

Southern Haiti



Haiti's south is all about taking it easy. Pulling out of Port-au-Prince on Rte National 2, the urban hustle is soon replaced by a much more relaxed air and rightly so – you're heading toward the Caribbean Sea.

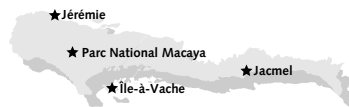
Of the towns strung along the coast, Jacmel is the gem. It's an old coffee port full of pretty buildings, with a chilled yet friendly welcome. Most people take quickly to its charms. Some hit the many handicrafts shops to load up on the painted wood and papier-mâché that the town is famous for. Others try to time their visit for the renowned Carnival festivities, when the whole town seems to turn into a giant masked street party.

Further west, things get pretty sleepy. The town of Les Cayes seems to be permanently in a contented half-yawn, and doesn't seem to mind that visitors prefer to use it as an embarkation point for Île-à-Vache. This island is blessed with possibly Haiti's best beaches and a couple of its nicest hotels. If you can tear yourself away, there are more palm-fringed sandy delights for all budgets in nearby Port Salut.

The southern 'claw' is bisected by the rugged Massif de la Hotte, home to some of the last remaining cloud forest, and the stunning Parc National Macaya. It's a bird-watchers dream, and a visit here can be hugely rewarding, although the logistics are extremely challenging. After a spectacular mountain crossing, the road just about gives up when it reaches the sea at half-forgotten Jérémie, the sometime City of Poets and the most isolated town in Haiti.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shop for handicrafts in **Jacmel** (p324), the south's most charming and laid-back port town
- Groove to the musical beat of *rara* and *compas* during **Carnival** (p322), Jacmel's – and Haiti's – best street party
- Chill out in style on the island getaway and former pirate stronghold of **Île-à-Vache** (p325)
- Bump over some spectacular mountain roads to reach **Jérémie** (p327) on Haiti's isolated southwestern tip
- Make a real expedition by exploring the hard-to-reach cloud forests of **Parc National Macaya** (p327)



JACMEL

pop 40,000

Sheltered by a beautiful 3km-wide bay, the old coffee port of Jacmel is one of the most friendly and tranquil towns in Haiti. Little more than a couple of hours drive south from Port-au-Prince, it's a popular weekend destination for city dwellers, and hosts one of the country's best Carnivals every Lent. But at any time of year, Jacmel is a great place for recharging the batteries.

Part of Jacmel's charm is down to its old town center, full of mansions and merchants' warehouses with a late-Victorian grace poking out from behind the wrought-iron balconies and peeling façades.

If some of the buildings need a lick of paint, Jacmel's artists could hardly be described as slouches. The town is the undisputed handicrafts capital of Haiti, with dozens of workshops producing hand-painted souvenirs, from wall decorations to the elaborate papier-mâché masks produced for the Carnival festivities. It's the birthplace of two hugely influential creative forces, both of whom have created inspiring works depicting the town, the artist Préfète Duffaut, who contributed to the amazing murals of Sainte Trinité Episcopalian Cathedral in Port-au-Prince (p295), and the novelist and poet René Dépestre.

HISTORY

Founded by the French in 1698, the exact origins of Jacmel's name remain a mystery. The Arawak settlement it replaced is believed to have been called Yaquimel, although other sources point to Jacques Melo, an alleged colonial founding father. Either way, Jacmel was a prosperous port by the close of the 18th century, when the town's large mulatto population began demanding equality with the whites. Soon after, Jacmel became an important battleground in the swirl of the Haitian independence struggle, with the mulattoes under André Rigaud initially siding with the colonists against the slave armies. The black general Lamour Derance from Jacmel more successfully led the struggle from the other side, eventually uniting the two sides, although Jacmel again became a center of mulatto power when Haiti split into two following Dessaline's death in 1806.

Jacmel also played a small role in the South American independence movement. Pétion hosted Simón Bolívar here in 1816 when the Venezuelan revolutionary leader was assembling his army, hospitality that Bolívar returned by abolishing slavery after liberating his country.

By the middle of the 19th century, Jacmel served as a major Caribbean loading point for steamships bound for Europe, and many European names can be found on the grave-stones in the cemetery from this time. Jacmel was the first town in the Caribbean to have telephones and potable water, and when the cathedral was lit up on Christmas Eve 1895, Jacmel became the first town to have electric light. The town center was destroyed by a huge fire in 1896 and then rebuilt in the unique Creole architectural style that remains to this day. Port trade, however, began to dry up following WWII and the Duvalier era, leaving the annual Carnival the one time of year when Jacmel truly recreates its glory days.

ORIENTATION

Most people enter Jacmel on Rte National 2 from Port-au-Prince and Léogâne; it is known as Portail Léogâne as it enters town and then turns into Ave de la Liberté, which heads toward the sea. Close to the town center it is met by Ave Barranquilla, Jacmel's second main street, which eventually leads east out of town toward the main beaches, the airport and Marigot. A turning west from Ave de la Liberté along Rue Comedie heads toward Bassins-Bleu.

Jacmel is built on three small hills, with its streets running down to the sea. From Ave de la Liberté, steep lanes lead up to the Place Toussaint L'Ouverture (also sometimes called Place d'Armes). East of the square on Rue de l'Eglise are the Marché de Fer (Iron Market) and the Cathédrale de St Phillippe et St Jacques. Rue St-Anne runs parallel to the seafront, and is where you'll find many of the artisans' shops.

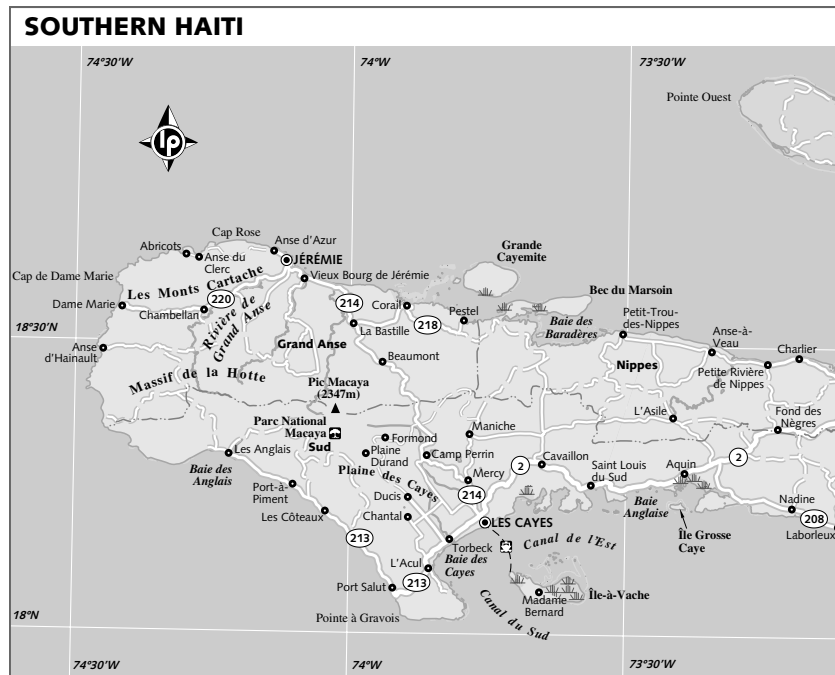
INFORMATION

Emergency

Police (Ave de la Liberté)

Internet Access

Jacmel Cybernet (Ave Baranquilla; per hr US\$1.10; ☎ 7am-10pm Mon-Sat, 9am-10pm Sunday) Has good electricity supply.



