A CRUISING GUIDE
TO
HAITI 3.0

by

Frank Virgintino

Flag of the Republic of Haiti
“There are no inferior people; only inferior thoughts about people”

Frank Virgintino
PRAISE FOR A CRUISING GUIDE TO HAITI

2014.03.14

We recently visited Haiti on our journey through the Windward Passage. We are thankful for the guidance that Frank Virgintino gave us on where to stop. If you happen to be traveling the same route, you should stop at the small fishing village just under the northern peninsula. It breaks up the long sail, and is a good place to rest. The people in the village are extremely nice, and very helpful. Nobody asked us for money or bothered us in anyway. There was a gentlemen name College who spoke pretty good English. He asked me to convey the real needs of the village for supplies, especially things like paint (for the school); pens, pencils, and paper (for the kids); used or old sails for the fishermen; etc. After our initial anchoring, we were greeted by the fishermen, and taken ashore by College and his brother. We were given a tour of the village, and then played limbo, and jumped rope with the children. It was an awesome visit. The anchorage is good for any easterlies, but it can be a bit rolly. Email Frank for the coordinates.

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All the cruising sailors who have a desire to sail far and wide. May this guide provide you with information to make your cruise interesting and worthwhile.

A special dedication is also made to Sally Erdle and Tom Hopman, owners and publishers of the free monthly publication, CARIBBEAN COMPASS (www.caribbeancompass.com), for their tireless contribution to the art of cruising and for the many hours of hard work that made it all possible.
A CRUISING GUIDE TO HAITI

Ed. 3.0

by

Frank Virgintino
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PROLOGUE

CRUISING HAITI ~ the forbidden fruit

Please take note that some of the opinions expressed in this prologue may be found to be offensive to some readers. This new edition of the guide contains an extensive bibliography that forms part of the basis of the opinions expressed in this section. The balance of the opinions is based on the writer’s own personal experience garnered over two decades of cruising Haiti. It is not the intent of this prologue to accuse or blame anyone for the problems that exist in Haiti.

I have cruised Haiti for two decades. In all of that time, I have found Haiti to be exceptional provided that areas of dense population are avoided.

In order to explain Haiti and why cruising boats should consider cruising Haiti, I believe it is necessary to try to explain why boats do not call there. The single greatest reason that Haiti is avoided is FEAR.
Haiti is feared because Haiti is largely misunderstood. It is my hope that this guide will provide some insight into a beautiful cruising area well worth considering. Haiti is off the beaten track. If you like marinas, restaurants and areas to shop in, Haiti is not your port of call. On the other hand, if you like cruising through small villages to see life lived simply in its own way, you will enjoy Haiti a great deal. Many people think that Haiti is destitute and hopeless. Haiti is not prosperous but it is not destitute by any account. Haitians are full of hope and joy and live life in the moment, ready to celebrate life for its basic value; life itself. Life can be challenging in Haiti. Notwithstanding the difficulties, families take care of their elderly and children are clean, uniformed and attend school and church.

I am not referring to the 1% well to do white Haitians or even the 4% light skinned Haitians who live at a higher standard. I am referring to the 95% black West African Haitians who live life without any surplus in their day to day lives. Haitians say in Creole, “Lespwa Fe Viv” (Hope makes us live) and in fact Haitians are and have always been very hopeful.

Creole (Kreol) became the official language of Haiti in 1987. It is full of charm and color and the many, many sayings that are heard daily well describe what it means to be Haitian. “Deye Morne Gin Morne,” means mountains beyond mountains. The name Haiti – Ayiti -- means the “land of mountains” and Haitians see life as a series of challenges to be overcome, as one mountain after another. You will not find most Haitians dour or angry; in fact, Haiti is a country of artists who sing and paint. Singing, dancing and visual art are part of their West African culture. They believe that God, the creator, is like an artist, creating something out of nothing. Therefore to be an artist is to be Godlike. Music is essential to their lives as well. To listen to Haitians sing at church or at a celebration is to listen to the most essential element of the human spirit that raises its voice; a voice so beautiful and so pure that it will uplift you.

Many of my friends tell me that I have fallen in love with Haiti and that I am blind to its dark side. To that I say in Creole, “Ayiti mete met, hounga sou mwen,” Haiti has cast a spell on me and if you cruise through it, it will cast a spell on you as well.
Most Haitian boys have a “Bois Fouille;” a dugout canoe. There are many of these all through Haiti. Look at that smile!

If you visit a schoolroom in a fishing settlement and see the hopeful faces of so many young children, so willing and ready to learn, and then listen to them pray or sing, you cannot help but be deeply moved.
Schoolroom at Bombardopolis, a fishing settlement on the southwest side of the north peninsula. Students were well groomed, respectful and a delight to watch as they did their lessons.

Visiting Haiti will be as a litmus test for your inner self; if you are not deeply moved, you will know that somewhere along the way you have given into doubt and cynicism. Those that know me will tell you that I am not given to Pollyannaish notions. I have written a number of cruising guides and I would not knowingly send anyone into a dangerous place or space.

The greater part of Haiti is good cruising ground. While cruising through it, you can also lend a helping hand. Haitians are most often not short on food or clothing. Most Haitians living in rural areas are short of cash and also do not have a great deal of potable water. They get cash from selling fish and from plot farming. Cash is always in short supply, making it very hard for them to purchase school books and school supplies, fishing equipment and medicine. While no one will refuse a bag of good used clothes, a bag of cooking charcoal is much more in need.
Most Haitian fishermen have a sail powered boat (bateau a voile); they are excellent sailors. Their greatest need is sails for their boats and fishing equipment of all types.

It is said that THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE. In the case of Haiti, this is particularly true as so many misconceptions have formed over such a long period of time.

Adventuring and exploration are among some of the reasons we choose to spend our time and money to cast off our lines. Given what most people believe about Haiti, I believe that your experience will be in conflict with many of the popular notions about the country. If you decide to cruise Haiti, do your best to set aside any preconceived thoughts you may have and let your experience be your yardstick.

To cruise Haiti safely, it is important to avoid densely populated areas where poverty abounds such as are found in the capital, Port au Prince, or on the
north side of the north peninsula, where some areas are desert-like and truly impoverished.

Outside of those areas, you will find the balance of Haiti to be provincial and caught in a time warp from the mid-20th century. Most of the settlements you will visit are fishing settlements and the people you will meet there live frugally.

The country is heavily deforested and droughts are frequent. This is attributed to the cutting down of trees to make charcoal. Until recently, Haiti was exporting charcoal (made from trees) throughout the Caribbean, as it was a way to raise cash. Additionally, due to the mountain ranges, on the average more rain falls on the eastern portion of Hispaniola (Dominican Republic) than on the west side of the island (Haiti).

Those that seek to cruise through Haiti must be reasonably self-sufficient. A water maker is an important piece of equipment for any extended cruise through the country or at minimum extra water carried on deck. In addition, there are no marinas and therefore repair services are not easily found. With that said, you will find that Haitian fishermen are excellent sailors and know a great deal about rigging and boat building. They also are very adept at repairing motors of all types. Sourcing parts is always a challenge so it is best to have adequate parts on the boat. Most mid-size towns and cities can fabricate and weld if needed.

Some cruisers have shared with me that they are concerned about piracy. I have not encountered any piracy in the two decades I have cruised Haiti. Virtually all boats in the rural areas of Haiti are fishing boats that are powered largely by sail. If they pose a threat, it is that at night they do not have running lights and one must take all measures to be alert to avoid collision.

As an aside, I would like to say that one should always be alert at sea to avoid collision.

This year I met two catamaran cruisers who had collided just south of Isla Beata; one headed west from the DR to Île à Vache, Haiti and the other heading east from Île à Vache, Haiti to the DR. They were on reciprocal courses. I met the first fellow anchored at Île à Vache, and when I returned to Boca Chica, DR, I met the other fellow. Both sustained a great amount of
damage to their boats although no one was hurt. Both boats were on GPS auto pilot headings. No one was watching on one boat and on the other boat the helmsman had fallen asleep at the helm. Get plenty of rest en route, drink a caffeinated beverage and stay alert; cruising is not a ride at DisneyLand and cruising the rhumb line on GPS auto pilot is DUMB LINE CRUISING!

