

# Understand Puerto Rico

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Brightly colored birds flit above, while below a riot of tropical fish dart through Puerto Rico's sparkling waters.

# Puerto Rico Today

Drive any distance on Puerto Rico's deplorable roads and your teeth will rattle to the perfect metaphor for the Commonwealth: it's on a very bumpy path. Its finances have gone from bad to worse and it is at risk of following Detroit into bankruptcy. Meanwhile, its best-educated workers see greater opportunity in the United States. And the very relationship with the giant to the north shows no signs of being resolved any time soon.

## Best on Film

**Maldeamores** (2007) Luis Guzmán stars in this film about love's little ironies.

**Lo que le pasó a Santiago** (1989) Nominated for an Oscar, this is a mysterious, lyrical tale of unexpected love.

**Rum Diary** (2011) Johnny Depp as Hunter S Thompson in his booze-filled days in San Juan as depicted in his book of the same name.

**La guagua aérea** (1993) A rueful comedy about Puerto Ricans who moved to the US in the '60s.

## Best in Print

**When I Was Puerto Rican** (Esmeralda Santiago; 1993) This memoir tackles immigration and cultural assimilation.

**Parrots Over Puerto Rico** (Susan L Roth & Cindy Trumbore; 2013) A beautiful and lyrical look at the island's people, nature and parrots.

**Simone** (Eduardo Lalo; 2012 (Spanish), 2015 (English)) A moody meditation set amid the neighborhoods of San Juan.

**Spiks** (Pedro Juan Soto; 1973) These short stories concern the struggle of Puerto Rican emigrants to the US in the '50s.

## A Question of Status

A commonwealth of the United States of America, Puerto Rico is a semi-autonomous territory whose constitutional status has long been a political oxymoron. Puerto Ricans enjoy many protections and benefits that US citizens have, but they are not allowed to participate in federal elections and have only a nonvoting 'Resident Commissioner' in the US House of Representatives.

A non-binding resolution in 2012 showed that the majority of the island's voters favor US statehood. President Obama committed to funding an 'official' referendum that would decide Puerto Rico's political fate, and set aside \$2.5 million for this purpose (although no date was specified).

The question remains, particularly under Donald Trump's presidency, whether any Puerto Rican vote favoring statehood could be linked to a mandated admission process to the US as the 51st state. President Trump's views on this, and relationship with the island, have so far seemed nuanced to say the least. But on becoming Puerto Rico's 12th Governor in 2017, pro-statehood Ricky Rosselló succeeded in getting Senate to pass a bill paving the way for the first 'statehood or independence' vote in Puerto Rico's history, set for June 11, 2017.

## Environmentalism & Energy

Energy issues have long sparked debate among Puerto Ricans, whose energy costs outweigh those of their US neighbors (electricity costs are virtually double the US average) despite them having, on average, half the salaries to pay for them with. The island's ailing electricity grid was responsible for an island-wide three-night blackout in September 2016.

As the island has no petroleum, gas or coal reserves, and these three currently account for 98% of its electricity generation, it's easy to see where the problem lies. Solar