Oasis Cybercafé (Ave de la Liberté; per hr US\$0.85; ☎ 10am-10pm)

Medical Services

Hôpital St Michel (☎ 2288-2151; Rue St-Philippe) For emergencies, but not brilliant.

Pharmacie St-Cyr (48 Ave Baranquilla)

Money

Banque Nationale de Crédit (Grand Rue)

Dola Dola (cnr Ave Baranquilla & Ave de la Liberté) Moneychanger.

Philippe Agent de Change (Ave Baranquilla) Changes euros and Canadian dollars.

Unibank (Ave de la Liberté) Gives Visa advances.

Post

Post office (Rue du Commerce; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat)

Telephone

Telemo (Ave Baranquilla)

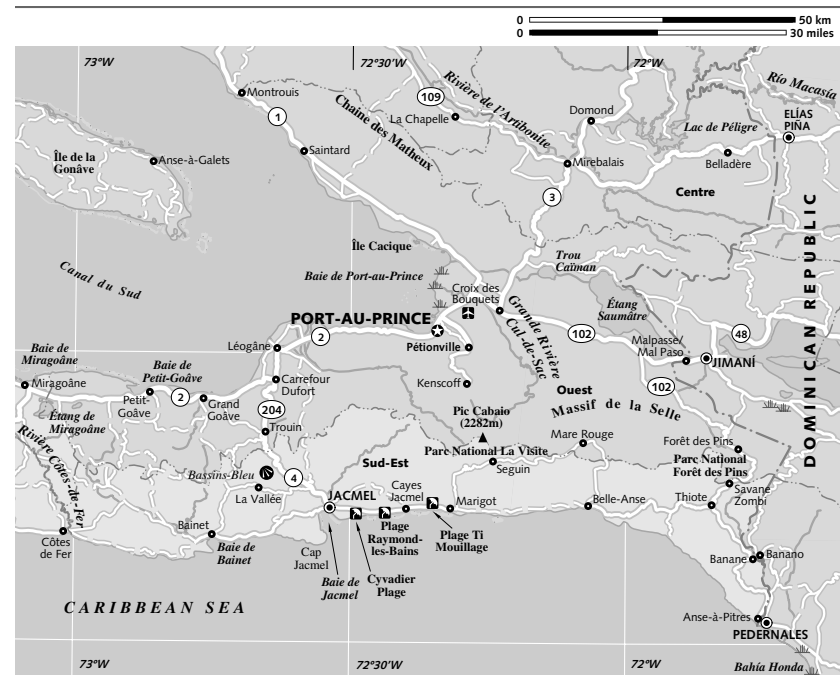
Tourist Information

There are plenty of freelance guides in Jacmel, most of whom you'll find around the entrance to the Hôtel la Jacmélienne sur Plage. They

can organize tours of the *artisanats* (craft workshops) and where the carnival masks are made, as well as arrange trips to Bassins-Bleu (p321). Expect to pay around US\$20 to US\$30 for a full day. One highly regarded English-speaking guide is **Michel Jean** (☎ 3693-3425). **Associations des Micro-Enterprises Touristiques du Sud/Est** (Amets; ☎ 2288-2840; amets_service@yahoo.fr; 40 Rue d'Orléans; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) Has maps of Jacmel, and can arrange car and horse rental. Also arranges homestays with local families.

SIGHTS Old Jacmel

Running parallel to the seafront, Rue du Commerce is the heart of old Jacmel and has many splendid (if slightly run-down) examples of 19th-century warehouses and merchants' residences. Key characteristics are the high-shuttered doors and windows, shaded by wide balconies with filigree railings. Of these, the house of the influential Vital trading family has been turned into the **Hôtel Florita**. At the eastern end of the street are some of the oldest surviving buildings, including the **Customs House** next to



the wharf on Place de la Douane, and the 18th-century **prison**.

The Vital family also owned the **Manoir Alexandre**, between Rue du Commerce and Place Toussaint L'Ouverture, during WWI. This white-and-green building is probably the most famous in Jacmel, once a hotel and the fictional residence of Hadriana Siloé (see boxed text, p321). Other key buildings to look out for are the grand **Maison Cadet** (cnr Ave de la Liberté & Grand Rue), with its red-iron 'witch's hat,' and **Maison Boucard**, near Rue Seymour Pradel, which has an intricate wrought-iron gallery façade.

Near Maison Boucard is the **Salubria Gallery** (☎ 2288-2390; 26 Rue Seymour Pradel; ☎ by appointment), an eclectic gallery in a blue-and-white fin-de-siècle house owned by American professor Robert Bricston. The walls are packed with paintings, even the bathrooms and bedrooms; you trail around the whole house, looking at a collection that includes most of the masters of Haitian art.

East of Place Toussaint L'Ouverture is the red-and-green baroque **Marché de Fer**, built in 1895 as a scaled-down version of the

grand iron market in Port-au-Prince. Closed Sundays, at all other times local produce spills out of every side of the market, jamming the surrounding streets.

The pretty white **Cathédrale de St Philippe et St Jacques** (Rue de l'Eglise) built in 1859 is close to the market. The ostentatious tombs in the rambling **cemetery** at the eastern end of Rue Alcuis Charmant, one block north of Rue de l'Eglise, include those of many early European settlers.

Beaches

The beachfront along Jacmel is sandy but also a little dirty – it's worth making the effort to head a little further out to enjoy more pleasant surroundings. Note that the undertow is especially strong along this coastline and can be fatal; don't venture out too far.