Haitian fishing boat—bateau a voile

Haiti has two cultures. One is elite, book educated, white or light skinned, French derivative and urban. The other is black of West African origin, tradition educated, and rural. As you travel through Haiti, you will clearly see the implications of the two cultures.

There are also two Haitis. The media’s version of Haiti, a country in a perpetual state of political violence and crime; and the real Haïti, where political demonstrations are usually confined to the capital. The countryside is quite provincial and just awakening, due perhaps, to the availability of cell phones and internet access. I have watched villages such as Caille Coq on
Île à Vache transform over the last two decades from very provincial fishing villages devoid of electric cars, cell phones, street lighting, etc., to villages now lit by street lights powered by solar panels, using generators to make electricity, and with widespread use of cell phones and internet. You would not yet call these communities prosperous but neither are they destitute. The younger generation is ever more educated and very aware of who they are and what they need to do to improve their lot in life. They are not ignorant by any means. In fact, they are quite inventive and adapt quickly. For all of the setbacks in Haitian history, there is no Creole word for disaster. Miwak in Creole is derived from the French word for miracle; an event so extraordinary that it can only be explained as an act of God.

The Republic of Haiti was founded after more than a decade of war between rebellious black slaves and the army of Napoleon, which army was defeated hands down. The Haitian Republic was formed in 1804 as both republic and democracy. It was founded on many of the same principals as those of the American Revolution. However, because it was achieved by black slaves, it was feared and resented as beliefs at the time held that the black race was inferior (sometimes I wonder how much things have really changed) and that black people were not capable of very much at all, least of all a successful revolution that resulted in a free Republic; the only successful Black Republic in the history of the new world.

“The rebelling Haitian slaves are the cannibals of the terrible republic,” wrote Thomas Jefferson, February 11, 1791. The USA did not recognize the Haitian government until 1862 and supported attempts to have it overthrown. Rudyard Kipling, British poet laureate, in his poem “White Man’s Burden” refers to black people as “Your new-caught, sullen peoples, Half-devil and half-child.” (There is much discussion by academics as to whether the remark was what he believed or an acerbic commentary.) It would seem that these labels have taken hold and persisted over the centuries. The net result of it all is racism and in the case of Haiti, abject racism; racism in its most virile form.

The result of such racism is that many perceptions have formed about Haiti and Haitians that have little or no basis in fact.
PERCEPTIONS, MISCONCEPTIONS & MYTH

Ever since Haiti fought for and won her independence from France, she became *persona non grata*. After her hard won independence, she became France’s bastard daughter and in many respects has remained so to this day.

Enlightenment philosophers such as Hume, Kant, Hegel and even Thomas Jefferson maintained that the absence of reason was a characteristic of those of African descent; black people. That Africans were inferior to Europeans. It was inconceivable that black men could beat back and win, over the superior white forces of Napoleon’s army. The very idea was too much of a threat for the new Republic of the United States where slavery existed throughout the south. The European countries did not want a fight for freedom for and by slaves to inspire other blacks in the Caribbean. Whereas the American Revolution had been led by the “ruling race of the world,” the Haitian revolution was led by black slaves. Many have asked how it was possible for slaves to overcome 50,000 superior French troops. What many could not understand is that the revolution in Haiti was led by men who were great strategists; men who knew the French very well and knew the terrain of Haiti even better. The small army that they led was well disciplined and the men and women in it were willing to die for what they believed in -- FREEDOM!

Many of France’s finest were killed in battle but many also died of dysentery and malaria as they pursued the rebels into the mountains. The rebels used knowledge of local topography as an advantage against a foreign colonial army. At night, in the mountains they used their black African culture, so alien to Europeans, to drive fear into their adversaries who were thousands of miles from their homeland trying to cope with a culture that frightened them. You might say the Haitians hosted a “Halloween party” for a group of gullible Europeans. The French needed an excuse for losing and they said that the Haitians were winning because they had made a pact with the devil. This was based on the fact that the Haitians were excellent at conjuring up the worst of fears in the rank and file, using masks, chants, dead animals and whatever else they could conjure up.

When the earthquake struck Haiti in 2010, Pat Robertson, a famous TV evangelical and host of the 700 club, said that the earthquake was the wrath
of God visited on Haiti for the pact with the devil that they had made so many years ago. To follow this logic is to believe that God would bury innocent men, women and children under tons of rubble.

**THOUSANDS WERE TRAPPED AND DIED UNDER TONS OF RUBBLE**
(Hurricane photo archives)

Haiti is largely Christian of one denomination or another (the majority are Catholic). To visit Haiti on a Sunday morning is to find people in their churches at service.

Slave owners were white Christian Europeans and North Americans. Imagine going to church on Sunday and then buying and owning a human being on Monday; a person over whom you had the absolute authority of life and death. Much of the rationale that permitted slavery was based on the strongly held belief that blacks were inferior to whites. Haitians are very West African and thus very black. Notions about race do not change overnight, even if the overnight is hundreds of years long.
In the United States of my youth, people prized Grade A white eggs and no one would buy brown eggs, which were less costly. Imagine a racism that is so ingrained, that even the shells of eggs are subject to discrimination. As a child, I always wondered if the inside of a brown egg was somehow different than the inside of a white egg.

Black American soldiers were segregated and discriminated against right through World War II. This tradition went all the way back to colonial days. It is difficult to comprehend what it must have been like to be asked to put your life on the line by a country who considered you inferior.

Bob Marley, the famous Jamaican singer and lyricist, tried to express feelings about what it was like in his song “Buffalo Soldier.” Their job was to protect white settlers; many of whom were racists.

“Buffalo soldier, dreadlock Rasta:
There was a buffalo soldier in the heart of America,
Stolen from Africa, brought to America,
Fighting on arrival, fighting for survival.”

(Bob Marley, first verse, Buffalo Soldier)
Some cruisers, who have visited Haiti, have told me that they feel awkward being the only white person among so many black people. The first time I walked through the Madame Bernard market at Île à Vache, I was the only white person among more than 500 black Haitians. It is easy to feel self-conscious in such a circumstance. I think what always put me at ease was my belief that regardless of what color shell an egg has, all eggs are the same inside. I have never had an incident in the two decades I have visited Haiti where I felt threatened.

Haitians refer to white people as “blans.” The term is neither pejorative nor complementary; it is meant to be descriptive. Europeans and North Americans have spent over 500 years distinguishing white from black and Haitians simply follow suit on where the emphasis has been.
Others tell me that they are uncomfortable with the level of poverty in the country. How is it that Haiti is so poor? When Haiti won its freedom from France, it was forced to pay enormous reparations; an amount so large, and paid for so long, as to make Haiti a debtor nation at its inception. During the ensuing centuries that have passed, Haiti has remained a debtor nation due largely to the politics of the hemisphere.

Many believe without question that Haiti is dysfunctional; that somehow Haitians are not capable of taking care of themselves. Haitians are very capable of doing what it takes to live and survive. When I say this, people normally respond by asking why then does so much aid go to Haiti?

The answer to this question is not a simple one but it can be summed up in two ways. The first is that much of the “help” that goes to Haiti is not help at all but rather the continuing story of exploitation, self-interest and the geopolitics that benefit from providing such aid. A good start would be to ask yourself, why Haiti imports its rice and sugar from the United States when in fact Haiti has always been a major rice and sugar producer. With a little reading, you should be able to “follow the money” to understand what has taken place.

Perhaps you will read “A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis” by David Rieff. His book, as well as others, clearly documents why aid “from the top down” does not work. Aid during a crisis is one thing but programmed welfare is something entirely different. Give a man a handout and you have created a beggar; give him the means to earn a living and you have a responsible citizen. The debt reparations that Haiti had to pay after their war of independence, which war concluded in 1804, were not paid in full until 1947. More than a century of calculated colonial occupation which caused impoverishment was followed up by decades of the US backed dictatorship of Papa Doc Duvalier and his son “Baby Doc.” This father-son team indebted Haiti still further and made it the dumping ground of the surpluses of the western world.

