

Around Port-au-Prince



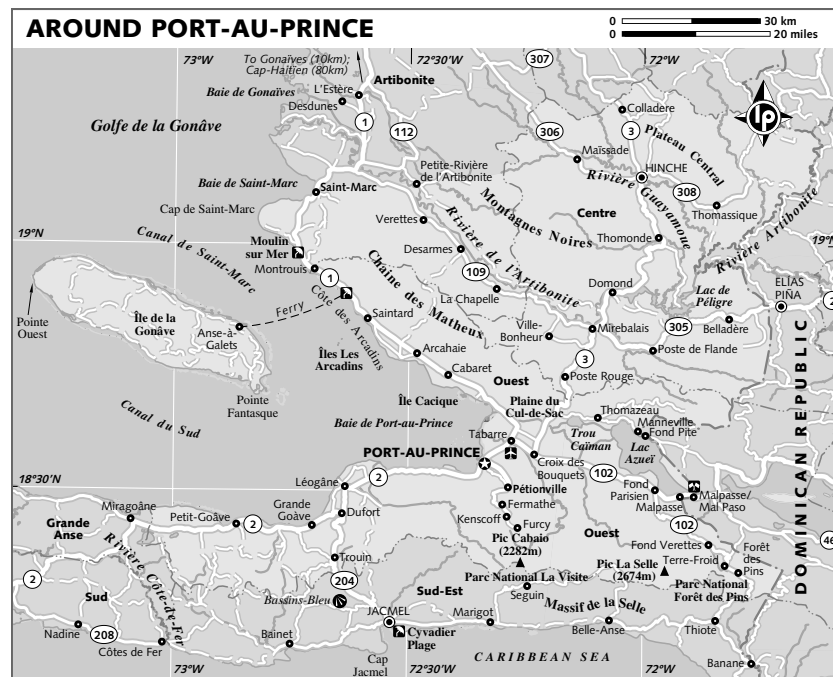
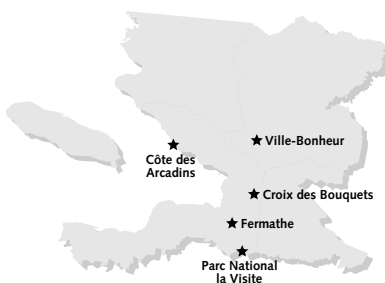
For all its buzz, Port-au-Prince can sometimes be a tiring place to stay. When city life gets too much, it's time to get out of the urban sprawl and recharge your batteries. Whether you want to laze on a beach, hike in pine-clad mountains or buy a piece of art, all options are within easy striking distance of the capital.

As the suburb of Pétionville peters out above the city, the Route de Kenscoff sweeps you up through increasingly dramatic mountain scenery toward the Massif de la Selle. The small town of Fermathe holds a couple of old forts built to safeguard Haiti's precarious independence, with commanding views out to sea. Beyond here, the air cools and the area becomes forested with pines, culminating in Parc National la Visite. This offers some of the best hiking in Haiti – you can even walk halfway to Jacmel from here if you've strong legs.

Down on the flat, the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac east of Port-au-Prince hosts the metal artists of Croix des Bouquets, who turn out beautiful sculptures from scrap iron. The Plaine is also important historically and culturally. A restored sugar plantation gives an insight into the past, while the Barbancourt Rhum Distillery offers a different taste of where the sugar goes. Those of a more spiritual bent may be drawn to Ville-Bonheur, where every summer the Saut d'Eau Vodou pilgrimage draws devotees from across the country. There's bird-spotting (and crocodiles, too) at Lac Azueï nearby. But if that's too much to choose from and you can't decide, take yourself to the Côte des Arcadins, where you'll find plenty of sand and sun lounges at the beach resorts – the only decision you'll need to make there is whether to have that second rum punch before dinner.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Shop for the intricate beaten metalwork from the craftsmen of **Croix des Bouquets** (p311)
- Take in the breathtaking views from Fermathe's **Fort Jacques** (opposite) over Port-au-Prince to the sea
- Hike through the mountain woods and rock formations of **Parc National la Visite** (p310)
- Follow the faithful to the water on the annual Vodou pilgrimage to **Saut d'Eau** (p313), outside Ville-Bonheur
- Catch some rays while lazing on the beaches of the **Côte des Arcadins** (p314)



SOUTH OF PORT-AU-PRINCE

ROUTE DE KENSCOFF

The main road from Pétionville's Place St Pierre winds steeply uphill toward the cool of the mountains. After just a few kilometers you're in a rich agricultural area, with steep terraced fields clinging to the sides of the mountains, and the fog of the city replaced by sweet cool breezes.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Taptaps (local buses or minibuses) leave throughout the day from Pétionville's Place St Pierre to Kenscoff, departing when full (US\$0.30, 30 minutes), and pass through Fermathe. Change at Kenscoff for Furcy.

