

## Haiti: Culture, Tips, and Facts



### About Haiti

- Haiti is located in the Atlantic Ocean, approximately 50 miles southeast of Cuba and 565 miles southeast of Florida.
- Haiti occupies the western third of the Caribbean Island of Hispaniola, shared with Dominican Republic, and is about the size of Maryland.
- The Republic of Haiti is the poorest and most densely populated country in the Western Hemisphere.
- Although French is the official language of Haiti, since it was founded as San-Dominique, only 10% of the population actually speaks the language. Haitian Creole is spoken by all Haitians and is considered the unofficial language of Haiti.
- Due to violence and AIDS, Haiti has the highest percentage of orphans of any country in the Western Hemisphere. Before the 2010 earthquake, the United Nations estimated there were 430,000 orphans.
- The population of Haiti is approximately 10.98 million.
- In January 2010, a powerful earthquake devastated the capital city of Port-au-Prince and much of the surrounding area. The quake killed an estimated 200,000 people and left more than one million homeless. This natural disaster further weakened Haiti's already fragile infrastructure and compounded the country's orphan crisis.
- Approximately 59% of the population lives on less than two dollars a day.
- Economic and political instability, as well as a number of natural disasters have plagued the country since its founding with the result being chronic poverty, lack of necessary infrastructure, and many other significant problems.

### Cultural and Travel Tips

- Avoid the temptation to point your camera at the poverty you will encounter. First, take it in and observe the world you've entered into. Second, remember these are people's homes and lives. Haitians are proud people, and sensitive to how their image is conveyed to the world.

- Learn a few greetings in the local language of Creole and respectfully greet people you meet. This allows people to see you're trying to understand the nation and the customs, and that you've done your homework.
- It's important to have a good supply of sunscreen and heavy-duty quick spray-on mosquito repellent.
- When it comes to money, the best thing is to carry US dollars in cash (\$10's and \$20's) and ideally new, fresh bills. Haitian currency (Gourdes) is not convertible, so plan to take out or convert Haitian currency only as you need it, so you are not left with a bunch at the end of your trip. If you need Haitian currency, Back2Back staff in Haiti can help you.
- Clothing: It is important to respect the Haitian culture and the children we serve by dressing appropriately. We do not want to stand out more than we already do! Therefore, please follow these dress code guidelines:
  - For women: All shorts must be knee length, NO running shorts. Dress/skirt for church. NO sleeveless shirts
  - For men: Pants are more culturally appropriate. Shorts must be around knee length. Collared shirts and long pants for church.
  - Women must wear one piece bathing suits at our compound swimming pool.
- Safe, filtered drinking water is always available on campus and during work projects.
- Electricity is the same as the U.S. Please use the power strips and surge protectors provided on campus for charging US devices.