Haiti has always been a country of plot farmers. Haitians plant to eat and to sell what is left over to raise cash. US aid has significantly reduced plot farming in Haiti. As a result many plot farmers have had to relocate to the cities putting more pressure on already overcrowded substandard areas.
The second way to understand Haiti’s plight is to understand that notions about Haiti are so firmly ingrained that they create a mindset. The young Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, gives a wonderful delivery that you can listen to about “the danger of a single story.” You can listen to the 20 minute link on TED Talks:

http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story

In her address, she explains when she came to the United States, the daughter of an upper class Nigerian family, her roommate automatically assumed she was poor, did not know how to use a stove and could not speak English. In fact, after finishing her undergraduate studies at the University of Nigeria, she came to the states to do graduate work and graduated from
John Hopkins as well as Yale. Her speeches and books have won her worldwide notoriety. Five hundred years ago, this exceptional young woman would probably have been shipped to the Americas for a life of enslavement.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

“Single stories create stereotypes that are not untrue; just incomplete.”
It is the incompletion that causes judgments and beliefs that are not correct.

Slavery is based on racism; an evil so pernicious that today in the 21st century, the world still suffers its fallout.

“The slave trade and slavery spread more human misery, inculcated more disrespect for and neglect of humanity, a greater callousness to suffering, and more petty, cruel, human hatred than can well be calculated. We may excuse and palliate it, and write history so as to let men forget it; it remains the most inexcusable and despicable blot on modern human history.”

It is hard for us living in the 21st century to imagine slavery, but one need only visit the Slave Museum in the capital of Curacao to see and feel what slavery was like. Slavery robbed a man of his freedom; his God given freedom, but worse, it robbed him of his dignity as a human being.

Frederick Douglass, an American slave who became a freeman and a great author, delivered an eloquent speech dedicating the Haitian Pavilion at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893. He said,

“We should not forget that the freedom that has come to the colored race the world over is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons of Haiti ninety years ago. When they struck for freedom, they struck for the freedom of every Blackman in the world.”

In other words, for black people, the Haitian Revolution was the “shot heard around the world.” It was a turning point in history and it demonstrated the fate of every slaveholding society in the world. Haiti proved that human bondage was not an inevitable or eternal fate.

Morris Birkbeck, an English immigrant, left Virginia for Illinois because he did not want to degrade himself and corrupt his children by living in a slave state. In 1818, he described in a widely read book what it was like to watch the sale of two slave women and their children on a Virginia street. He said “I could hardly bear to see them handled and examined like cattle when I heard their sobs.”
Imagine the terrible grief of being sold as well as being separated from one’s own children, who would be sold as well, never to be seen again.

If these pictures do not conjure up for you enough of the emotions that were present, the following is the first verse of *Ancestor on the Auction Block* by famed Jamaican poet, Vera Bell (1906).
Ancestor on the auction block
Across the years your eyes seek mine
Compelling me to look
I see your shackled feet
Your primitive black face
I see your humiliation
And turn away
Ashamed
“Bloated by wealth unlike anything seen since the early days of the conquest of the Americas, the colonial French planters of Haiti made the institution of slavery the institution of cruelty. Field hands caught eating cane were forced to wear muzzles while they worked. Runaways had their hamstrings sliced. There were brandings, indiscriminate floggings, rape and killing.”


The physical abuse that was heaped on the West African in the Americas was only surpassed by the emotional and mental degradation of their race and culture over a period of 500 years. To this day, racism is still alive and well demonstrated by ongoing events in Haiti and throughout the Caribbean.

Cruise to Haiti; embrace the opportunity to learn Haitian culture and its West African roots. By doing so, you will help destroy racism at its core - a core fueled by fear!

About 12,000,000 West Africans were taken and sent to the “new world.” Of those about 4,000,000 were settled in the Caribbean. They were all West African but they spoke different languages. Slave owners took great care to be sure not to put those that spoke the same language close to each other so that they could not plot against their white captors. What the white captors did not realize is that there are many forms of language, and all West Africans believe in one form or another of animism; the belief that spirits inhabit all living things including trees and animals. They believe that spirit is infused by the greatest spirit of them all - GOD (Bondye).

This belief system has come to be known throughout the world as Vodou or Voodoo. Some historians and anthropologists believe that the word comes from the French vieux deux - the old spirits of the forest. Others believe it comes from the word vodún, which is the Fon-Ewe word for spirit (from the West African peoples: Fon and Ewe and Yoruba).

Voodoo is a way of life for Haitians. Hollywood’s narrative displayed in the movie “The Serpent and the Rainbow” directed by horror movie director, Wes Craven, is a fiction about Voodoo on par with movies like “The Exorcist.” As a set of religious beliefs, Voodoo is one of the oldest on the planet; dated to about 5,000 years. It is said that Haiti is 85% Catholic, 15% Protestant and 100% Voodoo.
In Voodoo, the supplication of spirits, just like the supplication of saints by Catholics, is meant to induce the spirits (*lwas*) to intercede on one’s behalf to assist with the problems of life. Illness, shortage of money, finding the right mate, and so forth; these are all things for which a believer in Voodoo might request help. Some Voodoo ceremonies do sacrifice the blood of an innocent animal as an offering to God; such type of sacrifice is certainly not unique to Voodoo. Sometimes those that participate in such ceremonies do dance and speak as if possessed by the spirit, in many ways similar to some Christian sects being imbued by the spirit and speaking in tongues. The important thing to understand is that the tenets of Voodoo make life bearable and even joyful for Haitians amidst tragedy and suffering because it gives Haitians a way of understanding their plight. It gives them a way of understanding, which is deep in their gene bank and goes back thousands of years to those that lived in the forests of Africa. It is a type of understanding that allows people to assign a meaning to the death of a loved one or other difficult circumstances. If we accept what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie said, then the biggest problem that white people have with their understanding of Voodoo is that we have bought into the “single story”.

AIDS is also often cited as a reason not to visit Haiti. The roots of this fear go back to the first impact of the AIDS epidemic. What came to be known as the 4-H club incorporated hemophiliacs, heroin users, homosexuals and Haitians. This group was thought to be either the initiators of AIDS or a group with an above average amount of the AIDS virus. In 1983, the New York State Health commissioner removed Haitians as a risk factor for AIDS and in 1984 the United States Center for Disease Control did likewise. However, the damage was done and Haitians had become stigmatized. Their tourist industry declined by over 90% in a matter of a few short years and has not recovered to this day.

Remember again the “danger of the single story.” Whether it is crime or poverty, AIDS or Voodoo, there is no question that Haitians have been maligned and shortchanged by repeated single stories of their culture. If I am to base my decision to cruise or visit an area on supposition and myth, we could make a case to avoid cruising everywhere. If you choose to cruise to Haiti and make your ports of call some of the islands and villages, you will experience something so unique that perhaps Haiti will cast its spell on you as well.
Haitian art -- full of color and imagery
PORT REFERENCES
AN OVERVIEW OF THE DIFFERENT HARBORS AND PORTS THROUGHOUT HAITI

NORTH PENINSULA (north side, E -- W)

Figure 1. North side of Haiti’s North Peninsula

Fort Liberté Bay    Deep bay with good protection
Cap-Haïtien    Major port with dock facilities; exposed to northers
Acul Bay    Very protected
Port-de-Paix    Harbor has poor holding and a surge
Île de la Tortue    Anchorage is at Basse Terre
Cap Du Mole St. Nicolas    Very protected harbor
Entrance to Mole St. Nicolas
NORTH PENINSULA (southwest)

Figure 2. The tip of Haiti’s north peninsula

Pointe A Perle -- Bombardopolis

Easy anchorage; fishing settlement—EXCELLENT
CENTRAL PART OF HAITI

Figure 3. Port au Prince and Ile de la Gonave

Port au Prince     Large commercial harbor -- **AVOID**
Anse A Galets-Gonave   Good harbor and anchorage
SOUTH PENINSULA (north side)

Baradères Bay    Beautiful bay with protected anchorage, just west of Miragoâne

Grand Cayemite Island Excellent fishing settlement

Pestel              Excellent

Anse D’hainault    Good anchorage in prevailing wind

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Figure 4. North side of Haiti’s south peninsula
SOUTH PENINSULA (south side, W -- E)

Figure 5. South side of Haiti’s south peninsula

Île à Vache  Wonderful anchorage with good protection
Les Cayes    Mid size town with provisions and clearance
Jacmel      Anchorage open to south east winds, excellent town
APPROACHES FROM THE NORTH OF HAITI

THE WINDWARD PASSAGE

Figure 6. Approximately 50 miles wide at the north end and over 100 miles wide at the south end
The Windward Passage as seen from the anchorage at Bombardopolis; container ship in background heading south.