Fermathe

The small town of Fermathe is 13km above Pétionville. The main attraction is **Fort Jacques** (admission US\$0.70; ☀ sunrise-sunset), erected during the burst of fort-building following

independence in 1804. Well preserved, it was built by Alexandre Pétion and named after Jean-Jacques Dessalines. **Fort Alexandre**, a short walk away but ruined, was named by Pétion after himself. Both protected the Massif de la Selle overlooking Port-au-Prince, and now offer very grand views. The fort is usually locked – a guardian will open it on payment, though he won't help with the kids who try to attach themselves to you as guides. The fort is a 3km walk from the main road – take the sharp uphill road opposite Fermathe's covered market.

Fermathe also has the **Mountain Maid Gift Shop & restaurant** (☎ 8.30am-5pm, closed Sun) located near the entrance to the town. Run as part of the Baptist Mission, it sells crafts and produce from local cooperatives and self-help groups – everything from greeting cards and carvings to jams and cakes (the granola cookies here are famous). The restaurant is more a burger bar-cafeteria joint, but it has good sandwiches and great views. Next door is an interesting **museum** (donation requested; ☎ 8.30am-5pm, closed Sun), with a large and well-labeled array of artifacts

from Haitian history, and a small ethnographic collection. Free English tours are worth taking.

A few doors up from the Mountain Maid shop, **Wings of Hope** (☎ 3449-9942; sjfamilyhaiti@hotmail.com; Fermathe; per person half-board US\$35) is part of the same organization as St Joseph's Home for Boys (p299) in Port-au-Prince. With the same deal and appeal as its partner, it has the advantage of a much more spectacular setting perched above a terraced valley. With three six-bed dorms and one double room, all with private bathroom and balcony to soak up the stunning views, it's an ideal getaway from the city chaos.

Kenscoff

The cool of Kenscoff makes it a popular weekend destination for city dwellers – at 1980m above sea level, it's often referred to as the Switzerland of the Caribbean (there are even a few weird Caribbean-Alpine architectural hybrids). With sweeping views everywhere you look and the brooding cloud-capped backdrop of Massif de la Selle behind you, it's tailor-made for day walks or horseback riding (see Ranch Le Montcel, below). A highly productive area, coffee and vegetables are grown in great quantities here, giving Kenscoff an interesting local market.

Le Florville (☎ 3512-3535; 19 Rte de Kenscoff, Kenscoff; s/d US\$40/60; 📍) is a popular hotel and restaurant on the left as you drive up from Pétionville. There is only a couple of rooms, tidily appointed, but some virtually open out onto the restaurant. Eating here is actually the big draw, with the restaurant's high wooden ceiling and well-set tables serving a mix of French and Creole dishes (mains US\$12 to US\$22). The baby ribs are a particular hit. The outside terrace offers fine views, and at weekends live music frequently livens things up further with the crowds from the city.

Set 9km above Kenscoff, **Ranch Le Montcel** (☎ 3510-4777; www.montcelhaiti.com; Belot-Kenscoff; tent US\$45, s/d/tr US\$60/110/150; 📍 🚰 🚰 🚰 🚰) bills itself at Haiti's only ecotourist hotel. Around 90% of its electricity is generated by wind or solar power, food is locally grown, and recycling and water conservation is encouraged. The ranch is spread over several acres, with delightful Swiss chalets giving tremendous views to sea, and a host of activities, including horseback riding, tennis and wild camping, in the nearby plantations and mountains.

Furcy

To continue to the smaller and even more picturesque village of Furcy, turn left at Kenscoff Commissariat, then right after the fast-food places and continue uphill. Locals will rent out horses here (per hour around US\$3), making it easy to reach the Bassins Bleu waterfall, 1½ hours above the village by foot. Continuing on from Furcy, you reach the entrance to Parc National la Visite, from where you can hike over the mountains to Seguin (below).

