

# Haiti Directory

## CONTENTS

Accommodations	342
Activities	343
Business Hours	343
Climate Charts	343
Customs	344
Dangers & Annoyances	344
Embassies & Consulates	345
Festivals & Events	345
Food	347
Gay & Lesbian Travelers	347
Holidays	347
Insurance	347
Internet Access	347
Legal Matters	347
Maps	348
Money	348
Photography & Video	349
Post	349
Shopping	349
Telephone	349
Time	350
Tourist Information	350
Toilets	350
Travelers with Disabilities	350
Visas	350
Women Travelers	351
Work	351

## ACCOMMODATIONS

Most levels of accommodation are available in Haiti, from top-end hotels and beach resorts to complete fleapits, with everything in between. Port-au-Prince naturally has the widest choice of available options, along with Cap-Haïtien and Jacmel. You should be able to find the right accommodation for you, although there is often a shortage of midrange beds on offer.

In the Haiti guide we have defined budget as up to US\$40, midrange as up to US\$80 and top end as anything above this. Rooms come with private bathroom unless noted in the text. Prices are for doubles, but in many places you'll just be quoted a flat rate for the room irrespective of occupancy. As a general rule, only in midrange places and above can you expect to have breakfast thrown in. Even

cheap hotels usually have a ceiling fan, with air-conditioning more or less standard above this price range.

Whatever level you pitch for, bringing a torch (or candles) is recommended. Power cuts can be both frequent and long. At the budget level you just have to ride out the cut, while more expensive places tend to have their own generators, even if they don't always run them during daylight hours. Many hotels add an electricity surcharge of US\$5 to US\$10 to the daily rate, included in the prices listed where possible. Midrange and top-end rates also include the 10% government tax added to the bill.

## Guesthouses

Port-au-Prince has a number of small private guesthouses that cater primarily to visiting church groups, volunteers and aid workers. They offer a homey alternative to hotels, with a modest price tag attached. Standard rates are around US\$35, including breakfast and dinner, which are eaten together to give a highly sociable atmosphere. Bathroom facilities are invariably shared. These places usually have a strong Christian ethic attached, and sometimes operate night curfews. As they cater to visiting groups, booking in advance is recommended where possible.

## Camping

Pitching a tent isn't really an option in Haiti, and most Haitians would find the idea of voluntarily sleeping under canvas eccentric in the extreme. On top of this, with people everywhere in Haiti, finding a private pitch is nigh on impossible. The only likely options

## BOOK YOUR STAY ONLINE

For more accommodation reviews and recommendations by Lonely Planet authors, check out the online booking service at [www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/hotels). You'll find the true, insider lowdown on the best places to stay. Reviews are thorough and independent. Best of all, you can book online.

## PRACTICALITIES

- Newspapers: *Le Matin*, *Le Nouvelliste*, *Haiti Progrès* (has an English section), *Haiti en Marche* and *Libète* (Creole). International press is available in Port-au-Prince.
- Radio stations include Radio Haiti Inter, Radio Soleil and Radio Ibo. French and US TV available on satellite/cable. Haiti uses the same electrical system as the USA and Canada (110 to 125 volts AC, 60 Hz, flat-pronged plugs). Power cuts are ubiquitous, along with the sound of generators.
- Haiti uses the metric system, although gasoline is sold in gallons.

are for full-on expeditions, such as in Parc National Macaya, where the terrain demands that you be completely self-sufficient. We found just one campsite in the country, in the extensive grounds of Ranch Le Moncel on the slopes above Port-au-Prince (p310).

## Hotels

While hotels in Haiti come in all stripes, in comparison to the DR rooms can feel a little expensive, particularly in the midrange bracket, where even at this price you're not always guaranteed hot water.

At the budget end, hotels can be dreary, although we've tried to pick the best of the bunch. Some hotels double as brothels, with room rates quoted by the hour rather than the night. Known locally as *suivants* (for 'next!'), they're not particularly female friendly, although the turnover of guests means that their rooms are cleaned more regularly and efficiently than comparative hotels.

At the other end of the market, wi-fi access is becoming more standard. Expect good fixtures and a decent electricity supply. Most hotels of all ranges have attached restaurants or bars. Mosquito nets are rare.

Room rates don't change according to season, although at peak times – Jacmel during Carnival, for example – prices go up with demand.

## Resorts

Beach resorts don't feature in Haiti to the extent they do in the DR, but there are a string

of them along the Côte des Arcadins north of Port-au-Prince. Prices are all-inclusive, usually with a couple of bars and restaurants to choose from, along with water sports and other activities. If you arrive during the week, you'll virtually have them to yourself, while the city's well-heeled inhabitants descend en masse at weekends.

## ACTIVITIES

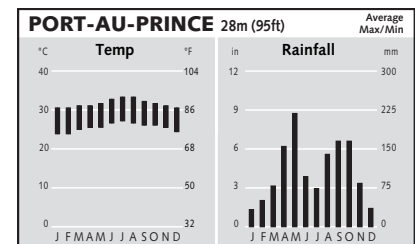
Compared to the DR, Haiti isn't a hugely rich activity-centered destination. Instead, traveling in Haiti itself becomes the activity. However, there are a few good options if you want a particular focus for your trip. It's possible to go scuba diving and snorkeling along the Côte des Arcadins, where there is good sea life, as well as along the Atlantic coast. Haiti's mountainous terrain lends itself well to hiking. A short drive from Port-au-Prince, Parc National La Visite and Parc National Forêt des Pins both offer good trekking country, with superb views and cool pine forests to explore. Both are also ornithologically rich. Birders will be amply rewarded by a visit to Trou Caiman and the wild Parc National Macaya.

## BUSINESS HOURS

Banks are usually open from 8:30am to 1pm weekdays, but some of the more central branches are also open from 2pm to 5pm weekdays. Shops and offices usually open at 7am and close at 4pm weekdays, but many close earlier on Friday; most shops are also open on Saturday. Government offices are open 7am to 4pm weekdays, closing for an hour at noon. Sunday is very quiet, with many restaurants and most businesses closed.

