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## *Arriving in Haiti*

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### **a. Immigration**

Arrival at the Port Au Prince airport can be daunting. You will pass through Immigration and present your International Entry-Departure Card which you will have been given for completion on the airplane prior to landing in Haiti. Keep this stamped copy in your passport after passing through Immigration. It is your exit visa.

### **b. Getting Through the Airport**

Once you pass through Immigration, we will go to baggage claim where we will rent luggage carts. Luggage might be unloaded on the floor or be found on the conveyor belt. We will gather all of our bags as a team, count them and proceed together to Customs where the bag(s) may be inspected. Team leader will collect all baggage claim tickets which are generally stapled to your boarding pass. Do not allow anyone to assist you with your bags, they will want to be paid. The team leader will select who will assist us through customs. Once cleared Customs, we will take your luggage to the exit doors. At this point, you will find yourself besieged by porters who want to assist with your luggage. Again, the Team leader will select one porter to help with our bags and indicate to him that he is in charge and only he will be paid. Stay with the porter/luggage/ team until we meet up with our driver. If porters ask to help with your bag, politely say “no thank you”. Team leader ONLY will pay the porter (who will pay any helpers he has enlisted). Keep money in your pockets/backpacks – DO NOT offer cash to anyone, you will be swarmed, and it could get dangerous.

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## *Background*

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### **Country Background:**

The native Taino Amerindians – who inhabited the island of Hispaniola when it was discovered by COLUMBUS in 1492 – were virtually annihilated by Spanish settlers within 25 years. In the early 17th century, the French established a presence on Hispaniola. In 1697, Spain ceded to the French the western third of the island, which later became Haiti. The French colony, based on forestry and sugar-related industries, became one of the wealthiest in the Caribbean but only through the heavy importation of African slaves and considerable environmental degradation. In the late 18th century, Haiti’s nearly half million slaves revolted under Toussaint L’OUVERTURE. After a prolonged struggle, Haiti became the first black republic to declare independence in 1804. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has been plagued by political violence for most of its history. After an armed rebellion led to the forced resignation and exile of President Jean-Bertrand ARISTIDE in February 2004, an interim government took office to organize new elections under the auspices of the United Nations Stabilization Mission

in Haiti (MINUSTAH). Continued violence and technical delays prompted repeated postponements, but Haiti finally did inaugurate a democratically elected president and parliament in May of 2006. A massive magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti in January 2010 with an epicenter about 15 km southwest of the capital, Port-au-Prince. An estimated 2 million people live within the zone of heavy to moderate structural damage. The earthquake is assessed as the worst in this region over the last 200 years. Haiti recently elected a new president, Michel Martelly.

Les Cayes is the third largest city in Haiti, 145 miles from Port au Prince. The drive to Les Cayes takes anywhere from 4 – 7 hours depending on the traffic conditions.

### **Organization Background:**

Bethesda Evangelical Mission, BEM Inc., is the parent organization based in Wallingford, Connecticut and Les Cayes, Haiti. BEM has a long history and successful track record, receiving awards for its humanitarian efforts in Haiti (you can learn more at [BEMHAITI.org](http://BEMHAITI.org)).

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## *COMMUNICATIONS*

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### **a. Language**

French and Haitian Creole are the official languages of Haiti. The children speak Creole and learn French in school. We hire translators to work with the team while we are spending time with our children. A knowledge of French is a huge plus as it allows you to both communicate with the children and also to become more familiar with the staff who works with us.

### **b. Phones**

The team leader will have a phone with international service that is available for team use. If anyone needs to use the phone it is available - if used excessively you may be asked to contribute to the cost. There is internet at the Mission house. It is recommended to check with your cell provider to ascertain what the services are that they offer in Haiti.

## DEPARTING HAITI

### **a. Upon Arrival at Port Au Prince Airport**

A driver that we have arranged will drop the team in front of the airport departure terminal. If we must use a porter (we should not need to), follow the instructions provided earlier.

### **b. Getting Through the Airport**

Have your passport ready to pass through the initial checkpoint. Check in at the ticket counter, showing your passport and proceed to the next checkpoint to turn in the stamped entry/departure

card you were given when you entered the country. Your departure tax is included in your ticket price, there is no need for cash.