Whatever your plans, don't forget some warm clothes – temperatures drop once the sun starts to dip.

A Canadian-style stone-and-wood cottage seems incongruous in Haiti, but the **Lodge** (☎ 3510-9870; www.thelodgeinhaiti.com; Furcy; s/d/tr incl breakfast US\$45/75/90; 📍 🚰 🚰 🚰), set amid the trees, has been finished with a keen eye for details. As well as standard rooms, there are a couple of apartments, some with saunas. The menu (mains from US\$15) makes a big thing of imported dishes like Alaskan king crab, but while the food is excellent, the welcome from staff and management often tends to discourage repeat visits.

PARC NATIONAL LA VISITE

The Massif de la Selle divides Haiti's south-east, a series of spectacular ridges still dotted with pine forest. You can do one of Haiti's best hikes here, a day of trekking that takes you across the western section of the mountains toward the Caribbean. The route traverses four mountains and takes in some truly beautiful terrain, from wooded slopes to almost rolling green hills, as well as lovely views out to sea. Once you reach Seguin you'll find the weird *kraze dan* (broken teeth) rock formations, great slabs of karst jutting up from the ground like so many discarded giant dentures.

A decent degree of fitness is required to do the trek, which usually takes six to eight hours. Take plenty of water and some food, as well as suitable clothing: the altitude ascends above 2000m in places, so there can be strong sun and wind as well as unexpected rain and chill. You won't be always be alone on the trek, however; although this is rugged terrain, the route is also a well-used pedestrian highway, traveled primarily by women on their way to market balancing their produce on their heads. The sight of foreigners walking for fun always seems to raise a friendly smile.

To reach the trailhead, take a taptap from Pétionville to Kenscoff, from where you change for Furcy. From there, you can walk to Carrefour Badyo, then bear left to follow the track to Seguin. By 4WD, you can drive 15 minutes to Badyo, from where you must start hiking. Once at Seguin, you descend to Marigot (a further couple of hours), from where it is a taptap ride to Jacmel (US\$1, one hour). At Furcy it's possible to hire horses with guides, but you'll have to pay for the return trip from Seguin.

In Seguin, the **Auberge de la Visite** (☎ 2246-0166, 257-1579; tiroyd@yahoo.com; r full board US\$50) is a delightful place to rest up after the trek. There are two low stone buildings with cozy rooms and porches, where you can sit in a rocking chair and enjoy views to the Caribbean. The owner is Haitian-Lebanese, a fact further reflected in the food served. The auberge can also arrange guides and horses for further exploration of the area.

EAST & NORTH OF PORT-AU-PRINCE

PLAINE DU CUL-DE-SAC

The fertile Plaine du Cul-de-Sac runs east from Port-au-Prince toward the Dominican Republic. Once the heart of the colonial plantation system, it's of interest to visitors for its metalworking community in Croix des Bouquet, its bird-watching sites at Trou Caïman, and the brackish waters of Lac Azueï, which straddles the border. To the northwest, the road leads into Haiti's central district, where every year the village of Saut d'Eau becomes the focus of a major Vodou pilgrimage.

Croix des Bouquets

An important market town east of Port-au-Prince, Croix des Bouquets is the setting for both one of Haiti's largest livestock markets, and one of its most vibrant art scenes. Although threatening to be sucked in by the capital's inexorable urban sprawl, it has a proud identity of its own, with a strong tradition of Vodou secret societies, such as *zobób* and *bizango*. During the Haitian revolution, the victory of the slave and free black army in the Battle of Croix des Bouquets in

March 1792 was the turning point that allowed the capture of Port-au-Prince.

Every Friday the town is filled with a cacophony of braying cattle, goats, pigs and horses accompanied by the cries of hawkers. The Noialles district is a bigger draw for visitors, home to the *boss fé* (ironworkers), who hammer out incredible decorative art from flattened oil drums and vehicle bodies. It's great fun to wander around and talk to the artisans, who are willing to demonstrate their skills.

SIGHTS

Croix des Bouquet's metal-art tradition was begun by the blacksmith George Liautaud, who made decorative crosses for his local cemetery. In the early 1950s he was encouraged by De Witt Peters, the founder of the Centre d'Art in Port-au-Prince (p296), to make freestanding figures and incorporate Vodou iconography into his work. The result was an explosion of creativity, with Liautaud and his apprentices creating a uniquely Haitian form of art: carved iron. Although Liautaud died in 1991, his legacy is the thriving community of artists in Croix des Bouquets that he originally inspired.

