

Port-au-Prince



Let's admit the obvious: Port-au-Prince doesn't have the image of somewhere you'd visit purely for fun. A true Third World city just one hour by air from Miami, the city has a reputation for impoverished chaos that precedes it. But look behind this and something altogether different is revealed: one of the most vibrant and exciting cities in the Caribbean, with a fantastic arts scene, good restaurants and live music, and an irrepressible spirit. Like a bottle of local *klerin* rum, Port-au-Prince takes all the raw energy of Haiti and distils it down into one buzzing shot.

You should be prepared, however. Port-au-Prince's infrastructure has never kept pace with its rapid growth. Electricity supply and garbage collection are massively inadequate, and whole districts flood whenever a hurricane blows through the Caribbean. The gap between the haves and have-nots is remarkable, with the poorest slums in the Americas overlooked from the cool hills of Haiti's richest suburbs.

Amid all this, the streets are mobbed with colorful painted buses, street vendors, impromptu art galleries and music. The calm heart of the city is the Champs de Mars district, with its parks, museums and memorials to the country's turbulent history. Nearby, many streets are still lined with instantly recognizable 'gingerbread' houses, while even the cathedrals stand as painted monuments to a rich artistic heritage. In the markets and cemeteries, the older spirits of Vodou come to the fore. Away from the hustle of the center is the suburb of Pétionville, where you'll find another Port-au-Prince altogether with expensive restaurants and five-star hotels.

Port-au-Prince has many faces. Its poverty can be distressing, but witnessing the self-sufficiency and spirit of its people might be the most life-affirming experience you will have on your travels. It's a chaotic, exhilarating and compelling place. We'd encourage you to jump right in.

HIGHLIGHTS

- People-watch amid the parks, avenues and statues of **Champs de Mars** (p293)
- Stand in awe at the Haitian art masterpieces decorating the interior of **Sainte Trinité Episcopalian Cathedral** (p295)
- Look for arts and crafts bargains at the **Marché de Fer** (p296), Port-au-Prince's splendidly chaotic covered market
- Visit the **Grand Rue artists** (p297) to see where the Haitian art of the past collides with the art of the future
- Dance late into the night at a **RAM concert** (p304) at the **Hôtel Oloffson**



HISTORY

Port-au-Prince was founded in 1742 during the boom years of French rule, when it was decided that St-Domingue needed a new central port, and was given its royal charter as capital seven years later. The broad bay in the Golfe de la Gonâve was the ideal location; its name taken from the French ship *Prince* that had first moored there in 1706.

During the slave revolution Port-au-Prince was a key strategic target. Jean-Jaques Dessalines rejected it as his new capital, seeing it as a mulatto stronghold (Pétionville, in particular), and was assassinated on its outskirts in 1806. When Haiti was reunited in 1820, Port-au-Prince returned to its capital status and has dominated the country ever since.

The initial site of the city was confined to the modern Bel Air district. In 1831 Pétionville, located in the cleaner hills above the city, was considered as a possible alternative capital but the idea never stuck. During the 19th century Port-au-Prince grew rapidly, its expansion only occasionally halted by the periodic fires that razed it to the ground. The wealthier residents moved to the rural east of the city, creating the suburbs of Turgeau and Bois Verna, where many of Port-au-Prince's best gingerbread houses can now be found. The poor found themselves pushed to the less salubrious marshy areas of La Saline in the north, the beginning of the city's *bidonvilles* (shanty towns).

The 20th century saw a push for modernization. The US occupation of 1915 improved the city's infrastructure and hygiene through its drain-building program. In 1948 the Estimé government built a link road to Pétionville, spurring the growth of the Delmas suburb. A year later the waterfront area just south of the docks was remodeled to celebrate the city's bicentennial. During the Duvalier period anarchic growth was more the order of the day, as vast numbers of country dwellers flocked to the city. The model development of Cité Simone (named for Papa Doc's wife) soon lapsed into slums, and was subsequently renamed Cité Soleil, while the sprawl of Carrefour similarly lacked state services or infrastructure.

Port-au-Prince continues to grow like a wild plant. The rich have largely retreated to Pétionville and other upscale suburbs, while the poorest areas such as Cité Soleil have proved the breeding ground for both popular politi-

cal movements like Jean-Bertrand Aristide's Lavalas, and the armed gangs that prospered in the period preceding and following his 2001 ouster. The presence of UN troops, while not without controversy, has at least brought a semblance of order back to the streets.

ORIENTATION

Port-au-Prince's unrestricted growth, its hilly position and lack of street-grid system means that getting your bearings can take a while for first-time visitors. To add confusion, many streets have two names (see the boxed text, p292).

The old commercial centre, Centre Ville (or downtown), lies east of the docks area, Bicentenaire, bisected north-south by Blvd Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Grand Rue). A central reference point for visitors is Champs de Mars. A large park area (and the cleanest, most open part of Port-au-Prince), this is where you'll find the Palais National, museums, and most of the downtown hotels and restaurants. Just north of here is the cathedral, Sainte Trinité Episcopalian Cathedral, and the Marché de Fer (Iron Market).

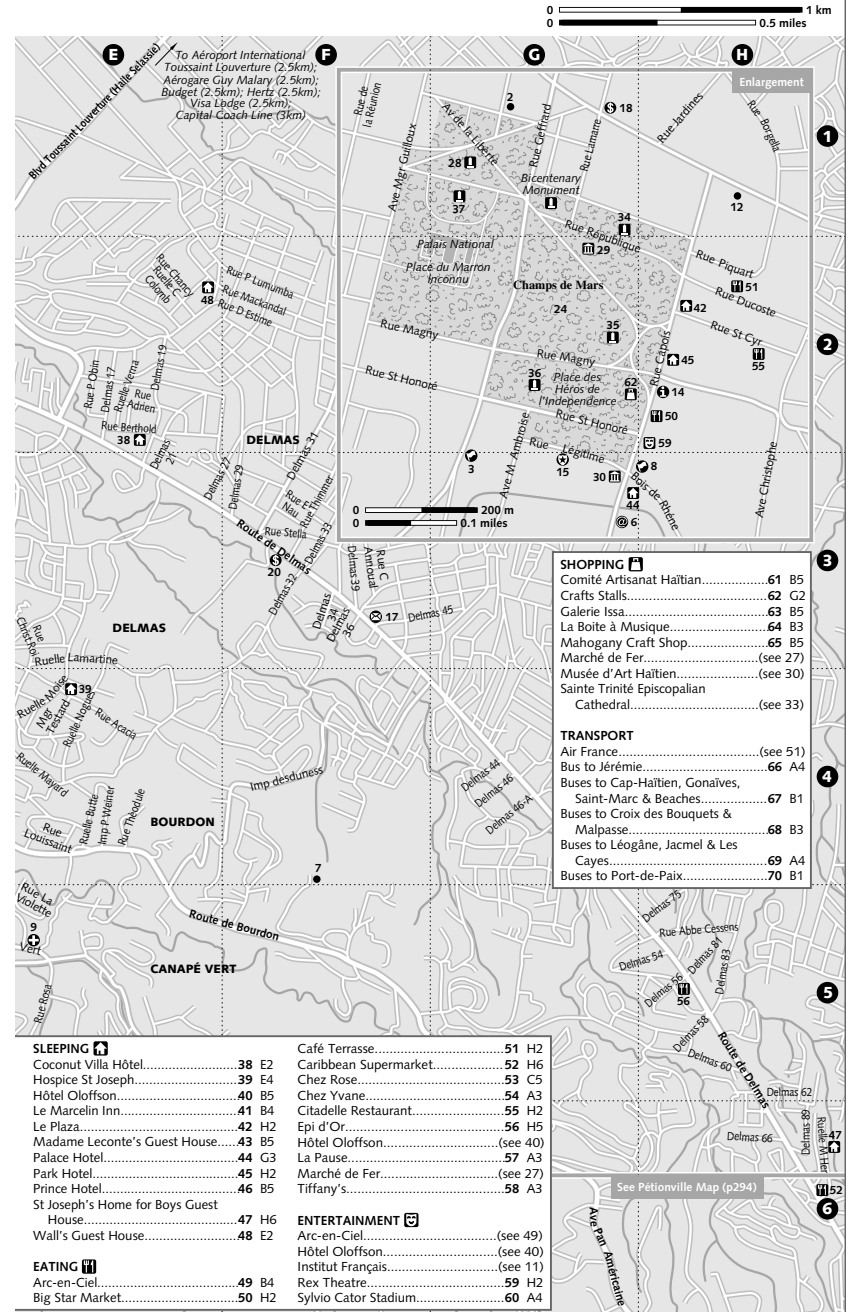
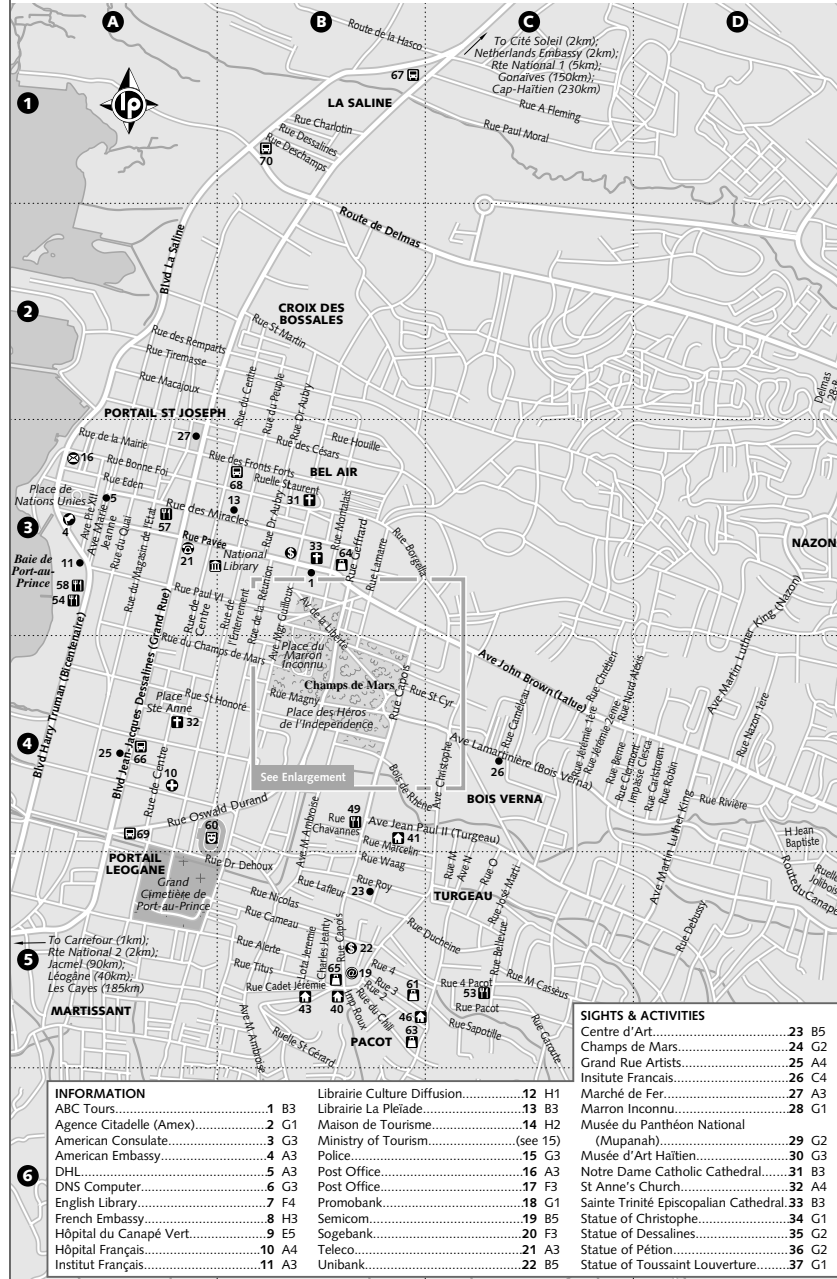
Grand Rue runs the length of Port-au-Prince, joining Rte National 1 to Cap Haïtien and other points north, and to the south Rte National 2 to Jacmel and Les Cayes, through the chaotic Carrefour suburb. Two main roads runs southeast from Grand Rue, both ultimately leading to Pétionville: Ave John Brown (Lalue) and Rte de Delmas. Several hotels are found off Lalue, which skirts the Nazon and Bourdon districts before changing its name to Ave Pan Américaine before it arrives in Pétionville. All of the side roads that join Rte de Delmas are numbered sequentially, odd to the north and even to the south, increasing toward Pétionville. Delmas 13 is an important junction - south is Ave Martin Luther King (Nazon), which joins Delmas to Lalue, while Blvd Toussaint Louverture (Rte de l'Aéroport) is the main road to the airport.

