

# Welcome to Puerto Rico

*Scented by slow-roasted pork and sea breezes, and colored by swashbuckling history, this sun-washed medley of Spanish and American influences is a paradise-seeker's pleasure dome.*

## Caribbean Beaches

Puerto Rico inspires Caribbean daydreams for good reason: it can satisfy both the lethargic beach bum and the budding big-wave surfer – all in a long weekend. Its coral reefs host a riot of fantastical fish and the shores shimmer like crushed pearls. On some beaches you'll have plenty of company. In other places like Vieques or Cabo Rojo you might have some of the world's best stretches of sand entirely to yourself. If the island tempts you to stay, you can opt for sizeable resorts or independent guesthouses for watching those seaside sunsets from your room.

## Cultural Vibrancy

The island's culture is of the visceral kind. Search for it beyond the condo towers and congested roads. Sometimes it seems Puerto Rico doesn't wish to show outsiders its cultural magnitude. Then, suddenly, you'll smell it in the smoke arising from *lechonerías* (eateries specializing in suckling pig), or hear it in the intoxicating patters of salsa beats. You'll glimpse it as sunlight sparkles across coffee plantations, or in museums celebrating everything from failed revolution to classical European painting. Puerto Rican traditions have been shaped by generations of cultural synthesis, celebration and setback, and it emerges today as vivid and indomitable.

## Happening History

Puerto Rico's past brims with cannon fire and colonization, repression and revolt. Legend abounds: from San Juan's fortresses, scoured by siege, to the crumbling South Coast sugar refineries once powering the island's economy. European settlers built pretty plazas in harbor cities while political revolutionaries schemed rebellion in mountain villages. History buffs can wander pre-colonial Taíno ruins or coffee haciendas. Even if your interest is scant, it's hard not to get immersed in Puerto Rico's tempestuous story in Old San Juan, where echoes of bygone times – of colonists and swashbucklers and smugglers – reverberate still.

## Forest Thrills

Even those who stick to the coast cannot escape the alluring shadow of Puerto Rico's thick forests, as knotted labyrinths of mangroves create crucial shoreline wildlife reserves and the green glint of the inland forested hills is rarely out of sight.

The island's dense foliage invites a perpetual mystery to blanket it, as coqui frogs chant and roots reduce so-called roads to rubble. The forests here are internationally important, such as El Yunque, the only tropical rainforest in the US. A journey into them guarantees to awaken the adventurer within.



## Why I Love Puerto Rico

By Luke Waterson, Writer

The island seems to specialise in making seemingly run-of-the-mill experiences rapidly erupt into life-long memories. The first time I traveled along the ramshackle south coast, I remember expressing interest to some passersby in an off-shore cay and no sooner had the words left my mouth than the impromptu offers to take me out there flooded in. This epitomizes Puerto Rico for me: one moment a stroll along a crumbling sea wall and the next, a float in azure, mangrove-backed waters with a cold beer in hand.

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