Steel drums are the most common material for the art. Cut in half and flattened, paper templates are laid down and the designs chalked onto the metal. Then begins the laborious task of cutting out with chisels. Once free, the edges are smoothed and relief work beaten out. The smallest pieces are the size of this guidebook; the most gloriously elaborate can stand over 2m. Popular designs include the Tree of Life, the Vodou *lwa* La Siren (the mermaid), birds, fish, musicians and angels.

It's worth spending time in Noailles wandering between **artists' workshops** to get an idea of what different artists are producing. One of the first workshops belongs to Serge Jolimeau, one of Liautaud's apprentices and the current master of the scene. His designs verge on art deco, and are frequently sold in American galleries. John Sylvestre is another imaginative artist, frequently drawing on Haitian folklore for inspiration. Many pieces depict particular *lwa* (Vodou spirits), so don't be afraid to ask about specific meanings.

There's a complete absence of hard sell from the artists, so take your time to browse. The smallest pieces can usually be picked up for US\$3 to US\$4, while the most expensive

pieces from the most celebrated artists can stretch into the hundreds or even thousands.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Taptaps from Port-au-Prince (US\$1, 30 minutes) leave from Carrefour Trois Mains near the airport. Get out at the police post, where the road splits left to Hinche and right to the DR. Take the right-hand road, then turn right at Notre Dame Depot. For Noailles, turn right at the Seventh Day Adventist Church, then follow the sound of hammered metal – a 10-minute walk from the main highway. The main workshops are on Rte Noailles and Rte Remy. Transport to Port-au-Prince leaves from the police post.

Parc Historique de la Canne à Sucre

At the outbreak of the Haitian Revolution, the Plaine du Cul-de-Sac was one of the richest parts of Saint-Domingue. The building of irrigation canals and watermills had turned it into one of the largest industrial centers in the Western world, with a series of huge sugar plantations feeding Europe's sweet tooth, all on the back-breaking labor of tens of thousands of slaves.

The plantation system was largely destroyed in the turmoil that followed independence, and little visible remains of this period. One important sugar mill constructed at the end of the 19th century was built on the site of Chateaublond Plantation and now stands as a **museum** (☎ 2298-3226; Blvd 15 Octobre, Tabarre; admission US\$7; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri, to 5pm Sat & Sun) to the period. Exhibits are mainly open air, surrounded by low colonial buildings that comprised factories and shops. In the grounds there is a collection of sugarcane presses, boilers and part of the aqueduct used to drive the mills. Sitting incongruously among such neatly clipped surroundings, there's also a train for the narrow-gauge railway laid to carry sugarcane to the factories.

The park is also a popular outdoor venue for music concerts.

Barbancourt Rhum Distillery

In such a rich sugar-producing area, it should be no surprise that Plaine de Cul-de-Sac is also home to Barbancourt, Haiti's most celebrated rum. Over 600 hectares of sugarcane from 200 local growers is used to produce the rum. After fermentation, the rum is aged in oak barrels from Limousin in France to give

it its distinctive flavor. The best Five Star rum sits patiently for 15 years before it's ready.

Group tours of the **Barbancourt Rhum Distillery** (☎ 2250-6335; www.barbancourt.net; Damien, Plaine du Cul-de-Sac) are available by prior arrangement. As well as seeing the process from cane cutting to bottling, there's also plenty of opportunity for tasting and buying, including some unusual blends hard to find elsewhere, like mango and coffee. The rum punches are, unsurprisingly, excellent.

Ville-Bonheur

An otherwise unprepossessing town, Ville-Bonheur becomes the focus of Haiti's largest Vodou pilgrimage every July 16. True to form, elements of Catholicism and Vodou have been blended to produce something uniquely Haitian (see boxed text, opposite).

