CULTURE

The capital of Haiti is Port-au-Prince, which is also the largest city. Out of all the countries in Latin America, Haiti is the most densely populated and has the lowest per capita income. About two thirds of the people are unemployed, and three quarters are living in poverty. Since agriculture is the largest source of income in Haiti's economy, many citizens are farmers. However, because of the large population density, most people do not have enough land to plant many crops and make enough money to live well. Most homes have one or two bedrooms, and no electricity or running water. Haiti's major exports are light parts, coffee, and various other crops. The United States is the country's leading trading partner.

In Haiti people eat mostly imported food including corn, beans, millet, rice, and vegetables. There is also a lot of local fruit available. It is hard to find good, clean drinking water in the country. Drinks such as colas and alcoholic beverages, like the local *kremass* and *kleren*, and beer are the most popular drinks consumed during festive occasions. The food modern Haitians eat is often a mixture of those found in Spain, France, Africa, and the United States because all of these countries played large roles in Haiti's history.

West African culture is very strong in Haiti since 95% of the population are descendants of African slaves. There are also many French traditions left in Haiti from the 17th century when France had control over the country. The most commonly practiced religions are Roman Catholicism, the worship of African nature gods, and Voodoo.

The Haitian people are known for their beautiful and colorful artwork such as basketry, embroidery, needlework, leather goods, pottery, papier-mâché, metal work, and sequin flag-making. When it comes to music the most important instrument is the drum because it holds significance in the voodoo culture that is popular in Haiti. Like many other countries, soccer is the most popular sport, although many like to play basketball as well.

HISTORY OF HAITI

Haiti is located in the West Indies on the western third of the island Hispaniola. The land used to be covered by trees, but has now been mostly deforested because of the amount of logging and farming that has taken place there.

Columbus landed on the island of Hispaniola in 1492 and the Spanish proceeded to decimate the natives, known as the Taino Arawaks. In 1697, Spain ceded Haiti to France. In the 18th century, Haiti's society consisted of Frenchmen, Creoles, freed blacks, and black slaves. Creoles were the mulattoes of the society and when they began feeling mistreated, they revolted. Toussaint L'Ouverture led black guerilla bands during that rough time, and in 1801 he proclaimed himself governor-general of Hispaniola and abolished slavery. The French eventually put Toussaint in jail. However, the fighting continued. When the French finally withdrew, U.S. president Thomas Jefferson sent aid to the rebels to stop the French from building military bases in Haiti.

Haiti won independence in 1804. Shortly after, Jean-Jacques Dessalines proclaimed himself emperor. In 1806 he was assassinated and the country was divided into black-controlled north, led by an emperor, and a mulatto-ruled south, led by a president. After Dessalines, Jean Pierre Boyer took control and reunified Haiti, but he also brought financial ruin to the country.

In 1859, Haiti became a republic and has been one ever since. In 1915 the United States invaded Port-au-Prince, forced the Haitian congress to permit U.S. control over customs receipts, and two years later dissolved the congress and made a new constitution. In 1930, the U.S. decided to allow Haiti to elect their own legislature, though the U.S. maintained fiscal control until 1947.

Haiti went through a series of suppressive presidencies ended by military coups. Because of this, in 1993 the United States imposed a trade embargo and an oil embargo on Haiti. The U.S. and the U.N. were consistently involving themselves with Haiti, forcing democracy along with other things, until 2000. However, corrupt elections and political violence continued, including the conflict over president Jean-Bertrand Aristide in 2003, and foreign financial aid was declining. Because of this violence, Aristide went into exile. A new government was not put into place until May 2006.

Recently, foreign aid for Haiti has been decreasing; there is also a huge lack of medical care, and there have been problems with armed gangs. Tropical Storm Jeanne killed thousands in 2005, causing severe damage to the country, and flooding, heavy rains, and several hurricanes in 2008 further devastated Haiti. Today Haiti is a republic with a president and a prime minister. Problems still exist in Haiti, though, because the country has never truly been politically stable, and deforestation and hurricanes have crippled the economy.

FAST FACTS

Geography

Size: 28,000 square kilometers
Slightly smaller than Maryland
Terrain: Mostly rough and mountainous
Natural resources: Bauxite, Copper, Calcium, Carbonate, Gold, Marble, Hydropower

People

Haitian population: 8,924,553
Life expectancy: Male - 55-83 Female - 35-59
Religion: Roman Catholic - 80% Protestant - 20%
Half the population practices Voodoo
Language: French and Creole
About 60% of the population lives in abject poverty.
One in twenty Haitians are infected with HIV/AIDS.

Government

Government type: Republic with an elected president
Capital: Port-au-Prince
Independence: January 1, 1804

Economy

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere.
Industries: Sugar refining, flour milling, textiles, and cement
Export commodities: Oils, cocoa, mangoes, and coffee
Import commodities: Food, fuels, and raw material
Currency: Gourde
The unemployment rate is over 80%.
More than half of Haitians live on less than a dollar a day.

Communications

Telephone main lines in use: 150,000
Cell phones: 2.2 million
Television channels: 2
Internet hosts: 7
Internet users: 1 million

Transportation

Airports with paved runways: 4
Most used transportation: Tap-Taps that are used as taxis and look like busses
Paved highways: 1,011 km

Education

Haiti has 11 universities.
Most of the population doesn't go to school.
Fewer than 75% of children attend school

Weather

Dry season: November - January
Wet season: February - May
June - October is unpredictable weather
Average rainfall: 140 to 200 centimeters

PROJECT 2009

HAITI

This year's project is with Partners In Health, based in Boston, MA, and will provide School Fee Assistance in Haiti. Attending school is very difficult for the poor children of Haiti. Families often have to choose between buying school books and uniforms or buying essentials, like food and medicine.

In August and September of 2008, Haiti was devastated by four major hurricanes. The storms left most families without homes, clothes, food and clean water. Although the Partners In Health programs were able to help thousands of Haitian families rebuild their homes and provided them with needed items, returning to school is still a major issue. Many children lost their school supplies in the storms.

Children in Haiti are born into poverty and their families struggle to find the means to survive on a day-to-day basis. If children are unable to get an education, they grow up unable to provide for their own families, and the poverty cycle continues. Education is one of the most important factors in overcoming poverty, and with this tool, children will be able to gain skills and achieve goals and better their lives in the future.

Partners In Health will provide many of the poor families of Haiti with school fee assistance and provide new materials for nearly 2,000 children, allowing them to go back to school in the near future. The assistance will be to those families that have HIV-positive parents who are unable to provide for their children's education.

Along with school fee assistance, funding will continue for the therapy, tests and medical care in the clinics of Haiti, set up by the Zanmi Lasante Health Clinic to treat and prevent HIV/AIDS. There will be HIV/AIDS awareness activities for the Haitians through forums, events, and celebrations.

GAMBIA

This year is the first year ODW-USA has decided to plan extra fundraisers to support a second project. The Salikenni Scholarship Fund, directed by Don and Alison May, provides money to poor children in The Gambia to go to high school. They have requested $1,900. In The Gambia, it is very important for the students to speak English because the high school classes are taught in English. To help with this problem, the Salikenni Scholarship Fund wants to provide Internet for the students so they can access English exercises and text. The students will also be able to access a section in their scholarship website to help them fund further education.