## CLIMATE CHARTS

Tropical Haiti enjoys pretty steady temperatures throughout the year. The main variation is due to altitude – while you'll get by



### PREVENTING CHILD-SEX TOURISM IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC & HAITI

Tragically, the exploitation of local children by tourists is becoming more prevalent throughout the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Various socioeconomic factors make children susceptible to sexual exploitation, and some tourists choose to take advantage of their vulnerable position.

Sexual exploitation has serious, lifelong effects on children. It is a crime and a violation of human rights.

The Dominican Republic and Haiti have laws against sexual exploitation of children. Many countries have enacted extraterritorial legislation that allows travelers to be charged as though the exploitation happened in their home country.

Responsible travelers can help stop child-sex tourism by reporting it. It is important not to ignore suspicious behavior. **Cybertipline** ([www.cybertipline.com](http://www.cybertipline.com)) is a website where sexual exploitation of children can be reported. You can also report the incident to local authorities and if you know the nationality of the perpetrator, report it to their embassy.

Travelers interested in learning more about how to fight against sexual exploitation of children can find more information through **ECPAT International** (End Child Prostitution & Trafficking; [www.ecpat.org](http://www.ecpat.org)).

**ECPAT – USA** (☎ 718 935 9192; [www.ecpatusa.org](http://www.ecpatusa.org)) is part of a global network working on these issues with over 70 affiliate organizations around the world. The US headquarters is located in New York.

**Beyond Borders** ([www.beyondborders.org](http://www.beyondborders.org)) is the Canadian affiliate of ECPAT. It aims to advance the rights of children to be free from abuse and exploitation without regard to race, religion, gender or sexual orientation.

with short sleeves most of the time, once you start climbing into the mountainous interior temperatures can take on a slight chill and you'll need an extra layer. Along the coast, humidity is more likely to be a problem.

Rainfall varies greatly, and depends both on your location and the time of year. Port-au-Prince gets most of its rain between April to November, easing off for drier July. The south more or less follows suit, while the north is wetter between November and March. Rains tend to fall heavily but stop abruptly, so are easy to work around. Look for *marchands* (female street vendors) suddenly appearing selling umbrellas and shower caps to keep hairdos dry! Travel in rural areas can be difficult after heavy rains due to rough roads and mudslides.

Hurricane season traditionally runs from August to October, although the winds sometimes blow strongly into November.

### CUSTOMS

Customs regulations are similar to most countries, with restrictions on the import of live animals, weapons and drugs, and the export of ancient artifacts and endangered plants or animals. You can bring in 1L of liquor and one carton of cigarettes or 50 cigars. Customs inspections can be vigorous.

### DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Haiti has rarely enjoyed a popular media image abroad. Poverty and regular political turmoil play their part, and many governments currently advise against nonessential travel to the country. And yet, for the traveler, Haiti really can seem like one of the friendliest and most welcoming countries in the Caribbean. Navigating these apparently contradictory states is the key to getting the most out of your visit.

The presence of large numbers of UN troops under the auspices of the Stabilization Mission for Haiti (MINUSTAH) have done much to bring stability to Haiti, especially in dealing with the large-scale gang and kidnapping problems. But you should always keep your ear to the ground for current developments before traveling – trouble generally occurs around elections, although it's incredibly rare for foreigners to get caught up in it. Avoid demonstrations, and if you come across one, turn in the opposite direction. In the event of real trouble, listen to the advice of embassy and hotel staff and follow it.

A weak state and high poverty levels can foster street crime. Take advantage of hotel safes and don't carry anything you're not willing to lose (or money in your back pocket). There are plenty of people on the streets dur-

ing the day, and should you encounter trouble it's quite likely that someone will come to your aid.

For all this, the main annoyances travelers are likely to face are the poor electricity supply and crazy traffic. A lack of street lights is as good a reason not to walk at night as any risk of being mugged – no one wants to fall into a sewer hidden in the darkness. Beggars can be persistent in some places, and at tourist spots, such as the Citadelle, expect persistent attention from faux guides. Try to discourage them before you set off – their only function seems to be to tell you how much tip you're going to have to pay at the end – as it's very hard to not pay them after they've run up a mountain alongside you.

On a less obtrusive note, all foreigners should get used to being stared at out of curiosity. You'll be called *blanc* a lot, too. This is the generic word for a foreigner and is not color-specific: we've even met Nigerians in Haiti utterly bemused at being called *blanc*! If someone gestures to you with what looks like a throat-slitting action, they're telling you they're hungry and want food – not that you're for the chop.

Finally, while taking care to be sensible, it's important not to get too hung up on Haiti's bad name. Many travelers fear the worst and avoid the country; those who do make it here are more likely to come away with positive impressions than horror stories.

### EMBASSIES & CONSULATES

All of the embassies and consulates listed following are in Port-au-Prince or Pétionville. Australia, New Zealand and Ireland do not have diplomatic representation in Haiti.

**Brazil** (Map p294; ☎ 2256-6206; fax 2256-6206; 168 Rue Darguin, Place Boyer, Pétionville)

**Canada** (☎ 2249-9000; fax 2249-9920, btwn Delmas 75 & 76, Rte de Delmas, Port-au-Prince)

**Cuba** (☎ 2256-3811; fax 2257-8566; 3 Rue Marion, Pétionville)

**Dominican Republic** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-9215; fax 2257-0568; 121 Ave Pan Américaine, Pétionville)

**European Union** (☎ 2249-0142; fax 2260-0544; 1 Impasse Brave, Delmas 60, Port-au-Prince)

**France** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-0951; fax 2223-9858; 51 Rue Capois, Port-au-Prince)

**Germany** (☎ 2256-4131; fax 2257-4131; 2 Impasse Claudinette, Bois Moquette, Pétionville)

**Mexico** (☎ 2257-8100; fax 2257-6783; 2 Delmas 60, Musseau, Port-au-Prince)

**Netherlands** (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-0955; fax 2222-0955; Rue Belleville, Parc Shodecosa, Port-au-Prince) Located off Rte Nationale 1.

**UK** (Map pp290-1; Hotel Montana, Rue F Cardoza, Port-au-Prince) Currently closed, but with possible plans to reopen it during the lifetime of this book.

