

# **HAITI ORIENTATION BOOKLET**



MISSION TO  
  
HAITI

## **Mission to Haiti Canada**

### **Introduction**

We're excited about your interest in Haiti. This handbook is intended to help you plan and prepare for your participation on a mission team. Your willingness to spend time, energy and resources in the country of Haiti is greatly appreciated and valued. This visit which will last between one and two weeks has the potential to create lasting changes in your life and more importantly in the lives of the people of Haiti. Not only does the team go there to engage in construction, child sponsorship initiatives, and providing medical care, we look to empower the people by displaying a Christ-like love to them and to each other. As we work side by side with the Haitian people we suggest that you seek out and build friendships; these friendships are often very meaningful, deep and long lasting.

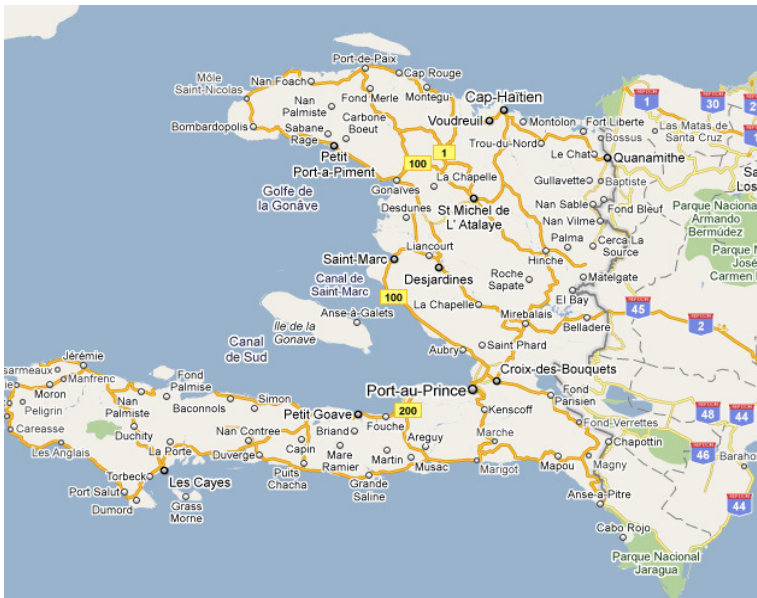


### **History of Haiti**

The island of Hispaniola was first discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492. It soon became a Spanish colony, but European disputes resulted in the eastern 2/3 of the island remaining under Spanish control and is now called the Dominican Republic. The western 1/3 of the island came under French control and is now Haiti. The indigenous people were of Arawak descent and they were quickly wiped out through murder, repression and ultimately from the diseases of these eastern settlers to which they had no immunity.

This small colony was a lush paradise with fertile lands in the northern plain where tobacco, cotton, indigo and cacao were grown. Slaves were imported from Africa and estimates suggest that 700,000 people were brought to Haiti for slave labor. By the late 1700's Haiti was producing 40% of the sugar and 60% of the coffee that was consumed in Europe; the profits from this trading went into the pockets of the French. By the year 1800, the white French masters represented less than 1% of the population on the island.

In the early 1790's a revolution began as the slaves rebelled against the oppression and brutality of their masters. After a series of violent battles they eventually emerged victorious as many of the French fighters succumbed to tropical illness. On January 1, 1804 the island declared its independence and became the first black republic in the world.



The past two hundred years of independence have seen a variety of dictators and scores of military coups and turmoil. The United States occupied Haiti from 1915 to 1934 and maintained external control over its finances until 1947. One of the most notable dictators was Dr Francois Duvalier “Papa Doc” who came to power in 1957 and declared himself President for Life and ruled until his death in 1971. His 19 year old son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” assumed leadership and led a “playboy” lifestyle until his overthrow in 1986 by a military coup. Both of these dictators ruled Haiti ruthlessly, killing any dissidents (with upwards of 30,000 people killed), stealing extensively from the national treasury, and leading Haiti further down the road of poverty.

From 1986 until the end of 1990, different temporary governments were established. In 1991 with the help of international bodies, Haiti held elections in which Jean-Bertrand Aristide – a former parish priest – was elected with broad popular support. However, only a few months later he was ousted by a military coup. US military forces under Bill Clinton reinstated Aristide in 1994. Only a year later his “4 year term” had finished and he had to relinquish the presidency. Haitian law prevents a president from

running for two consecutive terms, but a close alliance of Aristide won the election; this man was Rene Preval. Later in that same year Aristide and Preval had a falling out and Aristide formed a new political party which won elections for one third of the Senate and local assemblies but these results were not accepted by the government. Due to the deadlocks between these parties, further parliamentary elections were delayed. When parliamentary terms expired before elections could be held, Preval dismissed these members and ruled by decree.