During the pilgrimage the area around the Church of Our Lady of Mt Carmel is turned into a huge campsite for pilgrims. The few guesthouses are inundated. A decent option is the bright and clean **Hotel Villa Marie Robenson & Georges** (☎ 2245-2212; www.sautdeauinfo.com; Rue Clerveaux, Saut d'Eau; r US\$40; P ☎ ☎), in the town center. Alternatively, there is accommodation in nearby Mirebalais. The **Wozo Plaza Hôtel** (☎ 4455-07730; wozoplazahotel@yahoo.fr; Rte Nationale 3, Mirebalais; s/d incl breakfast US\$70/100; P ☎ ☎ ☎) on the outskirts of town gets consistently good reviews for its service.

Buses and taptaps leave from Estacion Mirebalais in Port-au-Prince (US\$2.50, 2½ hours) between Grand Rue and the cathedral, at the junction of Rue de Fronts Forts and Rue du Centre. Taptaps run throughout the day between Ville-Bonheur and Mirebalais (US\$0.30, 45 minutes).

Trou Caïman

The best place to see waterbirds in Haiti is northeast of Croix des Bouquets, off the main road to the Plateau Central. Also known as Eau Gallée by locals, Trou Caïman is a large marshy lake surrounded by rice plantings and saltbush flats. The name literally means 'crocodile hole,' although the scaly inhabitants have long since been hunted out. The lake is home to a resident colony of at least 150 greater flamingos, seven species of heron, beautiful bronze-gold glossy ibis and uncommon ducks, such as white-cheeked pintails and fulvous whistling ducks. From September until April the area hosts many visiting shore-

SAUT D'EAU VODOU PILGRIMAGE

In 1847 a vision of the Virgin Mary appeared in a palm tree in Ville-Bonheur, and began to draw pilgrims who were convinced of its healing abilities. A church was built on the site, but local devotees soon linked it to the nearby waterfall of Saut d'Eau, which was sacred to Erzuli Dantor – the *Iwa* (Vodou spirit) often represented as the Virgin. As a result, both Catholic and Vodou adherents now make the pilgrimage in huge numbers to spiritually cleanse themselves. A Catholic Mass is said in the church and a statue of the Virgin Mary is carried around town. The white of the Vodou adherents is augmented by the red and blue colors of Erzuli. People can be seen holding up photos of loved ones to be healed, or passports praying for US visas. Vodou pilgrims then trek the 4km to the Saut d'Eau waterfalls, a series of shallow pools overhung by greenery, where they bathe in the sacred waters, light candles and whisper requests to those adherents lucky enough to become possessed by Erzuli herself.

birds and the raptors that hunt them, such as the low-flying merlin falcon.

To get there from Port-au-Prince, drive to Croix des Bouquets and bear left at the main intersection by the police post. Continue toward the main church and turn left onto Rue Stenio Vincent, the start of Rte Nationale 3, to Mirebalais and Hinche. Continue several kilometers across the dry plains. Just before the road begins to climb up into the mountains, turn right on the dirt track to Thomazeau. This leads to the northern edge of the lake, where local villagers will eagerly offer to arrange a boat trip. Taptaps travel irregularly from Croix des Bouquets to Thomazeau.

Lac Azueï

Also called Étang Saumâtre (Brackish Pond), the intense blue Lac Azueï is Haiti's largest lake and, as its name suggests, a slightly salty one. It stretches into the DR, and until end of the 19th century was used as an important trade route between Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo. Today the lake is an important center for wildlife, home to over 100 species of waterfowl. Colonies of pink flamingos are its most emblematic sight, along with a small population of caimans that can sometimes be seen basking on the shores. Fishing is also popular, due to introduced species like tilapia.

The southwest edge of the lake is bound by savannah, and is skirted by the road from Croix des Bouquets to the border crossing at Malpasse – a very picturesque drive. Bird-spotters should head to the northern shores, however, at Fond Pite. Also nearby at Manneville is a cold freshwater spring that empties into the warm lake waters. A sandy beach here is ideal for swimming.

You get to Lac Azueï from Port-au-Prince via Croix des Bouquets. To reach Manneville, take Rte Nationale 3 toward Mirebalais, turning east to Thomazeau. Manneville is a further 6km. There are occasional taptaps to Thomazeau, with the possibility of onward moto-taxis to Manneville, although a 4WD is recommended (allow 1½ hours from Port-au-Prince).

Any transport from Port-au-Prince to the Dominican border will be able to drop you on the southern shore at Ganthier or Fond Parisien. At Ganthier, huge numbers of pilgrims climb the Kalvé Mirak (Calvary Miracle) hill here every Good Friday to retrace the Stations of the Cross, one of the largest religious gatherings in the region.