**USA** Embassy (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-0220, 2222-0269; fax 2223-1641; Blvd Harry Truman, Port-au-Prince); Consulate (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-0989, 2223-8853, 2223-9324, 2223-7011; fax 2223-5515; 104 Rue Oswald Durand, Port-au-Prince)

**Venezuela** (☎ 2222-0971; fax 2222-3949; 2 Cité de l'Exposition, Blvd Harry Truman, Port-au-Prince)

### FESTIVALS & EVENTS

There are plenty of festivals throughout the year that can be tied into your trip with a bit of planning. Most are based on religious feasts – either Christian or Vodou. In addition to those listed here, each town celebrates its patron saint's day (Fête Patronale; see boxed text, p346). This is marked by a Catholic Mass, but is often an excuse for a parade, music and late-night revelries – great fun if you happen to be in town on the day.

If you plan on attending one of the Vodou festivals, it's definitely a good idea to go with a local guide or Vodou follower, to ensure you adhere to local etiquette (and to explain to you what's happening).

### January SOUKRI

There are two Soukri celebrations, held in January and August. Both are dedicated to the Kongo *Iwa* (Vodou spirits), and are fortnight-long events, marked by music and ritual. They're held between Gonaïves and Cap-Haïtien – for details, see boxed text, p341.

### February CARNIVAL

Flush with color, music, dancing and rum, Carnival, or Mardi Gras – celebrated country-wide on the three days leading up to Ash Wednesday – is a great experience.

The main Carnival venue is Port-au-Prince. Here music is the main attraction, so you'll see few of the traditional costumes that characterize other Caribbean carnivals. There are often free open-air concerts on Champs de Mars during the run. For the main event, there are stands set up around the Plaza Hotel where, for a couple of dollars, you can watch the activity from a 'safe' distance. Haiti's main

## FÊTES PATRONALES

The following towns and cities celebrate their patron saint's day (Fêtes Patronales) on these days:

- Port-de-Paix – April 28 (St Louis Marie de Monfort)
- Jacmel – May 1 (St Jacque & St Philippe)
- Pétionville – June 29 (St Pierre)
- Cap-Haïtien – July 25 (St Jacques)
- Fermathe – July 25 (St Jacques)
- Camp Perrin – July 26 (St Anne)
- Port-au-Prince – July 26 (St Anne), August 15 (Virgin Mary)
- Les Cayes – August 15 (Virgin Mary)
- Ounaminthe – August 15 (Virgin Mary)
- Mirabelais – August 25 (St Louis)
- Croix des Bouquets – 1st Sunday of October (Our Lady of the Rosary)
- Gonaïves – November 1 (St Charles)

bands cram onto decorated floats with massive sound systems playing specially composed merengue songs that are all vying to be the anthem of the year. There are also roving bands that draw swarms of revelers in their wake. Most of the action takes place late at night, and it's all a bit hectic: a great party but possibly not for the claustrophobic.

During the week before Carnival, slightly more traditional celebrations take place in Jacmel. These are based around costumes and street theater rather than music, and are the most colorful in Haiti. In the months running up to Jacmel Carnival it's possible to see craftsmen making the papier-mâché masks that make the parade so famous. For more information, see boxed text, p322.

## Easter RARA

Sometimes dubbed the 'rural Carnival,' Rara takes place in the week leading up to Easter, when roads all over Haiti swell with bands of revelers, percussionists and players of bamboo and tin trumpets. The bands are led by 'presidents,' 'colonels,' 'queens' and other members of complex Rara band hierarchies. It's easy to become immersed in the band's groove of wild, spiraling rhythms as it moves slowly along the road visiting temples and saluting dignitaries – before you know it, you've followed the band for kilometers. Finally, exhausted, the band will reach its

climax by performing the *salute*, the cue for a fierce dance by the Major Jonc (lead male dancer).

## SOUVENANCE

Held at the site of the same name between Gonaïves and Cap-Haïtien, Souvenance is one of the biggest Vodou festivals, running for a week from every Good Friday. The *lwa* Ogou is celebrated here, accompanied by music and bathing in sacred pools (for details, see boxed text, p341).

## July

### SAUT D'EAU PILGRIMAGE

The largest Vodou pilgrimage of the year is at the Saut d'Eau waterfall near Ville-Bonheur, where a 19th-century sighting of the Virgin Mary has become fused with her *lwa* counterpart Erzuli Dantor. It's an incredible and powerful sight, with white-clad adherents bathing in the sacred pools to cleanse themselves. For more information, see boxed text, p313.

## November FET GÉDÉ

Fet Gédé takes place on November 1 and 2. The Gédé spirits (see p281) serve as both the guardians of the cemetery and the lords of the erotic. For this festival, people pile into the cemeteries to pour libations for Baron Samedi around blackened crosses festooned with candles, skulls and marigolds. A person possessed by a

Gédé will whiten his or her face with powder to resemble a corpse, and act lasciviously toward other onlookers, especially foreigners. The uniform of Gédé is black and purple clothes, a top hat and mirrored shades, matched with lewd behavior and omnipresent bottles of *klerin* (white rum). Rituals usually start late at night and continue into the small hours.

## FOOD

You can eat on any budget in Haiti, spending just a few gourdes on filling *fritay* (fried street food) eaten on the hoof compared to dining in the posh restaurants of Pétionville, where a main course might set you back US\$20. The most typical experience is eating in a bar-esto, with a plateful of fried pork or chicken with plantains, salad and a beer, all for around US\$4. Vegetables aren't high on the agenda, but there's plenty of fresh fruit. Excellent seafood abounds along the coast.

For more information on Haitian food and drink, see p284.

## GAY & LESBIAN TRAVELERS

Haiti isn't as homophobic as some other places in the Caribbean, including macho Spanish DR. There are no dedicated gay venues, however; these were clamped down on in the 1980s following negative publicity about HIV/AIDS in Haiti. While you may commonly see friends of the same sex holding hands and being openly affectionate with each other throughout the country, any tourists doing this will attract attention. Same-sex couples sharing a room should have no problem, although some discretion, especially in the more religious establishments, is advisable.

