CONCLUSION

Is There Any Hope for Haiti?

Paradise Lost

The small town of Jacmel, nestled on Haiti’s beautiful southern coast, features all the picturesque qualities associated with a Caribbean locale. Located at the end of a small, enclosed bay, alongside a mile-long beach of fine sand, Jacmel boasts a covered ironworks marketplace, garden fences graced by flowering bougainvilleas, and some fine examples of the gingerbread architecture popular at the turn of the century. When in Jacmel, tourists can sample flavorful dishes of the French-inspired Haitian cuisine, purchase some Haitian art (including the local specialty of *papier mâché* masks), or arrange a visit to nearby natural wonders. *Bassins Bleus*, a string of blue-colored pools of water perched high above the west of the city, is a popular destination; the two-hour horse ride in the hills offers impressive panoramas of the bay of Jacmel, framed by the *flamboyants* (tropical trees renown for their colorful flowers) lining the road (figure C.1). One may also trek up the footpaths crisscrossing the La Visite National Park to the northeast. The park boasts some of the last forests remaining in Haiti and offers a foray into the inimitable atmosphere of Haiti’s remote countryside: tiny fields, low huts, or *kay*, women balancing on their heads the goods they are bringing to market, the throngs of children that are everywhere in Haiti, and row after row of steep hills, or *mornes*. Thanks to the elevation, the air is pure, dry, and cool for a Caribbean island. One easily understands why colonial Saint-Domingue was known as the Pearl of the Antilles. A few springs offer welcome refreshment along the way; there are even a few bars well stacked with *Prestige* and *La Couronne*, the local beer and soft drink. An adventurous hiker, after two days of arduous climbs that give its meaning to the Haitian proverb “beyond the mountains, more mountains,” can
reach Kenscoff, the breezy town of Swiss-like chalets overlooking the hustle and bustle of Port-au-Prince.

The only thing missing from this paradisiacal setting are tourists. foreigners—aside from aid workers and diplomats—are virtually non-existent in Jacmel, as is the case throughout Haiti. Hotels stay empty for months on end, as do beaches and handicraft shops. Tourists prefer to pack high-rise buildings in the nearby Dominican Republic, or crowd the beaches of other Caribbean islands whose natural and historical heritage pales in comparison with Haiti’s. How is it that the Caribbean's most beautiful island, located a few hours by plane from the major population centers of North America and Western Europe, remains completely cut off from the tourist boom that is transforming the rest of the region?

The odd advertising techniques of Royal Caribbean, the only cruise line that still stops in Haiti, hint at Haiti's main drawback. Even though Royal Caribbean ships stop in Labadie, a small town to the west of Cap Haïtien, Royal Caribbean typically informs its passengers that their ship's destination is a private island in “Labadee, Hispaniola.” It has apparently concluded that passengers might balk if told that they are to set foot in Haiti. Security fears are unfounded; the beach is closed off with private guards when the cruise ships stop. Some tourists never even

Figure C.1 The bay of Jacmel as seen on the way to Bassins Bleus.