In November of 2000, Aristide was elected again with 90% of the votes; it is reported that a very low proportion of the population participated in this election. This created significant tension with the opposition parties and they again were unable to hold parliamentary elections and as the terms of members expired, Aristide was forced to rule by decree. In January 2004 the opposition called for Aristide's resignation, accusing him of corruption. Violent protests erupted on the streets and rebel forces began to take over parts of the country. On February 29, 2004 Aristide left Haiti and sought asylum in South Africa. Supreme Court justice Boniface Alexandre assumed control of the government and petitioned for and was

granted an international peacekeeping force by the UN. The presence of these peacekeepers is still highly visible in Haiti to this day although in reduced numbers.

There is debate as to whether Aristide left Haiti willingly or was forcibly removed by the United States. In February 2006 Rene Preval was once again elected president. In the spring of 2008 there were riots in many areas of Haiti due to rapidly rising food prices; many roads were blocked and the airport was closed for a short period of time.



## Economy

Unemployment is approximately 70% in Haiti. There is some production of cocoa, rice and coffee. The majority of Haitians work in the informal sector selling goods on the streets. The largest source of foreign dollars coming into Haiti is through government and non-governmental aid agencies. The second largest source is support sent from Haitian family members living in North America.



## People

Many Haitians will grace you with large smiles, welcome hearts, and an eagerness to get to know you; their main language is French Creole. Haiti is predominantly Roman Catholic with 1/3 of the population being Protestant. Voodoo also remains a part of Haiti's fabric; there are various amounts of fusion between Catholicism and Voodoo.

## Preparing for a Mission Trip

In preparation for a mission trip to Haiti it is important to be aware of certain things that will be required or expected of you while you are there. **For the Sunday church service you must wear dress clothes and dress shoes. No jeans for church!! All alcohol and smoking are strictly prohibited!!**

**Proper Identification:** Haiti requires that everyone have a valid passport to enter the country. The date of our departure must occur at least 6 months before the expiration date listed on your passport. Aboard the flight you will receive a tourist's visa to fill out; we will

review with you how this form is to be completed. You will be given a copy by the customs agent and because it is **compulsory to present it to exit the country**, we will collect these from you at some point upon our arrival in Haiti; this will reduce the likelihood of them being lost or misplaced. If you have submitted an application for a mission trip you should have received some correspondence regarding your passport information. We will require a photocopy of your passport approximately a month before our trip when we have an orientation meeting.



**Proper Clothing:** Everyone must dress modestly.

**For women:** Skirts and blouses are preferred for daily wear as jeans and shorts are not acceptable attire when leaving the campus. Jeans should be worn only around the mission camp; please assure that shorts or pants (jeans) worn on the campus are **moderate and not tightly fitting**. We need to be sensitive to the Haitian cultural norms and if you fail to respect this **you may be asked to change your clothes**. Scrubs will be provided for those working on the medical and dental teams. Make up and jewelry should be limited. Bring a one piece bathing suit for a one day beach excursion.

**For men:** No tight fitting shorts or Speedo type bathing suits. Shirts should not have beer slogans, and piercings should be removed. Please dress reasonable and modestly.

**Personal Items:** Please note that due to airline regulations, liquids and gels are not permitted in carry-on baggage. This includes toothpaste and deodorant. Please refer to the American Airlines policy statements for more specific information. Placing cellophane or plastic under the caps of shampoo bottles etc. and then placing these into another plastic

bag will reduce the likelihood of leakage and spills in your luggage. Please bring shower shoes, toilet paper, insect repellent (non-aerosol type), sunscreen and a shower/beach towel. You will also need a pillow, a sheet and a light blanket as the nights at the campus can be cool.

**Extra Money:** All expenses are covered by your team fare except for: a pizza lunch/dinner when we go site seeing; any meals eaten while in transit to and from airports; money for souvenirs. When buying souvenirs or food at the airport or in town you will need to bring US currency (**small denominations are preferable as most change will be provided in Haitian currency**).

**Meals and Snacks:** Meals will be provided but you should bring between meal snacks. This should be in sealed bags or containers. If you have special dietary needs you will have to bring your own food.

**Travelers' Insurance:** Be sure to have coverage for the entire time you will be away.

**Bible:** Please bring a bible so you can participate in devotions.

**Immunizations:** It is highly recommended that you consider prophylaxis for malaria. Currently Malarone and Chloroquine are advised as good options for prevention. Vaccination against hepatitis A and B is also recommended. Be sure you have an up to date tetanus booster. An appointment with a travel doctor can help you to get accurate information and immunizations. Visit the CDC website under the travelers' health section or visit:  
[http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/travel'drugs\\_public.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/malaria/travel'drugs_public.htm)