A third route to Pétionville is along Ave Lamartinière (Bois Verna), via Canapé Vert. Pétionville itself is relatively easy to navigate, as it has both a grid system and street signs.

Maps

Guides Panorama produces the best up-to-date map of Port-au-Prince (US\$5). A decent alternative is the street map produced by the Association of Haitian Hoteliers, which is

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available free from most car-rental companies. Harder to find, but with a useful street index, is the *Haiti Carte Touristique*, produced by the Ministry of Tourism. All have major routes highlighted and are indispensable if you're spending any length of time in the city.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Asterix (Map p294; ☎ 2257-2605; cnr Rues Grégoire & Ogé, Pétionville) Has a large selection of French-language books and magazines, plus some in English, along with postcards.

Librairie Culture Diffusion (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-9260; Ave John Brown) Just off Champs de Mars, with a decent selection of US magazines.

Librairie La Pleiade Port-au-Prince (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2510-0016; cnr Rue Bois-Patate & Ave Martin Luther King) Pétionville (☎ 257-3588; Complexe Promenade, cnr Rues Grégoire & Moïse) Port-au-Prince's best choice for English-language books.

Cultural Centers

English Library (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2249-6177; Pétionville Club, Rue Métreaux, Bourdon; ☎ library 4-6pm Fri) For long-term residents, this English library has annual membership costs of US\$30, and a social scene attached.

Institut Français (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2244-0014/0015; www.ifhaiti.org; 99 Ave Lamertinière; ☎ 10am-4pm Tue-Fri, 9am-5pm Sat) Port-au-Prince's major cultural center. Holds regular music concerts, lectures, exhibitions and literary events.

Institut Haitiano-Americain (Map pp290-1; ☎ 222-2947, 222-3715; cnr Rues Capois & St Cyr; ☎ 8am-noon & 1-5pm Mon-Fri) Has a decent English library, but few events.

KNOW YOUR STREET NAMES

Some official street names don't match the names used by locals. The following are some of the most common roads (listed first) with preferred colloquial names following:

Bldv Harry Truman	Bicentenaire
Ave Martin Luther King	Nazon
Ave John Brown	Lalue
Ave Lamartinière	Bois Verna
Bldv Toussaint Louverture	Rte de l'Aéroport
Ave Jean Paul II	Turgeau
Rue Paul VI	Rue des Casernes
Bldv Jean-Jacques Dessalines	Grand Rue
Delmas 105	Frères

Emergency

Fire Brigade (☎ emergency 115)

Police Port-au-Prince (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-1117, emergency 117; 4 Rue Légitime); Pétionville (Map p294; ☎ 2257-2222; emergency 117; Place Saint-Pierre)

Red Cross ambulance (☎ emergency 118)

Internet Access

Internet cafés are plentiful, often opening and closing at the drop of a hat. Concentrations are found downtown along Lalue, around Delmas 85, and Rue Grégoire in Pétionville.

Companet Cyber Café (Map p294; Rue Lamarre; per hr US\$1.20; ☎ 9am-7pm)

DNS Computer (Map pp290-1; Rue Capois; per hr US\$0.80; ☎ 8am-9pm)

Semicom (Map pp290-1; Rue Capois; per hr US\$1; ☎ 7am-9pm)

Vidnet (Map p294; Rue Grégoire, Pétionville; per hr US\$3; ☎ 8am-10pm)

Medical Services

Hôpital du Canapé Vert (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2245-0984/0985; 83 Rte de Canapé Vert) Excellent doctors and emergency service, recommended by expats.

Hôpital Français (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-2323, 2222-4242; 378 Rue du Centre)

Hôpital François de Sales (☎ 2223-2110, 2222-0232; 53 Rue Charéron)

Money

Sogebank, Scotiabank and Unibank are the most useful for travelers, as long as you're exchanging US dollars cash. All attract long queues, however, so an equally good alternative is to change money at a supermarket, such as Caribbean, Big Star or Eagle, most of which have dedicated counters. Midrange hotels and above will normally change money, but check the rates first. At the bottom of the rank are the street money-changers, often to be found in the vicinity of the large post offices.

Agence Citadelle (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-5004, 2222-1938; 35 Place du Marron Inconnu) Agent for Amex.

Promobank (Map pp290-1; cnr Ave John Brown & Rue Lamarre)

Scotiabank (Map p294; cnr Rues Geffrard & Louverture, Pétionville) Has an ATM.

Sogebank Port-au-Prince (Map pp290-1; Rte de Delmas 30); Pétionville (Map p294; Rue Lamarre) Both have ATMs.

Unibank (Map pp290-1; 118 Rue Capois)

Post

DHL (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-8133; 29 Ave Marie Jeanne, Bicentenaire)

Post office Port-au-Prince (Map pp290-1; Rue Bonne Foi, Bicentenaire; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat); Delmas (Map pp290-1; Delmas 45; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat); Pétionville (Map p294; Place Saint-Pierre; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Sat)

UPS (Map p294; Rue Geffrard, Pétionville)

Telephone

There are plenty of phone shops selling cell (mobile) phones, and street phone merchants for making calls and buying top-up cards.

Teleco Port-au-Prince (Map pp290-1; cnr Rue Pavée & Blvd Jean-Jacques Dessalines); Pétionville (Map p294; ☎ 2257-8651; cnr Rues Magny & Rigaud)

Tourist Information

There is currently no good state-run tourist information center in Port-au-Prince. For up-to-date tourist information, your best bet is to contact the local private tour operators (see Tours, p298).

Maison de Tourisme (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-8659; Rue Capois; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) In a white gingerbread building by Champs de Mars, but currently closed with any reopening uncertain.

Travel Agencies

ABC Tours (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-8705, 2223-9244; 156 Rue Pavée)

Agence Citadelle (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-5004, 2222-1938; www.agencecitadelle.com; 35 Place du Marron Inconnu) Reliable and well-established travel agent.

DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Popular conceptions hold that just to visit Port-au-Prince is to take one's life in one's hands, an image bolstered by the violence and kidnappings that followed the 2004 coup. Thankfully, the reality is a little calmer than the perception and visits by foreigners overwhelmingly pass without incident. Operations by the UN Stabilization Mission for Haiti (MINUSTAH) have largely neutralized the gang problem, and although kidnappings do still occasionally occur, targets are almost exclusively rich Haitians.

However, street crime is a fact of life in Port-au-Prince, so take sensible precautions. Don't be ostentatious with valuables, carry only what money you need and don't keep your cash in your back pocket as the pickpockets are skillful.

Rather than crime or gang violence, Port-au-Prince's worst problem for visitors is actually the traffic. The jams, the drivers treating the roads like a war zone, the potholes and the endless procession of vendors, beggars and street kids all conspire to make getting from A to B an exhausting process. Sidewalks are jam-packed, frequently forcing pedestrians onto the roads and into the paths of oncoming taptaps (local buses or minibuses).

Avoid walking at night where possible. Aside from the crime risk, streetlights are almost nonexistent, so broken pavements (and open sewer channels) present a genuine accident risk.

