Haiti continues to struggle with the aftermath of the devastating January 12, 2010, earthquake. But this is a proud country born of revolution, and its people are determined to rebuild for a better future.

With a modicum of stability, Haiti could yet become the Caribbean’s alternative travel destination *par excellence*. It has palm-fringed beaches and rum punches aplenty, but its richness lies in its history and its culture, closer to its African roots more than any other Caribbean nation and ever present in its vibrant art and music scenes.

Haiti isn’t the simplest country to travel in. You frequently need to keep an ear to the news, and it can be more expensive than you’d expect. But once you’re there, travel is not only possible but also incredibly rewarding. It’s truly an addictive country to visit.

There’s no particular season for visiting Haiti. April to November are generally the wetter months, and hurricane season (August and September) can cause transport problems due to mudslides. From November to March it’s hot and dry, and frequently rainy in the north.

The countrywide Vodou festival of Fet Gede is in November, and Carnival is celebrated in Port-au-Prince and Jacmel, usually in February. If you plan to visit during Carnival, book well in advance as a good hotel may be hard to find. Otherwise, hotel prices generally don’t fluctuate through the year.
GETTING TO NEIGHBORING ISLANDS

There are no ferries to neighboring islands. There are flights from Port-au-Prince to Cuba, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Nassau and Guadeloupe, and from Cap-Haïtien to Providenciales. There are direct flights and overland coaches from Port-au-Prince to Santo Domingo in the Dominican Republic (DR).

Itineraries

ONE WEEK
Spend a couple of days taking in Port-au-Prince, with a side trip to the artists’ village of Croix des Bouquets. Take a flight to Cap-Haïtien and overnight before making a day trip to the Citadelle and Sans Souci palace as well as checking out the beach at either Labadie or Cormier Plage.

Fly back to Port-au-Prince, and travel over the mountains to the town of Jacmel on the south coast, for its historic quarter and to stock up on its famous handicrafts, before returning to the capital.

Essential Food & Drink

The main types of meat eaten are chicken, pork, goat and beef; conch is also popular. Fresh fruit abounds – mangoes and avocados are particularly good.

» Bannan Fried plantain
» Barbancourt The best locally produced brand of rum.
» Diri Rice
» Fritay Street snack of fried meat, fish or plantain.
» Griyo Pork
» Kabrit Goat
» Lambi Conch
» Pate Savoury pastries; a good street snack.
» Plat complet A dish with the key elements of Haitian food – rice, beans and fried plantain – and meat, accompanied with a sauce.
» Poule Chicken
» Prestige The best locally produced brand of beer.
» Pwa Beans
» Tasso Beef

Fast Facts

» Area 27,750 sq km
» Population nine million
» Capital Port-au-Prince
» Telephone country code %509
» Emergency Police %122

Set Your Budget

» Budget hotel room US$40
» Two-course evening meal US$25
» Beer US$1.40
» Motorbike taxi ride US$0.50
» Internal flight US$90

Resources

» Haitian Footsteps (www.haitianfootsteps.com) Coverage of Haitian travel, culture and history
» Haiti News (www.haitinews.net) Useful news aggregator
» Haitian Magazine (www.haitiantoday.com) Haitian news and entertainment

AT A GLANCE

» Currency Haitian gourde (HTG); US dollar (US$) widely accepted
» Languages Haitian Creole, French
» Money ATMs in Port-au-Prince; credit cards accepted in some hotels and restaurants; bring cash US dollars
» Visas Generally not required for stays up to 90 days