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### *Helpful Trip Information*

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- The U.S. Embassy is located on Harry Truman Blvd., Port au Prince; telephone (509) 22-0200 or <http://usembassy.state.gov.haiti>.
- For information on safety and security you can always visit the State Dept. website at [www.travel.state.gov/travel/warnings.html](http://www.travel.state.gov/travel/warnings.html). The site is going to have many warnings about travel in Haiti, but be assured that we continuously monitor the situation with our Haitian partner whom we trust to advise us each trip. Those of us involved in this work have made many wonderful trips to Haiti and have not encountered situations that we felt were unsafe. We are also very careful about what we do and where we go and how we behave as guests in another country that is very unlike what we are accustomed to. Of course, common sense anywhere in today's world dictates that you keep doors locked, do not wander around in unfamiliar places or at night, stay with the team or go in pairs with prior knowledge and permission of Team Leader. The time in Haiti is the same as U.S. Eastern Standard Time, but Haiti does not follow U.S. Daylight Savings Time.
- The monetary unit in Haiti is the gourde (pronounced "goude"), which is based directly on the U.S. Dollar. The exchange rate for \$1 U.S. has varied between 30 to 50 gourdes, and as of this writing is about 41 Gourdes to \$1 U.S. Most Haitians talk in terms of Haitian Dollars, although there are no dollars and the currency is gourdes. Five Gourdes = 1 Haitian Dollar. Haitian Gourdes are not exchangeable outside Haiti.

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### *Life in Haiti and Some Important Considerations*

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#### **a. Photography**

It is recommended that you do not photograph Haitians without their express permission. There are many beautiful and compelling scenes you will encounter, but it is important that you not make anyone feel exploited. Haitians know very well that their living conditions are not what ours are and taking photos of scenes may feel exploitive to those you photograph.

The children love to have their photos taken. Take care with your camera, they will want to see the photo and will ask to use the camera. DO NOT feel obliged to do so and you do so at your own risk. PLEASE be aware where your belongings are and keep them safe. Expensive cameras and cell phones are a target. Be discreet, be prudent and careful.

#### **b. Cultural Perceptions**

It is common to be called "blan" (white), which actually signifies foreigner to a Haitian, it is not a racial remark. Senior men and women usually engender respect from the Haitians as elders are

revered in their own tradition. They have rich experience and knowledge to share, which can be a source of great gratification.

Culture shock can take many forms. The classic process is: (1) “The Honeymoon,” where you just love Haiti and everything about it; (2) “The Fall,” when certain aspects of the culture begin to bother you and you cannot reconcile your reactions; (3) “Bottom Out,” when experiences and observations become upsetting enough to tempt you to leave; and (4) “Refractory Period,” when you regain perspective and optimism.

Lack of privacy, as you become a visible focus for many Haitians may cause unexpected stress. It will be difficult at times to be polite, patient and noncritical. Some ways to handle culture shock are to be forgiving and kind to yourself, and to talk about your daily experiences with acquaintances, at team meetings and to keep a journal.

Keep in mind that travel is one of the best ways to learn about the world and the different people in it. By visiting foreign countries, we are introduced to ways of life that are far different from what we are used to. It is an experience that can enlighten and thrill, and it can cause us to look at our own lives from a new perspective. What we want for our teams is an attempt to experience a different culture in a way that is respectful, sensitive and open to new experiences. The cultural considerations listed below embody the nature of transformational travel and we hope you will take this Code of Ethics to heart.

#### **Code of Ethics for Travelers**

1. Travel in a spirit of humility and with a genuine desire to meet and talk to the local people.
2. Be aware of the feelings of other people, thus preventing what might be perceived as offensive behavior. Remember this especially with photography.
3. Cultivate the habit of listening and observing rather than merely hearing and seeing.
4. Realize that people in the country you visit often have time concepts and thought patterns different from your own. Not inferior, just different.
5. Discover the richness that comes from seeing another way of life, rather than looking for the “beach paradise” of the tourist posters.
6. Acquaint yourself with the local customs. Respect local customs; people will be happy to help you.
7. Cultivate the habit of asking questions instead of knowing all the answers.
8. Remember, you are one of many visiting tourists. Do not expect special privileges.
9. Spend wisely, shop responsibly. Remember that the bargain you obtain is only possible because of low wages paid to the maker. Ask yourself what is fair.
10. Make no promises to local people unless you are certain, and prepared, to fulfill them.
11. Reflect daily on your experiences; seek to deepen your understanding. Keep in mind that what enriches you may rob or violate others.

