

HAITI PROJECT TRIPS TO HAITI FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND SOME ANSWERS

The Haiti Project has hosted trips to Jeannette, Haiti, since 1986. The one thing that is sure is that nothing is certain. Things change in Haiti just as they do in the U.S., sometimes more drastically there. Part of the journey to Haiti is that this is an adventure. One must be open to trusting that God will take care of you and meet your needs and take care of you. Life in Haiti has presented floods and droughts, one horrific earthquake, diseases, political instability, famine and poverty. It is also a beautiful country with beautiful, strong people. One thing that is destructive may lead to reconstruction in ways we can't imagine. That being said, here are answers that haven't changed much over the years. Just don't hold us to them!

Where is Haiti and Jeannette? Haiti shares the island of Hispaniola with the Dominican Republic, is east of Cuba and about 500 miles south of Florida. Jeannette is on the western peninsula, about 70 miles west of the capital of Port-au-Prince (PaP) and 15 miles south of Miragoane. It probably isn't on any map but the closest town is Paillant. It is located in a rural area of the mountain at about 2500 feet.

When do trips go? How long will we be there? Trips go at all times of the year but, as we are guests, we ask the Haitian priest when guests can be accommodated and work groups can be effective. Many people like to go in the winter months. Summer weather can be cooler in Jeannette than in Wisconsin but PaP is hot and humid. August through October is hurricane season and not optimal. Most groups leave on a Friday or Saturday and return the following Sunday or Monday, or about 9 days. Travel to and from Haiti is a day each and ½ day is spent getting from PaP to Jeannette.

What will the mission group do while in Haiti? The actual tasks are determined by the needs of the Haitians and the skills of the participants. Each trip is different. For instance, there is no reason to have teachers go to paint. They can teach teachers. That being said, many people have skills that have nothing to do with their vocation. Others are able to adapt and take on a task that needs being done. Our primary mission, however, is a mission of presence. We are there to learn, to pray together, to make friends and to come home and tell our stories. We return changed people. Yes, our tasks have made a difference in the lives of all, but doing is secondary to being.

What is the cost of the trip and how do I pay? The trip is the price of your travel from home to Port-au-Prince PLUS \$700 and is your responsibility. Once the group and dates are determined, each person makes their own flight reservations, all people arriving in PaP at the same time. The sooner reservations are made, generally, the less expensive the flight. If you have frequent flyer miles, you may use them. Payment for the trip is made 6 weeks and 3 weeks in advance of the trip. Payment covers ground transportation, food, lodging, tips and certain supplies that go with the participants. Additional cost to each person would be a passport and vaccinations prior to leaving. And then there is fabulous shopping. We don't cover that!

Can I do fundraising to cover my trip? Is the trip tax deductible? Please DO raise funds. If you raise more funds than you need, we apply them to necessary supplies in Haiti. The trip is tax deductible according to IRS laws and should be discussed with a tax advisor. The Haiti Project will send you a

letter acknowledging that you were on a mission trip. The Project is under 501(c)3 category as a mission of the Diocese of Milwaukee.

What if the trip gets canceled or I can't go at the last minute? Your basic fee will be refunded to the best of our ability, depending on timing. The refund of the airfare will depend on the individual airline or the insurance policy.

How many people go? Our maximum limit is 5-12 people. Because we live and work as a close group for a week, it is important for each person to attend at least one of several organizational meetings prior to leaving. Once you are in Jeannette, there is no going home if you don't like it, unless you are seriously ill. Building community ahead of time makes for the most effective groups.

I'm a loner and would rather go by myself. Can I go to Jeannette without a group? This really isn't recommended until you know Haiti and the priest after participating in a group trip.

I really want to go but I don't have many skills, maybe my money is best spent being donated. What is your advice? That might just be an excuse and you are shy! Everyone has some God-given gift. Maybe you just don't know yours! Maybe you will find those gifts on this trip. If you don't want to go because you "have your limits," we understand. This trip isn't for everyone. And, yes, donations to support others are always welcome.

What supplies do I need to take? This question has two parts: what supplies do you need for your personal comfort and care, and what supplies do you take for the mission. For personal needs, you must take your personal medication and warm weather clothes, including one or two pairs of sturdy shoes. You will be asked to pack most of your items in a carry-on bag so that mission supplies can be checked on the plane. Each mission is responsible, at the direction of the group leader, for gathering necessary supplies. The checked bag is one per person, 50 lbs. each. Each additional bag is \$50 so we are selective in what we need to take. Mission supplies are packed by the group leader or at a meeting. Supplies may be determined by a group that has previously been to Jeannette and seen needs, or by the priest. Certain supplies, such as medicine, can be purchased in Haiti but are often 3 times the price of the price in the U.S. Please do not take "gifts" for children, unless you have enough for all 500 children in the school. Even, or especially, gifts of candy tend to foster begging.

I would like to see a voodoo ceremony. Is that possible? At one time there were 14 voodoo priests in the community. At certain times of the year, one can hear drums or music. However, we are guests of the Episcopal Church and it is not appropriate to visit these ceremonies.