## HOLIDAYS

Government offices and most businesses will be closed on the following public holidays:

**Independence Day** January 1

**Ancestors' Day** January 2

**Carnival** January/February (three days before Ash Wednesday)

**Good Friday** March/April

**Agriculture and Labor Day** May 1

**Flag and University Day** May 18

**Anniversary of Jean-Jacques Dessalines' Death** October 17

**Anniversary of Toussaint Louverture's Death** November 1

**Anniversary of the Battle of Vertières** November 18

**Christmas Day** December 25

## INSURANCE

It's always unwise to travel without insurance. Policies vary widely, but it's essential to have as much medical cover as possible (including emergency evacuation cover). Medical services insist on payment on the spot, so collect all the paperwork you can when being treated so you can claim later. Some policies ask you to call them (they'll usually call you back) so that an assessment of your problem can be made. Check excess fees for lost, stolen or damaged luggage.

An important point to note is that some governments issue travel warnings advising against nonessential travel to Haiti. Some insurance policies (or certain areas of their cover) may be invalidated in such circumstances, so discuss this with your broker before signing up.

## INTERNET ACCESS

Online access isn't a problem in any decently sized Haitian town, and internet cafés open and close frequently. Broadband connections are increasingly standard, along with webcams, CD burning and USB connections for uploading digital photos. Prices cost US\$0.80 to US\$3 per hour. The more expensive the joint, the better the electricity supply is likely to be. Cheap places don't run generators, making them highly susceptible to the regular power cuts.

If you're bringing a laptop, top-end (and some midrange) hotels often provide wi-fi access.

## LEGAL MATTERS

One of the key tasks of the UN presence in Haiti has been to train and reorganize the Haitian National Police (HNP). It's a mammoth task, as the police are spread thin and corruption is rife, with the judiciary burdened with similar problems.

Drugs are illegal in Haiti, and you will be jailed for possession of marijuana or cocaine. If you are involved in a car accident, the law requires you to stop your car and call the police as soon as possible. In general, Haitian law presumes innocence until guilt is proven, and it's unlikely that you'll actually be arrested unless there are supportable charges against you. Always try to contact your embassy without delay, and keep its contact details on your person. If the 'problem' is an imaginary one, the ability to be extremely patient may eventually see the issue disappear.

## MAPS

Of most use to travelers is the *Haiti Carte Touristique*, which can be found in Port-au-Prince bookshops. On one side there is a detailed country map with lots of tourist information, while on the reverse there are street plans of Port-au-Prince, Cap-Haïtien, Jacmel and all the other departmental capitals.

A decent alternative is the map produced by the Association of Haitian Hoteliers, which is available free from most car-rental companies, also with a map of Port-au-Prince. Guides Panoramas produces the best up-to-date map of Port-au-Prince (US\$5), as well as a street plan of Jacmel.

## MONEY

The Haitian currency is the gourde, usually seen written gde. The gourde is divided into 100 centimes, although the smallest coin you're likely to see is the 50 centimes, followed by the one and five gourde coins. Bank notes come in denominations of 10, 25, 50, 100, 250, 500 and 1000 gourdes, all with a revolutionary hero on one side and a historic fort on the other. There are still a few very grubby one, two and five gourde notes in circulation, although these are no longer issued.

Where matters get confusing is that most Haitians refer to the Haitian dollar (H\$) when quoting costs. The gourde used to be tied to the US dollar at a rate of one to five, with the result that five gourdes is universally known as one Haitian dollar. It's a system seemingly designed to perplex short-term visitors. When buying something, always check what people mean when quoting the price, whether a hundred is in gourdes or dollars (in which case it's 500 gourdes). To make things even more confusing, prices for expensive goods (or tourist souvenirs) are sometimes listed in US dollars.

The way to minimize headaches is to choose one system, either the Haitian dollar or the gourde, and stick with that. If you choose to work in Haitian dollars, you must divide prices in gourdes by five; if you choose to think in gourdes, you must multiply all Haitian dollar prices by five. You'll eventually be able to make price comparisons to your home currency, which is nearly impossible if you keep slipping between the two systems.

## ATMs

Automatic teller machines are increasingly common in Port-au-Prince and Pétionville,

but yet to catch on elsewhere in the country (we found just one, in Cap-Haïtien). They're the simplest and most secure way to manage your money on the road, although obviously you'll need to make sure you're liquid when heading out of the capital. Most ATMs are directly on the street, with some in secure booths. Always be aware of your surroundings when using an ATM and pocketing a wad of cash.

## Cash

Cash is king in Haiti. With the exceptions noted for credit cards (below), almost everything you buy will be with folding stuff. Traveling outside Port-au-Prince, you're likely to be carrying plenty of money, but there are a few precautions to reduce the risk of losing your stash to misadventure.

It's unwise to carry wads of money in your wallet, and you're similarly more prone to being robbed if you carry valuables in a shoulder bag, which can easily be snatched. Keep a small amount of money for the day in a handy but concealed place (eg in an inner pocket), and the bulk of your resources more deeply hidden. A well-concealed money belt is one of the safest ways to carry your money as well as important documents, such as your passport. It's also a good idea to have emergency cash (say US\$100 in small bills) stashed away from your main hoard, as a backup.

For many purchases – hotel rooms, for instance – it's acceptable to pay in US dollars instead of gourdes.

## Credit Cards

Most midrange and all top-end hotels (and Port-au-Prince restaurants) will happily let you flash the plastic. Visa, MasterCard and (to a slightly lesser extent) American Express will all do nicely. With an accompanying passport, cash advances on credit cards can generally be made in the larger banks.

## Moneychangers

Haiti must be one of the few countries where if you want to change money, the simplest option is to go to a supermarket. These generally have a separate counter near the cashier where you can top up your gourdes. In Haiti, the US dollar rules supreme, although Canadian dollars and euros are usually accepted, along with Dominican pesos. Try not to bring any other currency. Where there are street moneychangers, they're only interested in US dollars.

## Traveler's Checks

These are a nonstarter in Haiti. Bank tellers will almost look at them with some curiosity before pushing them back over the counter for you to take elsewhere, possibly mumbling something about having to go to the 'head office.' Persistence to the point of tears might get you somewhere (make sure you also have the purchase receipts with you), but we'd really advise against it.