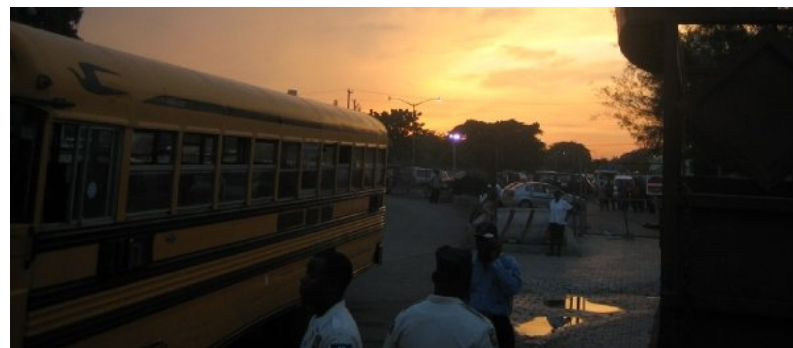
**Health:** You are likely to experience many changes during your visit: changes in diet, schedule, activities, climate and travel. All of these can affect your body in different ways, so don't be surprised if you feel slightly "off" from time to time during your stay. By following some basics you should be able to minimize this. **Never drink water from the tap.** Only drink the bottle water that we provide to you. **Wash your hands often,** if soap and water are not available then use hand sanitizer. Diarrhea is not an unusual occurrence in Haiti; most people will get over it within 4 days with adequate fluid intake. Anti-diarrhea agents may be prudent when travel is involved and not restrooms are accessible. **Drink plenty of fluids.** Dehydration is very common and can be very dangerous as can heat

exhaustion, heatstroke and severe sunburn. Be careful in regards to sun exposure and use sunscreen and hats judiciously.

Drink plenty of fluids and pace yourself; in general if you are not urinating clear then you are not drinking enough fluids!! If you have any special medical conditions, please inform one of the board members well in advance of our departure.

**Baggage Allowance:** You will be allowed one check in luggage weighing up to 50 pounds. You will be assigned a tote containing supplies, gifts for sponsored children, etc. We will give you a piece of paper outlining what is in this container should you be questioned by customs. You are allowed one carry on bag plus a camera or purse. It is suggested that you put personal medication, a change of clothes and other necessities in your carry on in case your check-in luggage is delayed or lost. **Liquids and gels are prohibited in your carry on bags.**

**Miscellaneous Items:** There is much poverty in Haiti and the people greatly appreciate gifts. You can bring children's clothing (summer clothing), school supplies, small toys, hard candy, shoes, toiletries, etc. Please check with your team leader before distributing items.



## **What to expect when you get to Haiti**

Once you set foot in Haiti, the first thing to greet you is the warm tropical sun; the temperature varies little year round. You will have to clear customs and then congregate as a group where the baggage is collected. We will exit the airport together as a group when all bags have been collected. A bus will be boarded and we will drive to the ministry centre where the group will stay. This is located about an hour's drive in a rural community called Cabaret. You will stay in one of two dormitory rooms (one for men, one for women) on the second floor of the church building. There are bunk beds with foam mattresses; mosquito



nets may be available to drape over them. Each room has access to three toilets and two or three showers. Since water is limited, you need conserve this resource. Electricity is provided by a generator; occasionally it is shut down for service or refueling and you will be given some notice if this is to occur. There are many night sounds (chickens, pigs, donkeys, etc.) so it is suggested that you bring ear plugs.

You must stay within the boundaries of the ministry centre unless permission is granted to leave. This is for your own safety and this rule must be followed.



You will have many opportunities to interact with the Haitians. The ministry centre is a busy place as there is a school, church, orphanage, the pastor's house and play areas for soccer etc. You are encouraged to learn a few words in the Creole language.

A schedule will be carefully planned out by your team leader; this may include individual duties for gross cleaning of the dormitory area and preparing lunch on a given day. In order to complete the scheduled projects, we will need everyone to co-operate. In the evening there will be time for socializing and games.

To respect the national Christians, it is mandatory that all group members refrain from smoking or drinking alcoholic beverages during their stay. For you to smoke or drink will cause them to question whether you really are a Christian. They are not being legalistic, but in Haiti, these habits have a strong association with a former way of life. People who become Christian give up these habits as a way of showing they have become a new creation in Jesus Christ. You compromise your Christian witness if you do not respect this. If you know it will be impossible to give up either of these, then please do not come. It is also important to avoid using swear words and cursing; the Haitian people are very in tune to these types of words

and will begin using them quickly if they hear them from us.



The Haitian people may ask for things such as your watch, shoes, jewelry, money etc. Do not promise anything. A “maybe” or “I’ll try” will be interpreted as a “yes”. **Do not give out your phone number or address to anyone.**

## **Conclusion**

Above all, we need to remember that we go to serve in obedience to a call. What we do is first of all for the glory of the King. The key to a successful mission trip is to submit ourselves to God and to one another out of

reverence for Christ. Thank you for the gifts of time, energy, and resources you are sharing. When you love, encourage, and strengthen others, you are a blessing to the Haitians and the rest of the team. Please remember to pray for Haiti regularly.