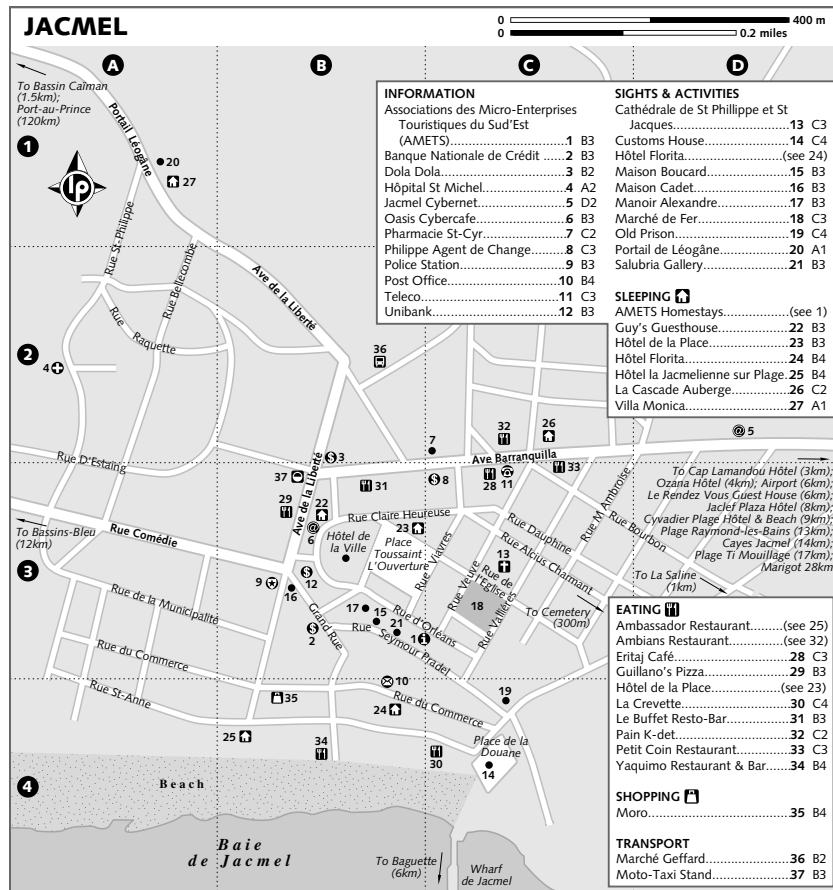
The closest beach to town is **La Saline**, a small cove with crystal-clear water that's a 30-minute walk from the town center past the cemetery (US\$0.40 by moto-taxi). If you're lucky, you might find a fisherman here who'll catch and grill you a lobster and sell you some cold beer to boot. You

can also arrange a lift from here (or from Jacmel's wharf) across the bay to the large sand-and-pebble beach of **Baguette** (30 minutes by boat) where, once you've tired of sun and sea, you can hike up to the ruins of an old French fort.

East of town, there is a succession of fine beaches leading toward Cayes Jacmel village. A taptap (local bus or minibus) heading in the Marigot direction will be able to drop you off at any of them. **Cyadier Plage** is about 10km outside of Jacmel, down a small track leading from the Cayes Jacmel road. The beach is part of the Cyadier Plage Hôtel (see p322). The small half-moon-shaped cove flanked by rocky cliffs has a protected beach, making the undertow less of a problem here.

About 13km from Jacmel and just before Cayes Jacmel lies the very popular **Plage Raymond-les-Bains**. This is another long stretch of sand, with palm trees and mountains as a backdrop. Parking and showers are available, and it can get crowded at weekends, although eating freshly caught seafood here surrounded by holidaying Haitians can make for a great time.

In the small fishing village of **Cayes Jacmel**, about 14km east of Jacmel, the beach spreads a further 3km to **Plage Ti Mouillage**, a gorgeous white-sand stretch fringed with coconut palms. Cayes Jacmel is known for making the rocking chairs seen throughout Haiti, while other artisans make wooden model boats.



HADRIANA DREAMING

Jacmel's most famous resident exists purely in the imaginative hinterland of the Haitian psyche. Hadriana Siloé is the troubled heroine of *Hadriana dans tous mes rêves* (Hadriana in All My Dreams) by Reñe Depestre, one of Haiti's most celebrated novelists.

On her wedding day during Carnival, Hadriana dies at the altar, and her body is displayed at a public wake before burial. But after her funeral she is found to have been turned into a *zombi* (Creole spelling of zombie) and is exhumed by the witch doctor who poisoned her. Hadriana escapes and flees to the mountains where she is mistaken for a freshwater *Iwa* (Vodou spirit), and is invited to seek a new life in Jamaica.

Although the Manoir Alexandre, which served as Hadriana's home, is now closed as a hotel, visitors to Jacmel can still see it – and if you come during Carnival, you might even catch a glimpse of a *zombi* in the procession, although Hadriana herself has long since fled to a happier life.

Bassins-Bleu

Bassins-Bleu is tucked into the mountains 12km northwest of Jacmel, a series of three cobalt-blue pools linked by waterfalls that make up one of the prettiest swimming holes in the country.

The three pools are Bassin Clair, Bassins-Bleu and Bassin Palmiste. Bassin Clair is the most beautiful of the three, deep into the mountain at the bottom of the waterfall, sheltered and surrounded by smooth rocks draped with maidenhair and creeper ferns. You'll undoubtedly share the pool with local kids, who will be initially curious to see you, before encouraging you to go into the small cave behind the falls so they can scream past you as they lunge into the pool from the higher rocks. You're sadly less likely to see the nymphs that according to legend live in the grottoes, although be warned that they've been known to grab divers attempting to discover the true depth of the pool.

Any guide in Jacmel can arrange a trip to Bassins-Bleu, which takes about two hours each way, usually by horse. Expect to pay around US\$20. The road is accessible most of the way by 4WD. Doing the trip without a guide is quite possible, but expect other 'guides' and hangers-on to attach themselves to you.

From Jacmel, walk to the western end of Rue Comédie and follow the road across the river. About 800m beyond the river you'll reach the place where you meet the horse handlers. From here follow the track to the left as it climbs the hill steeply, remembering to take in the spectacular views of the Baie de Jacmel behind you. A hat and sunblock are recommended for the walk. There

is a small hamlet close to the pools where the horses are watered and rested. The self-appointed guardian of the falls normally meets you here and leads you deeper into the woods to the pools (he'll expect a tip of around US\$3 to US\$4). The path is a little uneven, and at one point you must climb down a steep rock face (with carved footholds) by rope. From here, you're ready to dive in.

While the mineral-rich waters of Bassins-Bleu are a delight at most times of the year, it's worth noting that they turn a muddy brown after heavy rainfall, slightly dampening the experience.

FESTIVALS

Jacmel's Carnival celebrations (see boxed text, p322) are famous across Haiti, and people come from across the country and the diaspora to join in the party. The city also hosts two other big festivals worth checking out.