## PHOTOGRAPHY & VIDEO

As in many developing countries, taking photos of airports and police buildings is forbidden. It's a bad idea to snap a policeman without obtaining permission first, and UN soldiers can be similarly sensitive.

Haitians are well aware of their country's poverty, and often hate to be photographed in work or dirty clothes. Always ask permission – whether you're in a market or the countryside, producing a camera out of the blue can occasionally provoke a reaction. Discretion is key. This goes double at Vodou ceremonies, where you should always check with the *houngan* or *mambo* (respectively male or female Vodou priest) before you start clicking away.

Most internet cafés allow you to upload photos and burn CDs, and digital supplies are easy to come by in Port-au-Prince.

## POST

There are post offices in every town. Postcards to North America cost 25 gourdes (US\$0.70) to send, or 50 gourdes (US\$1.40) to Europe and Australia. It's generally better to send from a postbox, although the larger towns also have mailboxes dotted around. The service is reasonably reliable, although hardly superfast.

If you're in Haiti long-term and want to receive mail, you can have it addressed to Poste Restante at the central post office where you're based. Senders should underline your name and you should bring your passport identification when collecting mail for. A better, although more pricey, alternative is to set up a *boîte postale* (post box) at your local post office. Receiving mail is never fast in Haiti.

Faster in both directions are the international couriers. DHL, UPS and TNT are all represented in Port-au-Prince and Pétionville, with a few offices elsewhere noted throughout this book.

## TOP HAITIAN SOUVENIRS

Here are some of our favorite souvenirs from Haiti:

- Paintings by Haiti's most exciting artists from the galleries of Pétionville.
- Papier-mâché masks from Jacmel.
- Painted wooden boxes and place mats from Jacmel.
- Sequined Vodou flags from Port-au-Prince's Bel Air district.
- Intricate metal sculptures made from old oil drums in Croix des Bouquets.
- *Compas* (Haitian dance) and *racines* (roots) CDs, available everywhere.
- A bottle of Barbancourt Five Star rum.
- Rada drums as used in Vodou ceremonies.
- Carved wooden statues.
- Straw hats, worn everywhere in the countryside.

## SHOPPING

With its renowned arts scene, Haiti is filled with enough interesting handicrafts and souvenirs to have you worrying about your baggage allowance on the plane home. Port-au-Prince has the widest choice, with good shopping areas including the Marché de Fer and the Pétionville galleries. Jacmel, the so-called handicrafts capital of Haiti, also offers a comprehensive (and more laid-back) shopping experience. Often you'll be able to buy direct from the artists or artisans.

Except in galleries and a few shops, prices are never fixed, so be prepared to haggle. There's no rule on how much to offer, but it's best to treat the deal-making as a game rather than becoming obsessed with driving the price into the ground. Both sides will take it in turns to be uninterested and then outraged at the prices offered before finding common ground.

## TELEPHONE

Landline connections in Haiti can sometimes be patchy, and most businesses list several numbers on their cards and many people carry two cell phones of different networks.

Haiti uses the GSM system for cell phones. The two main operators are Digicel and Voila,

with HaiTel coming a fairly distant third. Coverage is generally good. The providers have international roaming agreements with many foreign networks, but it can work out cheaper to buy a local handset on arrival in Haiti for about US\$20 (including several hundred gourdes credit). Take a copy of your passport to the dealer for identification. Calls within Haiti cost around US\$0.10 per minute according to the network, and around US\$0.90 per minute overseas. Top-up scratch cards for more credit are available from shops and the ubiquitous street vendors.

To make a call, the quickest option is to find a phone 'stand,' usually a youth on the street with a cell phone that looks like a regular desk phone, who will time your call and charge accordingly. Alternatively, look for a central Telco office, which has booths where you can place your call.

Haiti's international telephone code is ☎ 509. There are no area codes. To make an international call, dial ☎ 00. The annually updated **Haiti Business Directory** ([www.haiti-business.com](http://www.haiti-business.com)) is useful for tracking down numbers.

## TIME

Haiti runs on Eastern Standard Time (GMT minus five hours), putting it in the same time zone as New York, Miami and Toronto. Haiti doesn't adjust for daylight saving time, so from the first Sunday in April to the last Sunday in October it's actually an hour ahead of eastern USA and Canada.

## TOURIST INFORMATION

Haiti's moribund tourist industry has left visitors scrabbling around for information. Port-au-Prince's main information center, the **Maison de Tourisme** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-8659; Rue Capois, Champs de Mars, Port-au-Prince; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri), had been closed for some time when we visited, with no plans to reopen. You may have more luck contacting the **Ministry of Tourism** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-2143; 8 Rue Légitime, Champs de Mars, Port-au-Prince) direct, but we make no promises. There's an occasionally staffed information booth at the international airport, Aéroport International Toussaint Louverture. Instead, the private tour operators (see p353) are the best source of up-to-date information.

Outside the capital, the **Associations des Micro-Entreprises Touristiques du Sud'Est** (Amets; ☎ 2288-2840; amets\_service@yahoo.fr; 40 Rue d'Orléans; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) in Jacmel has good informa-

tion, and the **Bureau du Tourisme** (Map p334; ☎ 2262-0870; cnr Rue 24 & the Blvd, Cap-Haïtien) can also sometimes help. There are no tourist offices abroad.

## TOILETS

There are no public toilet facilities in Haiti, but you can use the toilets in hotels or restaurants. The Haitian sewerage system is overstretched so, where supplied, dispose of toilet paper in a bin. Most Haitian men think nothing of urinating in the streets and, on long journeys, relieving oneself at the side of the road is usually the only option. For women, this is more easily accomplished if you're wearing a loose-fitting skirt or dress, although you'll see plenty of local women yanking down their trousers in such situations.