Unless you have a valid reason and are accompanied by a local, avoid visiting the *bidonvilles*, such as Cité Soleil and Cité Liberté.

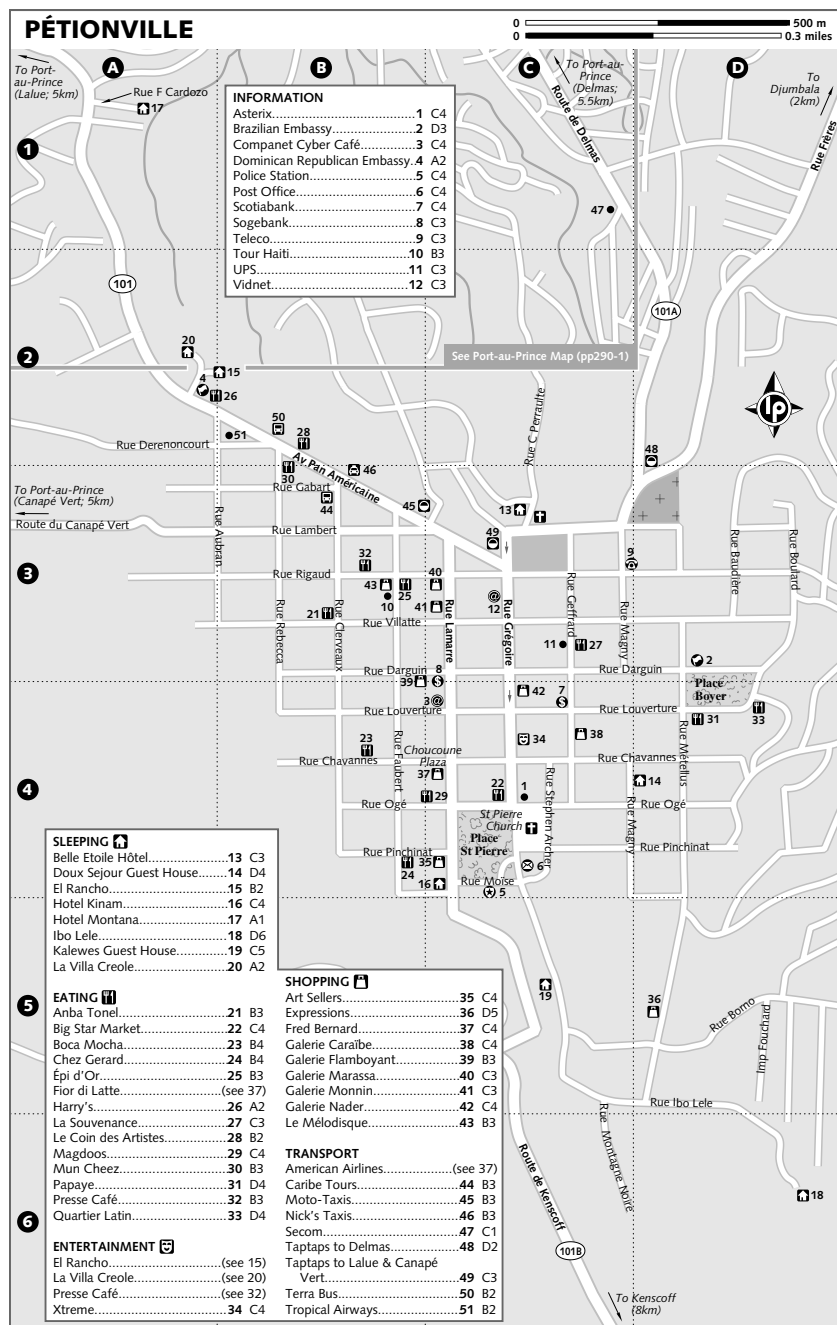
SIGHTS

Champs de Mars

The neat order of **Champs de Mars** (Map pp290-1), Port-au-Prince's largest open area, is a marked contrast to the rest of the city. Originally the site of a racetrack, it was built in 1954 to mark the 150th anniversary of independence, and gets further additions every time there's a significant anniversary to commemorate. A pleasant place to relax, it comprises a series of parks split by wide boulevards that collectively make up the **Place des Héros de l'Indépendance**. Champs de Mars runs from the Palais National to Rue Capois, and also takes in the Musée du Panthéon National and Musée d'Art Haïtien.

As the president's official residence, the **Palais National** is the focus of national politics and traditional host to coups d'état. It stands on the same site as its two predecessors, each destroyed during political unrest in 1869 and 1912 respectively. The three-domed, pristinely white building was completed in 1918 and modeled on the White House in Washington, DC. The palace is always under armed guard and is not open to the public.

Two statues stand in front of the Palais. **Toussaint Louverture** takes pride of place, and faces the **Marron Inconnu** across the road on Ave de la Liberté. This statue of the Unknown Slave by sculptor Albert Mangonès depicts a runaway slave blowing a conch-shell trumpet as a call to begin the revolution. Next to the statue is the scroll-like monument of the Eternal Flame erected in honor of 'Baby Doc' Duvalier; it was extinguished almost the moment he fled the country in 1986.



Near the Marron Inconu, the huge monument for Haiti's bicentenary erected by Aristide squats ugly and unmissable, a gray monolith resembling an oil derrick. It stands four floors high, each with 50 steps for every year of independence, leading to another (unlit) eternal flame. The 2004 coup meant it was never finished, nor is it likely to be.

East of the Palais, separate parks each contain statues of the remaining founders of independent Haiti: Jean-Jacques Dessalines (on horseback), Alexandre Pétion and Henri Christophe.

The area is a popular promenading spot, especially around sunset and on Sunday. It's also the one part of Port-au-Prince with reliable streetlights – visit of an evening and you'll see students with their books taking advantage of the light to do their homework. Food stalls are set up opposite the Musée d'Art Haïtien each evening and there are a couple of craft stalls, as well as a few would-be guides and street kids trying their luck.

Musée du Panthéon National

The **Musée du Panthéon National** (Mupanah; Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-8337; Place du Champs de Mars; adult/student US\$1.40/0.70; 🕒 8am-4pm Mon-Thu, to 5pm Fri, 12-5pm Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is a modern, mostly subterranean museum set in its own gardens. Its unusual design echoes the houses of Haiti's original Taino inhabitants, a motif repeated by the conical central 'well' bringing light to illuminate the gold monument recreating the cannons and banners found on the national flag. The bodies of Toussaint Louverture, Dessalines, Christophe and Pétion are interred below, and the names of further heroes of the independence struggle marked on the surrounding walls.

The museum's permanent exhibition chronicles Haiti's history, from the Tainos, through slavery to independence and the modern era. There are some fascinating exhibits. Exquisite Taino pottery faces the rusting anchor of Columbus' flagship, the *Santa Maria*; slave shackles nod toward a copy of the fearsome *Code Noir* that governed the running of the plantations; while the silver pistol with which Christophe took his life leads past Emperor Faustin's ostentatious crown to 'Papa Doc' Duvalier's trademark black hat and cane. A further gallery holds a good cross-section of modern Haitian art, but it suffers from poor labeling.

Musée d'Art Haïtien

The **Musée d'Art Haïtien** (Museum of Haitian Art; Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-2510; 16 Rue Légitime; admission US\$1.40; 🕒 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Sun), on the southern edge of Champs de Mars, is something of a curate's egg. It holds probably the largest collection of Haiti's naive art, with masters like Hector Hyppolite, Préfète Duffaut, Philomé Obin and Robert St Brice well represented. Unfortunately the works aren't hung well, and the permanent collection isn't always on display. Instead you have to take potluck as to what's on show, although the rotating exhibitions can be very good and sometimes branch out into photography. There's a small craft shop at the right-hand side of the building.

Sainte Trinité Episcopal Cathedral

From the outside, this **cathedral** (Map pp290-1; cnr Ave Mgr Guilloux & Rue Pavée; donation requested), just north of Champs de Mars, doesn't look architecturally inspiring – a large but essentially unimpressive pale brick building. But the quiet exterior hides an amazing secret, as the inside is covered with joyously exuberant murals marking out the life of Christ, executed by the great masters of Haitian painting.

In 1950 the cathedral commissioned artists from the Centre d'Art (p296) to decorate the interior. The results are astonishing, as the artists chose to interpret the Bible stories through their own experience, placing Christ in easily recognizable Haitian situations. The apse contains the first paintings to be completed: three huge murals depicting the *Nativity* (painted by Rigaud Benoît), the *Crucifixion* (by Philomé Obin, who places himself at the foot of the cross with his back to the viewer), the *Ascension* (by Castera Bazile) and above them all Gabriel Lévêque's *Heaven*.

To the right of the apse is Wilson Bigaud's striking *Wedding of Cana*, with Jesus turning water to wine. It's a fantastic snapshot of Haiti – a *rara* (festival music used in street processions) band plays for the party, a pig is slaughtered, chickens peck about the scene – all executed in wild naive colors. On the opposite side of the cathedral, Bazile shows Jesus' baptism, next to women washing clothes in the river, such as you might see anywhere in the country. Elsewhere, Duffaut reimagines the procession of the Cross through his native Jacmel instead of Jerusalem, while other murals show the Last Supper, the flight to Egypt, and Adam and Eve. Hyppolite

contributed with his clay apostles near the rear door, where visitors enter when there are no services.

As well as offering a masterclass in the Haitian masters, the cathedral also has a well-regarded philharmonic orchestra that plays regular concerts.

Notre Dame Catholic Cathedral

Two blocks north of Sainte Trinité in Bel Air this **cathedral** (Map pp290-1; cnr Rues Dr Aubry & Bonne Foi) is the city's largest ecclesiastical building. Completed in 1912, the pink-and-yellow structure has two domed towers on its west face. The cathedral itself was one of the first in the world to be built from reinforced concrete, and as such had to receive special dispensation from the Vatican to be consecrated. Worshippers fervently pray on the cathedral steps, at the gates and around the walls, alongside beggars and small stalls selling Catholic ephemera.

