



# Central Mountains

POP 575,000

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## Best Places to Eat

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## Best Places to Sleep

- ➔ Las Casas de la Selva & Tropic Ventures (p216)
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## Why Go?

Those who explore these winding roads gain a dramatically different perspective on the island and chances to commune with Puerto Rico's old soul. Best approached with a flexible agenda, this is a place of Taíno legends and sugarcane moonshine, muddy hillside towns and misty afternoons.

The whole thing is strung together by the Ruta Panorámica, a vine-covered ribbon of potholed blacktop that rolls like a roller coaster along the island's rugged spine. It meanders through ragged agricultural towns, humid patches of jungle and past cliff-edge vistas where birds of prey glide in lazy circles. Between fog-covered valleys and the sharp scent of fresh-roasted coffee beans, visitors catch a whiff of the endangered cultural essence of Puerto Rico.

For those requiring more definitive reasons to visit, they are manifold: the island's highest peaks, remotest hiking and best coffee haciendas – plus one of the world's most thrilling adventure parks near Barranquitas.

## When to Go

Unlike the reliably sunny shores, the mountains catch all kinds of weather and are considerably cooler.

Cerro Maravilla in the Toro Negro forest records average temperatures 10°F to 15°F lower than San Juan. In winter, towns in the hills can be downright chilly, sometimes dropping to 45°F. There's no rainy season, per se, but the dampness gets into the bones, making layered clothing a must.

Mornings are clearer, making simultaneous views of the north and south coast possible, but the Ruta Panorámica will still often be blanketed in mist.

# Central Mountains Highlights

- 1 Caguas** (p215) Study the stunning retablos of Edwin Báez Carrasquillo in the art museums here.
- 2 Guavate** (p219) Join the spontaneous street party

hosted by *lechonerías* besides Bosque Estatal de Carite.

- 3 Cañón de San Cristóbal** (p217) Descend into the gaping gorges and crashing waterfalls.

**4 Toro Verde Nature**

- 5 Reserva Forestal Toro Negro** (p220) Forge along

off-piste trails yielding views of Puerto Rico's highest summit.

- 6 Hacienda Pomarrosa** (p220) Inhale the aromas and sample the brews of

homegrown Puerto Rican coffee.

- 7 Gozalandia** (p225) Cool off in some of the island's most magical waterfall plunge pools.