## TRAVELERS WITH DISABILITIES

Haiti is going to be hard going for travelers with disabilities. Crowded and broken streets, anarchic traffic and the absence of wheelchair-accessible buildings all pose serious problems. However, travel is possible for those with an iron will, plenty of stamina and the willingness to adapt to whatever hurdles present themselves. Traveling with an able-bodied companion can immensely help in overcoming these obstacles. At the very least, hiring a vehicle and a guide will make moving around a great deal easier. Travelers with disabilities shouldn't be surprised at stares from Haitians, but they'll often also receive offers of assistance where needed.

For more information, consider contacting **Mobility International USA** (MIUSA; ☎ 3541-343 1284; [www.miusa.org](http://www.miusa.org); 132 E Broadway, Ste 343, Eugene, OR 97401), which offers general travel advice for travelers with physical disabilities.

## VISAS

Unless you're a citizen of the DR, Colombia, Panama or Taiwan, no visa is needed to visit Haiti, just a passport valid for six months and a return ticket. Your entry stamp entitles you to stay for up to 90 days. You'll also be given a green entry card that must be given up on departure from Haiti, so keep this safe.

If you wish to stay in Haiti for longer than 90 days, you must apply for a visitor/resident visa at your nearest embassy before you travel, a process of several months involving letters of support from your employer or a Haitian resident.

## WOMEN TRAVELERS

Haiti is an easier place for a woman to travel alone than many countries in the region (see also p254). The catcalls, whistles and leering that females may experience in many other places seem to be at a minimum. Haitian men do enjoy flirting and complimenting, but it usually isn't too overbearing and should be taken in good humor.

Haitian roads are abysmal and, as public transport is extremely bouncy, consider wearing a sports bra, especially on longer journeys, where you should also wear a skirt to allow for roadside toilet breaks. It's not a problem for women to wear modest shorts or sleeveless tops in and around town. A sarong is recommended for wrapping over a swimsuit at a hotel pool or the beach.

## WORK

Paid work is in short supply in Haiti. Official unemployment estimates mask far higher figures, and wages are desperately inadequate. Competition for jobs is enormous, so to find work you need to be able to demonstrate you have skills that no one in the domestic market possesses. Fluency in French and/or Creole is virtually essential. After you've been in the country for 90 days you must register as a resident with the **Department of Immigration** (171 Ave

John Brown, Port-au-Prince), for which you'll need a letter from your embassy and your employer, a health check and a Haitian bank account proving solvency.

Many foreigners working in Haiti and not in business are involved in aid and development. **ReliefWeb** ([www.reliefweb.int](http://www.reliefweb.int)) and **DevNet** ([www.devnetjobs.org](http://www.devnetjobs.org)) are good places to look for jobs in the development sector in Haiti.

Volunteer work in Haiti has traditionally been dominated by two strands – the Peace Corps and churches. The Peace Corps pulled out of Haiti following the 2004 coup, and it's not known if it will be returning. Church groups regularly send charitable missions to Haiti, but it's essential to know the work they'll be doing is both wanted by local communities and sustainable. The NGO **Healing Hands for Haiti** ([www.healinghandsforhaiti.org](http://www.healinghandsforhaiti.org)) sends medically trained volunteers to work with Haitians with disabilities through local partner organizations. These type of volunteer trips are usually quite short – often less than a month. If you want to get a taste of life as a volunteer, the web has scores of blogs from volunteers (including church groups) recounting their experiences. **Haiti Innovation** ([www.haitiinnovation.org](http://www.haitiinnovation.org)), a blog run by former Peace Corps workers, has an interesting commentary on the state of development and aid in Haiti, and is worth checking out.

# Haiti Transportation

## CONTENTS

<b>Getting There &amp; Away</b>	<b>352</b>
Entering Haiti	352
Air	352
Land	352
Tours	353
<b>Getting Around</b>	<b>353</b>
Air	353
Bus	353
Car & Motorcycle	354
Hitchhiking	355
Taptap & Camionette	355
Local Transportation	355

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

Flights and tours can be booked online at [www.lonelyplanet.com/travel\\_services](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/travel_services).

### ENTERING HAITI

The vast majority of travelers enter Haiti by air through Port-au-Prince, with the most common flight routes all being from the USA – Miami, Fort Lauderdale and New York. The international airport at Cap-Haïtien also handles a small number of incoming flights.

By land, there are several border crossings with the Dominican Republic, and direct bus services linking Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo, and Cap-Haïtien with Santiago. There are no international boat services to Haiti.

### Passport

All foreign visitors must have a valid passport to enter Haiti. Be sure you have room for both entry and exit stamps, and that your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your planned travel dates. See (p350) for information on visas.

### AIR

#### Airports & Airlines

Haiti has just two international airports.

#### Aéroport International Toussaint Louverture

(PAP; off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2250-1120) The main international airport, in Port-au-Prince.

#### DEPARTURE TAX

All departure taxes for leaving Haiti are included in the cost of your air ticket.

**Aéroport International Cap-Haïtien** (CAP; ☎ 2262-8539) In Cap-Haïtien, but currently only has flights with Lynx Air to Florida, USA.

#### AIRLINES FLYING TO/FROM HAITI

International carriers with services to Haiti:

**Aerocaribbean** (7L; ☎ 2222-5004; [www.aero-caribbean.com](http://www.aero-caribbean.com); Havana, Cuba) Flights from Havana and Santiago, and Punta Cana (DR) and Port-au-Prince.

**Air Canada** (AC; ☎ 2250-0441, 2250-0442; [www.aircanada.ca](http://www.aircanada.ca); Toronto, Canada) Direct flights from Montreal.

**Air France** (AF; ☎ 2222-1078, 2222-4262; [www.airfrance.com](http://www.airfrance.com); Paris, France) Flights from Paris via Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe or Miami.

**Air Santo Domingo** (EX; ☎ 2244-4897; <http://airsantodomingo.com.do>; Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic)

**American Airlines** (AA; ☎ 2246-0100, 3510-7010; [www.aa.com](http://www.aa.com); New York, USA) Direct flights from Miami, Fort Lauderdale and New York.

**Caribintair** (CRT; ☎ 2250-2031, 2250-2032; [caribintair.com](http://caribintair.com); Port-au-Prince, Haiti) Flights to Santo Domingo.

