

Reflections from a Traveler

I'm not going to lie--the first hour I spent in Haiti, after leaving the airport, was a tad terrifying. As we left the airport we were bombarded by people who wanted to talk, wanted to drive us, or help take our bags to the parking lot. There were military officials holding machine guns but instead of making me feel safe, I felt concern. Despite smiling and saying, "No, thank you" at every turn to all the offers to help, I watched someone literally take my travel partner, Rachel's, luggage right out of her hand. And at that point in time, you start following your luggage because you have no idea where it is going.



An afternoon boat ride on the Artibonite River.

Somehow we found our van and our driver, Earnts and our translator for the week, Tenior. I remember standing by the van in awe as huge 50 pound bags of luggage were being lifted over the top of heads to their resting place on the roof. Once the luggage was secure and all the helpers were financially compensated, we climbed into the van to depart.

The sun was setting and it was getting dark. As we drove to our evening accommodations I saw excessive garbage piled on the sides of the road and potholes and speedbumps on barely paved roads made travel slow. High cement block and solid metal fences lined the road and I was unsure if it was to protect the people inside or keep others out. People were all over the street—talking, selling items, and traveling on foot to their next destination. As we turned onto our street our vehicle slowed because the road was ripped up and looked like a construction site. We slowly and carefully traveled down the road and when we reached our accommodations, we had to knock on the metal fence to gain entrance. The small peep hole opened and then the security guard opened the gate for the van. The van bottomed out on the edge of a concrete curb due to the poor road conditions and the weight of the van. I think at that time I reached out to Rachel and whispered, "What did we get ourselves into?"

What I didn't understand in my first hour in Haiti was that all these things that I was witnessing—these things that were different than what I was used to and as a result, initially scared me, would soon aid me in having a deeper understanding of the world at large and Haiti in particular. The people at the airport and the vendors on the street are working hard to earn a living, the military men are providing security, and the cement block walls are for privacy and security. The roads are in disrepair because the Department of Transportation does not exist. The government planned to widen the road, but then changed their minds. *We were forewarned of these conditions in Haiti, but hearing about the situation and experiencing them are two different things.*

For me, this trip was life changing. It was one of the most enriching cultural experiences of my life. Haitians are hard-working, caring, beautiful people. Family and church are the center of their world. The country is deprived of so many of the luxuries we take for granted—clean water, continuous electricity, paved roads, and more--yet they are determined to prosper. I am so thankful I had the opportunity to take this trip and I look forward to my return!

Planning Ahead for Haiti Adventures 2020?
You'll have a choice of dates—either Friday,
January 10 to Saturday, January 18 or
Saturday, January 18 to Sunday, January 26.
We're limiting each adventure to just eight to
ten participants for each trip. Contact
Kathy.hetzel53027@gmail.com for additional
information or to register, go to
www.viphaiti.org.