

If you go: Port-au-Prince, Haiti



A beach near the town of Jacmel. Often forgotten, but true nonetheless, Haiti is a Caribbean country, with beautiful beaches and warm water. (Zachary Reid / For The Times)

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THE BEST WAY TO PORT-AU-PRINCE, HAITI

From LAX, Spirit, American, Delta, United and Copa offer connecting service (change of plane) to Port-au-Prince. Restricted round-trip fares begin at \$708, including all taxes and fees. Have connections lined up in advance, preferably with someone who will meet you at the airport. Public transportation is confusing, subject to change and often conducted in overcrowded pickup trucks and on undersize motorcycles. There are buses and taxis from the airport, and the prices are alluringly low (about \$1 per ride in one of the colorful little trucks called Tap-Taps), but the trip isn't for the novice or the timid. Spend \$19 and get your hotel to send a driver.

TELEPHONES

To call the numbers below from the U.S., dial 011 (the international dialing code) and 509, the area code for Haiti.

WHAT TO DO

Downtown ruins include the Presidential Palace, the Catholic and Episcopal cathedrals and blocks of Victorian-era gingerbread houses. Looking is free, but none are in places you'll want to traverse too long on foot. Most hotels will help you arrange a driving tour, for which you can expect to pay \$25 to \$100.

Croix-des-Bouquets is a village near Port-au-Prince where much of the country's decorative ironwork is made. There are dozens of workshops and storefronts sprinkled throughout an otherwise residential area. Some of the work is amazing, and if you prize buying something from the artist who made it, you'll have plenty of chances here. But if you have hang-ups about child labor or working conditions, steer clear. You will see bare-footed kids applying lacquer to metal, and you'll see workshops that would give an OSHA inspector a heart attack.

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Oloffson, 60 Ave. Christophe, Port-au-Prince; 2223-4000, <http://www.hoteloloffson.com>. \$75 to \$120 a night. Every big city has a cool old hotel in some stage of decline; the Oloffson is Port-au-Prince's claim to overnight fame. There's a good restaurant on-site, the hotel bar is home to the Thursday jam session for the RAM band, and the grounds include an odd assortment of statues reputed to have voodoo origins, plus a roving band of roosters.

St. Joseph's Home for Boys, No. 26, Delmas 91, Petionville; (919) 758-8085 [Raleigh, N.C., office] sffamilyhaiti@hotmail.com; <http://www.heartswithhaiti.org>; \$50 per person per night, breakfast and dinner included. *This is one of the more pleasant surprises in travel to Haiti. It's a home for orphaned boys, but the walled, secure complex also includes a guest house that can hold as many as 24 visitors. The rooms are comfortable but sparse, there's no hot water and you could wind up sharing the digs with a stranger (several of the rooms are dormitory-style). The fun part is getting to interact with the boys, if you want, and eating some of the best home cooking you'll find in the country. Plus, the home has an amazing collection of Haitian art. In a country without reliable access to museum-quality art, this is a rare chance to see a wide-ranging, deep collection of paintings.*

Le Plaza, 10 Rue Capois, Champ de Mars, Port-au-Prince; (866) 356-5407 [toll free in the U.S.], plazahaiti.com, \$79 to \$170. If you like your travel comfortable, relaxed and safely removed from the locals, this is your place. Most of the rooms face a large courtyard, which includes a pool and densely growing tropical plants. The restaurant on-site is good, quick and offers a mix of local (plantains

and pork aplenty) and not (pizza and burgers). If you're looking for people who speak English or just want to meet do-gooders from across the world, you'll find a mix here.

WHERE TO EAT

Quartier Latin, 10 Place Boyer, Petionville; 3445-3325. This place would be cool in any city. It's casual but chic, there's live music every night and the food is excellent. Odd to believe, but the chef's salad is delightful, with the ingredients served separate but together in large square bowls. Entrees \$15 to \$25.

La Souvenance, 42 Rue Geffrard, Petionville. A longtime favorite, this French restaurant is run by the French in a converted house. The food is excellent, and there's service to match. Eat inside or out; there's seating in a garden by the pool. Entrees \$20 and up.

Le Florville, 19 Rue de Kenscoff, Port-au-Prince. Set in the mountains above town, this Haitian American-run restaurant features a variety of culinary styles, from the expected (grilled goat, conch shell) to the pleasantly surprising (barbecued spare ribs).

TO LEARN MORE

People tend to go to Haiti to work, not play, so scant tourist information is available. The U.S. State Department has ample information on its website, <http://www.lat.ms/XjFerK> although, like many State Department descriptions, it may give you pause. Lonely Planet publishes a guidebook to Haiti and Dominican Republic, which occupies the other two-thirds of the island of Hispaniola. You can find a wide range of guides, from guys with motorcycles to tax-paying tour specialists with their own buses. Jacqui Lebrum of Voyages Lumière is a personal favorite; <http://www.voyageslumiere.com>.

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