What medical precautions do I have to take before the trip? What if I get sick while I'm there? First of all, you should be in good physical condition. There is no such thing as "handicapped accessible". The roads are anywhere from rugged to non-existent. Even walking in the village can be a challenge as paths are rocky and uneven and usually not flat. Please consult with your personal health care provider as to what you might need. We generally recommend that you be up to date on tetanus and polio at the very least. Other vaccinations may include typhoid and hepatitis. All should take a malaria preventative. Mosquito netting and bug spray with Deet are recommended as well. There is no reliable electricity in Jeannette so, if you have medication requiring refrigeration, do not expect it. C-pap machines just aren't possible. Sometimes people will have reactions to food or water and just

need a day of rest. Hospitals are hours away, which is what our friends live with. If you get seriously ill, we carry travel insurance to get you back to the U.S. as quickly as possible. We have never needed it.

Where do we stay? What do we eat? In PaP, we stay in at a lodging place that is safe and inexpensive that caters to mission groups. In Jeannette, we make our home in the “Presbytere”, a secure building built for the priest and his family as well as guests. Generally, one shares a bedroom with one other person. Haitian food is served. Rice and beans is a staple. Goat, fish, chicken might be served along with a salad, beets, and potatoes, or sandwiches for lunch. The food is excellent and part of the adventure. Our hosts always have vegetarian options.

I don't speak any foreign language. How will I communicate? The primary language in Haiti is Creole/Kreol, a phonetic version of French with different grammar rules. Many Haitians speak French fluently. Some know Spanish. Others have learned to make do with smiles, nods, pointing and laughter. We always hire local Haitians who help us out.

My children want to go? Is there a youth trip? Minors (under 18) are welcome to go on adult trips as long as they have a parent/guardian to accompany them. We have had a number of youth groups go with a minimum age of 16. People experienced with youth are needed to lead these groups and will be accompanied by an experienced traveler to Haiti. Youth groups take nearly a year of planning.

What is the weather like? Depending on the time of year, PaP is usually quite warm, 80-90, 100 degrees in the summer. Temperatures in Jeannette can drop as low as 60 at night in winter but is usually in the 75-80 degree range all year round. Hurricane season is August to November, when it rains almost daily.

What safety concerns should I have? Jeannette is very safe. People there recognize we are there to help them and are our friends. However, we recommend that you not wear any expensive jewelry. Dress casually but not sloppy. Do not bring anything that you don't want stolen. If you wish to leave behind something valuable during the day, we can leave it in a safe place. Do not go walking by yourself and preferably with a Haitian friend. Do not go walking far from the house at night. Always ask if you may take a person's photo before you do.

What kind of communication means will I have available to me while I am there? You can purchase cell phone coverage during your visit. There is reception in a few places on the mountain, but not always in the house. There is Wi-Fi in PaP and sometimes in Jeannette. It is best to go with the expectation that you won't be communicating with home or work while you are there unless there is a serious emergency in Haiti. If you are able to call home, count it as a blessing.

Do we have access to electricity while we are there? Maybe, maybe not. There is solar energy in the Presbytere. Sometimes there is a generator. This is one of the problems of living in Haiti. We are seeking ways to correct this.

Okay, I am really worried about the water issue. Please enlighten me. Ah, yes, another multipart answer required. Drinking water is bottled and safe. Do not drink any other water. In PaP guest houses, water comes out of the tap but may or may not be hot. Probably not. In Jeannette, water is

scarce. It is collected in large cisterns that serve the entire village. Since the earthquake, many do not retain water so people have to walk miles daily to collect and carry it on their heads. (Try carrying a 5 gallon bucket of water!) So we use as little water in our personal care as possible. The Presbytere has two bathrooms. Sometimes the showers work. Sometimes we have to do a “Navy shower” or bathe with a washcloth and a small amount of water. When it rains in Jeannette, think of it as a blessing as it is filling cisterns.

I’m not “religious. Does that matter? One needs to know that we are guests of the priest and church for a week and we go as representatives of the Episcopal Church. Those of us who go regularly see our primary connection with the people of Jeannette as a spiritual one. We pray together. We pray as a mission group. Most of our Haitian friends have a very strong faith in God. They have a lot to teach us. We ask that you be open to what God and they have to say to you.

Will we have a chance to go shopping while we are there? You bet! We generally stop at a grocery store and go to a craft center in PaP. We love to bring home crafts as gifts for those who have supported us or as things to sell to raise money. Shopping can be anything from haggling on the street for a piece of art or going through a check-out line.

I sponsor a child. Will I have a chance to meet him/her? We will do all we can to make this happen. Sometimes the child lives a long way from the school. Sometimes the child feels awkward about the experience as not all children understand the sponsorship program. Sometimes you are invited to the child’s home. We ask that you not bring a lot of gifts but perhaps a token, such as food for the family, a health kit or something for the house. Gifts sometimes cause jealousy or problems.

Are there any expectations of me after the trip? Definitely. We hope that you will learn what an important program the Project has in Haiti and that you will continue to support it by telling your stories. Our real mission is in the United States. We can use your help in fundraising, speaking to churches and groups, sharing our posts on Facebook and our newsletters, selling coffee. There is lots of work to be done! We hope you share the word that we need prayers as well as funds. Haiti is a difficult place to live. Our Haitian staff is the real missionaries and they need our continued spiritual and financial support. Don’t forget those who have touched your lives in ways that you could never imagine.

I am ready to go! How do I sign up? Please contact Mary Alice Eschweiler, sheppatch@aol.com. Fill out an interest form that is available at www.haitiproject.org and send it to her. You probably have more questions. Ask away!