Since 2004 **Jacmel Film Festival** (www.festivalfilmjakmel.com) has been one of Haiti's biggest cultural events. Taking place over a week every November, Jacmel hosts movie screenings by Haitian and international directors as well as film-making workshops. The festival takes place in several venues, including an open-air cinema erected on the wharf.

The first **Jacmel Music Festival** (www.jacmelmusicfestival.com) was held in May 2007, featuring bands from across Haiti and the Caribbean and (if funding permits) was planned to be an annual event. A three-day open-air concert on the beach, the festival helped further cement Jacmel's reputation as Haitian's festival capital.

CARNIVAL IN JACMEL

Every year, thousands of partygoers descend on Jacmel to take part in Carnival, one of Haiti's most fantastic spectacles. At this time, Jacmel turns into one giant street theater, with participants and the audience playing their part, and the whole thing a world away from the sequins and sparkle of Carnival in Rio de Janeiro.

The Carnival season starts its build up on Epiphany (January 6), with events every Sunday leading up to the giant celebrations and procession on the Sunday the week before Shrove Tuesday (it's held a week earlier than other Carnivals so it doesn't clash with Port-au-Prince's party). The streets suddenly swell and everywhere you look are strange figures in fantastical papier-mâché masks – the signature image of Jacmel Carnival. You can see the masks being made and on display in the ateliers year-round. Jungle animals jostle with mythical birds, giant fruit and *Iwa* (Vodou spirits). Mixed in with the procession are celebrants dressed as Arawaks and colonists, and horned figures covered in molasses and soot, who tease revelers with their sticky grab. St Michael and his angels ritually fight the devil, while gangs of *chaloskas* – monsters caricaturing military misrule – growl scarily at the crowds. There's even (an old Carnival favorite, this) a donkey dressed up in peasant clothes and sneakers. Music is everywhere, from bands on organized floats to *rara* (one of the most popular forms of Haitian music) outfits on foot. It's an enormous party. The procession kicks off roughly around noon, with celebrations continuing late into the night.

SLEEPING

Despite its obvious tourist attractions, Jacmel isn't overendowed with hotel beds. Many of the midrange and top-end hotels are actually outside Jacmel, heading out from Ave Baranquilla to Cyvadier Plage. Whatever your budget, if you plan on visiting during Carnival, advance booking is absolutely essential. Unless noted, all hotels listed include breakfast.

Budget

Guy's Guesthouse (☎ 2288-2569, 2288-9646; Ave de la Liberté; s US\$25-40, d US\$40-50, tr US\$55; (P) (B) (Q) (R)) There are invariably a few NGO workers staying at Guy's and it's easy to see why it remains popular. Although bathrooms are shared, everything is kept very clean, the rooms are comfy, and the staff friendly and helpful. Breakfasts are huge, and the restaurant out the front is a good place for lunch or dinner.

Villa Monica (☎ 2288-2380, 3703-5560; Ave de la Liberté; r US\$30; (P)) A homey little guesthouse a few minutes' walk from Marché Geffrard, Villa Monica has fairly basic rooms in a bungalow set in a shady garden. Bathrooms are shared, and there's no breakfast or any food options.

Le Rendez Vous Guesthouse (☎ 3541-3044; Ieren dez_vousrestobar@yahoo.fr; Route de Cyvadier; r US\$35; (P)) Outside the center of Jacmel and opposite the airstrip, you'll find this friendly, simple place. There are nine uncluttered rooms, an open-sided bar-restaurant, and lots of greenery with chickens and ducks pecking about. The man-

ager also has a house to rent that sleeps four (per night US\$200).

La Cascade Auberge (☎ 2288-4197, 3525-6834; cadauberge@yahoo.fr; 63 Ave Baranquilla; r US\$40; (B)) A new guesthouse that's a great deal: the large and spotless rooms have gleaming private bathrooms. The management speaks some English; the only drawback is that some of the rooms don't have external windows, making them a bit gloomy.

Midrange & Top End

Hôtel de la Place (☎ 2288-3769; 3 Rue de l'Eglise; r US\$45; (P) (B)) A pleasant old building overlooking Place Toussaint L'Ouverture, and a popular place to enjoy Carnival. Rooms are modern, although some are a little on the small side; most manage a view. The ground-floor terrace bar seems designed for hours of people-watching.

Cyvadier Plage Hôtel (☎ 2288-3323; www.hotelcyvadier.com; Route de Cyvadier; s US\$61-72, d US\$82-104, tr US\$158; (P) (B) (Q) (R)) Off the main highway, this is the furthest of the beach hotels from the center of Jacmel, but also one of the best. Rooms in a cluster of buildings face the terrace restaurant and out to the private cove of Cyvadier Plage (nonresidents are welcome). Rooms are good, if nothing spectacular, but the whole deal is very professionally run and welcoming.

Jadef Plaza Hôtel (☎ 3757-6818; www.jadefplaza.hotel.com; Route de Cyvadier; s/d US\$65/75; (P) (B) (Q) (R)) A brand-new hotel just outside town trying

to decide if it wants to pitch to the business traveler or the tourist. There's a good range of facilities and a bar, plus conference rooms. Guest rooms are very well sized but a shade characterless, something that's overcompensated for with a reckless love of chintz.

Hôtel Florita (☎ 2288-2805; www.hotelflorita.com; 29 Rue du Commerce; r US\$66; (B)) A converted mansion from 1888, the Florita oozes charm. There are polished floorboards, period furniture and comfy chairs aplenty, while rooms are whitewashed and airy, with mosquito net and balcony. Extra rooms at the back overlook the courtyard garden and are a bit more cramped, but still quite stylish.

Hôtel la Jacmelienne sur Plage (☎ 2288-3541; Rue St-Anne; r US\$75-100; (P) (B) (Q) (R)) Once Jacmel's most celebrated hotel, the Jacmelienne is now sadly a little past its best. The large rooms command good views to sea from their balconies, and although adequately appointed, are in need of some maintenance. The service and restaurant are decent enough.

Ozana Hôtel (☎ 3703-7463, 3542-0487; Rue St Cyr Imp Prophète; r US\$77; (P) (B) (Q) (R)) A bright, clean and very modern hotel, with nice rooms, satellite TV, a restaurant and everything kept spotlessly clean. The drawback? The location, down a long dirt track off the highway, makes your own vehicle pretty much essential.

Cap Lamandou Hôtel (☎ 3720-1436, 3920-9135; www.lamandouhotel.com; Route de Lamandou; r US\$93; (P) (B) (Q) (R)) On the edge of Jacmel but a bit of a hike off the main road, the Cap Lamandou is Jacmel's glitziest hotel. Rooms are immaculate, with wi-fi throughout and all with possibly the best views over the bay in Jacmel. The bar leads onto the central terrace and pool, which has more steps descending to the sea if you're in need of a further dip.