Parc National Forêt des Pins

When you're sweltering in Port-au-Prince, the idea of cool mountain pine forests can seem a world away, but driving three hours east to the Massif de la Selle near the Dominican border can have you pleasingly reaching for another layer to ward off the cool.

The road is very poor as it winds up the mountains, but the views are spectacular. Sadly, it's also a textbook illustration of deforestation and erosion; many towns beyond Forêt des Pins are regularly damaged during hurricanes. Large-scale logging persisted here until the early 1980s, and although it's nominally protected under law, cutting for wood and charcoal continues to be a problem.

From Fond Parisien on the Croix des Bouquets–Dominican Republic highway, the road turns south. It's a 50km drive to the village of **Fond Verettes** (which has its market day on Tuesday), and as the road climbs the climate gets colder and mistier. Four

hours' drive from Port-au-Prince, the park entrance is just beyond the suitably named village of Terre-Froide. A checkpoint for the **Ministry of Agriculture, Natural Resources and Rural Development** (MARNDR; ☎ 2250-0867) is here. There is no entrance fee to the park. Just past the entrance there is a cluster of basic cabins (per person US\$11). Prebooking with MARNDR is advisable, and you should be self-sufficient down to your (warm) bedding. The village of Forêt des Pins is a short walk beyond the cabins and has an interesting Saturday market.

The park is perfect for hiking. The denser parts of the forest are cool and tranquil, with birdsong and sunlight filtering through the trees. Good hikes from the park entrance include the gentle 5km walk to Chapotin, from where views stretch to the sea and to Lake Enriquillo in the Dominican Republic, or the stiff climb to Do Gimbi ridge for more fantastic views of the mountains, forest and sea (around four hours' walk round-trip). You'll meet plenty of locals on the tracks along both routes, so you shouldn't get lost.

CÔTE DES ARCADINS

From Port-au-Prince, Rte National 1 stretches north along the coast before switching inland toward Gonaïves and Cap-Haïtien. The deforested Chaîne des Matheux mountains descend almost to the sea here, looking out toward Île de la Gonâve, Haiti's largest island. The coast itself is named for the Arcadins, a trio of sand cays surrounded by coral reefs in the channel between the mainland and Gonâve.

The first main town after leaving the capital is **Cabaret**, 'Papa Doc' Duvalier's modernist construction built to order as a symbol of his regime, and ruthlessly satirized for its pretensions in *The Comedians*. The futuristic (and unused) cock-fighting stadium on the main road is the main relic of this time; instead look out for the merchants selling local *tablet* (peanut brittle) to passing vehicles for US\$0.30 a bag – it's delicious. Just beyond is **Archaïe**, where Dessalines created the Haitian flag in 1804 from the rags of the Tricolor.

Beyond Archaïe are the beach resorts. The beaches themselves aren't too inspiring, but offer safe, shallow swimming and snorkeling in clear water. During the week they're almost completely deserted but on weekends they come alive with visitors from the capital, and it's worthwhile booking accommodation in advance (although there are rates for day

visitors). The coast also has Haiti's best diving sites and one of the largest underwater sponges in the world. Kaliko Beach Club can arrange dives (for details, see below).

The **Plage Publique** (Km 62, Rte National 1; admission US\$1) is tucked in between the Kaliko Beach Club and Wahoo Bay. There are basic facilities, food sellers, sound systems and booze – it's a great picture of regular Haitians at play.

North of Montrouis, at Moulin sur Mer, is the **Musée Colonial Ogier-Fombrun** (☎ 2278-6700; Km 77, Rte National 1; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm) in a restored colonial plantation and sugar mill. It's definitely worth a look: there's an eclectic collection of exhibits, from a reconstruction of a colonist's room to slave shackles. At the entrance is a framed letter from Toussaint Louverture to the present owner's ancestors. Official opening hours are optimistic, however – if you visit during the week, you'll probably have to ask for it to be opened.

Sleeping & Eating

Beach hotels are the order of the day along the Côte des Arcadins, and are listed here in order of their distance from Port-au-Prince.