*Code of Ethics for Travelers, developed by the Christian Conference of Asia.*

#### **c. Requests for Financial Support and Money**

In general, Haitians are friendly toward foreigners. The people of Haiti, however; have many needs and you will encounter begging and as you develop friendships you may be asked for financial support for education or personal needs. It is painful and difficult, but you cannot help everyone and sometimes helping one person can lead to more requests or problems for someone else.

Please keep in mind:

- Your primary gift to the people of Haiti is your service and it is deeply appreciated.
- BEM does not encourage or allow gifts, cash or otherwise. Feel free to say it is against team rules to do so.
- Specific needs/requests you feel strongly about should be brought to the Team Leader(s). If appropriate, it will be handled by the team through Pastor Beaucejour.
- If you wish to leave clothing, shoes or other items, they can be left at the guesthouse with instructions with Pastor Beaucejour, or he can get items to the those who need it the most, he knows those needs better than we do.
- Giving money can be extremely dangerous to you or the person you are trying to help and we strongly urge you not to do this. Showing that you have cash puts you and everyone around you at considerable risk.
- BEM hopes to help Haitians help themselves by giving them the tools they need to do for themselves, not by giving handouts.
- We do not want to promote or encourage begging, hoping rather to encourage that which promotes self-esteem and empowerment.

#### **d. Distribution**

It is always tempting for visitors to think that it would be great to distribute toys and/or candy to the children, but we do not encourage this. Our concerns are for security in that you may run out of the items and this can be upsetting to people who have so little. Unless it is a controlled setting, and the Team Leader is aware of your intentions, please do not give anything away. If it is not safe or we do not have enough of an item for every child present, the “gifts” will be left with the pastor to be distributed at a later time.

It is imperative that you do not, under any circumstances, give money or gifts to Haitian staff or neighboring residents. Doing so has the potential to create problems with other staff or worse a very dangerous situation in the community, so we ask that you understand and respect this rule. We take very good care of those who work for us, hoping to empower and enable. It is also recommended that you keep your money and valuables hidden, safe at all times and do not leave it unattended or out of sight.

Tips (and sometimes team gifts) will be handled by the Team Leader ONLY. This ensures equal distribution and understanding that it comes from the entire team.

### **a. Travel Arrangements**

Travel arrangements will be made as a group to accommodate entrance into Haiti and ensure coordination of travel to les Cayes. All travel arrangements will be made by the team leader with the possible exception of travel to domestic airports.

### **b. Accommodations**

We will stay at the “Mercy House”, the Beaucejour residence and guesthouse. The second floor of the residence is for team use with dormitory-style bedrooms with bunk beds. There are two bathrooms, running water and flush toilets. On our way home from Haiti, we will leave the day before our flight and get into Port au Prince, where we stay with relatives of the Beaucejour’s. When we leave the next day there is very little stress concerning arriving at the airport in a timely manner and our home travel day is very pleasant.

### **c. Luggage**

Each member will bring 1 personal bag (50lb) 1 carry on (40 lbs.), 1 personal item (backpack or purse) and 1 bag (50 lbs.) with team supplies or donations. **NO LIQUIDS OR SHARP OBJECTS IN CARRY ON BAG**, put them only in your checked bag. When we leave Les Cayes please pack one day’s worth of clothing and sleepwear so that all of the suitcases are not unloaded from the bus as we stay in Port Au Prince for our last evening.

### **d. Health Precautions**

#### 1) Immunizations:

- Tetanus: up to date if given in the past 8 – 10 years
- Hepatitis A: one injection and then can be boosted in 6 months to give lifetime immunity
- Typhoid: comes in tablet form which is protective for 5 years, or injection which is protective for 3 years
- MMR: usually completed in childhood but double check; if born before 1960, you have most likely had the diseases

#### 2) Medications-

Malaria: prevention is usually with Chloroquine 500mg tablet; take one tablet the week before departure, one each week that you are in Haiti, and once a week for 4 weeks upon return.