EATING

Hôtel de la Place (☎ 2288-2832; 3 Rue de l'Eglise; mains US\$3-9; (B) 10am-10pm) The menu at this hotel inclines more to Western fast food with a few Creole dishes thrown in, but the main reason to eat here is to sit on the terrace and watch life unfold on the town square before you.

Pain K-det (Ave Baranquilla; burgers, pizzas & sandwiches US\$4-7; (B) 10am-late) Near Rue Veuve, this is a pleasant bar with a good line in sandwiches, ice cream and other snacks. It's a popular hangout, especially on Friday when it has a

happy hour between 7pm and 9pm, and blasts music out of the speakers on its terrace.

Yaquimo Restaurant & Bar (Grand Rue; prices US\$4-10; (B) 11am-11pm) Something of a beach bar, the Yaquimo has a bit of everything, mixing good food with decent music and plenty of drinks. It's a popular place for bands to play at weekends, when there's an admission charge of around US\$6.

Ambians Restaurant (Ave Baranquilla; mains US\$4-11) A bar-resto with a terrace to relax with a drink and take the town's temperature. It has a varied Creole-French menu; the food is good, but can sometimes take a while to materialize.

Le Buffet Resto-Bar (Ave Baranquilla; mains US\$5; (B) 9am-11pm) Typical of the bar-restos along Ave Baranquilla, Le Buffet is a hole-in-the-wall place serving simple but satisfying Creole dishes. Ask what's available that day – usually chicken, *griyo* (pork) or *kabrit* (goat) with plantains, undoubtedly washed down with a cold Prestige and accompanied by a tomato and avocado salad.

Guillano's Pizza (☎ 2288-2695; Ave de la Liberté; pizzas US\$5-15) Part of Guy's Guesthouse opposite (you can equally order and eat in its restaurant), this place does better than average pizzas, coming in very generous sizes.

Petit Coin Restaurant (☎ 2288-3067; Rue Bourbon; mains around US\$7; (B) 12pm-11pm) A cozy little restaurant, with a hint of French bistro. Three tables on a tiny terrace allow you to catch the last of the day's sun and people-spot, before retiring to the interior. The menu is Creole, with a couple of French dishes, all of it tasty.

Eritaj Café (50 Ave Baranquilla; fish US\$7-12; (B) 12pm-midnight) A great new seafood place on the main drag, the Eritaj has a shady courtyard with bright murals on the wall, a chilled atmosphere and a well-stocked bar. Locally caught fish is the order of the day, but there are some interesting pasta dishes also on offer.

Cyvadier Plage Hôtel (☎ 2288-3323; Route de Cyvadier; mains around US\$13; (B) 11am-11pm) The lobster at this hotel-restaurant is worth making a detour for, served up on a terrace that catches a cool sea breeze. There are plenty of other good fish dishes to choose from, although we'd recommend you go easy on the lethal house rum punch.

La Crevette (☎ 2288-2834; Rue St-Anne; mains US\$6-14; (B) 12pm-late) This place has a long covered dining area that overlooks the wharf and sea, so you'll be unsurprised to find seafood playing heavily on the menu. It's particularly

busy at weekends, when locals also come for the cocktails and the dance floor to get the party going.

Ambassador Restaurant (☎ 2288-3451; Hotel la Jacmelienne sur Plage, Rue St-Anne; mains US\$8-14; 🕒 11am-11pm) The Jacmelienne's hotel leans toward the formal, trying to echo Pétionville's finer dining establishments with French gastronomy and a wine list to match.

For self-caterers, the markets in the streets around the Marché de Fer are the place to head for; a local specialty is tiny sweet *ti malice* (bananas). There's plenty of street food around here, too. Between July and January look out for women selling *pisquettes*, tiny fish sautéed in huge numbers.

SHOPPING

Jacmel is a souvenir buyer's paradise. Its most famous output are the papier-mâché Carnival masks, unique to the town, that you can see being made in the months before the festival. More portable handicrafts include hand-painted placemats and boxes, wooden flowers, and models of taptaps, jungle animals and boats. Prices are cheap, starting at a couple of dollars for the smallest items, with a complete absence of hard sell. Most of the shops can be found on Rue St-Anne in the vicinity of the Hôtel la Jacmelienne sur Plage, along with a number of galleries showcasing Jacmel's art scene. One of the better *artisanat*-galleries is **Moro** (21 Rue du Commerce), although it's not the cheapest.

GETTING THERE & AROUND

The airline **Caribintair** (☎ 2250-2531) runs a popular daily flight from Port-au-Prince to Jacmel (US\$80; 15 minutes). The **airport** (☎ 2288-2888; Route de Cyvadier) is about 6km east of town.

Buses to Port-au-Prince (US\$2.70, three hours) leave from the Bassin Caïman station 2km out of town. Some taptaps (US\$3, 2½ hours) also leave from Marché Geffrard, closer to the town center. From either place, transport runs from before dawn until about 5pm, departing when full. The ride along Rte National 4 (Rte de l'Amité) is one of the best roads in Haiti and particularly scenic. At Carrefour Dufort the road joins Rte National 2 to the capital. If you want to travel west, get off here by the Texaco gas station and flag down passing buses before noon, as there are no direct buses from Jacmel in this

direction. Change at Grand Goâve or Petit Goâve if necessary.

A moto-taxi around town costs around US\$0.40. Even trips as far as Cyvadier Plage should give change from US\$1. Taptaps run all day along Ave Barranquilla. **Chery's Taxis** (☎ 2288-3717) has metered taxis, and will do charters to Port-au-Prince for around US\$80.

THE SOUTHWEST

RTE NATIONAL 2

From Port-au-Prince, Rte National 2 runs the length of Haiti's southern 'claw' to Les Cayes. Traffic whizzes through a succession of medium-sized towns along the coast: **Léogâne**, which is known for its distilleries and stone sculptors; **Petit-Goâve**, famous for its sweet *dous macoss* (see boxed text, p285); and the port of **Miragoâne**, its streets brimming over with imported (and often smuggled) goods, home to a large cathedral. The coastal road used to be popular for weekend beach visits from the capital before snarling traffic made the resorts of Côte des Arcadins a more attractive prospect. From Miragoâne the road cuts inlands and heads across the mountains westward to Les Cayes.

If you want to break your journey, Petit-Goâve has one of Haiti's most splendidly eccentric hotels.