**Copa Air** (CM; ☎ 2223-2326; [www.copaair.com](http://www.copaair.com); Panama City, Republic of Panama)

**Lynx Air** (LY; ☎ 3513-2597, 2257-9956; [www.lynxair.com](http://www.lynxair.com); Fort Lauderdale, USA)

**Spirit Airlines** (NK; ☎ in Dominican Republic 809-381-4111; [www.spiritair.com](http://www.spiritair.com); Fort Lauderdale, USA)

### LAND

The Haitian–Dominican border has three official crossing points open to foreigners. Of the most use to travelers is the Malpasse–Jimani crossing between Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo, followed by the northern Ouanaminthe–Dajabón crossing on the road between Cap-Haïtien and Santiago. A third, and little used, crossing is from Belladère to Comendador (aka Elías Piña).

There are direct coach services linking the two capitals, and Cap-Haïtien to Santiago; see p306 and p336 respectively for more details. Included in the cost of the ticket are border fees that all travelers have to pay.

Entering the DR you must pay US\$10 for a tourist card. The situation with fees entering/leaving Haiti by land is fluid – these are meant to have been abolished, but border officials may still ask for US\$10 to stamp you in or out. It remains unclear whether this is a legitimate fee or just a ‘gratuity.’

The Haitian border can be slightly chaotic if you’re traveling independently, particularly at Ounaminthe with its sprawling local market. Onward transport is plentiful, however, along with the occasional hustle – any tourist is going to stand out in this scenario. For more on the Dominican side of the border, see p256.

### TOURS

Haiti has three local tour operators, all offering excellent packages and services if you don’t want to strike out on your own.

**DOA/BN** (☎ 3510-2223; [www.haititravels.org](http://www.haititravels.org))

**Tour Haiti** (Map p294; ☎ 3457-5242, 3746-8696; [info@tourhaiti.net](mailto:info@tourhaiti.net), [ccchauvel@hotmail.com](mailto:ccchauvel@hotmail.com); 115 Rue Faubert, Pétionville)

**Voyages Lumière** (☎ 2249-6177, 3557-0753; [www.voyagelumierehaiti.com](http://www.voyagelumierehaiti.com))

## GETTING AROUND

### AIR

There are three airlines running domestic services in Haiti: **Caribintair** (☎ 2250-2031, 2250-2032; [caribintair@accesshaiti.com](mailto:caribintair@accesshaiti.com)), **Tortug Air** (☎ 2250-2555, 2250-2556; [tortugair@yahoo.com](mailto:tortugair@yahoo.com)) and **Tropical Airways** (☎ 2256-3626, 2256-3627) linking Port-au-Prince to several departmental capitals. Caribintair flies to Cap-Haïtien, Les Cayes, Jacmel and Jérémie. Tortug Air serves Cap-Haïtien, Les Cayes, Jérémie and Port-de-Paix, while Tropical Airways flies to Cap-Haïtien

#### THINGS CHANGE...

The information in this chapter is particularly vulnerable to change. Check directly with the airline or a travel agent to make sure you understand how a fare (and ticket you may buy) works and be aware of the security requirements for international travel. Shop carefully. The details given in this chapter should be regarded as pointers and are not a substitute for your own careful, up-to-date research.

and Port-de-Paix, with a route to Jacmel on the cards. Haiti’s small size means that flights are short (just 15 minutes to Jacmel), saving hours on bad roads. The planes are small and demand can be high, especially for destinations like Jérémie, so book as far in advance as possible. One-way tickets usually cost around the US\$85 mark.

### BUS

Getting around Haiti by bus isn’t always terrifically comfortable, but it’s the cheapest way to travel within the country and services run to most places you’ll want to get to. Sturdy beasts, buses have the advantage of taking you to places that you’d usually need a 4WD to reach. They are mostly secondhand American school buses, colorfully repainted, with more Haitian liveries for bus lines like L’Ange de Dieu and Dieu Qui Decide.

Seating is designed to squash in as many people as possible, with six or seven across being the norm. Your space is numbered, however, so look for the numerals painted above your head as you clamber through the bus over the assembled passengers and their bags (and occasionally chickens, too). When buying your ticket it’s worth asking for a window seat to give yourself some extra air. Try not to sit too far back either – suspension is not the vehicle’s strong suit, and the state of Haiti’s roads means that passengers sitting behind the rear axle are regularly bounced unceremoniously into the air. The front cab has several seats next to the driver. These are the most comfortable of all, but attract an extra premium of around two-thirds of a standard ticket.

With a few exceptions noted in the text, there are no timetables; buses leave instead when they’ve collected their quota of passengers. There’s a tricky payoff for travelers here: arrive too early and you’ll sit for hours waiting for the bus to fill, arrive too late and you’ll be stuck with a terrible seat. Buying a ticket in advance is sometimes possible for long distances (Port-au-Prince to Cap-Haïtien or Jérémie, for example), but be advised that the hour you’re told to be at the bus station will invariably be at least an hour before the bus pulls onto the road. If you’re ‘lucky,’ the driver will be playing deafeningly loud music to help pass the time. Overhead racks and space below the seats should be sufficient for most bags,

otherwise they'll have to go on the roof (the baggage handler will want his tip). Although baggage is usually covered, rainstorms can still soak through, so keeping your belongings in plastic bags inside your luggage is a good idea.

Each town has a departure point for buses, known as '*estacion*' followed by the destination name (Estacion Port-au-Prince, for example). They're not proper bus stations, rather sprawling, chaotic and noisy conglomerations of vehicles and people and market stalls: Haiti in microcosm. Touts shout out destinations, which are also painted on bus fronts. While you're waiting for the bus to leave, there's a constant procession of hawkers and street-food vendors, so you won't go hungry. Some even travel with the bus – travelling goods salesmen selling everything from toothpaste to miracle cures (we've experienced pitches lasting a good hour into a journey).

Upon arrival in their destination, buses turn into pseudo-taxi services, stopping at the roadside at passengers' request. This can be done by pressing a buzzer or yelling '*merci, monsieur*' to the driver. While this may be great for getting dropped right outside your chosen hotel, it can be maddeningly frustrating as the bus stops every 50m or so to drop off yet more people and their assorted baggage.

