

Did You Know?

- Haiti's name comes from the Arawak word *ayiti*, which means "land of mountains."
- Haiti is the second oldest *republic* (a type of government in which the leader is elected) in the Western Hemisphere, after the United States. It became a republic in 1804.
- Henri Christophe, a Haitian freedom fighter and emperor, fought in the American Revolutionary War when he was only 17.
- More than three-quarters of Haiti's people live in poverty.
- *Cockfighting*, a fight to the death between trained roosters, is a popular national sport.
- Crocodiles, iguanas, and many kinds of birds make Haiti their home.

Flag

The flag of Haiti, most recently adopted in 1987, incorporates the country's national colors—blue and red. In the center is Haiti's coat of arms, which includes a palm tree, flags, two cannons, and a scroll with the motto *L'Union Fait la Force* (In Union There is Strength).



National Image

One of Haiti's national symbols is the palm tree.



People and Places

Land and Climate

Haiti takes up the western third of the island of Hispaniola (the eastern half is the Dominican Republic), in the Caribbean Sea. High mountains and hills crisscross the land. Great forests and rich soils once covered Haiti, but today many trees have been cut down and much of the good soil has washed away. The weather is warm and humid, and it's rainy in the spring and fall. Hurricane season runs from 1 June to



30 November.

Population

Haiti has 8.9 million people. The population is quite young, with more than 40 percent under the age of 15. About 95 percent of Haitians (HAY-shuns) descend from Black African slaves brought to Haiti to work on farms. The remaining 5 percent are *mulattoes* (people with black and white ancestry) or whites. A large number of Haitians live in Florida, New York, and Montréal, but there are Haitian communities in other parts of Canada and the United States as well.

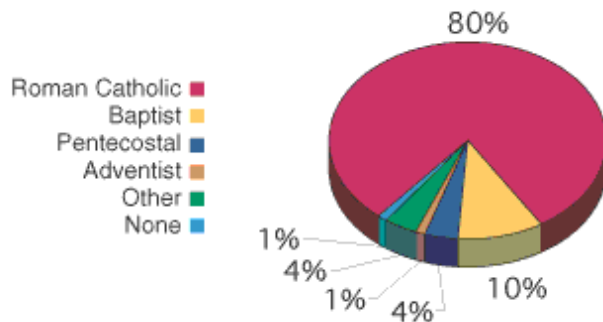
Language

French and Creole are both official languages, but less than 10 percent of Haitians speak French. French is used mostly in government and business. Everyone speaks Creole, however. Creole is a mix of French and various African languages. Most school classes are taught in French, but Creole's use is growing on radio and television.

Can You Say It in Haitian Creole?

Hello	<i>Alo</i>	(ah-LOW)
Good-bye	<i>Baybay</i>	(BAH-bah-ye)
Please	<i>Souple</i>	(soo-PLAY)
Thank you	<i>Mèsi</i>	(MAY-see)
Yes	<i>Wi</i>	(wee)
No	<i>Non</i>	(noh)

Religion



The majority of Haitians are Catholic. Protestants make up about 16 percent of the population. The largest Protestant churches are Baptist, Pentecostal, and Seventh-day Adventist. Voodoo, an African religion brought to Haiti by slaves, is practiced to some degree by a majority of Haitians. It combines tribal religious beliefs in ancestor worship, healing, and spirits with elements of Catholicism such as the worship of saints.

History

Time Line

1000 BC

1000 BC The Arawaks live peacefully on the island



AD 1400

AD 1492 Columbus lands on the island and calls it *Hispaniola*, or Little Spain; Carib Indians arrive and attack the Arawaks



1500s Spain controls Hispaniola

1503 Spain begins importing slaves to grow sugar, coffee, and cotton



1600

1697 Spain gives the western part of the island to France; France calls it St. Domingue

1791 Toussaint Louverture leads a slave revolt

1793 Slavery is done away with

1800

1803 Haiti defeats Napoleon; Louverture dies in a French prison



1804 Haiti becomes independent; Jean-Jacques Dessalines makes himself the emperor

1804–1915 Dozens of dictators and presidents control Haiti; many are murdered

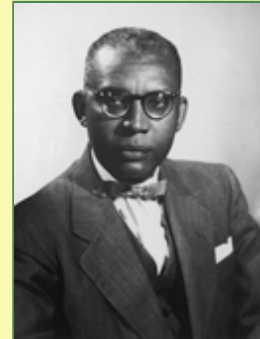
1811–22 Haiti is divided into a north and south country, but then is reunited