Built in 1849 as a residence for Emperor Faustin Soulouque, **Le Relais de l'Emperor** (☎ 3462-3793; cnr Rues Républicaine & Louverture; r US\$65; 🍷) is faded grandeur personified. Rooms are ostentatious, with high ceilings, four-poster beds and huge baths with gold taps in the bedrooms. In the 1970s Hollywood's brightest propped up the bar, while the manager paraded his pet jaguar on a leash. There's a feeling of arriving slightly too late for a really great party, but anywhere else in the Caribbean this would be a boutique hotel to die for.

Buses and taptaps ply the highway all day between Port-au-Prince and Les Cayes.

LES CAYES

Pop 46,000

You'd be hard pressed to find a sense of urgency in Haiti's fourth-largest city, lulled into a sense of torpor by the gentle Caribbean breeze. More popularly known

OK IN AUX CAYES?

According to legend, the term 'OK' was born in Les Cayes. When high-quality rum was exported to the USA, Haitian packers would mark the crates 'Aux Cayes' to note its point of origin. American stevedores, charged with inspecting goods arriving at port, knew the contents would always be top-quality booze, so would let them pass without having to open them up. Thus 'Aux Cayes' was abbreviated as port slang to 'OK,' the word then spreading to the rest of the world through the merchant shipping lanes.

as Aux Cayes, Les Cayes is an old rum port sheltered by a series of reefs that has sent many ships to their graves (its first recorded victim was one of Columbus' ships on his final voyage to Hispaniola). Pirates were another treat, notably from nearby Île-à-Vache (right). John James Audubon, the naturalist and painter, was born here in 1785. Today Les Cayes has little to offer the visitor, although it's a good stopping-off point for other destinations in the south.

Les Cayes is laid out in a grid. Rte National 2 turns into Ave des Quatre Chemins upon entering the town, bisected by Rue Général Marion. Two main roads lead south from here to the town center – Rue Nicholas Geffrard and Rue Stenio Vincent. The former leads to the wharf, while the latter takes you to the main square with its easily spotted Notre Dame Cathedral, a whitewashed copy of the Parisian original.

Sleeping & Eating

There isn't a huge range of sleeping options in Les Cayes. For something fancier, head across the water to Île-à-Vache.

Le Meridien des Cayes (☎ 2286-0331; info@hotelmeridiendescayes.com; 15 Rte National 2; s/d with fan US\$34/48, with air-con US\$58/76; 🍷 🍷 🍷) A fair if slightly bland choice. Rooms vary but are mostly spacious; some face onto the internal courtyard and restaurant, and lack external windows. Staff are brisk rather than friendly, although the restaurant is good, both for the breakfasts and the Creole dinner menu.

Concorde Hôtel (☎ 2286-0079; Rue Gabions des Indigènes; s/d with fan US\$40/47, with air-con US\$45/57; 🍷 🍷 🍷) Centrally located, the Concorde

has two buildings set in large and pleasant gardens. Rooms are slightly quaint but decent enough (those in the main building are nicer), there's a pool, and the manager is very helpful. There's an extra supplement for breakfast.

Cayenne Hôtel (☎ 2286-0770; Rue Capitale; r with fan US\$56, with air-con US\$68-114; 🍷 🍷 🍷) This is the closest thing Les Cayes gets to a beach hotel: the sea is on the other side of the Cayenne's boundary wall. There's nothing wrong here – rooms are standard – but the whole place carries a slightly weary air that makes the prices seem a little on the steep side.

Bay Klub (☎ 2286-0544; Les Cayes wharf; mains around US\$5; 🕒 9am-10pm) Looking out to sea, this is a good place to chill. During the day you're better off sticking to drinks as service is incredibly laid-back; food – *griyo*, *kabrit*, *lambi* (conch) and the like – comes once the sun starts dipping.

Nami Restaurant (☎ 2286-1114; 15 Rue Nicholas Geffrard; mains US\$5-7; 🕒 8am-10pm) This little restaurant is a happy incongruity in Les Cayes, and has some really good Chinese dishes for those whose palettes need refreshing from Creole (which is also served, along with Continental selections).

Getting There & Around

There's a daily flight to Port-au-Prince with **Caribintair** (US\$80, 30 minutes). **Nami** (☎ 2286-9898; 15 Rue Nicholas Geffrard) is the agent for both Caribintair and Tortugair, as well as running the restaurant next door.

Buses and taptaps leave from the area around Carrefour des Quatre Chemins, leaving when full. Port-au-Prince transport is the most common (US\$8, four hours), stopping at Petit-Goâve and Léogâne. Get off at the latter to change for Jacmel, or just before at Carrefour Dufort. Taptaps to Port Salut (US\$1, 45 minutes) are plentiful. To get to Jérémie (US\$10, eight hours), you have to wait for the bus from Port-au-Prince to pass through around mid-morning, or go to Camp Perrin (US\$2, 1½ hours) and hope to get something from there.

Moto-taxis around town cost US\$0.30.

ÎLE-À-VACHE

The so-called 'Island of Cows,' Île-à-Vache lies about 15km south of Les Cayes. In the 16th century it was a base for the Welsh pirate Henry Morgan as he terrorized Santo Domingo and Colombia. Three centuries later

Abraham Lincoln tried to relocate emancipated black American slaves here, but it was a short-lived and ill-provisioned experiment. The island today is scattered with rural houses, plantations, mangroves, the odd Arawak burial ground and some great beaches.

The only accommodation options are two contrasting upmarket resorts, although some islanders in the village of Madame Bernard have been known to rent rooms to foreigners for around US\$10.

Abaka Bay Resort (☎ 3721-3691; www.abakabay.com; Anse Dufour; s/d US\$98/195; ♿ ♿) This hotel must have one of the most fabulous beaches in the Caribbean, a smooth white curve of a bay, met by lush foliage and a series of pleasant bungalows and villas. The atmosphere is laid-back, but the service manages good attention to detail.

Port Morgan (☎ 3921-0000; www.port-morgan.com; Cayes Coq; s/d incl full board from US\$225/420, 2 nights min; ♿ ♿ ♿ ♿) Served by a yacht harbor, Port Morgan is all bright-and-breezy gingerbread chalets with lovely views out to sea. There's a small beach, a really excellent restaurant serving French-influenced cuisine, and various kayaks and other water-sports equipment for rent.

Both resorts include transfers from Les Cayes wharf in their rates and can organize other boat excursions, including to nearby Ilet des Amoreux (Lover's Island). Otherwise, the Île-à-Vache *bateaux-taxi* (water taxi) leaves from the wharf several times daily (US\$2, 30 minutes) for Madame Bernard. Getting around by foot is easy; you can do a pleasant day walk in a loop between the two resorts via Madame Bernard, taking in the viewpoints of Pointe Ouest and Pointe Latanier.