Breakdowns aren't uncommon, but can sometimes provide relief from the terrible roads, or allow a much-needed toilet or food stop (women are advised to wear a skirt to allow for roadside squatting). Otherwise food or rest stops can be rare, although brave food and drink vendors do hang perilously from the windows and doors as buses pass through towns and villages. When road conditions allow it, buses love to get up a head of steam, forcing all comers to scatter before them.

## CAR & MOTORCYCLE

Although having your own wheels is a convenient way of seeing Haiti, be aware that you need both nerves of steel and a sense of humor. Terrible roads, a lack of road signs, and the perils of wayward pedestrians and oncoming traffic are all part of the mix. But if you're up for the challenge, you might find yourself driving with a flair and aplomb you never knew you possessed before.

### Driver's License

In order to drive or rent a vehicle in Haiti, you need either a valid International Driving

Permit or a current license from your home country. It is an offense to drive without a valid driver's license on your person. Carry your passport with you at all times, as the police will want to see it if they stop you for any reason.

### Rental

Many international car-rental companies operate in Haiti, mostly based near Port-au-Prince's international airport; see p306. Rates are pricey due to the high rate of accidents and road conditions that cause a lot of wear and tear. Although fees vary from company to company, don't be surprised to be quoted around US\$70 for a saloon, or US\$150 for a 4WD per day. Although insurance is offered, it isn't always comprehensive and often carries high deductibles; furthermore, foreign drivers are often held liable for accidents whether they are at fault or not.

### Road Conditions

It's best not to come with high hopes of Haiti's roads to avoid bad surprises. With the notable exception of the well-maintained highway from Port-au-Prince to Jacmel, the main roads are potholed and cracked. Secondary roads are worse, with some becoming impassable, especially after rain, except in a 4WD. Wherever tarmac allows drivers to get some speed up, accidents are common, so it's sometimes worth thinking of the broken roads as an efficient traffic-calming system.

Avoid driving at night if at all possible. Many drivers are allergic to using headlights, and animals and pedestrians are hard to see in the dark.

### Road Rules

Road rules are extremely lax, but most vehicles at least aspire to drive on the right. Drivers rarely signal, so expect cars to swerve out in front of you suddenly, usually to avoid a hole. When overtaking, use your horn liberally. Many drivers far prefer the horn instead of the brakes, so take heed. Always beep to warn people walking that you're coming, and they will make way – even in the most congested street, you can usually miraculously slip through.

If you have an accident, you must to stop your car and call the police as soon as possible.

In cities, watch out for parking restrictions. Instead of issuing tickets, police are liable to

remove your license plates, returnable from the local police station on payment of a fine. When parking, kids or men may approach you to be a *gardien* and watch your vehicle for you for a small fee.

## HITCHHIKING

It's extremely unusual to see foreigners hitchhiking in Haiti, but due to the low rate of car ownership and unreliable transport systems, Haitians are used to asking for a *rue libre* (free ride). As with hitchhiking anywhere in the world, there's a small but potentially serious risk in flagging down a ride. If you do get picked up, don't be surprised if the driver asks for some money – keep public-transport fares in mind so that, should you strike someone trying to extort silly amounts from you, you'll know what not to give and what you'll be expected to pay for the ride. However, some Haitians will be baffled by the sight of a foreigner without a vehicle and will just pick you up out of curiosity.

## TAPTAP & CAMIONETTE

Smaller vehicles than buses ply the roads carrying passengers. A taptap is a converted pickup, often brightly decorated, with bench seats in the back. Fares are slightly cheaper than a bus. The same rules for buses apply to taptaps, which leave from the same *estacion*: they go when full, the comfy seats next to the driver are more pricey, and you can hail one and get off where you like. They're usually packed like sardines (the answer to how many people you can fit in a taptap is invariably 'one more'), so carrying luggage places you at a disadvantage. Expect a few bruises from the hard bench seats, bouncy roads and sharp elbows.

Taptaps are better suited for short trips, and in many areas are likely to be the only feasible way of getting around. In Port-au-Prince, taptaps run within the city along set routes and are by far the cheapest and easiest way of getting from A to B.

Halfway between a taptap and a bus is the *camionette*. This is a larger truck designed primarily for transporting goods, but which also takes human cargo. Often open sided, or with crude windows cut out of the truck body, these are very cheap and as basic as they come. There are no seats, just a few ropes dangling

from the ceiling for people to hold on to. A foreigner riding in a *camionette* will get such looks of incredulity from a Haitian that it's worth trying one for the response alone. Certainly, don't do it for a smooth ride.

## LOCAL TRANSPORTATION

### Moto-taxi

The quickest and easiest way to get around any town is to hop on the back of a moto-taxi (motorcycle taxi), often just referred to as a 'moto.' As with *publiques* (collective taxis), these have transport license plates, and in some towns the drivers wear colored bibs. A trip will rarely cost more than about 20 gourdes/US\$0.45, although rates can climb steeply if you want to travel any serious distance.

Moto-taxis can have two passengers riding pillion, although it's not recommended. If you have luggage, get the driver to place it between his handlebars, rather than unbalancing yourself with it on your back. Although pot-holed roads don't always allow the bikes to attempt high speeds, many drivers seem to have a fatalist's view of their own mortality, so don't be afraid to tell them to slow down.

### Taxi

Port-au-Prince and Cap-Haïtien operate collective taxis called *publiques* for getting around town. You might find them hard to spot initially, as they look like any other battered car, but look for the red ribbon hanging from the front mirror and license plates starting with 'T' for transport. Once you spot one, they're everywhere. Charging set fares (usually about 25 gourdes/US\$0.70), they roughly stick to particular routes. After you hail a *publique*, the driver will let you know if he's going your way (minor detours are usually fine). The usual tight seating arrangement is two in the front and four in the back.

When you get into an empty *publique*, the driver will sometimes remove the ribbon, indicating a private hire with resulting increased charge. If you want to ride *collectif* (with other passengers), now is the time to let him know. Alternatively, settle the fee before he drives off, not on arrival.

Most major towns have radio-taxi firms with meters.

© Lonely Planet Publications. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'