



NEWCOMERS' GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

Congratulations on your decision to assist in the sustainable recovery efforts of Haiti Communitere. However long you decide to spend with us, the impact on both your life and the lives of those you work with will make your trip one that you'll never forget.

In this guide, we hope to answer some of the questions you might have about your stay. We understand that plunging into the world of relief work can overwhelm even well-traveled people, but don't worry – we're readily available to answer questions. If you have any questions not covered within this newcomers' guide, please don't hesitate to email us at: volunteer@haiti.communitere.org.

ABOUT HAITI COMMUNITERE

Mission: Haiti Communitere (HC) is a Haitian based organization that strives for Haitian and International groups to operate as a community, thus increasing capacity and streamlining logistical operations. HC partners operate in a shared overhead environment, thus allowing their focus of operations to remain project based. HC continues to respond to the observed needs not being addressed on the ground while coordinating a Sustainability Resource Center that fosters creativity and connectivity while inspiring the Haitian and International development effort.

Purpose: Haiti Communitere is not your typical disaster relief organization, and our volunteer program is a reflection of that.

We don't run massive demolition or building projects. Our volunteer program works to develop and foster an individual's ideas and passion to help them develop their own project either as part of Haiti Communitere or as a partner organization/individual.

We encourage new volunteers to spend time getting to know and understanding the country they have just arrived in and discover where they feel they can best place themselves to get the most out of their time with us and here in Haiti. Many of the projects that have the greatest success are the ones that are developed in-country.

For more information please visit our [Facebook Page](#) or visit our website and blog at www.haiti.communitere.org.

INFORMATION ABOUT HAITI

History of Haiti

Knowing a bit about Haiti's tumultuous history can help put the nation's current struggles into context. A few key primers can go a long way towards appreciating the culture and political climate. Below are a few suggestions:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Haiti

<http://thelouvertureproject.org/wiki/>

<http://www.echodhaiti.com/history>

Current Conditions in Haiti

Haiti was already, in many ways, a troubled nation pre-earthquake. In the first year after the earthquake, Haiti took on a number of new and quite devastating problems. The largest impact of the earthquake, for relief purposes, was massive population displacement. Over one million people lost their homes, making them internally displaced persons (IDPs). Because of the influx of international aid, IDP camps became a draw for people in surrounding provinces, causing already burgeoning camps to overflow with people seeking help. As with any overpopulated, poorly facilitated area, ongoing sanitation issues continue to beget tremendous public health problems, such as cholera and typhoid. Currently the focus is on sustainable development through workforce job training, community impact groups that are learning to care for and maintain their neighborhoods on their own, and housing that is safe, low cost, efficient and healthier to live in.

Weather

The weather in Haiti can generally be described as “very, very hot,” especially during the summer months. During the rainy season from March to November, refreshing downpours occur most evenings. There can also be tropical storms or hurricanes. Evenings remain pretty warm, but you may want to sleep with a sheet and a light blanket.

Travel and Health Precautions

Refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for [Health Information for Travelers to Haiti](#).

Please see your doctor before departing for Haiti. S/he should provide you with all relevant medical information, including inoculations and medication to stay safe while in-country. For over-the-counter medicine recommendations, see the “packing list” list within this document.

Beginning June 1, 2011 it is Haiti Communitere's policy that all volunteers send proof of insurance before coming to Haiti (medevac and evacuation coverage are strongly encouraged). Health insurance policies will only reimburse you for your hospital stay and medical costs after you have returned from your trip, so you must bring enough money to cover these costs yourself in case of emergency.

Transportation

Transportation around Haiti comes in three main forms: motos, taxis, "tap taps," and buses. Buses are large and usually open, tap taps are modified small bed pickup trucks and motos are motorcycles or scooters.

Money

The currency in Haiti is the Gourde, with a rate of approximately 40 Gourdes to 1 USD. Many prices are given in "Haitian Dollars." One Haitian Dollar equals five Gourdes. If a merchant quotes a price of "five dollars," one would clarify that they mean Haitian Dollars, and then multiply the number by five to calculate Gourdes.

1 Haitian Dollar = 5 Gourdes = about 13 cents US.

Regarding money to bring with you, you will want to bring enough USD to cover at least 4 weeks. This can be calculated at approximately \$5 USD per day for additional luxuries such as entertainment and drinks.

Having money changed from USD to Gourde is an easily accomplished task. If you are staying longer than 4 weeks, please make sure you have a way to transfer money, either through an ATM (please contact your bank to verify overseas ATM usage charges) card or through Western Union.

COSTS

The following is a list of our rental rates

You will be expected to pay a per diem of 20 USD per night. This per diem includes: 2 meals (Breakfast & Dinner) per day, 6 days (Monday–Saturday) per week; WiFi; electricity 24/7; on site security 24/7; and a clean water source.