Centre D'art

The **Centre d'Art** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-2018; 58 Rue Roy; ☎ 9:30am-5pm Mon-Fri, 9am-3pm Sat) is in a two-floor gingerbread house on a quiet street south of Champs de Mars. It was opened in 1944 by De Witt Peters as both school and exhibition space to encourage the new breed of Haitian painters. Through its work the Centre d'Art helped give painters such as Hyppolite, Obin and Bigaud the recognition they deserved, and was of such importance in the development of Haitian art that its opening is often referred to as 'the miracle of 1944.'

COLONIAL PORT-AU-PRINCE?

The district of Bel Air, named for its healthy climate, was once the heart of French St-Domingue, but you'll be hard pressed to find much of it left. Just about all that remains is the esplanade wall of Notre Dame Catholic Cathedral, built in 1788 as part of a never-completed governor's residence. An older cathedral once sat next door. Built in 1771 on the ruins of the city's first church, this elegant structure was razed by fire in 1991 just before President Aristide's inauguration, torched by a mob protesting against the pro-Duvalierist Archbishop of Port-au-Prince's alleged involvement in an attempted coup.

The Centre d'Art was the first art gallery in Haiti and remains a commercial venture, although there's more than an air of museum about the place. The downstairs is given over to current exhibitions (both paintings and the cream of Croix des Bouquets metal sculptures), while the upstairs rooms are stacked high with canvases in a manner more akin to a treasure trove than a formal gallery. It would take hours to go through everything, and it's an exciting place for art lovers to browse. Almost all pieces are for sale. Compared to the galleries in Pétionville, it's a sleepy place, but the staff are very knowledgeable, and there are sometimes artists working on-site.

For more galleries, see p305.

Marché De Fer

Several of Haiti's cities have Iron Markets, but the original and best is in central Port-au-Prince. The **Marché de Fer** (Iron Market; Map pp290-1; cnr Grand Rue & Rue des Fronts Forts; ☎ daily) is an exuberant and exotic red-metal structure dating from 1889, which looks more akin to something from the *Arabian Nights* than tropical Haiti. In fact, it was originally destined to be the main hall of Cairo train station (hence its minarets), but when the sale from the Parisian manufacturers fell through, President Florvil Hyppolite snapped it up as part of his plan to modernize Port-au-Prince.

The market is roughly divided into two sections. The southern hall is the food market, a full-on assault on the senses, with the stifling air buzzing with the noise of traders and the tang of fruit, vegetables, meat and unknown scents. All the produce of Haiti is here, from piles of dried mushrooms and yams, heaps of millet and more different types of mango than you've ever seen, along with charcoal braziers and various cooking implements made from old oil cans.

The northern hall is given over to a giant craft market, with the biggest selection of local arts in the country. It's all here, from naive paintings and Vodou flags to wood and metal sculptures. The market is especially rich in Vodou paraphernalia.

Marché de Fer is open every day, although there are fewer vendors on Sundays. Be prepared for plenty of bustle, and a little hustle, too – you'll attract plenty of would-be guides and should also keep a close watch on your possessions.

PORT-AU-PRINCE'S GINGERBREAD ARCHITECTURE

The vast majority of Haiti's unique gingerbread buildings are in Port-au-Prince, almost entirely the product of just three Parisian-trained Haitian architects: Georges Baussan, Léon Mathon and Joseph-Eugène Maximilien. There are a couple of hundred gingerbreads, although many are now falling into disrepair, being expensive to maintain.

The key gingerbread characteristics are brick-filled timber frames adorned with lacy wooden latticework, high ceilings, and graceful balconies set over wide porches – all designed to take advantage of the prevailing winds. The old Palais National, built in 1881 (and blown up in 1912), was an early model, and its style was quickly appropriated as the height of bourgeois tropical living. The residential areas of **Pacot** (Map pp290-1) and **Bois Verna** (Map pp290-1) saw gingerbread houses reach their zenith during a 30-year spree that ended in 1925 when Port-au-Prince's mayor stifled wooden buildings as a potential fire hazard.

The **Hôtel Oloffson** (Map pp290-1) on Ave Christophe is Port-au-Prince's most photographed example of gingerbread. Built in 1887, it served as the family home to the son of President Sam, then as a military hospital during the American Occupation before being converted to a hotel in 1936. A walk along **Ave Lamartinière** (Map pp290-1) in Bois Verna reveals a parade of great gingerbreads: the twin witch's-hats towers of No 15; President Tancredi Auguste's 1914 mansion at No 46; No 48 with its strange room over the porch; the impossibly narrow No 52; and the one-story house at No 84 with its elaborate roof. Other notables are Le Manoir at 126 Ave John Brown (Lalue), with its four towers and grand bishop's-hat roof, and the four-story Villa Miramar at 2 Rue 4 in Pacot.

There are few gingerbreads in Pétionville. The loveliest by far is the **Hotel Kinam** (Map p294), although this was built in the 1950s, long after the original gingerbread boom.

Grand Rue Artists

While most of Haiti's artists are represented in the rarified air of Pétionville's galleries, a collective of sculptors and installation artists is producing spectacular work in the unlikelyst of settings, squeezed into the cinder-block houses backing onto the mechanics and body workshops on Grand Rue. The **Grand Rue artists** (Map pp290-1; 622 Blvd Jean-Jacques Dessalines; www.atiz-rezistans.com) are unlike anything you've seen in Haiti, turning scrap and found objects into startling Vodou sculpture. The results are a heady mix of spirit, sex and politics – a Caribbean junkyard gone cyberpunk, yet one very much grounded in the preoccupations of daily Haitian life.

Three main artists make up the endeavor. André Eugène is the founder and elder member, a one-time housebuilder who has turned to sculpting in wood, plastic and car parts to produce his vision of the *Iwa* (Vodou spirits). Doll's heads and human skulls abound, alongside the earthy humor of highly phallic Gédé pieces.

Jean Hérard Celeur trained as a sculptor, and has done many of the largest pieces, life-sized statues of twisted wood and parts of car chassis, hubcaps, old shoes and a liberal application of twisted nails.

The youngest of the artists is known simply as Guyodo and is never seen without a pair of big sunglasses. Of all the artists, Guyodo favors painting his sculptures with metallic spray, and his workshop (artfully lit using car batteries for power) glitters silver and gold like a weird Vodou grotto.

The artists have exhibited across the USA, and in 2006 collaborated with the local community to build a sculpture for Liverpool's International Slavery Museum in the UK. Pieces are for sale, but sadly most are too large for easy transportation.

This urban museum is near Ciné Lido on Grand Rue. Set slightly back from the road, look for the giant Gédé statue made from car parts and with a giant spring-loaded penis guarding the way. Just beyond this, Eugène's house-museum is surrounded by statues, with the motto 'E Pluribus Unum' ('Out of many, one') hung over the door. Guyodo and Celeur's workshops are in the narrow lanes beyond – you'll need to be accompanied.

Grand Cimetière De Port-au-Prince

A vast necropolis of raised tombs, Port-au-Prince's **Grand Cimetière De Port-au-Prince** (Map pp290-1) sprawls itself out between Grand

Rue and Silvio Cator Stadium, bound by walls with often lurid Vodou murals. Many of the elevated sarcophagi more closely resemble houses, bigger and more elaborate than many of the shanties in the *bidonvilles*. It's a fascinating but weird place, littered with broken graves and old beer bottles left behind from late-night offerings to Baron Samedi and Maman Brigitte, guardians of the deceased.

'Papa Doc' Duvalier, who so consciously portrayed himself as an incarnation of the Baron, was buried here in 1971. Fifteen years later during the reaction against Duvalierism, his tomb was sacked to desecrate his body, dooming him on Judgment Day. But his coffin had been mysteriously spirited away, and the final resting place of his body remains unknown.

The cemetery is the main focus for the Fet Gédé celebrations every November 1 and 2 (see p346) and is well worth checking out, although it's best to attend with a local. Funeral processions are a public affair here, regularly taking place in the late afternoon with marching jazz bands and troops of majorettes, with several funeral parties marching together from nearby St Anne's church to the cemetery gates.

Pétionville

The suburb of Pétionville (Map p294) was founded by President Boyer and named for his predecessor. It never became the replacement capital he hoped for, but from the mid-19th century it became a popular getaway from Port-au-Prince. Urban sprawl has long incorporated Pétionville into greater Port-au-Prince, but the district has maintained its own identity as the center of gravity for Haiti's elite, and a hub for many businesses and banks.

Place Saint-Pierre (Map p294) is at the heart of Pétionville, a shady square featuring a bust of Pétion with an allegorical figure representing Haiti, and the Saint-Pierre church. The action naturally flows downhill from here, with streets laid out in a grid (surprisingly well signed for Haiti). This is where you'll find the best restaurants, galleries and upmarket shops. At the bottom of the hill a large street market spills along Rue Grégoire toward Rte de Delmas.

TOURS

Haiti's two main tour operators can organize guided tours around Port-au-Prince, as well as excursions beyond the capital:

Tour Haiti (☎ 3457-5242, 3746-8696; info@tourhaiti.net, cchauvel@hotmail.com) Day tour per person US\$90, minimum two people.

Voyages Lumière (☎ 2249-6177, 3557-0753; www.voyagelumierehaiti.com) Day tour per person for one/two/three people US\$125/100/90.