Traveler’s Diarrhea: it is best to bring a prescription filled for Cirpofloxacin 500mg, one tablet every 12 hours for three days, 6 tablets; a box of over the counter Imodium and Pepto-Bismol. If you develop diarrhea while on the mission trip, speak to the medical team leader as to how to treat. See your health care provider if you are less than 18 years old for other antibiotic options. Metronidazole 500mg twice a day is used if dysentery is the problem, but is usually carried by the medical team.

Your personal medications: Bring enough for the duration of the trip; carry in original containers; place in your carry-on luggage. Be sure all information about your medical situation is on your application. Discuss any concerns with the medical team leader. Reminder: some medications make you sensitive to the sun so check with your pharmacist.

Over the counter medication: Bring whatever items you think you might use; Tylenol or ibuprofen are always a good idea to bring. Also consider bringing packages of powdered rehydration drinks, such as Gatorade. It is very hot in Haiti and you will sweat out a lot of water. Consult your health care provider or local travel clinic if you have other questions. Other “medicinal” things to bring: Ear plugs (many dogs and roosters); Bug repellent spray/wipes/wrist bands; mosquito bed netting, usually for a twin size; hand sanitizer that is 60% alcohol; SUN SCREEN.

### **Drinking Fluids:**

Keeping well hydrated is necessary to feeling well. Drink plenty of purified or bottled water and avoid ice unless it comes from the mission house. Limit soda as tends to make you thirstier. Powdered rehydration drinks are easy to carry. Bring your own water bottle with a covered mouth piece.

REMEMBER: If you are thirsty, you are dehydrated. Use ONLY bottled/purified water when brushing your teeth. You may want to bring an extra tooth brush in case you forgot.

### **Food:**

Eat ONLY food prepared in the mission house or approved restaurants. Use hand sanitizer before you eat. Use utensils whenever possible. Bring individually packed snacks, such as fiber/granola bars, dried fruits or nuts; crackers and peanut butter. Blessedly, the food is great on these trips and eat fruit as often as it is served.

### **Sun Protection:**

Apply sun screen before you go out into the field and reapply often. Bring a hat and neck scarf (for sweat); keep shoulders covered.

### **Working in the Mission Field:**

We want you to feel your best and be safe out in the field. ALWAYS wear closed toe shoes! Foot coverage is best at the beach, too. Wear hats and gloves as needed. If working with cement, please wear goggles to protect your eyes. Glasses are better than contacts out in the field as there is a great deal of dust and smoke in the air.

**PACE YOURSELF:** take breaks and sit in the shade, drink often. Do not wander off from the team. If you are not feeling well, let the leader know.

### **HANDWASHING**

Please wash hands often—it is your first line protection against illness. Use a 60% alcohol hand sanitizer even more often!! And as simple as it sounds, keep your hands out of your mouth.

### **Once Home:**

Traveler’s diarrhea, and other illnesses can start after you have returned home. If feeling poorly, seek medical care. Be sure to finish your chloroquine or other malaria medication.

### **e. Clothing**

Women and men should dress modestly since immodest dress or behavior will certainly attract

undesirable attention. Your personal appearance reflects your respect for the culture of the people with whom you will be working.

Light, loose fitting cotton clothing is recommended. At church, women are asked to wear dresses or skirts that cover their knees and shoulders; men are asked to wear slacks and a button up shirt, short sleeves are fine. Study shoes and water tolerant, thick soled sandals are recommended. Women are asked to refrain from spaghetti strap tops and short shorts; men are expected to wear shirts. You can relax as you wish at the guesthouse.

Beach wear should also be modest, no bikinis please, one piece or tankini-style bathing suits only.

#### **f. Jewelry**

It is best to leave most of your jewelry at home. Be modest, wedding bands, a simple necklace and stud-type earrings.

#### **g. Incidentals**

You may wish to pack your favorite snack food to have in Haiti. If you wear eyeglasses or contact lenses, you may want to consider packing spares. Hats and sunglasses are recommended. Work crews/construction teams are required to have work gloves and sturdy shoes.

