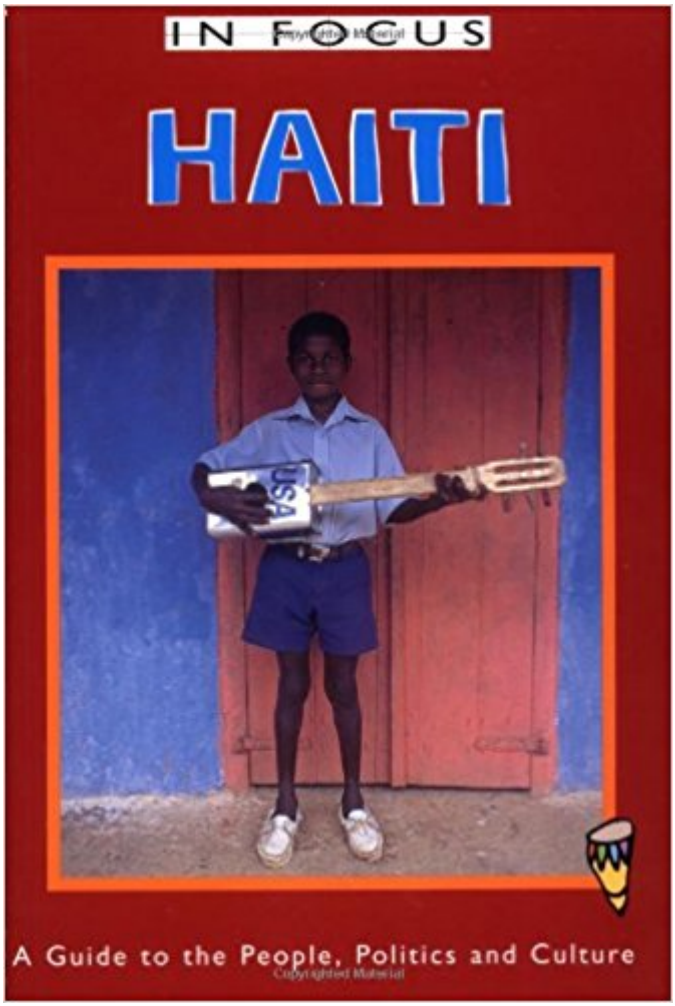
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Haiti In Focus: A Guide To The People, Politics And Culture (In Focus Guides)



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Synopsis

During two centuries of independence from colonial rule, Haiti has developed into a society quite distinct from those found in the rest of the region. Hollywood-derived images of black magic and Graham Greene-inspired conceptions of a "nightmare republic" do scant justice to the reality of life for those who make up the third largest population in the Caribbean. How did the slaves of France's most prosperous colony defeat the armies of Napoleon, Spain, and Britain? Why did the U.S. occupation of 1915-34 fail to establish a plantation economy in Haiti? Haiti in Focus is an authoritative and up-to-date guide to this fascinating country. The guide explores the land, history and politics, economy, society and people, culture and environment, and includes tips on where to go and what to see.

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Customer Reviews

Haiti in Focus is an authoritative and up-to-date guide to this fascinating country. It explores the land, history and politics, economy, society and people, culture and environment, and includes tips on where to go and what to see. Charles Arthur is the co-ordinator of the London-based Haiti Support Group and the co-editor of Libte: A Haiti Anthology.

Sometimes it's hard to be an American, and to look out at what we've done to the rest of the world.Haiti will soon be celebrating its bicentennial of independence. As the second-oldest nation in the Western Hemisphere and the black nation with the longest uninterrupted history, it should by

rights be rich, educated, forward thinking, and a bright light for the rest of the world. However, imperialist forces from abroad, including France, Britain, and most recently the United States of America, have colored its two centuries. Its people have been harangued by Castro's Cuba, Trujillo's Dominican Republic, Bush and Clinton's USA, and even the wildly corrupt Duvalier administration. Its land is stripped, its resources have been plundered, its cities are grossly overpopulated, and its seas are silted. And yet, somehow, Haiti survives.In the wake of the 1991 coup that unseated President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the 1994 US-led UN invasion that restored him to power, much news was made. Haiti was front-page headliner material nearly every day, a prestigious international hot spot. Names were made and broken in political spheres around the Haiti issue. Debate ran high. And then everything just disappeared. Haiti merited a two-paragraph mention on page twelve if the paper needed filler, and then only in large papers that could dedicate themselves to foreign affairs. For most of us, even those of us who maintained our religious interest in the nation, an entire nation may just as well have dropped off the face of the earth.British activist Charles Arthur, whose other works on Haiti include "A Haitian Anthology: LibÃƒÂ¨te," identifies himself as a "Solidarity Activist." His latest book, "Haiti in Focus," is subtitled "A Guide to the People, Politics, and Culture," and it lives up to that description admirably. For those interested, the available information is brought up to date through the middle of 2001. Arthur details the current political struggles surrounding the election of Aristide to another term in office; he lets us know about the struggle between Protestant missionaries and vodou adherents for control of the site at which the Haitian Revolution began; and he even gives us pointers on how to tour the country.This slim, easy-to-read book is deceptively clear. It focuses on what Haiti is today, and on the forces that have made it so. Arthur posits no blame for what's happened to the country; yet observant reading serves to point out several recurrent patterns. Currently, the United States has been trying to micromanage the Haitian economy to the advantage of America, and indeed has been using the Monroe Doctrine as an excuse to do so for some time. This has been happening in force through the last century, though it can be traced overtly to 1862, when the US recognized the country's sovereignty, and more covertly back to Haitian independence, when the US refused to recognize a free black nation.America is not alone in this treatment, however. Britain immediately recognized Haiti's independence, but apparently only for political advantage and access to the profitable plantations. When the plantation economy went the way of all flesh, Britain appears to have just walked away. France held recognition for ransom, offering it only when Haiti paid massive war indemnities that left the country in financial ruin from which it hasn't fully recovered. The United Nations and the Organization of American States have consistently tried to co-opt Haiti's foreign policy and dictate