PORT SALUT

An excellent new road leads west from Les Cayes to the spectacular beaches of Port Salut. A one-street town strung for several kilometers along the coast, it's best known as the birthplace of the former president Aristide. The beach is the main reason to come here: kilometers of palm-fringed white sand with barely a person on it, and the gorgeously warm Caribbean to splash around in.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotels are presented in the order they appear on the main road when arriving from Les Cayes. All have their own restaurant unless noted.

Arada Inn (☎ 3754-6956; r US\$28; ♿ ♿ ♿ ♿) The first hotel on the main road, and the cheapest decent sleeping option in Port Salut, there are just five rooms, simply presented but well maintained. Food is available on request, and the beach is a short walk away.

Relais du Boucanier (☎ 3558-01806; s/d US\$70/80; ♿ ♿) You could hardly be closer to the Caribbean in this coral-pink hotel. The waves almost break into the open-sided dining room, while in any of the large and fine rooms you'll be pleasantly lulled to sleep by the sound of the sea.

Hôtel du Village (☎ 3779-1728; portsaluthotelduvillage@yahoo.fr; r with fan/air-con US\$40/65; ♿ ♿) A government-owned hotel comprising a series of chalets, which was getting a facelift when we visited. The results are excellent value – airy rooms nicely turned out, although you're not likely to spend much time in them since the front doors open straight onto the sand.

Auberge du Rayon Vert (☎ 3713-9035; auberge.durayonvert@yahoo.fr; s/d US\$79/112; ♿ ♿) Stylish and immaculate rooms are the order of the day here, with locally made furniture and very modern bathrooms, and the beach seconds away. The restaurant-bar is the best in Port Salut, with a range of seafood and other French-influenced dishes and a good wine list. Very hospitable.

Two new high-specification hotels beyond the Auberge du Rayon Vert were due to open soon after this book's publication, both worth investigating: Creek Bay Hotel, with its own tiny bay, and the Chambres d'Hôtes, which promised to be run on ecofriendly lines.

Chez Guito (mains US\$4-9) Opposite Hôtel du Village, this decent beach bar (albeit sitting on the opposite side of the road) is the place to head for fish and *lambi*, a cold Prestige and a sweet *compas* soundtrack.

Getting There & Around

Taptaps to Les Cayes (US\$1, 45 minutes) leave throughout the day, while moto-taxis zip up and down the length of the town.

CAMP PERRIN

At the foot of the Massif de la Hotte range in lush surroundings en route to Parc National Macaya and Jérémie, Camp Perrin is where the south's good roads give out: from here on it's rough and rocky. The town is little more than two streets with a few shops and bar-restos. It was founded in 1759 by the French,

who left behind a network of irrigation canals. A different watery attraction not to be missed is the beautiful **Saut Mauthurine waterfall** (*les chutes*) with its deep green pool, a 15-minute moto-taxi ride away.

Auberge La Distribution (☎ 2286-0899; Zone Lévy; d with fan/air-con US\$25/40; ♿ ♿) Standing next to one of the irrigation canals, this hotel is better than one might expect for such a small town. There is a number of buildings set in a large and rambling garden, with tidy rooms and a palm-shaded terrace bar and restaurant. It's fairly well signed from the main road.

Taptaps to Les Cayes (US\$2, 1½ hours) leave several times daily, picking up passengers along the main street. Buses to Jérémie usually pass through in the middle of the day.

PARC NATIONAL MACAYA

The 5500-hectare Parc National Macaya contains Haiti's last region of cloud forest, spread across the mountain ridges of the Massif de la Hotte. It has an extremely rich biodiversity, particularly birds and amphibians, with a high number of endemic species. One in every 10 plants is only found inside the park, with orchids notably represented.

The near-permanent cloud cover brings around 4000mm of rain per year, which goes on to water the Plaine des Cayes, Haiti's most productive agricultural region. But Macaya itself is desperately poor, and not immune to the pressures of tree felling for charcoal and land clearance, particularly the largest broadleaf and pine trees, some of which tower 45m high. The Société Audubon Haïti, Haiti's leading conservation organization, is working to promote the long-term conservation of the park. Macaya has a huge future potential as an ecotourism destination, but right now potential is almost all there is, as nothing is easy about organizing a visit.

As well as its biodiversity, Macaya has several potential treks. The most challenging, taking four days there and back, is to the top of Pic Macaya (2347m). You must cross over a 2100m ridge and descend another 1000m before attempting the mountain itself. The trails are barely existent, so a knowledgeable guide and a machete to cut the way are both essential.

The main starting point for entering the park is Formond. The road from Les Cayes is extremely tough, and you'll need a 4WD with high clearance, a couple of spare tires

and at least four hours. Along the way you'll pass the overgrown Citadelle des Platons, one of Dessalines' network of defensive forts built after independence.

If you're planning a trip, we'd advise getting in touch with **Philippe Bayard** (pbayard@societaudubonhaiti.org), president of the Société Audubon Haïti. A good guide based in Camp Perrin is **Jean-Denis Chéry** (☎ 3766-4331), who has worked with many international organizations in Macaya. There is no accommodation, so tents are necessary. As the region is so poor, employing locals to cook or as further guides is a good way of spending money locally – a guide is recommended to help arrange this equitably. Bring food, water purification paraphernalia and wet-weather gear.

JÉRÉMIE

Jérémie, the capital of Grand Anse Département, is about as close to the end of the road as you can get in Haiti. The journey here amply demonstrates its isolation, with a terrible road crawling over the mountains to Les Cayes in rough (albeit truly spectacular) fashion. Once here, it seems to fulfill the cliché of a forgotten tropical port, with abandoned warehouses, little traffic and a sense of torpor in the air – a town whose best days are behind it.

By contrast, Jérémie has a rich history. In 1793 it was the landing point for Britain's short-lived invasion of Haiti. After independence it was a major center for mulatto power, and its inhabitants grew rich on the coffee trade, sent their children to be educated in Paris and wore the latest French fashions. Jérémie was known as the 'City of Poets' for its writers. Its most famous sons are the mulatto general Alexandre Dumas, whose son wrote *The Three Musketeers*, and the poet Emile Roumer. Such heritage is hard to find these days, however. In 1964 the town was the focus of an attempt to overthrow 'Papa Doc' Duvalier, who responded in murderous fashion by ordering the massacre of virtually Jérémie's entire mulatto population of around 400 men, women and children, along with the closure of the port (yet to fully reopen).

Politically and economically isolated, Jérémie is a sleepy, pretty place to spend a few days. There's little to occupy yourself with except soaking in the atmosphere, but there's no rush...