Most boats that make the passage south to the Caribbean come through the Bahamas, and then on to the Turks and Caicos Islands. From the Turks and Caicos, they head for the Dominican Republic, entering the north shore at Luperón. They then transit the north coast heading east until they reach the Bay of Samaná, before crossing the Mona Passage to make their easting to ‘the Caribbean.’ The Caribbean that has traditionally been referred to is the Lesser Antilles; the Virgin Islands to Grenada.

The Lesser Antilles comprise a part of the Caribbean and are located at the eastern border of the Caribbean Sea. Cruising boats work to go east to make their landfall in the Virgin Islands. Some go offshore following routes like that of the Carib 1500 rally and others “harbor hop” following the routes explained in “The Gentleman’s Guide to Passages South: The Thornless Path to Windward” by Bruce Van Sant.
Coming through the Windward Passage from the north, suggested harbors and anchorages include Cap Mole, Bombardopolis, Grand Cayemite Island, Anse D’Hainault, and Ile à Vache.

_Cruising boats have avoided the Windward Passage, which is the easiest, quickest and safest way into the Caribbean because of their fixation on arriving to the Lesser Antilles._

For those that do take the Windward Passage, there are some really nice and very convenient stops as you transit. At the southwest corner of Haiti you
can cruise east along the south coast of Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic) with great anchorages along the way. The south side of Hispaniola is not a lee shore, and you are no longer in the Atlantic Ocean. Because of the definition of “the Caribbean” that has been accepted, as well as a desire to avoid Haiti, we have spent over 50 years taking the hard route when we could have simply freed our sheets at the south end of the Bahamas and sailed through the Windward Passage.

Why would you want to cruise east in the Atlantic along the dangerous north coast of the Dominican Republic with only one safe anchorage for the entire distance; Luperon? Luperon is a mangrove backwater that was cut to make access. The water is foul. You cannot make water from it or swim in it. Your boat’s bottom will become fouled with a white calcium-like substance that will clog your intakes. At the end of the coastline, you must negotiate the Mona Passage which can be, at times, very challenging, for reasons that are explained in *The Cruising Guide to the Dominican Republic* offered free at www.freecruisingguides.com.

If you do use the Windward Passage and want to avoid Haiti, this can be achieved by sailing “down the middle” and thereby remaining off the Haitian shore. The Windward Passage is approximately 50 nm wide at the north end and more than 100 miles wide at the south end. Once at the south end, you turn to port and can use the katabatic winds to sail east along the south coast of all of Hispaniola.

Or you can follow this guide and make some safe and beautiful stops in Haiti which you will cherish and hold as outstanding.
People have asked me if the Windward Passage between Haiti and Cuba is dangerous. In all the years I have transited this passage, I have never had any difficulty whatsoever. I know of no incidences of piracy in these waters emanating from either Cuba or Haiti.
OTHER APPROACHES TO HAITI

From the WEST on the SOUTH SIDE of Haiti

Figure 9. From the West

Coming from Jamaica and points west, one will have the prevailing easterly Trade Wind as well as the westerly current against them. To counter these adverse factors, there are a number of strategies to consider.

Both islands (Jamaica and Hispaniola) have high mountain ranges. As a result, at night the prevailing wind is usually offset by the katabatic winds (heavy cold air that falls to sea level after sunset) from each island. Therefore, winds will often be reduced in this “night shadow” between the
northeast side of Jamaica and the southwest corner of Haiti in the Jamaica Channel.

A review of weather files will generally indicate a wind reduction in a "corridor" that is 5 to 10 miles wide. The stronger the prevailing Trade Wind during the day, the less the effect of the katabatic winds at night. The westerly set of the current is approximately one knot and grows stronger as the moon becomes fuller. If a strong norther is blowing early in the Trade Wind season, one can wait for it to pass and use the lull directly thereafter to make one’s easting.

The Trade Wind blows hard and then blows itself out. This most often happens early in the Trade Wind season; December through February. Alternatively a norther comes down from the States and stalls the Trade Wind. This also happens most often early in the Trade Wind season. From March on, the likelihood of the Trade Wind blowing itself out, or a norther stalling the Trade Wind, becomes less and less. **The Trade Wind becomes more constant as the summer approaches.**

**ADDITIONAL NOTE:** Going east into the Trade Wind always requires the work involved in beating to windward. Whether you go offshore from North America directly to the Virgin Islands; or island hop across the top of Hispaniola using Van Sant’s strategies to cope with the Trade Wind; or enter the Caribbean through the Windward Passage as I recommend and then go east along the south coast of Hispaniola and Puerto Rico; all require work to windward. However, the big difference if you come through the Windward Passage is that you will be in the Caribbean Sea and not on a lee shore in the Atlantic Ocean.
From the EAST on the SOUTH SIDE of Haiti

Approaching Île à Vache and other points of Haiti from the east on the south side of the island provides for a favorable wind in normal trade wind conditions and a favorable current of approximately one knot. If approaching Île à Vache from the east, be sure to stay to the north, as the north side of the island is strewn with reefs.

From the SOUTH on the SOUTH SIDE of Haiti

From the south side of the Caribbean Sea, the approach to Haiti must take into account a westerly set for the current. As the current will be on the starboard, an adjustment to compass heading will be required to counter it.

Depending on the time of the month, the current will flow westerly at approximately one knot. In normal Trade Wind conditions, the easterly wind can make for a pleasant sail depending on your point of departure. The farther west you start on your crossing north to Île à Vache, the closer the wind will be.

From the coast of Colombia through the ABC islands, one should be able to make the southwest corner of Haiti on a starboard tack without great effort.

One must plan carefully to avoid departing at the onset of a norther which will then require a beat into heavy seas. A norther occurs during the early part of the Trade Wind season. It can be mild and also quite strong; so strong that it can be felt all the way south to Colombia. Sometimes this is referred to inappropriately as “enhanced Trade Wind.” Do not head north across the Caribbean Sea in conditions when strong northers prevail.

Check the weather very carefully, especially during December through the end of March when northers are most frequent.
ENTRY REQUIREMENTS

There are many ports in Haiti where one can clear in or clear out. Normally the requirement is a current passport for each member of the crew. In addition, the ship’s papers and papers from the prior port MAY need to be presented. Each area seems to address entry requirements in their own fashion. Most often all that is required is to have your passport stamped by immigration. Customs is most often interested in commercial shipping or not to be found. There are some harbors such as the large commercial ports of Port au Prince and Cap Haitian on the north coast, where the authorities will line up and ask you for hundreds of dollars (See http://www.noonsite.com/Countries/a-short-cruise-in-northern-haiti ). You can remain polite and simply refuse to pay and the amount will be reconsidered. In the smaller towns this is not the case and you simply go to the Immigration office.

Most harbors charge $10 to $20 US for the passport to be stamped indicating that you entered or departed the country.

Should your port of entry be Île à Vache, the hotel at Port Morgan will take your papers for a small fee to Les Cayes and have them processed or you can do it yourself at Les Cayes right at the pier where the ferries dock. While I render no opinion, many who visit Île à Vache do not clear in or out.
HAITIAN CULTURE

Haiti is the poorest country economically in the Americas; yet it is a country of art and artists. Haitian art is usually vibrant and filled with color. Through art, Haitians are able to express their feelings and through their art we can learn a great deal about the Haitian perspective. Haitian art is a complex tradition reflecting African, French, Catholic, tribal and Voodoo roots. It is an important representation of Haitian culture. If you like art, quality Haitian art can be a real bargain.

ART

PLOT FARMING
painting by Jocelet, Les Cayes, Haiti
Haitian open market
painting by W. Etienne, Jacmel, Haiti
Scenes often depict the marketplace and/or animals, as well as people working in the fields. The art makes a real attempt to overcome the many difficulties inherent in Haitian life. Haitian art is filled with the colors of the Caribbean.

MUSIC

Compas is a musical genre as well as a dance that originates from Haiti. It was named by the Haitian jazz great Nemours Jean-Baptiste on a recording released in 1955. The name derives from the Spanish word meaning rhythm or tones. It involves a medium-to-fast tempo, and shares with other Caribbean styles of music a pulsating drum beat. The lyrics are typically in Haitian Creole. Sometimes it is referred to as kompa, which is a combination of French and Spanish with African drums. You can sample compas on YouTube, which features a number of videos from compas festivals in places like Montreal, Boston, New York, and Miami.
FOOD

The cuisine of Haiti is comprised of African, Taino (indigenous), and European influences. Rice and beans is a mainstay as are chicken, goat and pork. Plantains are also a staple and are usually eaten fried.

