



DESTINATION HAITI



The world's first black-led republic and first Caribbean state to achieve independence, Haiti is now a country that has suffered through decades of poverty, environmental degradation, violence, instability and dictatorship, which has left it as the poorest nation in the Americas.

Facts at a Glance

Full Name:	Republic of Haiti
Population:	8,308,504
Area:	10,714 sq. miles
Government:	Republic
Capital:	Port-au-Prince
People:	Black 95%; Mulatto and White 5%
Language:	Creole and French (both official)
Life Expectancy:	51 years (men), 52 years (women)
Literacy Rate:	53%
Religion:	Roman Catholic 80% Protestant 16% (Baptist 10%; Pentecostal 4%; Adventist 1%; other 1%) Other 3% None 1% Note: roughly half the population practices Voodoo
Monetary Unit:	Gourde

Geography/Weather

Haiti, in the West Indies, occupies the western third of the island of Hispaniola, which it shares with the Dominican Republic. About the size of the state of Maryland, Haiti is two-thirds mountainous, with the rest of the country marked by great valleys, extensive plateaus and small plains. Temperatures range from 58° to 95°, averaging 85°. The average rainfall per year is 50 inches.

People

Haiti's population is concentrated most heavily in urban areas, coastal plains and valleys. Sixty percent of the population lives in rural areas. About 85% of Haitians

are of African descent with the rest of the population mostly mixed Caucasian-African. French is one of two official languages but it is spoken by only about 10% of the people. All Haitians speak Creole. English is increasingly used as a second language among the young and in the business sector.

The dominant religion is Roman Catholic though increasing numbers of Haitians have converted to Protestantism through the work of missionaries active throughout the country. Much of the population also practices voodoo, recognized by the government as a religion in April 2003. Haitians tend to see no conflict in these African-rooted beliefs coexisting with Christian faith.

Although public education is free, the cost is still quite high for Haitian families who must pay for uniforms, textbooks, supplies, etc. Only 65% of primary school-aged children are actually enrolled and at the secondary level, the figure drops to 20%. Less than 35% who enter will complete primary school. Though Haitians place a high value on education, few can afford to send their children. Money from Haitians living abroad is important in paying for these costs.

Large-scale emigration, primarily to the U.S—also to Canada, the Dominican Republic, The Bahamas and France—has created what Haitians refer to as the Tenth Department or Diaspora. About one of every eight Haitians lives abroad.

Government/Economy

Haiti has suffered through brutal dictatorships, military uprisings, economic sanctions, electoral irregularities and ongoing extra-judicial killings. A bloody rebellion forced President Aristide out of the country in 2004. Since then an elected leadership has taken over and in February 2006, Rene' Preval was elected president and took office in May 2006. Mr. Preval says he wants to tackle social inequalities and to create jobs. He has visited potential donor countries in pursuit of aid.

Haiti remains the least-developed country in the Western Hemisphere and one of the poorest in the world. Social and economic indicators show Haiti falling behind other low-income developing countries. About 80% of the population lives in abject poverty. Furthermore, the infrastructure has all but collapsed and drug trafficking has corrupted the judicial system and police.

Haiti is ill-equipped to deal with the aftermath of tropical storms. Severe deforestation has left it particularly vulnerable to flooding.