A good local guide who can be found in his small Mahogany Craft Shop (Map pp290-1) outside the Hôtel Oloffson in Port-au-Prince is Milfort Bruno, who knows a lot of artists and is a useful fixer.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Port-au-Prince's main festival, and one of the biggest in the Caribbean, **Carnival** takes place during the three days before Ash Wednesday, its highpoint being the huge parade of floats, music and carnival queens that winds its way downtown through an immense crush of people before climaxing at Champs de Mars. Taking most of the afternoon, the revelries continue late into the night. For many people, the best part of Carnival is the bands, who either play on floats or walk through the crowds. Carnival bands are fiercely competitive, each devising their own new merengue song that they hope will become the theme to the entire festival, played on the radio in the run-up to the parade. But whoever comes out on top, all strike up the 'Ochan' (Carnival Theme) at the drop of a hat to pay tribute to the partying masses.

SLEEPING

There's essentially one main choice when choosing a bed for the night: whether you want to stay downtown or above it all in more upscale Pétionville. Both have their advantages. Staying downtown puts you in the heart of the action, for the liveliest (and unsanitized) Port-au-Prince experience; it has some good cheap guesthouses as well as one of Haiti's most iconic hotels. Pétionville is quieter with less hustle but has a better selection of hotels at the higher end of the price bracket, as well as putting you closer to the best eating options, which tend to congregate in the suburb.

Port-au-Prince

BUDGET

Hospice St Joseph (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2245-6177, 3550-5230; www.hospicesaintjoseph.org; 33 Rue Acacia, Nazon;

r US\$30 per person, incl breakfast & dinner) One of the Christian guesthouses Port-au-Prince seems to specialize in. The hilltop location of the hospice (not to be mistaken for St Josephs Home for Boys Guest House) gives great views over the city. There's a relaxed atmosphere and good, clean rooms, with your rent helping support local health care, feeding, human-rights and education programs.

Wall's Guest House (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2249-4317, 2249-0505; www.wallsguesthouse.org; 8 Rue Mackandal, Delmas 19; shared r per person with fan/air-con US\$30/35, incl breakfast & dinner; ☎ ☎ ☎) A friendly guesthouse run with a strong Christian ethic; you're likely to find yourself sharing with missionaries, aid workers and adopting families. Rooms are basic and bathrooms shared, there's a tiny pool and everyone eats together (but early - dinner is served at 5pm).

our pick **St Joseph's Home for Boys Guest House** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2257-4237; sjfamilyhaiti@hotmail.com; 3rd street on right, Delmas 91; shared r per person US\$35, incl breakfast & dinner) You've never stayed anywhere like this before, a guesthouse also operating as a highly regarded home for ex-street boys, and a fantastic Haitian experience. Spread over several stories, the house has lots of hidden corners with terraces and views, as well as a chapel and performance area for the music and dance recitals the boys regularly perform. Most rooms contain two bunk beds, and you may be expected to share depending on availability; meals are also taken together. For water conservation, buckets are used to flush the toilets. From Delmas 91 (opposite Radio Haiti Inter), take Rue La Plume (third right) and turn left at the end of the road. St Joe's is the last house, marked by a bright mural.

Madame Leconte's Guest House (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-9703; 54 Rue Cadet Jérémie; r US\$35) If you're on a tight budget but need to stay close to Champs de Mars, this guesthouse-cum-family-home may be your best option. Facing the park near the Oloffson hotel, there are a few comfy rooms sharing a bathroom, although the nearby bars can be noisy. Breakfast is included but a generator is not, so prepare for the power cuts.

MIDRANGE

Palace Hotel (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-3344, 2223-4455; hotelpalace@yahoo.fr; 55 Rue Capois; s/d/tr US\$40/50/60; ☎ ☎ ☎) Next to Champs de Mars are the wide verandahs of the Palace Hotel. Everything is whitewashed, contrasting with the black-and-white tiled entrance and the funky Haitian art

everywhere. Rooms are decent enough but could be a bit sharper - the overall effect is a little tired, but certainly fun.

Park Hotel (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-4406, 2222-8721; www.parkhotel.homestead.com/park2.html; 23 Rue Capois; s/d US\$53/70; ☎ ☎ ☎) An old townhouse-hotel facing Champs de Mars, the Park aspires to faded grandeur but ends up just feeling a bit sleepy. Rooms are simple but well turned out, set around the pool at the back or in the block alongside. The gardens are shady, adding to the quiet atmosphere - not bad considering the location. Breakfast isn't included in the rate.

Coconut Villa Hôtel (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2246-1691, 2246-0234; www.coconutvillahotel.com; 3 Rue Berthold, Delmas 19; s/d US\$65/77; ☎ ☎ ☎) The Coconut Villa is set in large and leafy grounds, with quick and easy access to Rte de Delmas. Rooms in the main block are comfy and fair value, with the green calm of the surroundings (and the cool blue of the pool) making this hotel a welcome retreat.

Le Marcelin Inn (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2221-8233, 2221-9445; www.marcelin.com; 29 Rue Marcelin; r US\$76-86; ☎ ☎ ☎) This hotel is tucked off Ave Christophe, a modern building that's been 'gingerbreadized' to pleasing effect. The rooms are very nice with brand-new fixtures and fittings, although it's a shame a few lack external windows. There's a decent restaurant and a small pool, and good-quality art on the walls. Good value for both price and location.

Prince Hotel (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-0100, 2245-2764; princehotelha@yahoo.com; 30 Rue 3, Pacot; s/d from US\$77/91; ☎ ☎ ☎) Placing yourself in Pacot should give the advantage of views across Port-au-Prince, and this hotel doesn't disappoint. A charming-enough option, with pool, bar and restaurant, although some of the rooms are in need of a refit.

our pick **Hôtel Oloffson** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-4000, 2223-4102; oloffsonram@aol.com; 60 Ave Christophe; s/d US\$80/92, ste US\$130-146, bungalow US\$101/118; ☎ ☎ ☎) Immortalized as the Hotel Trianon in Graham Greene's *The Comedians*, the Oloffson remains for many people the quintessential Port-au-Prince hotel. We can understand why: the elegant gingerbread building is one of the city's loveliest, further tricked out with paintings and Vodou flags. There's a very sociable bar for your rum punches, and every Thursday the house band RAM plays up a storm until the small hours (see the boxed text, p304). The Oloffson

isn't beyond trading on its name (some of the rooms are certainly a bit creaky, although the suites are very good), but its charms always seem to win out at the end of the day.

TOP END

Visa Lodge (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2250-1561, 2249-1202; www.visalodge.com; Rte des Nîmes; s/d US\$85/96; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) This is certainly one of Port-au-Prince's better hotels, a relaxed high-quality hideaway in large grounds off Blvd Toussaint Louverture, near the airport. A number of buildings are arranged around a central pool, plus there's a tennis court and a gym if you're feeling energetic (and two restaurants and a bar if you're not). Rooms are very spacious and comfy, and there are weekly rates for long-term guests. The only drawback is the location – superhandy for flights, but a significant drive from the rest of the city.

Le Plaza (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2224-9310, 3510-4594; hiplaza@acn2.net; 10 Rue Capois; s/d from US\$97/108; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) The unobtrusive main entrance opposite Champs de Mars (you'll walk past it twice) hides the fact that this is downtown's largest and most high-class hotel. The hotel was originally the Holiday Inn, and some people still refer to it thus. Rooms have balconies facing inward to a central quadrangle and, while well fitted out with all mod-cons, are best described as business-class bland. A good-quality (if not very exciting) choice.

Pétionville

BUDGET

Kalewes Guest House (Map p294; ☎ 2257-0817; 99 Rue Grégoire; r US\$40; 🚰) This gingerbread in lush grounds is a short walk uphill from Place Saint-Pierre on the main (and busy) road to Kenscoff. Rooms are pretty basic, although not lacking for space. There are some nice verandas around the garden and pool, and colorful murals provide a bright contrast to the dark antique furniture in the communal areas.

Belle Etoile Hôtel (Map p294; ☎ 2256-1006; Rue C Perrault; s/d US\$40/43) Some of Pétionville's budget hotels tread an uneasy line between cheap and cheerful and overflowing with prostitutes. The Belle Etoile manages just fine – threatening to be grimy from the outside, but actually hosting bright and clean rooms that have been recently kitted out, with friendly staff.

Doux Sejour Guest House (Map p294; ☎ 2257-1533, 2257-1560; www.douxsejourhaiti.com; 32 Rue Magny; s/d from

US\$40/50; ♻️ 🚰 🚰) A fun little guesthouse painted lobster pink, the Doux Sejour has a series of airy rooms interestingly laid out (ascending the balcony terrace feels like climbing into the trees). Staff are helpful, and the attached restaurant (Le Bistro; mains US\$8 to US10) serves tasty, filling meals.

MIDRANGE

Hotel Kinam (Map p294; ☎ 2257-0462, 2257-6525; www.hotelkinam.com; Place Saint-Pierre; s/d from US\$76/112, ste from US\$120; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) A large gingerbread hotel right in the center of Pétionville, the Kinam is something of a winner. Rooms are well sized and modern, while the hotel as a whole offers quality that goes beyond its price tag. The whole effect is charming, particularly of an evening when the pool is lit up and guests congregate for the renowned rum punches.

Ibo Lele (Map p294; ☎ 2257-8500, 2257-8509; Rte Ibo Lele; s/d US\$78/97; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) The Ibo Lele was a big player in the 1960s tourist years, but today it feels a bit lifeless. Rooms still maintain some quality, and the huge pool can be a draw for nonguests to use. There are stunning views as the hotel is perched high on the slopes above Pétionville proper.

TOP END

El Rancho (Map p294; ☎ 2256-9870, 2256-9873; www.hotelrancho.com; Rte El Rancho; s/d from US\$121/143, ste from US\$174; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Entering this hotel through its dramatic canopied lobby-walkway, you'd be forgiven for thinking you were part of a Golden Age Hollywood premiere. Interiors do their best to carry on the glitz, with marble floors, large luxurious rooms and not one but two swimming pools. The fitness center has saunas and offers massage, where you can shirk off your losses from the hotel casino. A couple of restaurants and bars seal the deal.