Most dishes are seasoned with Epis, which is made from scallions, small green or red peppers, parsley, garlic and vegetable oil. Once you have eaten a few of the local dishes you will immediately come to recognize this distinctive flavor. Be careful not to eat lettuce or any vegetable that has not been cooked. Also, do not eat any fruit that can be eaten without being peeled.
The typical Haitian plate, much like the Dominican plate, will include the ever present fried plantains

SOCIETY

Most of those who live outside the cities farm small plots of land in order to feed themselves and earn an income. The average Haitian earns less than $1,000 US per year and has a life expectancy of 62 years which is rising as medical care continues to improve. There are pockets of poverty in Haiti, in particular in areas of the large cities in the slums. However, poverty is not the same as dysfunction and Haitians are anything but dysfunctional contrary to the picture the western press portrays. Income levels are deceptive because many Haitians fish or farm and barter to attend to their needs.

There are deep and bitter divisions between blacks (over 90% of the population) and light skinned mulattos who have most always aligned themselves with the white colonials. While blacks have always been the overwhelming majority, mulattos have had advantages within education, government and the military. Most mulattos speak French, the language of
higher education and most job opportunities, while the vast majority of Haitians speak Creole.

Despite all of their problems, you will find most Haitians hopeful for the future.

HAITIAN CREOLE (Kreyol) - one of Haiti’s two official languages.

Spoken by virtually all Haitians, French continues to be the language of prestige and power; a hangover from colonial times.

Haitian Creole is described by Laguerre and Accilien as a “language of nuance, rhythm, and sound,” captured in seemingly endless proverbs such as Ayiti se tè glise (Haiti is a slippery land) and Dèyè mòrne gen mòrne (Behind mountains are more mountains). Pronunciation is phonetic; a letter is written as it is pronounced and vice versa.

Some words and phrases that follow may prove useful. Remember, how they look is how they sound.

Hello .......................................................... Bonjou (morning)  
.......................................................... Bonswa (afternoon)

My name is ..................................................... Mwen rele…

Mister .......................................................... Mesye

Mrs. ............................................................ Madamn

Please .......................................................... Tanpri

No problem ................................................... Pa gen pwoblèm.

Excuse me/sorry ......................................... Eskize mwen.

Thank you very much .................................... Mèsi anpil.

I only speak a little Haitian Creole ................ Mwen degage mwen.

Can you speak more slowly? ....................... Ou kapab pale pi dousman?
Do you speak English?  
Yes, please.  
No, thanks  
Happy Birthday! 
Congratulations!  
What do you think?  
That depends.  
I’m just looking, thanks.  
Not too hot/spicy or without pepper  
Dangerous 
I don’t feel well 
Earthquake 

Èske ou pale anglè? 
Wi, tanpri. 
Non, mèsi. 
Bòn fèt! 
Felisitasyon! 
Sa ou panse? 
Sa depan. 
Mwen jis ap gade, mèsi. 
Pa twò pike or san piman 
Danjere 
Mwen pa santi m byen. 
Tranbleman

NOTE: To be able to effectively communicate in Haiti, it is worthwhile to be able to speak some French. However, if you cannot speak French, many times, especially among the younger generation, you will find someone who speaks English. And if all else fails, SMILE and say Hello!

IT IS IMPORTANT IN HAITI, AND IN PARTICULAR IF YOU DO NOT SPEAK FRENCH OR CREOLE, TO REMEMBER THAT COMMUNICATION IS A FUNCTION OF INTENTION.
RELIGION

This section is not exclusively about Voodoo; it is about religion as it is part of the culture of Haiti. West Africans developed a religion that can best be referred to as syncretic. Syncretism, as defined by the American Heritage Dictionary, is “the reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief.” In the case of Haitians, they fused Christianity with Voodoo. Many people have difficulty understanding this as they have such a stereotypical view of Voodoo. Remember earlier on when you listened to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie speaking about the “danger of a single story?” This is exactly what she was referring to. Try to open your mind to a different viewpoint and understanding so that you will come to understand Haiti and her people through their story; a beautiful and complex story filled with suffering and pain but also with consistent examples of a people’s perseverance through hardship; a perseverance that is made possible by their “syncretic religion.”

The overwhelming majority of Haitians are Roman Catholic. About 20% are Christian of various Protestant sects. Voodoo can be described as an eclectic West African Religion. Many Haitians practice Voodoo alongside Christianity. It is said that Haiti is 80% Catholic and 100% Voodoo. In popular literature and films such as “The Serpent and the Rainbow” which was released in 1988, Voodoo has been construed as a religion of savages that utilizes sorcery and witchcraft. The impressions about Voodoo created by the movie as well as by the popular press are false and demean an entire culture. Many times, Voodoo is practiced alongside Christianity with no conflict. The term Voodoo is most often attributed to the Dahomean West African term, vodu or vodun. It means spirit. Western culture has not understood Voodoo and as a result, Voodoo has come to be viewed outside of Haiti as something bad, as evidenced by references in the western press such as “voodoo economics” and “voodoo science.”
Voodoo altars demonstrate the syncretic nature of this belief system. There are statues of Catholic saints and the Virgin Mother as well as other forms of Christian symbolism.

For the slaves, Voodoo made life bearable and sometimes even joyful as it is often times celebrated in groups and accompanied by singing, chanting and the sharing of food; normally an animal is sacrificed. Missionaries often imposed their ethnocentric views of the superiority of white Christian culture and as a result most Haitians keep Voodoo among themselves. As a result, it is said that Voodoo has more enemies in public and more friends in private than can be counted. Haitians are aware of their history and what they achieved in their revolution.

When you remove all the hype, Voodoo is a religion of creation and life. It is the worship of nature and natural forces. One might speculate that individuals such as Henry Thoreau could have been a Voudouisant; a servant of the spirits and nature.
Haitians at church services. The churches are always full.
I have visited with many ministers and priests throughout Haiti. They tell me what my own experience in Haiti bears out - that most Haitians are very fervent Christians.

Voodoo rituals commemorating the lwa (spirits) include dancing, drumming and spirit possessions. Ceremonies are held to heal disease or end bad luck, among other reasons. A vèvè is a religious symbol commonly used in Voodoo. It calls in the particular lwa or loa being invoked, and then serves as the spirit’s representation during rituals.

Examples of vèvès

Vèvès are an art form in themselves
A vevé is drawn on the floor or ground by strewing a powdery substance, usually cornmeal and wood ash in Haiti, to make a design. There are hundreds of spirits or loa and as many vevés.

The music, drumming and dancing associated with Voodoo or Vodoun rituals have become an important part of Haitian pop culture.

Drapos or spirit flags are used during Voodoo ceremonies to honor the spirits and to summon their energies. They are most often made of satin or rayon and decorated with beads or sequins, sometimes as many as 20,000. The design of the Drapo varies according to the purpose and the spirit that is being invoked.
La Sirene Vodou Banner (drapo)
Evelyn Alcide, Port-au-Prince
(Indigo Arts Gallery, Philadelphia)
A NOTE ON VOODOO

Generally Haitians will avoid sharing Voodoo ceremonies with foreigners. Many Haitians will smile and tell you that Voodoo is a superstition that they do not believe in.

However, Voodoo is pervasive in Haiti and most Haitians believe in it at one level or another. Do not make negative comments about Voodoo. It is best to be interested and observant and leave it at that.

Avoid any discussion in which you share your opinion as you can cause insult without realizing it.

If you like a Haitian Drapo, you will find that they can be purchased.

However, one must take care not to deal with Drapos in any way but respectfully. Haitians take Drapos seriously on two counts.

First, many Haitians believe deeply in their power.

Secondly, they are considered a sacred art form.

They are considered Haiti’s finest form of Folk Art.
CRUISING HAITI

To cruise Haiti safely, one must be careful to avoid large cities. Cruise the settlements and small towns and you will find Haiti charming and the people welcoming; anxious to meet you and happy that you came.

There are some other factors that make for a successful cruise. You must carry sufficient spare parts to keep your vessel in good condition as you will not be able to find those parts in Haiti or easily have them brought in.