1900

1915–34 The United States invades and controls Haiti



1957 "Papa Doc" Duvalier becomes president and rules the country ruthlessly



1971 Duvalier dies and his son, Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc"), takes his place

1991 Jean-Bertrand Aristide is elected president, but the army forces him into exile

1994 The United States invades and puts Aristide back in power



2000

2004 Following a rebel uprising, Aristide again goes into exile

2004 Storms in May and September cause severe flooding, resulting in more than four thousand dead or missing and leaving tens of thousands homeless



2006 Rene Preval becomes president in the first general elections since Aristide was overthrown in 2004

2008 Significant increases in the price of food lead to rioting in the streets

PRESENT

Arawaks

No one knows when the Arawaks, a peaceful native people, first moved to what today is called Haiti. But soon after Christopher Columbus arrived on the island of Hispaniola in 1492, Spanish settlers came to the area and enslaved the native people. Within a few decades, a million of the Arawaks had died from starvation, hard labor in Spanish gold mines, and European diseases such as smallpox and measles. By 1600, almost all of the Arawaks on Haiti had died.

Spain and France

Spain built new towns and forts on Hispaniola. To work the island's sugar and cotton plantations, Spain began importing thousands of African slaves in 1517. In 1697, Spain gave France the western part of the island, the part we call Haiti. However, the French pirates and farmers named it Saint Domingue.



Revolt and Independence

The slaves lived and worked in horrible conditions. In 1791, they rebelled against the French plantation owners. The revolt was inspired by the ideals of the French Revolution, which was going on at the same time. Although the slaves won their freedom by 1793, leaders such as Toussaint L'Ouverture (a freed slave) continued the fight for independence from France. L'Ouverture was eventually captured and died in a French prison, but his successor, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, gained victory over the French in 1803. The country became independent in 1804 and named itself Haiti.



Kings and Dictators

After independence, many cruel leaders held power. Some made themselves kings and built giant palaces. Most died violently. This made the future hard to predict. To protect its interests, the United States took over in 1915 but left in 1934. Dr. François Duvalier (called "Papa Doc") was elected in 1957. His brutal secret police caused terrible suffering in Haiti. His son, who ruled after him, was not much better.



Poverty and Progress

Violence and corruption have made Haiti one of the poorest countries in the world. Because the water and environment have been damaged, making a living is hard. Many citizens don't have clean water to drink, enough food to eat, or adequate health care. Still, Haitians keep trying to improve their country.



Lifestyle

Games and Sports

Haitian boys and girls often have few or no toys or possessions. They have a lot of imagination, however, and make up games to play with their friends. Soccer is the most popular sport, and many kids join soccer leagues. Kids who don't have a soccer ball might make one out of rags or other material.



Holidays

Haitians have combined African traditions with the holidays and traditions of the Catholic Church. *Carnaval*, or *Mardi Gras* (Fat Tuesday), is one example. It happens seven weeks before Easter and lasts three days. Loud music, wild dancing, floats and parades, and feasting all help people forget their problems for a while. On 2 November, *Fèt Gede*, families visit cemeteries, pray, and leave food for their dead ancestors.



Food

Haitians frequently eat beans and rice, but *sorghum* (a grain), corn, and yams make up an important part of their diet. Other foods include fruits, vegetables, seafood, and meat. However, few people can afford to eat meat. Oranges, hot peppers, and garlic are common seasonings. Most Haitians don't get enough food to keep them healthy and give them the energy they need.



Schools

Most kids never finish elementary school. School is free, but parents must pay registration fees and buy books and supplies. Many can't afford this cost. Sometimes there aren't qualified teachers. Parents try their best to give their kids an education, but since most Haitians can't read or write, it's difficult. Only a few kids make it to high school, and even fewer go to college.