In addition to the per diem, you will also need to pay a daily rate*, which depends on the type of accommodation you choose:

Tent Space or Dorm: 0 USD per day

Purple room: 15 USD per day / 85 USD per week / 275 USD per month

Green or Blue room: 15 USD per day / 85 USD per week / 300 USD per month

Earthship house: 35 USD per day / 210 USD per week / 600 USD per month

Strawbale house: 25 USD per day / 140 USD per week / 400 USD per month
Adobe house: 20 USD per day / 105 USD per week / 350 USD per month
Igloo: 15 USD per day / 85 USD per week / 275 USD per month

* If more than one person is sharing a living space, the daily rate is split between each person

Other fee requirements:

BEFORE you purchase your ticket and are allowed to come to work with us at Haiti Communitere you **must** purchase and show proof of health / travel insurance, to include Medical Evacuation coverage.

When you arrive at the Base we also require that you present a fully refundable emergency fee of \$300 USD (to be paid back in full or in part, depending upon whether you have had to use the fund or not) to be paid in cash. This fee will be kept safely locked away for your use should you require medical attention beyond basic triage. Hospital stays are to be paid at the hospital before leaving. You will not be able to use your health insurance until you return home and are able to request reimbursement for care.

ARRIVING IN HAITI

Haiti's international airport, Toussaint Louverture in Port-au-Prince, is conveniently located approximately 1 mile from Haiti Communitere's compound.

After landing at the airport, your passport will receive an entry stamp and you will turn in your customs form (which you will receive at some point during the flight). This is the point at which you will have to have your travel sheet ready with our address on it. You do not need to worry about a visa before arrival, although we do strongly advise that you register with your embassy prior to your travel date ([Link for Americans](#), [Link for Canadians](#)). Those staying three months or more can obtain a visa from within the country. Proof of a return ticket is also not required for entry. Your address while in Haiti, for paperwork purposes, will be **19 Rue Pelican/Clercine 4, Port-au-Prince**.

The arrivals terminal at Port-au-Prince is remarkably hectic, with only two luggage conveyors for all flights. Unless you're completely over encumbered with luggage, politely decline any offers to help you carry your luggage. (If you do allow someone to carry your luggage at any point in the process, please be prepared to pay them in US dollars and no more than \$2). Once you have retrieved your luggage, walk outside the terminal building and turn right. Proceed down the long path towards the car park area where you will see a crowd of people waiting for arrivals; this is where someone from Haiti Communitere will be waiting. Keep an eye out for a sign with Haiti Communitere or your name written on it.

If for any reason you don't see us immediately, please wait and have a seat in the shaded, covered area and stay calm. There are people walking around with cell phones which can be used for a small fee (US dollars or Gourdes). If you need to make a phone call, the word for phone is the same as English: just say "telephone" to someone in uniform. Call **509 4738-1434** and we will be able to help you.

After we have found each other, we will meet with a taxi driver and he will take us back to the base for a \$10 USD fee. We have found this to be the best way to get our new volunteers back to the base. Please make sure you have the fee somewhere that is easily accessible.

VOLUNTEERING WITH HAITI COMMUNITERE

Those who stay with Haiti Communitere fall into two basic categories: Haiti Communitere Volunteers and Partner Organizations.

Partner organizations apply through a separate application process and work on their own projects.

Below is a list of projects recently completed by HC volunteers. Please remember that needs change every day, as do our projects.

- Ubuntu Blox alternative building project
- Adobe house construction
- Construction of a water drainage system on base
- Building a roof for our tool lending program
- Loading/unloading supplies to Haitian clinics/ helicopters
- IT support
- Straw bale house construction (with a partner org)
- Earthship house construction (with a partner org)
- Example house constructed for permanent display at Building Back Better Communities Expo (BBBC) supported by the Clinton Foundation
- Ongoing support of community building projects in Cite Soleil

HAITI COMMUNITERE BASE

Our compound (and home) hosts a number of other partner organizations, as well as all of our volunteers. We live and work on site, making for a very communal experience.

Food

Two meals per day (breakfast & dinner) are provided Monday – Saturday. These usually

consist of traditional Haitian cuisine. We have onsite cooks from the local community that provide this service. If you have special food needs please indicate your requirements on your application. Most meals consist of rice, beans, sauce, small amounts of vegetables (carrots, beets, corn), and meat (usually chicken, goat or fish). You are welcome to go to local markets or grocery stores to supplement your food needs.

Please note that lunch and Sunday meals are not provided. It is possible to purchase simple meals ranging in price from around 50 cents to \$3 USD from vendors on our street or in our neighborhood. We also have a working kitchen for you to prepare food for yourself (or to share with others!).

Water

The base does not have running water. We treat water from a cistern that is filled from the municipal water supply. This water is completely safe to drink and is kept in large water jugs in the kitchen. Water from other sources around base (i.e. the hand washing station and water used for showers) has been chlorinated but not treated, and thus should not be drank. We have four private showers for volunteers to use for bucket showers.

