

INFORMATION ABOUT HAITI

History of Haiti

Knowing a bit about Haiti's tumultuous history can help put the nation's current struggles into context. A few key primers can go a long way towards appreciating the culture and political climate. Below are a few suggestions:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Haiti

<http://thelouvertureproject.org/wiki/>

Current Conditions in Haiti

Haiti was already, in many ways, a troubled nation pre-earthquake. In the first year after the earthquake, Haiti took on a number of new and quite devastating problems. The largest impact of the earthquake, for relief purposes, was massive population displacement. Over one million people lost their homes, making them internally displaced persons (IDPs). Because of the influx of international aid, IDP camps became a draw for people in surrounding provinces, causing already burgeoning camps to overflow with people seeking help. As with any overpopulated, poorly facilitated area, ongoing sanitation issues continue to beget tremendous public health problems, such as cholera and typhoid. Currently the focus is on sustainable development through workforce job training, community impact groups that are learning to care for and maintain their neighborhoods on their own, and housing that is safe, low cost, efficient and healthier to live in.

Weather

The weather in Haiti can generally be described as "very, very hot," especially during the summer months. During the rainy season from March to November, refreshing downpours occur most evenings. There can also be tropical storms or hurricanes. Evenings remain pretty warm, but you may want to sleep with a sheet and a light blanket.

Travel and Health Precautions

Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for Health Information for Travelers to Haiti. Please see your doctor before departing for Haiti. S/he should provide you with all relevant medical information, including inoculations and medication to stay safe while in-country. For over-the-counter medicine recommendations, see the "packing list" list within this document.

Transportation

Transportation around Haiti comes in three main forms: motos, taxis, "tap taps," and buses. Buses are large and usually open, tap taps are modified small bed pickup trucks and motos are motorcycles or scooters.

Money

The currency in Haiti is the Gourde, with a rate of approximately 40 Gourdes to 1 USD. Many prices are given in "Haitian Dollars." One Haitian Dollar equals five Gourdes. If a merchant quotes a price of "five dollars," one would clarify that they mean Haitian Dollars, and then multiply the number by five to calculate Gourdes.

1 Haitian Dollar = 5 Gourdes = about 13 cents US.

Regarding money to bring with you, you will want to bring enough USD to cover at least 2 weeks. It is also a good idea to bring small bills as many Haitian have a hard time making change for a \$20 bill. It is also recommended that you have undamaged bills, some of our team has been hassled for having damaged or torn bills. This can be calculated at approximately \$5USD per day for additional luxuries such as entertainment and drinks. Having money changed from USD to Gourde is an easily accomplished task. If you are staying longer than 4 weeks, please make sure you have a way to transfer money, either through an ATM (please contact your bank to verify overseas ATM usage charges) card or through Western Union.

ARRIVING IN HAITI

Haiti's international airport is Toussaint Louverture in Port-au-Prince. After landing at the airport, your passport will receive an entry stamp and you will turn in your customs form (which you will receive at some point during the flight). This is the point at which you will have to have your travel sheet ready with our address on it. If you are staying at Haiti Communiterie, your local address is: **19 Rue Pelican/Clercine 4, Port-au-Prince**. If you are staying at Hotel Oloffson, your local address is: **Ave Christophe #60, Port au Prince**.

You do not need to worry about a visa before arrival, although you do need to register with your embassy prior to your travel date. Those staying three months or more can obtain a visa from within the country. Proof of a return ticket is also not required for entry. The arrivals terminal at Port-au-Prince is remarkably hectic, with only two luggage conveyors for all flights. Unless you're completely over encumbered with luggage, politely decline any offers to help you carry your luggage. (If you do allow someone to carry your luggage at any point in the process, please be prepared to pay them in US dollars and no more than \$2). Once you have retrieved your luggage, walk outside the terminal building and turn right. Proceed down the long path towards the car park area where you will see a crowd of people waiting for arrivals; this is where your pre-arranged driver will be waiting to pick you up.

If for any reason you don't see us immediately, please wait and have a seat in the shaded, covered area and stay calm. There are people walking around with cell phones which can be used for a small fee (US dollars or Gourdes). If you need to make a phone call, the word for phone is the same as English: just say "telephone" to someone in uniform. To reach Haiti Communiterie call **509 3856-2196**, to reach Project HOPE Art call **509-4774-7034** to reach Hotel Oloffson call **509 2223-4000** and someone will be able to help you. After we have found each other, we will meet with a taxi driver and he will take us back to the base for a \$10 USD fee. We have found this to be the best way to get our new volunteers back to the base. Please make sure you have the fee somewhere that is easily accessible.

Communication and Electronics

Many places in Haiti have electricity and WiFi available 24-7, including Haiti Communiterie & Hotel Oloffson. If you want to bring your laptop or other electronic devices, please do so, but be aware that you are responsible for the care and tracking of all of your items. Haiti runs standard American 110v plugs, so if you're coming from a 220v area, please ensure your devices are dual voltage.

When contacting family we suggest that you consider using email and Skype. Otherwise, locally-purchased cell phones can call the States for fairly inexpensive rates. A Haitian Cell phone can be purchased with SIM card for around \$20 USD at the airport, and then be topped up with minutes purchased on the street. We can assist you with this upon arrival.

PACKING LIST

The following are strongly suggested basics. Remember you will be living with us during your stay, which means you will want to be comfortable, so don't minimize to a point where you are unhappy. Essential / required (please make sure you bring all of these!):

1. Passport and copy of passport
2. Cash (US dollars)
3. Mosquito net
4. Headlamp/torch
5. Insect repellent
6. Personal first aid kit
7. Towel
8. Toiletries
9. Water bottle
10. Sunscreen
11. Sunglasses
12. Hat
13. One pair of long pants
14. Shorts/skirt/dress (keep in mind that when going out into the community, it is sometimes a good idea for legs to be covered up down to the knee)
15. Sandals/flip flops
16. Rain jacket
17. Rechargeable batteries (and chargers) for any portable electronics, including headlamp/torch
18. Any medications you require for the length of your stay (consult a travel clinic doctor for Haiti-specific medications)
19. Anti-bacterial hand sanitizer

Optional:

1. Your favorite dry foods
2. Comfort foods to share!
3. Camera
4. Earplugs (communal living means these are highly recommended if you are a light sleeper)
5. Books
6. Laptop
7. Surge protector (the electricity here surges quite a bit and can easily fry electronics)
8. Any other clothing you might want

WISHLIST

If you have extra room in your bags, there are tools and materials that we are unable to source in Haiti. Please check our online wish list, if you're interested in bringing some of these items and let us know so we can mark it off the list.