In addition, fresh water is scarce and any water supply that is available is poor. It is best to be able to make fresh water or at least to have extra fresh water jugs on deck sufficient to maintain your water supply.

Take care if you want to give someone a gift as you will quickly be overrun with people. I have found that it is best not to make individual gifts. If you give, give through an established channel such as an orphanage, church or school. Among the greatest needs are: school supplies, medicine and medical supplies, fishing supplies and equipment including used sails, and bags of charcoal.

With regard to vaccinations, prepare for Haiti like you would most parts of the Caribbean. It is wise to check with your doctor prior to an extended cruise in the Caribbean and he will review appropriate vaccinations with you.

How to prepare for risks to health as one travels is a difficult and complicated question best reviewed with your medical professional. I have always been sure to keep my vaccinations up to date. On the other hand, I have never taken a prophylaxis for malaria but do use repellants. For those that want to take detailed precaution you can review the information at the following website link:

Figure 10. The Windward Passage is the key to cruising Haiti
HAITIAN PORT AND ANCHORAGE DETAILS

NORTH PENINSULA~NORTH COAST

Figure 11. HAITI’S north peninsula~north coast
Fort Liberté Bay
19° 43.17N  71° 50.67 (just north of entrance to bay)

This is the first major bay in Haiti heading west from the border with the Dominican Republic. Fort Liberté Bay is five miles west of Manzanillo Bay which is located in the DR just past the Massacre River. The entrance to Fort Liberté Bay is narrow, and located between West Point (Pointe de Ouest) and Saint Louis Redoute (Fort), which extends out on the east shore. You will see the ruins of the old fort as you approach the entrance.

The midchannel is clear of obstructions and will allow you to enter this nearly landlocked harbor. Depths in the bay are good, ranging from 6’ to 60’. If you are entering you can clear at Fort Liberté town. There is a long pier on the western side of the entrance channel.
Cap-Haïtien
19° 47.37N  72° 11.07W  (point just north of #1)

As you close on Cap-Haïtien, you must take note of the numerous reefs in the area. The water is often clouded due to rain runoff and every precaution must be taken. The channel is well marked and there is a dock where you can tie up to visit the port captain. The dock area is centrally located and there will always be a crowd of people. In Cap-Haïtien, you will find many people who can speak English.
From Cap-Haïtien the Citadelle (Citadel) of Christophe is less than 20 miles south, the last seven miles from the town of Milot an uphill trail perhaps better traversed on horseback unless one is an experienced hiker.

The Citadel may already be familiar to you as its likeness is featured on Haitian currency and stamps. It is a monument of great historical and cultural significance for Haitians; it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

This amazing structure, the largest fortress in the Americas, was built as part of an ambitious system of fortifications surrounding Port-au-Prince to defend against French attack in the wake of Haitian independence.
CITADELLE OF CHRISTOPHE
Port-de-Paix
19° 56.80N  72° 49.99W  (Just north of entrance)

Port-de-Paix is a port of entry located about halfway between Cap du Mole and Cap-Haïtien. It is the second largest town (and the home base of the internationally acclaimed Orchestre Tropicana, one of Haiti’s legendary big (compas) bands) on the north coast of Haiti. This harbor is subject to a surge and in a norther is untenable. The holding is poor and clearing in at this location should be reserved for really settled weather.

Some of Haiti’s notable musicians, poets, writers, intellectuals and politicians are from Port-de-Paix. The town is considered to be one of the more stable in Haiti.
Île de la Tortue (Tortuga Island)
19º 59.75 N  072º 42.54W  (just south of entrance)

Figure 15. Île de la Tortue (Turtle Island)

This island is about 20 miles long by 3 to 4 miles wide. Its only anchorage is at Basse Terre at the southeast point. However there are fringing reefs and entry is not straightforward. There is a village at Basse Terre.

Figure 16. Basse Terre on Île de Tortue
where you will see fishing boats at anchor. The island has always been a Haitian boat building center and many wooden sailboats and pirogues are still made there, by hand.

**Acul Bay**

19° 46.55N  72° 19.73W  (just north of entrance to Bay)
This bay is extremely large and goes deep into the surrounding countryside. The entrance is 10 miles west of Cap-Haïtien. The anchorage is in Lombard Cove, one of the best protected anchorages on the north shore of Hispaniola and especially useful in a strong norther. While the bay is open to the north, it is protected by reefs that keep it calm inside.

Proceeding west from Cap-Haïtien there are numerous coral heads just below the surface. If you are moving in that direction, it is best to stand offshore a mile or so. The channel into the bay is unmarked and careful attention to navigation is warranted. The area around Acul Bay is much less crowded than Cap-Haïtien.

Figure 18. The entrance to the Windward Passage from the north
WEST END OF NORTH PENINSULA (north side)

Figure 19. West end, Haiti’s north peninsula
Cap Mole St. Nicolas
19º 48.60N  73º 25.08W  (at entrance to bay)

Cap Mole St. Nicolas is a delightful bay to enter and it is truly beautiful.

Unfortunately, except for the extreme north part of the anchorage, water depths average about 20’ to 40’. If you anchor in front of the town of Mole St. Nicolas, aside from the depth of the water, if the wind comes up strong from the north, which happens with some regularity during the early part of the Trade Wind season (December – March), you will find yourself in a lee shore.

The town is a mid size town and you can visit immigration there if you would like to clear in.
Anchorage at Cap Mole St. Nicolas

There is a settlement just above the town but I found the anchorage south of the sandbar and north of the reef too risky should the wind come up from the north. Above the settlement it is desolate but anchorage can be found in 10’ of water very protected from wind and sea.
Settlement just north of the town of Mole St. Nicolas

North end of settlement just south of the sandbar
Unless you have a reason to visit the town, I prefer to continue on and to make the turn around the west end of the peninsula to anchor at Pointe a Perle in front of the fishing settlement of Bombardopolis.
Bombardopolis
19° 30.04N  73° 25.25 W

Anchorage at Bombardopolis

Bombardopolis shorefront
Haitians have a very high regard for their children and go to great sacrifice to cloth and feed them and send them to school. The children are considered to be from the world of “Petit Monde;” the world of the little ones.
The Caribbean sun can be very hot - look for the shade

Welcoming Committee - they invited us to visit the settlement
HAITI CENTRAL~THE CAPITOL

Port-au-Prince
18° 33.64N  72° 23.18W  (just east of entrance to the harbor)

Port-au-Prince Harbor is a commercial harbor, open to the west with some shelter from reefs and shoals. It is the capital of Haiti, densely populated at two to three million people. The damage inflicted by the earthquake which struck in 2010 was so severe as to render the city unable to operate.

It will be many years before Port-au-Prince returns to a semblance of order and until that time, cruising yachts should avoid this area.
If you decide to head west, you can call at Anse a Galets at the northeast corner of Île de la Gonave. The harbor is pretty and well protected. However, the town is uninspiring and does not have much to offer. Should crew fly in or out from Port au Prince, taking a ferry from Anse a Galets to Port au Prince is much better than taking your boat into Port au Prince.
Tourists returning from snorkeling

She smiled when she saw me docking at the wharf... a smile that was worth a 1,000 words...
SOUTH PENINSULA

Baradères Bay
18° 33.25N  073° 33.45W

This is the largest bay on the southern peninsula. It has many good anchorages and if you would like to sample Haitian life in basic fishing villages of an earlier era you will find that here.

Entrance into the bay is straightforward. If you speak with a local fisherman, he can take you in your dinghy or his pirogue up river a few miles through the Baradères River to the town of Baradères. The trip up river will take you back in time 50 years or more to a level of primitive living now rarely seen. Be sure you leave someone on your boat to watch it. Leave it locked and well anchored.
You will find most of the people in this very rural area uncommonly polite. There is a small cay, Rum Cay, as well as a little island, Cabrit, which are both worth a look. At the western end of the bay is the entrance to a small fjord. The mountainous south side of the bay makes for a dramatic anchorage. Since the bay lies at the extreme western edge of the earthquake’s epicenter, the impact was much less devastating than in Port-au-Prince.