Information

Alliance Française (☎ 2286-6573; 110 Rue Stenio Vincent; internet per hr US\$1.70; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) Excellent internet connection. Also hosts concerts, films and an annual cultural festival every April.

Martha Cybernet (Place Alexandre Dumas, 1st fl; internet per hr US\$1.40; ☎ 9am-8pm)

Soleil Levant (Ave Emile Roumer) Moneychangers inside handy Lebanese supermarket.

Teleco (Rue Eugène Margron)

Unibank (Place Alexandre Dumas)

Sights

The town is centered on Place Alexandre Dumas, with its red-and-white cathedral, inaugurated in 1893, on its western edge. On the eastern side, Rue Stenio Vincent runs parallel to the sea, with many interesting old buildings and coffee warehouses, almost all sadly neglected. Continuing past the grubby beach takes you to Fort Télémargin, a crumbling fort that makes an excellent spot to watch the sunset.

About 5km northwest of Jérémie is the beach of **Anse d'Azur**, a gorgeous sandy bay with several caves that any Caribbean country would envy. A return moto-taxi will cost around US\$3 to US\$4.

Sleeping

There are several insalubrious cheapies on Rue Stenio Vincent near Place Alexandre Dumas. The better hotels are all uphill along Ave Emile Roumer in the Bordès district.

La Patience Hôtel (☎ 2284-6290; Rue Stenio Vincent; s/d US\$25/35) Immediately east of Place Alexandre Dumas, between the street and the sea, this is the best of a gang of unimpressive budget hotels. Reasonably clean, reasonably welcoming and reasonably acceptable for the price.

Hôtel La Cabane (☎ 2284-5128; Ave Emile Roumer; s US\$30-40, d US\$50-60, tr US\$70, incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) A bright and clean hotel. Some rooms are a little small, or maybe they just feel that way because of the ostentatious dark-wood furniture squeezed in. The airy restaurant is decorated with paintings of Jérémie's famous literary and political sons.

our pick Auberge Inn (☎ 3727-9678, 3465-2207; aubergeinn@netscape.net; 6 Ave Emile Roumer; s US\$45-54, d US\$72-84, tr US\$90-108, incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) The decor and welcome make the Auberge Inn feel more like a home than a guesthouse. Very charming, rooms have mosquito nets, the food is excellent, and there's a selection of

books, maps and handicrafts on sale. The only drawback is that bathrooms are shared.

Hôtel le Bon Temps (☎ 2284-9148; hotelbontemps@yahoo.fr; 8 Ave Emile Roumer; s US\$65-75, d US\$100-110, incl breakfast; ☎ ☎ ☎) Next door to the Auberge Inn, this is a modern, well-appointed hotel, run with an efficient smile. The whole place is spotless, although some of the (cheaper) rooms have skylights rather than windows.

Next door to Hôtel La Cabane, the Hotel des Trois Dumas has had good reviews in the past, but was temporarily closed when we visited. When it reopens, expect to pay around US\$40 a head.

Eating

The midrange hotels all have restaurants, but usually demand advance warning if you're eating in.

Chouconne (☎ 2286-6573; 110 Rue Stenio Vincent; meals US\$1.50-7; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-8pm) Located inside the Alliance Française, this small cafeteria-restaurant is a relaxing place to take a meal, and you'll often find yourself striking up a conversation with the students. Food is simple (sandwiches, pasta dishes etc) but tasty.

Chez Patou (Rue Monseigneur Boge; snacks/mains from US\$2/4; ☎ 8am-3pm & 6-9pm) A great place to fill up, this airy red-and-white building has a decent range of sandwiches and burgers, along with hearty servings of Creole standards, spaghetti and the like.

Le Boucanier (Rue Stenio Vincent; mains from US\$5; ☎ 6-11pm) A typical bar-resto, Le Boucanier has a wide-ranging Creole menu, but there are usually only one or two dishes available, typically barbecued chicken or *griyo* (pork) served with plantain and salad.

L'Oasis Restaurant (☎ 2284-4757; mains around US\$7-10; ☎ 6pm-late) Popular with Jérémie's youth, this large restaurant is a lively place at weekends, when the drinks flow and the sound system is cranked up (there's often live music). Expect no surprises from the menu (although the fish and *lambi* are good), but go for the atmosphere. It's located near Rue la Source Dommage.

You can buy fruit, vegetables and bread at the market north of the main square, along Rue Alexandre Pétiou and Rue Monseigneur Boge.

Getting There & Around

Jérémie feels a long way from just about anywhere else in Haiti. The quickest way in and

out is the daily **Tortugair** (☎ 2250-2555) flight from Port-au-Prince (US\$90, 45 minutes). Demand is high, so book as far in advance as possible. The grassy airstrip is 5km northwest of Jérémie.

Buses leave every afternoon for Port-au-Prince (US\$14, 11 hours) from a lot on the southern outskirts. The road gives literal meaning to the Haitian proverb 'After the mountains, more mountains,' and can be treacherous during the rains. Buses stop at all main towns en route, but you'll be asked to pay the full Port-au-Prince fare irrespective of your destination.

A ferry sails from Jérémie wharf every Friday evening to Port-au-Prince (US\$14, 12 hours), although the boat is very creaky and often dangerously overloaded.

Moto-taxis ply the streets, charging around US\$0.40 for most rides (US\$0.60 to the bus station from the town center).

AROUND JÉRÉMIE

About 20km west of Jérémie is the startlingly beautiful cove of **Anse du Clerc**. It's pretty much as far as the road goes and you need a 4WD to get here, although a moto-taxi can just do it if it hasn't rained recently (US\$8.50,

one hour). There's a small village on the pebble beach, and a charming hotel. **Anse du Clerc Beach Hotel** (☎ 2246-3519; per person half-board US\$55) has half-a-dozen thatched bungalows surrounded by lawns and palm trees right on the beach, one of the most picturesque spots in Haiti.

Contrary to many maps, the road does not continue west from here to Dame Marie and Anse d'Hainault.

PESTEL

The pretty port village of Pestel is three hours east of Jérémie along the Grand Anse coast. It's a charming place once you're here, with its French fort, old wooden houses and some of Haiti's most wonderful (and wonderfully untouched) beaches. Until recently Pestel hosted a great **Festival of the Sea** every Easter, with regattas and *rara* bands; plans are afoot to restart it in the near future.

Hotel Louis & Louise (☎ 2284-6191; r US\$35) is a yellow-and-blue gingerbread-style building with cozy rooms and home-cooked food.

The easiest way to get to Pestel from Jérémie is by boat (US\$7), but they're often worryingly overloaded. There's daily transport, but the road is terrible.

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