, Jérémie, Hinche and Port-de-Paix on an unscheduled basis. **Taxi:** Station-wagons (*camionettes*) run between Port-au-Prince and Pétionville, as well as some other towns. **Car hire:** Available independently in Port-au-Prince and Pétionville, or through hotels and the airport. Petrol can be very scarce outside Port-au-Prince. All hired cars' registration numbers begin with 'L'. **Documentation:** An International Driving Permit is required.

Getting Around Towns and Cities: **Bus:** *Tap-taps*, which run within Port-au-Prince with a standard rate for any journey, are colorful but crowded; travelers are advised not to use these. **Taxi:** Unmetered, with fixed route prices, otherwise fares agreed in advance. Taxi licence plates begin with the letter 'P'. Shared taxis (*publics*) are the cheapest form of taxi service in the towns. Drivers can be hired for tours by the hour or the day with price negotiated. Taxi drivers do not expect tips.

Health

Food and Drink: All water should be regarded as being potentially contaminated. Water used for drinking, brushing teeth or making ice should have first been boiled or otherwise sterilized. Milk is unpasteurized and should be boiled. Powdered or tinned milk is available and is advised. Avoid dairy products which are likely to have been made from unboiled milk. Only eat well-cooked meat and fish. Vegetables should be cooked and fruit peeled.

Other Risks: Hepatitis B occurs. Seasonal meningococcal meningitis has been reported. Outbreaks of dengue fever occur in the area. HIV/AIDS is also a serious problem. Rabies is present. For those at high risk, vaccination before arrival should be considered. If you are bitten, seek medical advice without delay.

Health Care: Health insurance providing cover for repatriation in the event of serious illness is strongly recommended. Medical facilities are fairly good. The local herb tea is said to be good for stomach upsets.

Safety & Security

Travel in Haiti can be dangerous and all visitors are urged to exercise vigilance and caution. In some cities and towns ordinary services such as water, electricity, police protection and government services are either very limited or unavailable. While U.N. personnel from several countries have been in Haiti since 2004, their presence does not guarantee absolute security for residents or visitors.

For the latest security information, Americans traveling abroad should regularly monitor the Department of State, Bureau of Consular Affairs' web site, where the current [Travel Warnings and Travel Alerts](#), as well as the [Worldwide Caution](#), can be found.

Up-to-date information on safety and security can also be obtained by calling 1-888-407-4747 toll-free in the U.S. and Canada or, for callers outside the U.S. and Canada, a regular toll line at 1-202-501-4444. These numbers are available from 8:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Eastern Time, Monday through Friday (except U.S. federal holidays).

Food and Drink

The French cuisine is good and the Creole specialties combine French, tropical and African influences. French wine is available in the better restaurants.

National specialties:

- Guinea hen with sour orange sauce.
- *Tassot de dinde* (dried turkey).
- *Grillot* (fried island pork).
- *Diri et djondjon* (rice and black mushrooms).
- *Riz et pois* (rice and peas).

Tippling: 10% service charge is added to hotel and restaurant bills.



References

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- http://travel.state.gov/travel/cis_pa_tw/cis/cis_1134.html#safety
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