Life as a Kid

Life for most Haitian kids is hard. Many kids die from not getting enough food to eat or from not having clean drinking water. Others die of diseases like malaria. Families in towns might have three or four children, while those in the country might have nine or ten. Few doctors live in Haiti, and few people can afford them. Kids often work in the fields or in other ways to help their families survive. Kids love to sing and dance, though, and be part of celebrations and holidays.



Society

Government

President: René Prével

Prime minister: Michèle Pierre-Louis

Haiti has an elected president and a prime minister, who is appointed by the president to run the daily affairs of government. Haiti also has a 99-member Chamber of Deputies and a 30-member Senate that make the country's laws. The voting age is 18. Unfortunately, the government doesn't often work like it should. *Dictators* (people with complete power) have often taken control of the government by force. They stay in power by hurting people and making them afraid.



Money and Economy

Two-thirds of the Haitians work in farming. They grow coffee, *cacao* (used to make chocolate), and sugar. However, just a few people own most of the good land. This means that most Haitians have a hard time growing enough food to live on. The cities don't have enough jobs, but people go there anyway, hoping to find a better life. The money used in Haiti is called the *gourde*.



Getting Around

Haitians usually use public transportation (like buses) wherever they go. However, some people often walk miles to fetch water or firewood, buy food, or go to school. Cars and gas are too expensive for most people. In rural areas, some Haitians take brightly painted vans or trucks called *taptaps*. Although these are taxis, they look like traveling art galleries.



Culture Facts & Contacts

Master Storytellers

Haitians love art: painting, sculpture, carving, dance, and music. One of their favorite arts is storytelling. Some storytellers act out stories, some sing and dance them, and some just tell them. The storyteller begins a story by asking "*Cric?*" (Are you ready?). The audience replies, "*Crac!*" (Yes, let's go!). Then the storytelling begins! Folktales are favorites. Many of these folktales come from Africa.



Learn More

Contact the Embassy of the Republic of Haiti, 2311 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20008; phone (202) 332-4090; web site www.haiti.org.

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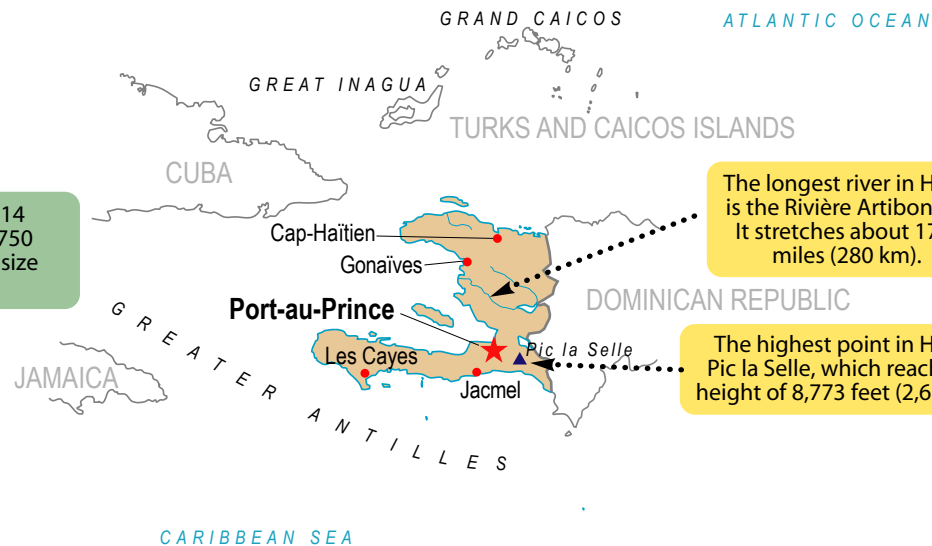


Because of all the mountains, only 20 percent of the land can be used for crops.



Haiti is part of the Greater Antilles, a group of islands that also include Cuba, Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico.

Haiti covers 10,714 square miles (27,750 sq km), a land the size of Maryland.



The longest river in Haiti is the Rivière Artibonite. It stretches about 174 miles (280 km).

The highest point in Haiti is Pic la Selle, which reaches a height of 8,773 feet (2,674 m).