Kaliko Beach Club (☎ 3513-7548; www.kalikobeachclub.com; Km 61, Rte National 1; s/d full board US\$110/150, day pass US\$25; 📶 📺 📺 📺) A modern all-inclusive-style resort, with a series of linked pools and cute octagonal bungalows set amid shady grounds. There are various water-sports options along the pebbly beach. Also based at Kaliko, **Pegasus** (☎ 3624-9486/9411/4775; nicolemarcelinroy@yahoo.com) can arrange diving charters for qualified divers.

Wahoo Bay (☎ 2298-3410; www.wahobaybeach.com; Km 62, Rte National 1; s/d from US\$65/80, ste US\$130; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Set in lush gardens and skirting a sandy beach, Wahoo wears a slightly more laid-back air than its neighbors. Rooms are decent, and there's the expected complement of restaurant, bar, pool and water sports. It's a long walk down to the beach, though, so don't expect waiter service.

Ouanga Bay (☎ 2257-6347; ouanga@hotmail.com; Km 63, Rte National 1; r incl breakfast US\$77; 📶 📺 📺) A relatively small hotel, but with a cute and immaculate beach and breezy rooms. The palm-thatched restaurant extends over the water, making it an ideal place to laze over fresh seafood (mains US\$12 to US\$16) and watch the boats go by.

Moulin Sur Mer (☎ 2222-1918; www.moulinsumer.com; Km 77, Rte National 1; s/d full board US\$100/160, day

AN AMERICAN KING IN HAITI

Barren Île de la Gonâve has always been set slightly apart from the mainland. A refuge for Taínos from the Spanish and for runaway slaves from the French, it was on its reefs that the ghost ship *Marie Celeste* was abandoned in 1884. But the island's strangest story came with the US occupation in 1915, when a Polish-American marine sergeant named Faustin Wirkus was appointed administrator of the island. Popular with the locals, he came to be seen as the reincarnation of Emperor Faustin Soulouque, who ruled in the mid-19th century. At his police station he was crowned King Faustin II with great ceremony, and decorated with hummingbird and macaw feathers. He ruled to local acclaim for four years until 1929, when he was faced with an army transfer; he resigned his commission and left Haiti for the more prosaic occupation of bond broker. Wirkus wrote a regal memoir, *The White King of La Gonave*, and died in 1945.

A daily ferry crosses to Île de la Gonâve from a jetty 500m north of Ouanga Bay hotel (US\$6, one hour), departing early in the morning for the port of Anse-à-Galets and returning late afternoon. There's a very basic hotel here and not much else, but some good beaches on the west side of the island.

pass US\$9; 📶 📺 📺 📺) This charming large complex was undergoing extensive renovations when we visited. Rooms nearest the beach had been 'gingerbreadized,' while those further back leaned more toward a Spanish hacienda style. Both are well appointed, and are augmented by a pool, beachside **Boucanier** (mains US\$10-18) seafood restaurant, and gardens full of sculptures. The Musée Colonial Ogier-Fombrun is in the same grounds, a (complimentary) golf-buggy ride away.

Club Indigo (☎ 3442-9999; www.clubindigo.net; Km 78, Rte National 1; s/d US\$121/176, day pass US\$35; 📶 📺 📺 📺) Everything at this former Club Med hotel is bright and breezy, with huge grounds and whitewashed buildings centered on the pool and restaurant-bar area. The beach is lovely, and a good job, too, as you'll only want to sleep in the frankly tiny rooms. At weekends Club Indigo heaves with UN Stabilization Mission for Haiti (MINUSTAH) staff and Port-au-Prince's hip set.

Xaragua Hôtel (☎ 3510-9559; Km 80, Rte National 1; s/d full board US\$71/128; 📶 📺 📺) Big rooms

all offer sea views here. Rates are very reasonable, so you can happily ignore the tired 1970s architecture and decor inside. Instead, look to the pool terrace and the beach. The hotel is owned by a local aid organization, and all profits go toward running five rural hospitals in Haiti.

Cabaret and Montrouis are good places to stop if you want to buy cheap eats, where there are food stalls selling fruit, pâté, beans and rice along the roadside.

Getting There & Away

By public transportation from Port-au-Prince, catch a bus or taptap to Gonaïves or Saint-Marc (US\$3.50, 2½ hours) from Estation O'Cap beside the Shell gas station, at the confluence of Blvd Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Grand Rue) and Blvd La Saline in Port-au-Prince, and advise the driver where you want to be dropped. Return transport is a lot more hit and miss, as you're reliant on flagging down passing buses – don't leave it too late in the afternoon.

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