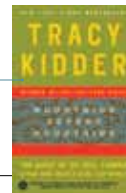


Heroes

RECOMMENDED READING

Tracy Kidder's *Mountains Beyond Mountains*, about the humanitarian work of Dr. Paul Farmer, inspired Taylor's first trip to the Haitian countryside.



Take it from me...

» **Backpackers can help local economies.** Each village on Taylor's routes will earn roughly \$400 per night for providing meals and a place for the hikers to sleep. While this isn't all profit (some will go to buying food), \$25 can send a child to school for a month and \$300-\$450 can build a latrine.

» **Hiking can foster friendships.** One of the easiest ways to build camaraderie and understanding with someone is to walk side-by-side on a trail. You don't even need to speak the same language.

» **Courtesy is a universal currency.** During a homestay, express gratitude for the person's home and hospitality—even if that means suspending your ideas of what a house should have. A little thanks goes a long way.

» **Pack for the conditions.** Must-haves: A steriPEN or other water purifier that zaps viruses, and plenty of headlamp batteries. Consider: a solar charger for your phone (cell service is widespread but electricity isn't).

» **Join us.** We're always looking for adventurous backpackers for scouting hikes. We're working on a new route up north, in addition to the one we've been perfecting in the Central Plateau. Follow our progress and find out how to join a trek at expeditionayiti.org.



Austin Taylor, 27

He's creating Haiti's first backpacking tours—and keeping the profits local.

When **Austin Taylor** and his friend Mike Roth visited Haiti in 2009, they saw something others missed in the hemisphere's poorest country: a backpacking destination. "There's a lattice of footpaths connecting all of the villages," Taylor says. "They go past lakes, through forests, and across rolling hills," Roth, an experienced hiker, called it a "backpacker's dream." That got Taylor's imagination going. Back in Indiana, the high school health teacher began planning a trek across the Caribbean nation. He returned to Haiti in January, 2010. Five days later, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake ravaged the Port-au-Prince area, killing tens of thousands. Taylor cancelled his hike and spent 11 days volunteering with Habitat for Humanity's disaster response team.

Once he returned to the U.S., Taylor's dream evolved. He still wanted to explore the Haitian countryside on foot (given the lack of roads, it's really the only way to do so), but he also recognized an opportunity for the devastated nation: an economic boost from trekkers. "Lots of foreigners headed to Haiti to volunteer after the earthquake," Taylor says. "But from what I saw while I was there, it seemed that what Haitians needed most in the long-term was the chance to earn money." Adventure tourism could create jobs for **local guides** and income for villagers who provided accommodations and meals for hikers.

Taylor returned to Haiti four more times to lay the groundwork for his outfitting company, Expedition Ayiti (*Ayiti*, or "land of mountains," is the Haitian Creole name of the country). During his visits, he stayed with Haitian-born **Gerald Joseph**, a school principal he'd met through Habitat for Humanity, who became a business partner. "In Haiti," Joseph explains, "nearly all villages need the basics like food, education, homes, and latrines. The money earned through hosting hikers could make a huge difference for those communities."

Taylor and three local guides led a scouting hike with some of Taylor's American friends in March 2012, navigating a five-day loop through the mountain-cradled grasslands of the Central Plateau region. The group visited caves, trekked to a rainforest waterfall, and **scored views** of the 9,000-foot peaks in the Massif du Nord range. Instead of camping, they got a full cultural immersion by staying with rural families each night.

The next trek is set for December 2012, when Taylor and crew will spend three weeks exploring even more remote trails. Taylor's ultimate goal is to channel 80 percent of Expedition Ayiti's fees (he charges \$1,300 per hiker for an eight-day, all-inclusive trek) directly to **host communities** along his routes, and lead several hikes per month. He expects the first round of paying clients to hit the trails this January.

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