For the adventurous, you will find Baradères Bay offers all the remoteness of a trip to the interior of the African continent.
The settlement at the southwest corner of the island is called Pointe Sable. It is a wonderful place to anchor and to visit. You will find the people welcoming and their lives interesting. Enter between the islands (Petite and Grande); controlling depth about 8 to 9 feet. Anchor directly in front of the village.
Anchor directly in front of the settlement

You will meet them all, the young and the old. Most often you will find them welcoming and gracious and happy that you came.
Grand Caymte Island, Pointe Sable fishing settlement
Anse D’Hainault
18° 29.13N  74° 27.27W  (at anchorage in front of town)

Anse D’Hainault is a town of about 30,000 people. There are banks and food stores here but the boat should not be left unattended at the anchorage. Avoid the dock unless you want a large number of uninvited guests.
The best use of this anchorage is that it offers a convenient stop on the way through the Windward Passage, particularly on the way south through the passage en route to Île à Vache. You can anchor here and sleep, and get under way when you have a good weather forecast regarding the velocity of the easterly Trade Wind. Once you “turn the corner” at Cap Tiburon it is about 36 nm to reach Pointe à Gravois and another 10 nm to reach Île à Vache. If the easterly winds are blowing hard this can be a difficult passage. Many times at night the winds are very light and if you depart from Anse D’Hainault at about midnight or thereabouts you should make Île à Vache in the early morning without too much difficulty, if any at all. Be careful sailing in close to the land, as most Haitian fishing boats are unlit.
Anse D’Hainault

Île à Vache
18°06.72N  73°41.84W  (Just north of Baie à Feret)

Figure 28. Île à Vache and Les Cayes on the mainland
As you round Pointe Ouest to enter the Baie à Feret, you will almost certainly see ‘Bois-Fouilles’ (dugout canoes) and Batiments, the native sailing boats. They carry a disproportional amount of sail with the crew standing on boards to balance their fine craft.

The smaller boats are used for fishing and the larger ones for moving cargo and people between island and mainland. Since they have no engines, when the wind drops they use long oars for propulsion. These craft are one of the few remaining examples of sailing craft whose design hasn’t changed for generations.

The Bay of Feret provides a wide entrance (see note after chartlet below) to this idyllic natural harbor. You may anchor in the bay, although as it sweeps around to port the shelter gets even better. Steep hills cocoon the anchorage from all points and the final basin is quite likely to be as still as a millpond, whatever the weather offshore.

The anchorage is named Port Morgan after Henry Morgan who, amongst other pirates, is said to have sheltered there.
Navigational Warning: On entering bay give starboard side a good margin due to the shoal on the west side of the bay ~ favor port entering Baie à Feret.

Anchor in twenty feet of water in hard sand, turn off your engine and enter the tranquility of this magical place. Children will paddle out in Bois Fouilles (canoes), looking for a gift or perhaps work. They will continue to come to your boat all day long but I never have found them aggressive. If you want them to leave, simply say “NO MERCI!”

Overlooking the bay is the Hotel Port Morgan, tastefully built into the hillside (www.port-morgan.com). The hotel has a fine restaurant serving local produce with a French flavor.
Baie à Feret anchorage

The proprietor of the hotel can help you with fuel and water, as well as immigration if you choose to stay. They take your documents to the mainland and return them to you for a small fee. As a result there is no need for you to go personally.

The land around the bay which is the village of Caille Coq has neither electricity nor running water. Take a walk through the trees and meet the locals. They will welcome you to witness their uncomplicated lifestyle. There are no cars on the island; just horses and a few bicycles.

NOTE: Do NOT take photos of Haitians without their permission.
We treated to a lunch of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches —they drew pictures afterwards.

I took the photo above in 1998; these boys are all grown now. I know their families and am proud of their academic accomplishments. They have become good friends and they say that when I enter at night, they know it is me for they can recognize the sound of the boat’s engine.

Figure 30. Anchorage at Île à Vache-Baie à Feret
Provisions are brought in from Les Cayes on the mainland to the village of Madame Bernard a couple of miles east of the anchorage. An open market is held on Mondays and Thursdays. With its spicy smells and hustle and bustle, the market is something to savor; a moment that could have been captured in a National Geographic article circa 1950.

Figure 31. Caille Coq to Madame Bernard, Île à Vache

MUCH THAT COMES TO MARKET ARRIVES VIA PACK MULE OR HORSE
MADAME BERNARD MARKET-- A SCENE REMINISCENT OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC CIRCA 1950

It is said that she has not missed a day at the Madame Bernard market in over 40 years
When Mom goes to market, Junior tags along

Some of the millions of mangos
FISHERMEN BRING THEIR CATCH TO MADAME BERNARD MARKET
If the weather is settled you can take your dinghy to the market and leave your boat anchored at Port Morgan. You can have your dinghy watched by one of the youngsters for a small tip. Should you desire, you can take a guide with you from the village for a small fee. He can come with you in the dinghy or you can walk the four mile distance -- a slow two hour walk or very fast one hour walk. If you choose to walk, you will witness the daily activities of Île à Vache.

Plowing the land on Île à Vache

There are various services in the village of Caille Coq. The Kaliko Bar and Restaurant is run by Jean Jean and his wife Rosemina. Jean Jean will come by your boat to take reservations. Place your order the day before you want to visit so he has time to prepare the meal. You can dinghy over to his bar/restaurant on the beach on the west side of the bay or tie up to the hotel dock and walk through the village.

Vilna and her husband Dou Dou will come out to the boat to see if you need laundry done. This will cost $7 USD or 280 Gourdes per load.

Local guides are readily available and they will pave the way for your exploration. Use your camera with discretion and get your guide to ask permission to photograph if you have any doubt. Many Haitians do not like their picture taken and become upset if you take unauthorized photos.

This is a place you will never forget where the clock stopped many years ago.
Village of CAILLE COQ
From the mouths of babes:
“I love my daddy”
MAKING A DIFFERENCE ON ÎLE À VACHE

If you visit the village of Madame Bernard, about 4 miles east of Caille Coq, you may choose to visit Sister Flora’s orphanage.

Sister Flora is a tiny French Canadian Catholic Nun who has worked in Haiti since 1967. She has created an effective organization for helping orphans and other people in need.

SISTER FLORA AND FRIENDS

She operates a school, an orphanage and a hospital that service over 300 children, including physically and mentally handicapped children and teenagers. Her organization has managed to staff and equip a specialized ward, school and other operations through donations.

Here is a place where, if you are inclined, a donation of goods or money helps not just one person for an afternoon, but many for years. Should you decide to bring supplies to the orphanage, the organization has a boat which will come to the anchorage to accept your generosity. Antibiotics and medicines are always appreciated as well as clothes and school supplies. They are easy to contact. You can visit Madame Bernard market with your boat or, if the Trade Wind is not blowing too hard, by dinghy. Or you can walk.

The four mile walk along the path from Caille Coq to Madame Bernard will take you through a number of villages. The views, sights and sounds are extraordinary and worth the effort. If one of the crew comes up in the dinghy, going back will be a breeze literally as the trade wind will be aft all the way home.
Pumping water for her brother, her dress in the grass (to the left of her head) to keep it from getting dirty ~ no sense getting in trouble with Mama!
VILLAGE SCHOOL

Path along the way to Madame Bernard
NOTE: DO NOT TAKE PHOTOS OF HAITIANS WITHOUT THEIR PERMISSION. They consider photos personal property and believe that taking photos without permission is a violation of the person’s rights. You may however shoot photos of scenery and most buildings without any problem.

FRIENDS OF ÎLE À VACHE

The non-profit FRIENDS OF ÎLE à VACHE HAITI, established in Canada in 1999, helps the people of the island through sustainable economic development. It reaches out to the public to fund its ongoing and developmental projects on the island.

The purpose of all FRIENDS’ efforts is to demonstrate what can be done and how to break the continuous aid cycle. Its efforts are elegant in their simplicity, yet life changing for the residents. They have the potential to make Île à Vache an even more desirable cruising destination. Everything developed on the island can be replicated elsewhere in Haiti.

Two of the most important continuing initiatives are establishing sustainable ways to provide fresh food and deliver clean water. The group developed a rainwater cistern collection plan and has so far strategically placed over 40 cisterns around the island. The cistern project now not only provides clean water, but trains and employs local people in the skills required for construction and management of the systems.

Fish farm on Île à Vache
The Friends have funded the construction by local people of a fish farm, taking advantage of otherwise difficult water resources. The fish farm provides several jobs as well as protein food. The fish raised on the farm are harvested twice weekly to sell at the Madame Bernard market to individual families. Local traders also buy the farmed fish. They carry the fish in coolers to Les Cayes to sell and restock their supplies to sell at Madame Bernard.