La Villa Creole (Map p294; ☎ 2257-1570, 2257-0965; www.villacreole.com; Rte El Rancho; s/d from US\$132/165, ste from US\$185; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) Measuring itself confidently against Port-au-Prince's other top hotels, the Villa Creole carries a slightly more relaxed air than its competitors. It's nicely laid out, with the open reception area flowing down to the exceedingly pleasant bar and pool area, beyond which are most of the rooms and an elegant restaurant. Rooms are medium to large, superbly appointed and comfortable, and the staff are well known for their service and attention to detail.

Hotel Montana (Map p294; ☎ 2229-4000, 3510-9495; www.htmontana.com; Imp Cardozo, Ave Pan Américaine; s/d from US\$133/165, ste from US\$330; P ♻️ 🚰 🚰) The Montana is the hotel of choice for Port-au-Prince's great and good, and carries off its air of international professionalism with some aplomb. It has all one could want for the price tag: two restaurants, several bars and coffee-shops, a business center and a gym. Rooms are excellent, and the hotel's commanding location means that its views over the city are justly famous.

EATING

There's a wide range of restaurants in Port-au-Prince, with the default menu being Creole with a smattering of French and American dishes. If you're downtown, you should also consider the hotel restaurants – many restaurants close on Sundays and lots of places only open in daytime hours during the week (lunch is the big meal of the day). For a wider range of eating options, head up the hill to Pétionville, Haiti's undisputed fine-dining capital.

Port-au-Prince

RESTAURANTS

Arc-en-Ciel (Map pp290-1; 24 Rue Capois; mains around US\$5; ☎ 9am-2am) This is a decent no-frills sort of a place, serving up healthily large portions of Creole standards. Along with platters of *griyo* (pork), plantain and the like, there's good jerked chicken and a dash of American fast food. Later in the evening, diners compete with dancers as the music and atmosphere crank up a pitch.

Chez Yvane (Map pp290-1; ☎ 3512-7182; 18 Blvd Harry Truman; mains US\$5; ☎ 8am-6pm) It looks like a bright American diner, but Creole is the order of the day here. It's good, too, going beyond *plat complet* (complete menu; consisting of rice and beans, salad, plantains and meat of your choice) for some interesting stews and soups. Also known locally as Chaffeur Gide.

La Pause (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-9382; 14 Rue des Mirades; mains US\$5; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) La Pause is a successful minichain, with branches on Delmas 32 and in Pétionville. Swift service and good value is what's done – Creole, pastas and other international dishes fly over the counter to customers who'll no doubt be back for a return visit.

Citadelle Restaurant (Map pp290-1; 4 Rue St Cyr; mains US\$7; ☎ 9am-2pm) Down a road to the right of

Le Plaza Hotel, Citadelle is a lovely dilapidated red-and-white gingerbread. The food is all Haitian and can be eaten inside, on the veranda or in the courtyard. All very friendly and relaxed.

Hôtel Oloffson (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-4000; 60 Ave Christophe; snacks/mains from US\$4/8; ☎ 7am-11pm) A lazy lunch on the veranda of the Oloffson is one of central Port-au-Prince's more pleasurable dining experiences, and lit up at night its equally charming. A mixed international and Creole menu, dishes can sometimes be a bit hit and miss, although the salads and club sandwiches are always reliable. On Thursdays, stay to watch the owner's band RAM play from around midnight (see boxed text, p304).

Chez Rose (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2245-5286; cnr Rues 4 Pacot & Bellevue; mains from US\$8; ☎ 11am-9pm) The service and setting in this converted gingerbread are worth a detour. The menu is the expected mix of Creole and French dishes, nicely presented and with accompanying ambiance.

Tiffany's (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-3506; 12 Blvd Harry Truman; mains around US\$11; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat) This well-regarded restaurant in Bicentenaire has a cool, dark interior that attracts a slightly more well-heeled crowd, making this one of the few higher-end downtown restaurants to hold its own against the gravitational pull of the Pétionville dining scene. The French-influenced menu and good wine list are equally attractive draws here.

QUICK EATS

There are plenty of quick and informal cheap eats to be had in Port-au-Prince, with food stalls around Champs de Mars in the evening, and bar-restos extending down Rue Capois. Street corners and transport junctions attract plenty of women selling *fritay* (fried snack food).

Épi d'Or (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2246-8560; Rte de Delmas, Delmas 56; sandwiches around US\$2.50; ☎ 6am-9pm) This Haitian take on the Subway-style sandwich outlet was taking Port-au-Prince by storm when we visited. As well as fantastic sandwiches, it also serves crepes, pizza and 'MacEpi' burgers, and there's an inhouse patisserie, all in bright surroundings and with cool air-con. Pay first, then present your ticket to complete the order. Be prepared for lengthy lunchtime queues.

Café Terrasse (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-5648; 11 Rue Capois; lunches around US\$4-9; ☎ 10am-4pm Mon-Fri)

Enter this café on Rue Ducoste to the side of Le Plaza hotel. For such a small place it has a broad international menu, and there is a couple of dining options – in the upstairs salon or on the terrace café, designed for quick refueling. Good salads and crepes.

GROCERIES

Big Star Market (Map pp290-1; Rue Capois) Next to the Rex Theatre, this is the most central supermarket for downtown hotels, with several other options along Lalue.

Caribbean Supermarket (Map pp290-1; Delmas 95) The country's largest supermarket, with a huge selection of imported goods.

Marché de Fer (Iron Market; Map pp290-1; cnr Grand Rue & Rue des Fronts Forts; ☎ daily) Shopping for fresh produce at this market (p296) is always an adventure.

Pétionville

RESTAURANTS

Anba Tonel (Map p294; ☎ 2257-7560; cnr Rues Clerveaux & Vilatte; ☎ 5-11pm, closed Mon-Wed) Most people hit Pétionville's restaurants for an alternative to Creole cuisine, but Anba Tonel may be the place to change minds. *Kibby* (fried stuffed meatballs) is the highlight here, along with the winning (and unlikely) *lambi* (conch) kebabs. It's all served amid wonderfully kitsch decor, quite unmissable.

Harry's (Map p294; ☎ 2257-1885; 97 Ave Pan Américaine; mains around US\$5; ☎ 10am-4am) A popular extended bar-resto, Harry's is one for the nightbirds. Pizzas are the thing, but there are sandwiches and a smattering of Creole dishes, too. It's unconventionally cool, and when you've eaten, grab a beer and challenge the locals to a game of pool on one of the tables.

Quartier Latin (Map p294; ☎ 3455-3325; 10 Place Boyer; mains US\$5-22; ☎ 10:30am-11pm) A newer restaurant that's proving itself popular, Quartier Latin throws French, Italian and Spanish dishes into the mix, and serves up generous and tasty dishes as a result. There are a few tables outside around a tiny pool, and a generally relaxed ambiance – further exhibited by the encouragement of its diners to write reviews and other messages on the walls at the entrance.

Le Coin des Artistes (Map p294; ☎ 2257-2400; Ave Pan Américaine; fish US\$6-15; ☎ noon-10pm, closed Sun) Come here if you're after seafood. It's an informal sort of an affair, with an open-air grill in its terraced garden. The catch of the day

is cooked over coals and served with Creole accompaniments, tasty and highly enjoyable with a cold one from the bar.

Magdoos (Map p294; ☎ 3552-4040; 30 Rue Oge; mains around US\$9; ☎ 11am-11pm) The best place in Pétionville for Lebanese food, Magdoos also doubles as one of the places to be seen: check out the young, beautiful and rich here every Friday night. While you're at it, enjoy the spread of Middle Eastern mezze, kebabs, and the Arabic music on Friday and Saturday evenings.

Fior di Latte (Map p294; ☎ 2256-8474; Choucoune Plaza; salads from US\$5, mains US\$9-17; ☎ 11am-10pm, closed Mon) Fior di Latte is not particularly well signed (it's next to the American Airlines office). This restaurant's vine-covered canopy is a lovely place to take an extended lunch break. The menu is Italian, with great plates of pasta and pizza, and some really tasty quiches thrown in, too. Finishing a meal with a bowl of homemade ice cream is a must.

Presse Café (Map p294; ☎ 2257-9474; 28 Rue Rigaud; light bites US\$3-7, buffet US\$10, mains US\$10-13; ☎ 7:30am-midnight Tue-Sat, to 7pm Mon, closed Sun) We like Presse Café for its casual bistro air. Decorated with old newspapers and photos of jazz heroes, it's a great place for a relaxed snack and drink, and even better for its lunchtime buffet. On Thursday and Friday evenings there's usually live music.

Papaye (Map p294; ☎ 3513-9229; 48 Rue Métellus; mains around US\$18-28; ☎ noon-2:30pm & 7-11pm, closed Sun-Mon) 'Caribbean fusion' aren't words you expect to see written in a Haitian restaurant review, but Papaye carries off the idea with considerable aplomb, taking Creole dishes and jamming them up against Asian, European and other culinary influences. Somehow it works, and is worth repeated investigation.

La Souvenance (Map p294; ☎ 2257-7688; 42 Rue Geffrard; mains from US\$20; ☎ 6:30-11pm, closed Sun-Mon) For years La Souvenance has been regarded as one of Haiti's best restaurants. It's certainly its poshest. The menu is extensively French high dining, and the service impeccable.

Chez Gerard (Map p294; ☎ 2257-1949; 17 Rue Pinchinat; mains around US\$25; ☎ noon-3pm & 7:30-10:30pm, closed Sun-Mon) One of the places you dress up for, Chez Gerard is in a verdant covered garden hidden behind grand wooden doors. There are liveried waiters and dripping candles galore, and a Cordon Bleu menu of the highest order. If you want France in Haiti, look no further.

QUICK EATS

Épi d'Or (Map p294; ☎ 2257-5343; 51 Rue Rigaud; sandwiches around US\$2.50; ☎ 6am-9pm) This new branch of the popular Haitian franchise serves up more of its successful mix of sandwiches, burgers, crepes and pastries to the Pétionville crowd.