Sleep

Nearly all residents of HC's compound stay in tents around the inside of the perimeter wall. Please make sure your tent is large enough to accommodate your belongings and whatever bed you choose to use, whether it is a sleeping pad, cot, or mattress.

Please consider the weather when buying a tent. Great ventilation, mosquito protection and a full rainfly are a must.

If you would like to leave your tent behind when you leave Haiti, we can always use extras. Tents are set up on a surface of smooth stones, so you may prefer an air mattress over a sleeping pad, and don't forget a pillow!

Security

The HC compound is gated with 24 hour security staff. Personal lockers, a safe and small locked storage room are available for valuable personal items to be secured during your stay.

Communication and Electronics

We have electricity and WiFi available 24-7. If you want to bring your laptop or other electronic devices, please do so, but be aware that you are responsible for the care and tracking of all of your items. Haiti runs standard American 110v plugs, so if you're coming from a 220v area, please ensure your devices are dual voltage.

When contacting family we suggest that you consider using email and Skype. Otherwise, locally-purchased cell phones can call the States for fairly inexpensive rates. A Haitian

cell phone can be purchased with SIM card for around \$20 USD at the airport, and then be topped up with minutes purchased on the street. We can assist you with this upon arrival.

Facilities & Amenities

As previously mentioned, the HC base has no running water, however cold water bucket shower facilities are available.

We have two outdoor composting toilet facilities available and we will further explain how these work upon arrival.

Tubs and water are available for hand washing your laundry or a washing service is available once per week by a local merchant for a small fee. Typically you will be purchasing your own wash soap. It is inexpensive and easily found at local supermarkets.

Recreation

While much of Haiti still suffers from the devastation of January 12, 2010, the recreational sector has rebounded slightly. We work Monday–Friday, so Saturdays and Sundays are your time for relaxation. We are happy to guide you on popular places of interest. As mentioned, we operate under a 10pm curfew for our volunteers and the “not out alone after 6pm” rule still applies.

For longer term volunteers warranting longer R&R breaks, the Dominican Republic or Jacmel for some beach time, or Kenscoff and the beautiful green mountains lay only a bus ride away.

Drug Use

Illegal substances (including Marijuana) are strictly forbidden for HC volunteers and partner organizations. The laws of Haiti apply within the HC base and any partaking in illegal substances will not be tolerated and the individual will be escorted from the property.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Haiti Communitere volunteers work 8am – 5pm Monday through Friday. A typical weekday schedule looks like this:

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 7:30am | Breakfast is served and quiet hours end |
| 8:00am | Mandatory Base meeting. All people on base are required to attend this meeting, as we talk about the day’s projects, make announcements, meet new people and say goodbye to those leaving. |

8:30am	Work day begins
12:00pm	Lunch
1:00pm	Back to work
5:00pm	Dinner
6:00pm	Buddy up if you want to go off of the base! It is mandatory.
9:00pm	Quiet hours begin
10:00pm	Curfew

VOLUNTEER SECURITY

The security status will be announced at the 8am meeting each day. Volunteers are required to adhere to a buddy system to leave the base after 6pm and follow a strict 10pm curfew. If you want to remain up and social past 9pm when quiet hours begin, we ask that you hang out in the workshop so that those who wish to sleep are not disturbed.

PACKING LIST

The following are strongly suggested basics. Remember you will be living with us during your stay, which means you will want to be comfortable, so don't minimize to a point where you are unhappy.

Essential / required:

1. Completed waiver
2. Passport and copy of passport
3. Cash (US dollars), and please remember to bring enough for Emergency Deposit
4. Sleeping pad/air mattress
5. Sheets, pillow(s), pillowcase(s)
6. Mosquito net
7. Headlamp/torch
8. Insect repellent
9. Personal first aid kit
10. Towel
11. Toiletries
12. Water bottle

13. Work gloves
14. Sunscreen
15. Sunglasses
16. Hat
17. One pair of long pants
18. Shorts/skirt/dress (keep in mind that when going out into the community, it is sometimes a good idea for legs to be covered up down to the knee)
19. Sandals
20. Work shoes (closed-toe)
21. Rain jacket
22. Rechargeable batteries (and chargers) for any portable electronics, including headlamp/torch
23. Any medications you require for the length of your stay (consult a travel clinic doctor for Haiti-specific medications)
24. Anti-bacterial hand sanitizer
25. Flip flops

Optional:

1. Your favorite dry food (if you plan on keeping food in your tent, bring plastic storage to store it in)
2. Comfort food to share!
3. Camera
4. Earplugs (communal living means these are highly recommended if you are a light sleeper)
5. Books
6. Laptop
7. Surge protector (the electricity here surges quite a bit and can easily fry electronics)
8. Any other clothing you might want

WISHLIST

If you have extra room in your bags, there are tools and materials that we are unable to source in Haiti. Please check our online wishlist, if you're interested in bringing some of these items and let us know so we can mark it off the list.

www.dld.bz/grassrootswishlist