



# Understand Puerto Rico

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With inexorable political, cultural and economic ties to the US, sunny Puerto Rico struggles against the stormy backdrop of the global economic crisis.

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A dynamic history has endowed Puerto Rico with a rich artistic tradition, from brightly colored folk-art masks to contemporary film.



## population per sq mile

Puerto Rico



USA



UK



1 icon ≈ 80 people

# Puerto Rico Today

## Fast Facts

- » Population: 4.4 million
- » Population growth rate: 0.27%
- » GDP (per capita): \$17,100
- » Life expectancy: 78.7 years
- » Literacy rate: 94.1%
- » Unemployment: 16.4%
- » Percentage of adults with cell phones: 73%
- » Internet users: 1,222,000

## The Economic Downturn

Like so many other places in the world, Puerto Rico's economy was sent in a downwards spiral with the Global Financial Crisis. The effect on the island was immediate and stark: many places included in the previous edition of this guide were found shuttered, with the less touristic south coast particularly hard hit. Unemployment stood above 16% in early 2011, nearly twice the US average. Almost all visible road and infrastructure development projects were next to signs boasting of the Obama administration's 2009 Federal Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

Though Puerto Rico's economy is weak in comparison to most US states, it boasts one of the most dynamic economies in the Caribbean. If you arrive from Jamaica or the Dominican Republic the differences are palpable.

Dreamt up in the 1950s and '60s, Operation Bootstrap succeeded in converting Puerto Rico from an agricultural society into an industrial powerhouse. Tax incentives introduced by prophetic island governor Luis Muñoz Marín led to long-term US investment on the island and growth in both the pharmaceutical and tourism industries. That said, Puerto Rico's per capita GDP is significantly lower than the US's poorest state (Mississippi), and 45% of its population lives below the poverty line.

## Environmentalism & Energy

Energy issues have long sparked debate among Puerto Ricans, whose energy costs are twice that of their US neighbors. After a massive explosion disabled the island's only refinery in 2009, the energy crisis has been a constant challenge for environmentalists. A 2010 law promised 12% in renewable energy sources by 2015, but this may not be easy – wind turbines in the southwest were narrowly approved after conservationists protested the impact on the critically endangered Puerto Rican nightjar

## Greeting People

» Though the customary greeting for people in Puerto Rico is similar to the US, with a handshake or a quick hug, greetings with acquaintances are a bit more physical and may include a pat on the shoulder or kiss on both cheeks.

## Top Books

- » **When I Was Puerto Rican** (Esmeralda Santiago) This memoir tackles immigration and cultural assimilation.
- » **The Rum Diary** (Hunter S Thompson) A tangled tale of treachery, alcoholism and lust at a San Juan newspaper.

- » **La Charca** (The Pond; Manuel Zeno Gandia) This 19th-century novel explores love, murder and the struggle of coffee farmers.
- » **Spiks** (Pedro Juan Soto) These short stories concern the struggle of Puerto Rican emigrants to the US in the '50s.