domestic positions, and the European Union, primarily under pressure from France, is now trying to horn in on Haitian self-determination. As Arthur explains, Haiti remains a small force, battered on all sides by winds it cannot satisfactorily resist.The country is also riven internally. Though all involved want the country to flourish and thrive, wildly dissimilar ideas persist as to what would make this happen. Christian missionaries, primarily Catholic and Evangelical Protestant, have brought their faith to the country, but even Jesus Himself hasn't preserved the country. Aristide and his coalition have concrete ideas for how to use the government to resolve problems, but his plans are controversial and have stirred up strong negative feelings. Education is usually severely inadequate because of the lack of skilled teachers, disagreements over the importance of French, and the high cost of schooling in a poor nation. Meanwhile, poverty is swelling, illiteracy remains rampant, and nothing is being done about it.However, in Arthur's estimation, Haiti remains a culturally vibrant land, a noble nation resisting the homogeneity of Western-styled "globalization." The native art, music, and religion of the land are the most African in the Western Hemisphere, and are a celebration of life in the face of poverty. A full-color photo spread in the middle of the book shows the beauty that accrues to everything in the country-the way a tap-tap driver will paint rainbows on the side of his vehicle; the way rara musicians will dance down the street during a festival. Though this is a country damaged and struggling, Arthur makes plain, this is not a country to give up on, not a country to permit to die.This book is detailed enough to appeal to those intimately interested in Haiti, either those who appreciate the whole nation or those interested in one or two aspects. At the same time, it's clear enough in style and structure to reach out to readers who are being newly introduced to Haiti, and to those who know only the horror stories that recur in motion pictures and the news. Though it will date quickly, for the moment it stands as a strong primer for the condition that is Haiti and a land working for healing in a world that only wants to use it as a tool.

great intro to Haiti, even though it may not be up to date

This little book is very thorough, accurate, and informative. This book isn't meant for the causual globe-trotting tourist but for someone who really wants to understand Haiti. The book touches on several subjects (history, agriculture, politics, religion) and then links the subjects together in a simple but thorough way that makes sense.It also touches on important but obscure subjects like why the well-intentioned eradication of the poor farmers' "Creole Pigs" in the 1980s led to much of the rural problems today. Or why 5 Gourdes (Haiti money) is called "one dollar", which is something that confuses new visitors.This isn't a deep, complex book either. It's easy to read. And it doesn't

seem to have any particular political bias.If you want a good book on Haiti, this is it!

This book helped me to understand the Haitian culture a little better. Mesye anpil Charles Arthur

Too bad the book is too short and doe not go into the details of the pre- and post- independence periods of Haiti, whiwh are crucial for the country's future to come then. Otherwise a good 1st approach to the global situation of Haiti.

Don't purchase this book if you're looking for an in-depth travel book, an economic or cultural primer. Do purchase this book if you would like to get a general overview of Haiti, that includes a brief mention of the voodoo religion (spelled voodou in the book). It's a good starter book to learn more about the unspoken half of island of Hispanola. A quick read.

This is a thin booklet providing a nice overview of Haitian culure, politics and history: it contains a little bit of everything, illustrated by photographs. The scope of the book is limited, however, and considering political conflicts and agenda, it has aged a bit since 2002 edition. I like the fact that the booklet invites you to further reading, including online resources. At times, I found the language a bit twisted and information a bit insufficient (which is to be expected). If you feel you're missing some general knowledge on Haiti, this is an excellent book to start with (and easy to take with you anywhere), but make sure you update yourself with the latest political issues, before making a decision to travel there. In the time of writing this review, most Western countries advise their citizens not to travel to Haiti. That being said, I think the front page photo provides a great insight ...

You'll be fascinated, impressed, depressed, and delighted with Arthur's succinct introduction to the people, culture, and history of a small nation so very close to U.S. shores and U.S. history, yet so very far from our thoughts. From the joyful cover image to photos of brightly-painted buses to the clear maps and tips for travelers, Arthur delivers more than promised--as does Haiti herself. You'll come back for more, once you taste this brief introduction to the famed Hotel Oloffson, tap-taps and Vodou, rara and compa and rasin music, Sweet Micky & Boukman Eksperyans & Tabou Combo, the "little church" and "the flood," peasant movements and death squads, creole pigs and deforestation, poverty and structural adjustment, Toussaint Louverture & the slave revolution, the Duvalier dictatorship and the Tonton Macoutes, poetry and paintings. This book came just in time to enlighten & amaze students in my class on the prize-winning works of Haitian-American author

Edwidge Danticat. We all give this little book a two-thumbs-up!

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