

Facts about Haiti

Official Name: Republic of Haiti

Population: 9,035,536

Capital City: Port au Prince

Ethnic Groups: 95% black

Religion: Roman Catholic—80%

Languages: French and Haitian Creole

Leaders: Jean-Max Bellerive—Prime minister

Rene Preval—President



- Haiti is the poorest country in the western Hemisphere
- One out of five children die from preventable illnesses before reaching the age of five
- Diarrhea is the leading cause of death for children under five
- Only about 20% of the population has access to running water
- Life expectancy is 51
- Approximately 75% of the population live on less than \$2 a day
- Voodoo is widely practiced in Haiti. Roughly 80% of the population practice some form of Voodoo
- 52.9% of the total population age 15 and over can read and write (2003 est.)

Haiti Government

- A president serves as Haiti's head of state
- The people elect the president to a five-year term
- The president appoints a prime minister to serve as head of the government
- A parliament called the National Assembly makes the country's laws
- The upper house, called the Senate, has 27 members, elected by the people to six-year terms
- The lower house, called the Chamber of Deputies, has 83 members, elected to four-year terms

Haiti Geography

- The country of Haiti makes up the western one-third of the island of Hispaniola in the Caribbean. Hispaniola is located between Cuba and Puerto Rico and the eastern two thirds of the island is the Dominican Republic
- Most of the island is mountainous, and the country's name comes from an Indian word that means "high ground"

Haiti History

The native Arawak Amerindians - who inhabited the island of Hispaniola when Columbus discovered it in 1492 - were virtually annihilated by Spanish settlers within 25 years. In the early 17th century, the French established a presence on Hispaniola, and in 1697, Spain ceded to the French the western third of the island - Haiti. The French colony, based on forestry and sugar-related industries, became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean, but only through the heavy importation of African slaves and considerable environmental degradation. In the late 18th century, Haiti's nearly half million slaves revolted under Toussaint L'OUVERTURE and after a prolonged struggle, became the first black republic to declare its

independence in 1804. Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. It is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.

Climate

The climate is tropical. Haiti has two rainy seasons: April-May and August-October. The latter is also the season for hurricanes. Haiti also faces the natural hazards of flooding, earthquakes, and droughts. December and January are cool and balmy with the medium temperature of 75-80 degrees F. February-April temperatures begin to climb into the 90's F. By May-August, the temperatures climb into and stay in the upper 90's and 100's.

Culture

Haitian culture is the result of the fusing of African, French, West Indian and American cultures. The Haitian people use art and music to tell the stories of their struggles, their joys and great sorrows. Haitian artists use all the resources available to them. Some paint or carve to create "pictures" of local scenes of people in daily lives and religious symbolism. They use oil paints, woods, clay, stone, bamboo, leather, shells and metals such as copper, silver and tin. Vivid colors and simple forms characterize their art. The music is rhythmic, harmonious and moving, both emotionally and physically. The literature tells the stories of the people. The proverbs reflect their wisdom and philosophy. The many interpretations make them ageless.

Language

The languages of Haiti are French and Haitian Creole. Even though the two languages share linguistic items and phonics structure, they differ substantially at the grammatical level rendering the two mutually unintelligible in most cases. Haitian Creole developed out of pidginized form of French.