Mun Cheez (Map p294; ☎ 2256-2177; 2 Rue Rebecca; burgers/pizza from US\$2.50/6; ☎ 11am-11pm Mon-Sat, 2-10pm Sun) A long-established and popular 1st-floor fast-food joint with good food, overlooking the junction with Ave Pan Américaine. It's a cheery spot; you can sit with a beer and burger and watch the world go by.

Boca Mocha (Map p294; ☎ 3656-7369; Rue Chavannes; sandwiches around US\$5; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat; ☎) Expat call Boca Mocha the Haitian Starbucks, but it's nicer than the epithet suggests. Coffee is the order of the day – we fell for the white-chocolate mochaccinos – but there are some refreshing smoothies and a suitably fortifying selection of sandwiches and cakes. There's wi-fi, the art on the wall is for sale and the air-con is positively arctic.

GROCERIES

There are plenty of supermarkets in Pétionville, including a couple of branches of Big Star, one on Place Saint-Pierre. The side streets off the main square usually attract plenty of fruit and vegetable sellers, while **Épi d'Or** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-5343; 51 Rue Rigaud; ☎ 6am-9pm) has the best bread and pastries in town.

ENTERTAINMENT Music

You don't have to go far to hear music in Port-au-Prince: many taptaps have their own mega soundsystems blasting tunes out to the world. If you want something a little more organized, look out for the billboards posted on major junctions advertising forthcoming concerts. Cover charges cost about US\$7 to US\$20 for really big names. As well as venues in Port-au-Prince (most bands play in Pétionville), large concerts and music festivals are regularly held at Canne à Sucre (p312) just outside the city. **Kiprogram** (www.kiprogram) also lists upcoming gigs and festivals.

Several bands play regular concerts that are worth checking out. Foremost of these is RAM at the **Hôtel Oloffson** (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2223-4000; 60 Ave Christophe) every Thursday from midnight (see the boxed text, p304). Also worth checking out are the troubadour band Macaya at **La Villa Creole** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-1570, 2257-0965; www.villacreole

.com; Rte El Rancho) and the *compas* (traditional music) outfits Jukann and Mamina most Friday and Saturday nights at **Presse Café** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-9474; 28 Rue Rigaud; ☎ 7:30am-midnight Tue-Sat, to 7pm Mon, closed Sun). There's no admission fee for these shows.

Bear in mind that if you're out dancing all hours, taxis can be extremely hard to find late at night.

Xtreme (Map p294; ☎ 2257-0841; 64 Rue Grégoire, Pétionville) Home most Saturdays to the fantastic Orchestre Super Choucoune, a big-band orchestra whose blend of *compas*, merengue, Cuban *son* and troubadour styles is tailor-made to get you dancing.

Djumbala (off Map p294; ☎ 2257-4368; cnr Ave Boisand Canal & Rue Frères, Pétionville) A large and always popular open-air club, leaning heavily on *compas*, with regular live bands.

Institut Français (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2244-0014/0015; www.ifhaiti.org; 99 Ave Lamertinière, Port-au-Prince) Holds regular concerts of classical, folkloric and modern Haitian music.

El Rancho (Map p294; ☎ 2256-9870; Rte El Rancho, Pétionville; ☎ from 9pm Friday) The El Rancho hosts one of Pétionville's more popular dance clubs – if you want tips on how to dance to *compas* or are ready to rumba, head here.

Less formal are the plentiful bar-restos that often feature live music on the weekend. Rue Capois off Champs de Mars has several decent places – head for **Arc-en-Ciel** (Map pp290-1; 24 Rue Capois, Port-au-Prince; ☎ 9am-2am), or just follow your ears.

Cinéma

Because of the popularity of pirate DVDs, there are only a couple of cinemas, typically costing US\$2 a seat and showing a mix of Hollywood and Haitian Creole movies:

Ciné Capitol (☎ 2221-3820; Rue Lamarre, Pétionville)

Rex Theatre (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-1848; 41 Rue Capois, Champs de Mars)

Sports

Soccer matches are regularly played at **Sylvio Cator Stadium** (Map pp290-1; cnr Rue Oswald Durand & Ave Mgr Guilloux; admission US\$1.50). It hosts international matches as well as being the home ground for Port-au-Prince's two main clubs, Racing Club Hâtien and Violette Athletic. The atmosphere can be frenzied, with lots of music, drumming and Prestige beer.

Port-au-Prince has several *gaguères* (cock-fighting arenas). They're low-key and often

RAM – THE BEST HOUSE BAND IN THE CARIBBEAN?

Every Thursday night between 11pm and midnight, crowds gather at the Hôtel Oloffson (p299) to dance until the small hours to the Vodou rock 'n' roots music of RAM. A potent blend of African rhythms, *rara* horns, guitar and keyboards, the shows have an irresistible atmosphere. At the center of everything is band leader (and Oloffson owner) Richard A Morse. We caught up with him after a show.

How would you describe RAM's music?

When Haiti became independent back in 1803–04, half the population had been born in Africa. Because it was a slave revolt, the surrounding countries ostracized Haiti to try to keep the revolution from spreading. That isolation kept Haiti's roots intact. We take those African roots as a starting point to our music, hence the word *racines* or 'roots.'

How long have you been playing?

I thought about the RAM project as early as 1983–84. I was still in my [New York] punk band. A French producer heard some tropical influences in our music, found out my mother was from Haiti and told me to get down here. It took me five years, plus taking over the Oloffson, before forming RAM in 1990.

RAM's music often has a strong political element, and you've had some run-ins with the authorities in the past...

When you write love songs, people want to get involved in your personal life. In the long run giving someone a positive message is probably the way to go. I've been grabbed by authorities, and some band members were once arrested during a show. If I get into more detail, perhaps we'll lose our 'tourist' audience!

But you still had the most popular merengue of the 2008 Carnival?

We were champions of Carnival. Corporate sponsorship, government recognition...I don't know what my friends back home would say!

Do you really play every single Thursday at the Oloffson?

If we're on tour, we might miss a Thursday or so and we often take the month of October off before starting up again in November. But the party here on Thursdays is always new and fresh. People join in, people dance, some are off in the corners making deals or exchanging stories. It's quite a phenomenon. Sometimes I can't believe I'm in the middle of it. When I read Quincy Jones' description of a 'juke joint,' I thought, 'I live in a juke joint!'

We heard you bought the Oloffson in a slightly unorthodox manner.

I was coming back from a friend's house one Saturday morning with a *houngan* [male Vodou priest] I had met. He asked me, 'Do you want the hotel?' to which I replied 'No.' Once again he asked me, 'Do you want the hotel?' and once again I said 'No.' His eyes were getting wider and he was getting more excited as he said, 'Say yes! Say yes! Do you want the hotel???' To which I resigned myself and said, 'OK, I want the hotel' and he snapped back, 'GIVE ME TWENTY DOLLARS!...'

How would Thursday nights with RAM have played in the Hotel Trianon in Graham Greene's The Comedians?

Well, if the Trianon had had RAM, then perhaps he wouldn't have had to sell!

Finally, what other Haitian bands should we have on our iPods?

I'm old-school – I like Coupe Cloué, Tropicana, Gerard Dupervil, Jazz Des Jeunes. But you've also got to check out Tabou Combo and Boukman Eksperyans.

macho affairs, hosting bouts most days. If you want to see a fight, it's best to get a local to take you; entrance is usually about US\$0.30.

SHOPPING

Port-au-Prince is Haiti's market place. For a full-on sensory shopping experience, head for the **Marché de Fer** (Iron Market; Map pp290-1; cnr Grand Rue & Rue des Fronts Forts; ☎ daily), where you'll find every-

thing from paintings and *artisanat* (handicrafts) to Vodou flags, and a heady slice of Haitian life. Have your bargaining wits about you. For more details, see p296. Alternatively, head for some of the more specialist options following.

Crafts

There are some good *artisanat* (craft) stalls outside **Sainte Trinité Episcopalian Cathedral** (Map

pp290-1; cnr Ave Mgr Guillooux & Rue Pavée). The following places have fixed prices unless noted.

Comité Artisanat Haïtien (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-8440; 29 Rue 3, Pacot; ☎ closed Sun) Established in 1972, this craftsmakers' cooperative has worked to promote Haitian crafts and provide fair wages for its artisans. The shop here is strong on well-priced metalwork, stone sculptures, lively painted boxes and miniature taptaps.

Musée d'Art Haïtien (Map pp290-1; 16 Rue Légitime, Port-au-Prince; ☎ closed Sun) This shop is part of the Saint-Pierre art college attached to the museum, and sells paintings and various *artisanat* produced by the students.

Mahogany Craft Shop (Map pp290-1; Rue Capois, Pacot) Near the gates of Hôtel Oloffson is this tiny, brightly painted shop, packed with jolly wood-carvings, paintings and painted metalwork. Prices are set by haggling.

Fred Bernard (Map p294; ☎ 2256-2282; Choucouné Plaza, Pétionville; ☎ closed Sun) A more upmarket Pétionville interpretation of an *artisanat* shop, here you'll find painted boxes and papier mâché, metalwork and other delights, along with current Haitian fashions.

Art

Impromptu open-air art galleries can be found throughout Port-au-Prince, with canvases hung on fences and walls, all quickly executed copies of the Haitian masters. Large congregations are found downtown near the main post office on Rue Bonne Foi, and along the wall of the Hotel Kinam in Pétionville. Prices should never really top US\$15.

If you're after something more specific, try the following galleries, all but one in Pétionville (and the district has plenty more to discover). Staff are knowledgeable and will be able to give more information about specific artists and schools of painting. Prices range from reasonable to astronomical depending on the artist. Galleries tend to close on Saturday afternoons and Sundays, but have regular exhibitions and openings that are worth attending if you can. In central Port-au-Prince, the Centre d'Art (p296) is worth a detour for anyone interesting in shopping for canvases.

