

Country Handbook: Haiti



Introduction

Travelling to see the work of Compassion and our local church partners firsthand is an unforgettable experience. On this trip, you'll see for yourself how children are known, loved and protected by their church communities and are being released from poverty in Jesus' name.

This Country Handbook is designed to start preparing you for your trip to Haiti. Please read it before you depart, and we'd also recommend that you keep it handy for easy reference.

We pray that God will bless your time in Haiti!



Country Information



Haiti means 'Land of Mountains' and was named after the three mountain ranges that stretch across the country. There are strong African and European influences woven throughout the culture. Haiti became the world's first black-led republic and the first independent Caribbean state in the early nineteenth century. Haitians love bright colours and decorations, and it's common to see painted Tap Tap buses adding a splash of colour to the streets.

Main languages:

Haitian Creole and French

Climate:

Warm, humid and tropical

Main religions:

Roman Catholic (55%),
Protestant (29%)

Note: 50-80% of Haitians practice some elements of voodoo culture

Currency:

Haitian Gourde (HTG)



Compassion in Haiti

Compassion has been working to release children from poverty in Jesus' name in Haiti since 1968. 52 per cent of people live below the national poverty line.

Compassion's Child Sponsorship Program is tailored to be age-appropriate for each child.

Children **AGED 1 TO 3** receive home-based care.

Children **AGED 3 AND OLDER** and older attend their local Compassion centre on weekdays and Saturdays.

Compassion assisted children in Haiti typically attend program activities at their local child development centres. Here is an example of what a typical program day looks like:

8:00am - A time of prayer and devotion and breakfast.

A typical breakfast usually consists of eggs, bread or buns, and tea.

9:00am - Spiritual lessons, in which children sing songs and learn Bible stories. Children receive age-appropriate Bibles over the course of their development.

10:30am - Break time, when children can play in a safe environment and develop friendships.

11:00am - Social-emotional lessons ranging from conflict resolution to developing healthy self-esteem. Children often come from challenging home environments and are taught social and personal skills.

12:00pm - Lunch and social time. Children often receive juice or milk, and sandwiches or a hot meal of spaghetti or rice, beans, vegetables and meat. There is a special nutritional program for malnourished children.

1:00pm - Health lessons, in which children learn practical health and hygiene lessons, including how to prevent malaria and HIV.

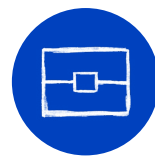
2:00pm - Letter writing and career planning. Older children work with local staff to identify their strengths and interests and set goals for their future.

Children are also invited to attend spiritual retreats during Carnival and Easter. Older students can choose vocational training classes, including painting, crafts, sewing, computer, music, photography, videography, cooking and foreign language classes. Parents and caregivers are offered training in income generation activities, and parenting seminars each week.



For more information on Haiti, scan the QR code or visit: compassion.com.au/where-we-work/haiti

Cultural Considerations



Clothing

- Due to the heat and humidity, loose fitting clothing is recommended.
- Body piercings, jewellery, ankle bracelets and toe rings should be avoided—particularly when attending church.
- **Men:** Jeans, slacks or cargo pants with t-shirts or polo shirts and joggers are recommended during visits to child development centres. Collared shirts and dress shoes are advised for church services.
- **Women:** Joggers, sandals, dresses, skirts, pants, t-shirts and short sleeved shirts are all acceptable attire for women. A skirt covering the knees is advised for church services.
- It is best to wear closed-in shoes when visiting local church partners or children.

Greetings

- People in Haiti feel very strongly about greetings, particularly in rural areas. When passing someone on the street, it's best to take the time to greet them properly before engaging in further conversation. A simple 'bonjour' (hello) will go a long way.
- When greeting one another (and departing), men will shake hands and women will kiss each other on the cheek.
- Haitians tend to be quite indirect in communicating, and often use stories and parables to get a point across. Humour and laughter play a big role in communication.
- Haitians usually avoid direct eye contact when speaking with people.

Security

- Please ask permission before you photograph any local people. This can include photos taken from a moving vehicle, so be sure to check with your driver or Trips and Visits Specialist first.

Emergency contact information:

Local emergency number: 114

Compassion Colombia office:

011-509-2813-1984 / 011-509-2813-1985

Australian Embassy: +1-868-822-5450

Public interactions

- Please avoid whistling in public as it's considered impolite.
- Bartering or negotiating for all items available for sale is the norm in Haiti.
- Animated and lively conversation is normal, and arguments are common, lively and loud.
- When entering a yard, Haitians shout 'onè' (honour), and the host is expected to reply 'respè' (respect).
- Men and women showing affection towards one another in public—even with your spouse—is frowned upon.

Language

- Haiti has two official languages: French and Creole. French is spoken and understood by around 40 per cent of the population, while Haitian Creole (a mix of French, Taino, West African, Spanish and Portuguese) is spoken and understood by all Haitians.
- Useful Creole phrases:

Hello: Alo

Goodbye: Orevwa

Good morning: Bon maten

Good night: Bon lannwit

Thank you: Mèsi poutèt ou

Please: Tanpri

Excuse me: Eskize mwen

How are you? Kouman ou ye?

I don't understand: Mwen pa konprann

Yes: Wi

No: Pa

Eating and drinking

- Haitians generally eat two meals a day: a small breakfast of coffee and bread, juice, or an egg, and a large afternoon meal centred around carbohydrates such as cassava (root vegetable), sweet potatoes or rice.
- Fruit is common as a between-meal snack.
- Dining in Haiti can be quite a formal affair—regardless of social status. Dressing up to eat is common, and the most honoured position is the head of the table.
- It's common to begin a meal with a toast to your health, where the host will say "Bon Appétit!"



Key Challenges and Prayer Points

Haiti is currently the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with over half of the population living under the national poverty line. The country has been experiencing socio-political instability for decades, and as a result, many gangs have formed in urban areas there are high levels of crime. It is common for children from poorer rural regions to be taken to urban areas by families as cheap labour. These children, known as 'restaveks,' are often subjected to physical, psychological, and sexual abuse. Violence in the home is also prevalent with 83 per cent of children aged 1-14 having experienced some form of psychological aggression or physical punishment. Please pray for all the children across Haiti who face these grim circumstances, and for our local church partners as they bring hope to those desperate for a different way of life.

Many Haitians are still struggling with the legacy of the earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince on 12 January 2010, creating a tragic situation in which 1.5 million people were left homeless, many were injured and more than 300,000 people passed away. Even before the earthquake, Haitians have been struggling with extremely high unemployment rates and lack of access to food, clean water and sanitation. Today, many Haitians continue to live in 'tent cities' (makeshift camps) after their houses and neighbourhoods were destroyed. Conditions like this make rising above a life of poverty exceedingly difficult; please pray for all the children and families who feel trapped in their circumstances. Pray that our local church partners would be equipped and strengthened to bring light to the darkness.



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