

# Helpful Information for Mission Service in Haiti

## SPIRITUAL PREPARATION

Our short-term mission trips are intended to be expressions of Christian service. Participants on our teams are expected to be ambassadors for Jesus Christ. A necessity for this trip is that all team members are prepared spiritually for these mission experiences. Our intention is that these cross-cultural experiences will contribute to growing the Kingdom of God in Haiti, and in the United States. Prayer and Bible study, as well as, study and reflection on mission are vital preparations for these short-term mission experiences.

## TRAVEL PREPARATIONS

- a. **Passports.** Valid US Passports are required. American citizens do not need a visa to enter Haiti. Keep your wallet and Passport on your person at all times. Do not put them into any suitcase or carry-on bag or purse.
- b. **Health precautions.** The State Department does not require any immunizations for travel to Haiti. As a precaution, it is recommended that you:
  - Have received a **diphtheria/tetanus** booster within the last 10 years
  - Have received a **Hepatitis A** inoculation prior to travel to Haiti. All health workers should also receive a **Hepatitis B** shot prior to travel.
  - Have a prescription for **500 mg. of Chloroquine** to be taken two weeks prior to arrival, once a week during your stay, and for four weeks following return home to prevent malaria. Alternatively, a prescription for **Doxycycline**, taken 48 hours before departure, daily on-site, and for two weeks daily upon return home.
  - Have a prescription for **Ciprofloxacin** (anti-diarrheal) or **Imodium** or other equivalent non-prescriptive.
  - Have ample personal supply of an insect repellent containing DEET for all exposed skin surfaces to repel mosquitoes.
  - Have a refillable water bottle to avoid dehydration in the heat and humidity.
- c. **Clothing.** Women and men should dress modestly. Your personal appearance reflects your respect for the culture of the people with whom you live and work. Bring light, loose clothing. Haitian medical workers wear shirts with collars, long slacks, and close-toed shoes. Women wear dresses, skirts, or slacks. Shorts are not appropriate for hospital staff. Other workers wear clothing appropriate for their tasks. Sturdy tennis shoes and water-tolerant, thick soled sandals are recommended for off-duty hours. If done, laundry is hand-washed and dried in the sun.

Bring cotton clothes with pockets, such as sports or hiking clothes. Also bring cotton sleepwear, cotton undergarment/socks, beach shoes, sun hat, and appropriate footwear.

- d. **Personal things to consider.** Sunscreen, flashlight, sun glasses, fanny pack, rain-gear (June thru August rainy season), a large bath towel, facecloth, a bar of soap, packets of facial tissue and a roll of toilet paper. If you wear eyeglasses or contacts, consider taking a spare pair with you. Don't forget to pack your most valuable possessions: *flexibility, patience and a sense of humor.*

## ARRIVING IN HAITI

- a. **Before exiting the plane.** Use the restroom facilities on the plane before landing. If you need to use the facilities in the airport, one is located behind the Immigration area. Secure your wallet and Passport on your person. Be accompanied by another traveler, if possible.
- b. **Immigration.** Present your International Entry-Departure Card, which will be completed on the airplane prior to landing in Haiti. Your Entry-Departure card will be stamped. **Keep this card with your passport at all times since you can't exit the country without it. It is your Exit visa.** Also, you will be asked how long you will be in Haiti.
- c. **Getting through the airport.** The hosts are not allowed in the Arrivals section of the airport. If French or Creole is not spoken, assistance may be necessary. Upon clearing immigration, go to baggage claim where there are carts on which to pile luggage as it arrives. The most recent fee was \$1.00 US per cart. Luggage may arrive there before the passengers to whom it belongs, and piled on the floor. Look there first. After collecting the luggage, proceed to the Customs bench for bag inspection. Do not pay any fees to customs officials. When leaving Customs, take the luggage to the Exit door. Stand there for a minute until the host with an appropriate sign is found behind the cyclone fence. Porters wear badges with numbers, so select one porter, note his number, and let him take the bags even if they are manageable. Payment of \$1.00 per bag is standard. Stay with the porter until the luggage is in the appropriate vehicle.
- d. **Lost luggage.** If luggage is lost in transport, go to the Baggage Claim Desk, which is on the left wall as you walk to the Customs bench. You will be asked to present your baggage claim tickets, and fill out a lost luggage claim form. Your group leader will have information on contact numbers to be notified when your luggage is found.