Galerie Issa (Map pp290-1; ☎ 2222-3287; 17 Rue du Chili, Pacot) Set up by the late Issa el Saieh, one of Haiti's most important art collectors (and sometime jazz musician). The gallery, with everything piled up in one huge room,

has a wide collection of artwork on sale, plus some of the best metal art from Croix des Bouquets.

Galerie Caraïbe (Map p294; ☎ 2256-2659; 56 Rue Geffrard, Pétionville) Set in a courtyard with a restaurant, this gallery has a small and specialized collection of contemporary works.

Galerie Flamboyant (Map p294; ☎ 3555-9398; 9 Rue Darguin, Pétionville) A small gallery with a nice mix of naives and moderns.

Galerie Marassa (Map p294; ☎ 2257-5424; galeriemarassa@hotmail.com; 17 Rue Lamarre, Pétionville) This is a quite specialized and exclusive gallery exhibiting a good base of contemporary and naive Haitian artists, as well as metalwork, crafts and Vodou flags.

Galerie Monnin (Map p294; ☎ 2257-4430; galeriemonnin@hotmail.com; 23 Rue Lamarre, Pétionville) Port-au-Prince's oldest private art gallery, in a lovely building. Lots of landscapes, but with a wide selection of different Haitian schools.

Galerie Nader (Map p294; ☎ 2257-5602; galerienader@hotmail.com; 50 Rue Grégoire, Pétionville) A huge gallery over two floors, with a large collection of mostly moderns and some naives. The owner has an extensive private collection housed as a museum at a separate address.

Expressions (Map p294; ☎ 2256-3471; 55 Rue Métellus, Pétionville) A well-regarded Pétionville gallery.

Music

Along with the shops listed here (which also sell concert tickets), there are plenty of street stalls in the markets selling pirated CDs of some of Haiti's more popular musicians.

La Boite à Musique (Map pp290-1; 11 Rue Pavée, Port-au-Prince) Close to the intersection with Rue Montalais, La Boite à Musique is a good downtown music choice.

Le Mélodisque (Map p294; cnr Rues Rigaud & Faubert, Pétionville) Has the best selection of Haitian music CDs in Pétionville.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

International flights depart from **Aéroport International Toussaint Louverture** (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2250-1120) and domestic flights from **Aérogare Guy Malary** (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2250-1127), next to each other on the northern outskirts of Port-au-Prince.

The following airlines have offices in Port-au-Prince:

Air Canada (☎ 2250-0441, 2250-0442; www.aircanada.ca; Aéroport International Toussaint Louverture)

Air France (Map pp290-1; ☎ 222-1078, 222-4262; www.airfrance.com; 11 Rue Capois, Champs de Mars)
American Airlines (Map p294; ☎ 2246-0100, 3510-7010; www.aa.com; Choucouné Plaza, Pétionville)
Caribintair (☎ 2250-2031, 2250-2032; caribintair@accesshaiti.com; Aérogare Guy Malary)
Tortug Air (☎ 2250-2555, 2250-2556; tortugair@yahoo.com; Aérogare Guy Malary)
Tropical Airways (Map p294; ☎ 2256-3626, 2256-3627; Ave Pan Américaine, Pétionville)

Bus & Taptap

Port-au-Prince has no central bus station; instead there is a series of mildly anarchic departure points according to the destination. Timetables are generally absent, with buses and taptaps leaving when full – exceptions are for Cap-Haïtien and Jérémie, which you can buy seats for in advance.

For destinations in the south and southwest, go to Estation Port au Léogâne, Les Cayes and Jacmel (its name depends on your destination; Map pp290-1), at the junction of Rue Oswald Durand and Blvd Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Grand Rue). Here you'll find buses and taptaps to Jacmel (US\$2.70, three hours), Les Cayes (US\$8, four hours), Petit-Goâve (US\$4, two hours) and all points in between. For Jérémie (US\$14, 11 hours) there are several bus offices on Grand Rue near the Ciné Lido. Buses usually depart between 5am and 7am.

For Cap-Haïtien (US\$12, seven hours) go to Estation O'Cap (Map pp290-1), at the corner of Grand Rue and Blvd La Saline. Transport to Gonaïves (US\$6, three hours) and the Côte des Arcadins also leaves from here (see p315).

To make your way to Croix des Bouquets (US\$1, 30 minutes), there are taptaps that depart from Carrefour Trois Mains near the airport. If you're heading to Kenscoff (US\$0.30, 30 minutes) and the mountains above Port-au-Prince, taptaps leave from Place Saint-Pierre in Pétionville.

Three companies offer direct services to Santo Domingo in the DR: **Caribe Tours** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-9379; cnr Rues Clerveaux & Gabart, Pétionville), **Terra Bus** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-2153; Ave Pan Américaine, Pétionville) and **Capital Coach Line** (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 3512-5989; www.capitalcoachline.com; Rte de Tabarre), departing from the northern Tabarre district. All have daily departures at around 8am, arriving in Santo Domingo nine hours later, with tickets costing around US\$40. For more on crossing into the DR, see p352.

Car

Many of the car-rental companies are based along Blvd Toussaint Louverture near the airport. Among the more reliable:

Budget (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2250-0554; www.budgethaiti.com; Blvd Toussaint Louverture)
Hertz (off Map pp290-1; ☎ 2250-0700; hertz@dynamic-haiti.com; Blvd Toussaint Louverture)
Secom (Map p294; ☎ 2257-1913; www.secomhaiti.com; Delmas 68, Rte de Delmas)

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

From the northern edge of Port-au-Prince, it takes around 30 to 45 minutes to reach the airport from the city center depending on the time of day. Badged and cream-shirted taxi drivers from the **Association des Chauffeurs Guides**

ART ON WHEELS

Haitian art isn't just found on the walls of galleries – it weaves through the streets picking up passengers. Painted taptaps (local buses or minibuses) are one of Port-au-Prince's delights. While some owners are content to just paint their routes on the doors, others really go the distance by adding extra bumpers and mirrors and repainting the whole vehicle until it looks like a fairground ride. Slogans and Biblical verses typically decorate the windshield, while the rear serves as a canvas for paintings both sacred and profane: in five minutes between downtown and Carrefour we spotted the Nativity, Daniel in the lion's den, two Ché Guevaras, Tupac Shakur and a Ronaldinho!

d'Haïti (ACGH; ☎ 2222-1330, 3402-7706) will approach you in the arrival hall. The fare should be fixed at US\$20, but make sure this is clear before getting in the vehicle.

It's possible to take a taptap to or from the airport (US\$0.15); they wait outside the terminal and drop passengers off at the corner of Blvd Toussaint Louverture and Rte de Delmas (Delmas 13), from where it's possible to get a shared taxi into town.

Taptap

Port-au-Prince's taptaps run along set routes and are a very cheap and convenient way of getting around. The usual fare is five gourdes (US\$0.15) per trip. Routes are painted on the side of the cab doors, sometimes abbreviated (eg 'PV' for Pétionville). They all stop on request if they have space for more passengers – standing on the edge of the sidewalk with a wave of the hand or a loud 'psst!' usually does the trick. Shouting 'Merci chauffeur!' or

banging on the side of the vehicle will stop the driver, whom you pay as you alight.

Particularly useful routes include Ave John Brown (Lalue) to Pétionville, Rte de Delmas to Pétionville and Canapé Vert to Pétionville. Routes running north-south include Aéroport to Nazon (crossing Delmas and Lalue), and Saline to Martissant (running along Grand Rue).

Taxi

Collective taxis called *publiques* ply Port-au-Prince's streets. Invariably beaten-up saloon cars, they're recognizable from the red ribbon hanging from the front mirror and a license plate starting with T (for transport). Hail one as you would a taptap, and squeeze in with the other passengers. Fares are set at 25 gourdes (US\$0.75). Like taptaps, *publiques* stick to set routes, so if your destination doesn't suit the driver will refuse you, otherwise beckoning you in with what looks like a dismissive tilt of the head. If you get into an empty *publique* and the driver removes the red ribbon, he's treating you as a private fare and will charge accordingly – up to US\$20 if you're going a long way. State clearly if you want to ride *collectif* and share the ride with others.

Publiques don't tend to travel between Port-au-Prince and Pétionville, so hiring is often the best option. There are a couple of radio-taxi firms, especially useful if you're out late: **Nick's Taxis** (Map p294; ☎ 2257-777) and **Taxi Rouge** (☎ 3528-1112). Both charge around US\$10 between downtown and Pétionville, or US\$15 per hour.

Both Port-au-Prince and Pétionville have moto-taxis, if you're up for weaving through the insane traffic. They cost around 30 gourdes (US\$0.80) for short trips, with prices hiking steeply for long distances. The best place to find a moto-taxi is around a bus or taptap station.

VODOU FLAGS

Brightly sparkling Vodou flags are one of Haiti's more unusual and eye-catching art creations. Used during Vodou ceremonies, the flags (*drapo*) are magnificent affairs, made of thousands of sequins sewn onto sacking, catching the light from every angle. Each flag is dedicated to a particular *lwa* (Vodou spirit), often depicted through its Catholic saint counterpart or with its personal *vévé* (sacred symbol).

Flags are highly collectable, and many of the most celebrated artists' flags are sold in Pétionville's art galleries. But it's fun to go direct to the artists themselves, who mostly live in the Bel Air district just north of Notre Dame Cathedral. A guide is recommended, as many of the workshops are down narrow alleys and impossible to find alone (the Hôtel Oloffson, which also sometimes sells flags, is a good place to ask). Artists to look out for are Edgar Jean Louis, an urbane Vodou priest and coffin-maker, on Rue des Césars; Silva Joseph, also a Vodou priest, at the top of Rue Houille; and Yves Telemacque, on Rue Tiremasse.

There are also a couple of good flag artists in Nazon, such as Ronald Gouin, off Rue Christ Roi, and Georges Valris, in the same area.

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