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### *Team Guidelines*

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- #1 priority is to share God's love and light.
- Be flexible – plans will change as circumstances require.
- It is NOT about us. We are going to serve God by caring for the children and others in need, and sometimes each other.
- We are not going there to save Haiti. We can't save Haiti. We can make a difference. Focus on what you CAN do, not what you CAN'T do.
- Cross cultural tips: sensitivity, flexibility, respect. Enjoy the people, enjoy the country, but always be aware of your surroundings, stay in group or in pairs.

#### **MONEY:**

- People will ask you for money, especially at the airport and sometimes in church. **YOU DO NOT GIVE ANYONE MONEY OR GIFTS.** Feel free to tell people that. You cannot, it is against the rules, take the burden off of you and put it on team leadership. If you see someone/something you feel compelled to do something about, please approach Team Leader and we will address it as a team. If appropriate, we will act as a team through Pastor Beaucejour. Please respect this. Everything we do in Haiti has a future ramification on someone else. Most often we cannot give to all, so it is not appropriate to



give to one. Giving money away could lead to injury or a riot in some situations, so please don't do it.

- Team response – Do as asked – inquire later. It may be against your normal temperament, however follow directions. Don't question it, do it. Questions and explanations will take place later when danger or security is no longer an issue.
- At the airport, do not let anyone touch or help you with your bag. If someone touches your bag they will want to be paid. Team leaders will rent carts and hire someone to help with the bags, Team Leaders will handle paying that person(s) for helping. It can get chaotic; simply say “no thank you”. **KEEP YOUR MONEY IN YOUR POCKETS!!**
- We will stay together as a team. If you need to leave the group for any reason, inform Team Leader and **GO IN PAIRS** only. Safety and caution are key. Instructions are told to keep you safe. There may be times of frustration. We will work it out later.
- Communication is key. We will debrief daily about everything and anything. Share what is on your heart, let things out instead of keeping emotions bottled up all inside, this will help with “re-entry” and form connections and create lasting friendships. Haiti is a difficult place, we know that. Talk about what you see, talk about what is in your heart, joys and sorrows, frustrations, ideas, dreams.

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#### *Trip Finances*

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1. Team expenses should be paid in full two weeks prior to travel so that funds can be sent to Haiti ahead of us to make necessary arrangements.
2. You may wish to bring funds for personal expenses, between \$100 – \$200 (depending on the number of gifts or souvenirs you wish to bring home).
3. American money is fine. Souvenirs can be bought from vendors who will come to the Mercy House and will be happy to accept American money. You will also need money for the offering plate at church and for food at the airports.
4. Small bills work best (1"s and 5"s) as no one is going to give you change.
5. **NEVER TAKE A WAD OF CASH OUT OF YOUR POCKET.** Have bills separated in different pockets when dealing with vendors or preparing for church.

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#### *Trip Packing Checklist*

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- Work clothes
- Clothes for relaxing at night- shorts, etc.
- Church clothes – one outfit, light slacks for men, button down shirt, dresses or skirts for ladies
- Sleep clothes
- Passport
- Bug spray/wipes/Off Fan & refills
- Gold Bond Powder/Baby Powder
- Mosquito net

- Sunscreen and lip screen
- Sunglasses
- Hat/bandana
- Work gloves – if possible, bring extras to share with our Haitian co-workers
- Flashlight and batteries
- Bathing suit (see dress code) and beach towel
- Toiletries-shampoo, conditioner, soap, deodorant, toothbrush, toothpaste, razor, shaving cream, facewash and washcloth, band aides and antibacterial ointment
- Hair brush, hair stuff
- Shower sandals, sandals, sneakers or work shoes, church shoes
- Rx medications in carry on (in case luggage is lost)
- Malaria meds/Cipro if recommended by physician
- Imodium, Tylenol or Ibuprofen
- Water bottles – 3-4
- Snacks
- Electrolyte packets
- Antibacterial hand gel or wipes
- Camera and batteries
- Bible (if you wish)/journal/pen
- Creole dictionary
- CD Player, iPod and charger
- Ear plugs if you are a light sleeper
- *NO Alcohol, Cigarettes, or other drugs.*

**Suggestions:**

- Liquids cannot go in your carry on, they will be confiscated. This includes toothpaste and water.
- Packing clothes in large Ziploc bags saves space and you can use them later for dirty clothes.
- Pack snacks in Ziploc bags to prevent ants and keep things fresher.
- Sweatshirt or long sleeve shirt for airport & plane as it can be chilly