**COMMUNICATIONS.** French and Creole are the official languages of Haiti. The official language for Medical Records is English. Hopefully, each team will have one or several interpreters for the group.

**E—MAIL AND LAPTOPS.** Availability of electric may be a problem. Generators do not operate full time. Bandwidth is limited. SKYPE is not available.

**LIFE AT YOUR WORKSITE.** It may be difficult to shift from high-speed, big technology environments to one with more limited resources, and that appears to operate at a much slower pace.

- a. **Photography.** The recommendation is that Haitians must be asked if they want to be photographed. Do not take their pictures without their permission. Photographs inside hospitals are not permitted without the prior approval of management.
- b. **Cultural perceptions.** Cross-cultural perceptions may present particular problems to some racial and ethnic travelers. It is common for people of color to be called “blanc”, or white, which actually signifies ‘foreigner’ to a Haitian. Hispanics may not be perceived as North Americans, but rather as from the Dominican Republic. People of Asian descent may be stereotyped as a result of ‘Kung Fu’ movies.
- c. **Gays and lesbians** may encounter prejudice in rural areas.
- d. **Senior men and women** usually receive respect from Haitians, since elders are revered in their tradition. Seniors often have an easier time adjusting to an environment of low-tech systems.
- e. **Lack of privacy.** You will be a visible focus for Haitians, especially children. At times it will be difficult to be polite, patient and noncritical.

**TIME.** The time in Haiti is the same as US Eastern Standard Time, but Haiti does not uniformly follow the daylight savings time.

**LODGING AND HOUSEHOLD HELP.** The hosts arrange for housing and it varies greatly from site to site. You may get a bed, a cot, a mat on the floor, or a hammock. You will probably share a room with a number of other travelers. There will probably be a cook and a housekeeper in a guest house. Breakfasts are usually served at 6:30 AM, lunches at noon, and dinners at 6:30 PM. It is recommended that the cook and housekeeper be tipped at the end of your stay.

**DRINKING WATER.** The cook will usually provide filtered drinking water. Fill your water bottle each morning before you leave for the work site. Carry water with you at all times. Bath water may not be filtered, so do not drink it! You will probably 'sponge bathe' during the week and only shower on the last day before departure.

**MEALS.** All food is washed and cooked properly to meet our standards. It will consist of local products, especially rice and beans.

**CURRENCY.** The basic currency in Haiti is the GOURDE. \$1.00, US, = approx. 40 Gourdes, or 8 Haitian dollars. .5 Haitian Gourdes =1 Haitian dollar. Most Haitians talk in Haitian dollars even though there is no such paper currency. Haitian Gourdes are not exchangeable outside Haiti, so dispose of any Goudes before you exit the country. **DO NOT LEAVE CURRENCY AT YOUR RESIDENCE WHILE YOU ARE AT A WORKSITE.**

**SECURITY.** Because Haiti is in a transitional phase, negative events are often in the news and may create concern for personal safety. Common sense anywhere in today's world dictates that you keep your doors locked, a security light on at night, and that you do not venture away from your housing at night.

#### **DEPARTING HAITI.**

- A. Departing Haiti. Your host vehicle will drop you off at the Departure terminal. Use a porter. Pay \$1.00 per bag and a tip of \$1.00.
- B. Getting through the airport. Check at the ticket counter, showing your ticket, your Passport and your stamped Entry/Departure Form. Your departure tax (\$35) should have been included in your ticket price. Go through the entrance to the left of the ticket counter, and present your ticket and your Passport to the clerk there.
- C. After going through Passport Control, go through the security X-ray checkpoint.
- D. Immediately ahead of the security area is a set of stairs, which rises like a figure A. They lead to the second floor gift shop, duty-free shops, snack bar and restrooms.
- E. After leaving the snack area, go to the departure area and relax. There are also restroom facilities in this area.