

[Tips for Avoiding “Voluntourism” in Haiti Statement from the Institute of Haitian Studies on Hurricane Matthew](#)

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Just 6 years after the January 12, 2010 deadly earthquake from which Haiti is still recuperating, a category 4 hurricane hit the southwestern region killing close to 1000 people (current estimates as of 10/10/2016) and destroying over 80% of towns like Les Cayes, and Jérémie and surrounding villages (<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-37596222>).

Many people want to reach out and have asked about how best to help.

Here are a two practical tips:

1. Educate yourself. Learn about Haiti and the root causes of these types of natural disasters. Beware of “The Danger of a Single story” as Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie reminds us because they only give partial truths and lead to critical misunderstanding: (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

She states: “The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.”

The majority of media outlets reporting on Hurricane Matthew in Haiti continuously repeat the same version of the single story of Haiti as “the poorest country of the Western hemisphere” where people cut trees. The stories do not explain that the deforestation is due to the fact that people cut trees to make charcoal so they can cook. While the deforestation in Haiti has been the object of ongoing debates for decades, too often ecologists and other scholars are not making the link between colonialism, poverty, deforestation and capitalism. People have to be educated out of poverty and be given opportunities to work to become independent. Only then can we all plant trees.

1. Avoid voluntourism. On August 13, 2016, *The New York Times* published the story “To Get to Harvard, go to Haiti”

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<https://networks.h-net.org/node/2606/blog/study-race-and-culture-america/147790/tips-avoiding-%E2%80%9Cvoluntourism%E2%80%9D-haiti>

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(<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/08/14/opinion/sunday/to-get-to-harvard-go-to-haiti.html>) in which a 17 year old high school student laments the fact that many of his friends are posting pictures on Instagram and Snapchat with some brown child that they helped during the summer in Haiti as part of their college application essay so that they can have a story detailing their “transformation” and voluntourism effort. This story is an example of disaster tourism. In *Killing with Kindness: Haiti, International Aid, and NGOs*, scholar anthropologist Matt Schuller describes what he refers to as “trickle down imperialism” to describe the role that power plays within the aid system using examples from post-earthquake aid given to Haiti. If you choose to offer on-site aid, do so responsibly. Research the organization with which you will work, and be sure that their efforts are put toward sustainable solutions.

1. In the same vein, it is important to give responsibly. It’s not enough to just click and send a donation. Do your research and find out where your money is going. Are you supporting an organization that is working at the grassroots levels with Haitians to have direct impact on the population or are you just giving to an organization’s overhead? Realize that you can give at any time and in different ways. Find out the way that makes sense for you to give. Many people are giving now but in a few weeks or months they will have forgotten about Haiti. Perhaps you should wait to give later or give on an ongoing basis.

While we do not endorse any particular organizations, we recommend that you do research before you give to any particular organization to be sure they are aligned with your own values. Here are some suggestions of organizations where you may want to start to do research:

Anseye pou Ayiti/Teach for Haiti: <http://anseyepouayiti.org/en/>

Beyond Borders: <http://beyondborders.net/>

Christian Veterinary Mission: <https://donate.cvmusa.org/CVMReliefResponse>

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontière: www.doctorswithoutborders.org

Global Orphan Project: <https://www.goproject.org/>

Konbit Mizik: <http://www.konbitmizik.org/>

MADRE: <https://www.madre.org>

Na sonje/We will remember: <http://www.wewillrememberhaiti.org/>

Partners in Health (Zanmi Lasante): <http://www.pih.org/>

The Lambi Fund of Haiti: <http://www.lambifund.org/>

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UCI: <http://ucihaiti.org/support> click on the support form link and choose humanitarian

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<http://haitianstudies.ku.edu>

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