The Friends organization was born during a search for the wreck of the original Canadian icon, the BLUENOSE, which sank off the Île à Vache coast in 1946. It is no surprise then that the Friends are working with the government to establish the Île à Vache Marine Park to protect the underwater history of shipwrecks that surrounds the island, a project that will lay the groundwork for tourism and the jobs and improved local economy that will follow.

Every cent donated to the Friends of Île à Vache Haiti makes its way to the Haitian population. Not one cent goes to overhead, an enviable claim in the non-profit world. Donations of goods, services, or money help prime the pump of basic sanitation and health through access to clean water, boost nutrition through adequate locally grown food, and economic wellbeing because of the jobs generated.

Recognizing that the children of today are the cure for Haiti tomorrow and that education is the key, the Friends’ TEACHERS FOR HAITI program aims to improve teacher education to raise the standard of education.

It has taken 500 years for this part of Hispaniola to slip down to the level it is at. It will take several generations to finally pick itself up. What happens on Île à Vache today can make a difference for the entire country.

For more information on Friends of Île à Vache Haiti you can write to: friendsofileavache@gmail.com or visit the web site: http://www.friendsofileavachehaiti.com/welcome.php
MORE “FRIENDS” OF ÎLE À VACHE

In addition to the organization named “Friends of Île à Vache,” a number of other non-profits or “non government organizations” (NGOs) are active on the island, among them, and a by no means exhaustive list,

- Kakok Foundation, which operates a medical clinic with fulltime nursing staff.
- Good Samaritan Foundation, which has a school in the village of La Hatte.
- A business women’s association, which supports a micro-loan program on the island.
- Oceans Watch, which provides support in many environmental and sustainability areas to organizations on the ground.
- Archangel Airborne, which operates regular medical clinics in outlying areas of Les Cayes and on Île à Vache.

Whether it is the schools, fish farms, fresh water collection projects, Sister Flora’s orphanage, school and hospital, the Madame Bernard market, the quaint village of Caille Coq, the Port Morgan Hotel or just the beauty of the anchorage, you will find Île à Vache to be an extraordinary place to visit.
No one goes to school without their uniform and getting their hair done!
Les Cayes
18° 11.15N  073° 44.40W  (just southeast of entrance to harbor)

This town is a small commercial port across the water just a few miles northwest of Île à Vache. There are stores and fruit and vegetable markets all through the town. Les Cayes, with a population of 60,000, is an interesting place to visit to experience a typical Haitian town. It is a bit dusty and worn, but you will find it safe. There is an ATM machine where you can get Gourdes with your ATM card.
Les Cayes is a busy town with a great deal of movement.
You will find that most Haitian women “use their head.”
This one was a real charmer who sold me lemon grass.
UN police vehicles as well as local police are seen often and are very present. However, I have always found this town to be stable and peaceful.

There are faded Victorian views everywhere you look
Even in poverty there can be elegance
Even in desperation there can be hope.
Painting of “Judy” by Jorge Severino, renowned Dominican artist
Unfortunately there is no good anchorage for Les Cayes. You will anchor in 10’ to 15’ of water in front of the town, somewhat open to the trades. On most days it will be bumpy but acceptable. Many times you will see a commercial boat anchored, perhaps 150’ to 250.’ Anchor off its lee side to get a little protection.

You land with your dinghy at the ferry dock, which has one wooden ladder. If a boat is on it, come alongside the boat and climb over. It can be a bit challenging but very doable with a little patience. The ferry dock is the one where the boat from Port Morgan docks as well as the other ferries from Île à Vache.

DO NOT LEAVE YOUR BOAT UNATTENDED AT THE ANCHORAGE. I always take along someone from Caille Coq with me to stay on the boat.
We buy roasted peanuts from her

Outdoor market at Les Cayes is vibrant and colorful
One of so many street vendors selling a little bit of everything
Jacmel
18° 13.79N  072° 32.19W  (just south of commercial dock)

Figure 34. Baie de Jacmel

Figure 35. Breakwater ruins in Baie de Jacmel
Between Île à Vache at the southwest end of Haiti and Isla Beata, the little island at the west end of the Dominican Republic off of Cape Beata, lies the town of Jacmel. Jacmel was the first town in Haiti to invest in tourism and you will see signs of that everywhere. If there is prosperity in Haiti, Jacmel is a good example. It is very easy to enter the harbor at Jacmel and anchoring is also uncomplicated. There is an old breakwater that is submerged 2/3 of the way into the harbor on the east side that you must be careful of. (See Figures 34 and 35 above.) Other than that, anchoring is in mud with excellent holding. The big drawback is that you cannot use the harbor if there is a southerly component in the wind as the harbor is open to the south.

Once anchored, you can dinghy into the boat ramp which is just northwest of the town dock. Here you can land on the concrete launching ramp. Do not leave your dinghy unattended. Have someone look after it. You will find the immigration office on the main wharf. They charge $10 US per person to enter; no charge to depart. Customs has no interest in you unless you have cargo.
The town, built on a hillside, is very attractive. The architecture is distinctively French. From the town dock to town is a very short walk. The town has a Victorian sense to it and many of the buildings speak eloquently of the turn of the 20th century. I have been told that much of the steel structure of the old buildings was fabricated and brought in from France.

The town has very good stores to provision in as well as art galleries and much to see. It might be a good idea to take a guide from the wharf with you on your walk. The guide who accompanied me is called Tek-Tek and he is there more often than not. $1,000 Haitian Gourdes ($25 US) will get you close to a full day with him. He will take you shopping, carry your bags and basically help you with your tour. He speaks English, French, Creole and a smattering of other languages as well.

Inside La Florita Hotel and Restaurant; owned and operated by an American

For too many years we have avoided Haiti for safety concerns. You will find Jacmel very safe and something beyond the ordinary to visit. If you are coming from the east to west or vice versa, and need a midpoint stop, Jacmel is worth your consideration.
FROM MY PERSPECTIVE
THE FUTURE OF HAITI
LOOKS AS BRIGHT AS
THEIR SMILES AND AS
HOPEFUL AS THEIR
EYES!

Haitian students on break, Jacmel, Haiti
The eyes have it!

Whether you visit Haiti, or decline to, depends a great deal on your definition of cruising. If you are looking for adventure outside the beaten track with a good record of safety, a cruise along the south shore of Haiti will bring you back in time and remind you that we should never take what we have for granted. Sometimes we must lose what we have to know what it is that we have lost! I have spent a great deal of time over the years along the Haitian south shore and I still marvel at the capacity and inventiveness of the human spirit in its quest to survive and endure.

The French impact on architecture, the law and the culture is everywhere to be seen and even felt. Coupled with its very apparent West African culture, it does not take much to realize that nothing stays the same forever and that Haiti will change. Visit the south shore now before it loses its charm.
The Hotel Communal in Jacmel is long closed but the message at the top of its façade remains intact; “Liberte, Egalite and Fraternite” is perhaps Haiti’s way of saying that it believes the majority of us in the world do believe in the solidarity of man.

NOTE: It bears repeating: Do not shoot photos of people in Haiti without their permission as many consider such a breach of etiquette. Get permission or be very discreet.
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About the Author

Frank Virgintino is a native New Yorker. His sailing background of over forty years covers the Canadian Maritimes, all of the eastern seaboard of the United States and the entire Caribbean, many times over. Aside from cruising he has spent the better part of his career building and administering marinas.

In the process of writing this guide all of the harbors listed were personally researched as was all of the information about, and knowledge of, Haiti contained in the guide. It is hoped that this guide will make Haiti easier to access and understand.

The author believes that this guide should serve as an excellent source of information for this beautiful land although it should not be used for navigation at any time. All charts, latitude and longitude positions given, and inserts exhibited should be used as a frame of reference only. Navigation should only be undertaken with appropriate charts of the area.

Anchorages, harbors and facilities are dynamic and thus in a state of constant change. This cruising guide should be a tool that provides for insight and basis for your research, but it is a “guide” only.

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All of the latitudes and longitudes herein are given to the best of the author’s ability. However, they should never be relied on. The skipper of the boat must remember that he/she is solely responsible for proper navigation.

Additionally, facts and circumstances related to statements made in the guide can change; sometimes facilities and services that existed during the writing of the guide may no longer be available.
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