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Glitz and Glamour

Puerto Rico, San Juan, 5 Days

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Guide Description



AUTHOR NOTE: We wanted to visit El Conquistador, one of the island's best resorts, but at the same time we wanted to get a better feel of the island before being sequestered away. The Ritz in Isla Verde commands a high price, but it is the most private of the large hotels in San Juan. The nightlife in San Juan is somewhat reminiscent of Miami beach, with the added bonus of casinos. Once in El Conquistador, we decided to take advantage of some of the nearby excursions rather than just lounging around the pool and beach, and these certainly made the trip memorable.

Itinerary Overview

things to do
restaurants
hotels
nightlife

Day 1 - San Juan

DAY NOTE: After a nice afternoon at the beach, we had an exquisite dinner at Il Mulinno, then played a little in the casino. We took a short cab over to the rooftop lounge at the Water Club.



The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Hotel, Spa, and Casino

Exclusive and regal



Wet and Liquid

Boutique hotel clubs in the lobby and roof

DAY NOTE: We arranged for a day sailing trip out to a nearby island.



Erin Go Bragh

Sail with the family

Day 5

DAY NOTE: We arranged for transportation to the airport straight from the resort.

Day 2 - San Juan

DAY NOTE: We spent the day at the pool. At night we tried the casino at El San Juan. It's a little bigger than the one at the ritz, but mainly impressive for the gorgeous lobby. We went a bit early to the nightclub Bravas and left as it was starting to fill up at 11.



Ocean Bar and Grill (The)

Taking it to the Ritz!



Bravas

San Juan's premier club



The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Hotel, Spa, and Casino

Exclusive and regal

Day 3 - San Juan

DAY NOTE: We arranged for pick up from El Conquistador, which was about an hour's drive from San Juan. There are plenty of activities, restaurants, pools, and a casino at the resort. The beach is a little disappointing however. The resort is very close to the bioluminescent bay, and we arranged for a sunset kayak tour. The kayaking was not difficult, but it is a little strenuous overall.



Las Tortugas Adventures

Expert guides lead unforgettable kayak tours around some must-see island spots

Day 4 - Puerto Rico

Day 1 - San Juan

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: After a nice afternoon at the beach, we had an exquisite dinner at Il Mulinno, then played a little in the casino. We took a short cab over to the rooftop lounge at the Water Club.

contact:

tel: 787-253-1700
<http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/SanJuan/Default.htm>

location:

6961 Avenue Of The Governors
Carolina -- 00979

1 The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Hotel, Spa, and Casino

DESCRIPTION: The ultimate resort destination in San Juan, The Ritz Carlton offers some of the most luxurious amenities in the area. Comparable to neighboring El San Juan Hotel, The Ritz stands alone when it comes to name recognition. Its casino and spa are remarkable and favorites of not only locals, but other tourists staying in close-by hotels. Restaurants, bars, boutiques and more are to be found here. Not to mention a beautiful beach right in front. © NileGuide



contact:

tel: 787 728 3666
<http://www.waterbeachclubhotel.com>

location:

2 Tartak Street, the Waterclub Hotel
San Juan PR 00979

2 Wet and Liquid

DESCRIPTION: On the weekends DJs spin great US and European hits at Liquid, the hotel lobby club. Upstairs on the roof at Wet enjoy chic cocktails, a fantastic view, suave sounds, and fantastic sushi.



Wet and Liquid

Day 2 - San Juan

QUICK NOTE

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contact:
tel: 787 253 1700

1 Ocean Bar and Grill (The)

location:
The Ritz-Carlton San Juan
Carolina 00979

DESCRIPTION: Located inside what is arguably the most luxurious property in the Capital, The Bar resides in the Ritz-Carlton San Juan. This is the Ritz casual poolside bar and grill. © wcities.com

hours:
Daily 11a-6p

contact:
tel: 787 444 7778
<http://www.bravapr.com/index.html>

2 Bravas

location:
6063 Isla Verde Ave
Carolina PR 00902

DESCRIPTION: Located at the El San Juan Hotel & Casino, Bravas (formerly Babylon) is a fixture in San Juan nightlife. Locals and tourists mingle with the island's celebs to shake their bon bons and taste la vida loca. Bravas is as elegant as its host hotel and enforces a very strict, semi-formal dress code. Call the club to check on special parties and performers. © wcities.com

hours:
Th-F 9p onwards; Sa 10p onwards

contact:
tel: 787-253-1700
<http://www.ritzcarlton.com/en/Properties/SanJuan/Default.htm>

3 The Ritz-Carlton, San Juan Hotel, Spa, and Casino

location:
6961 Avenue Of The Governors
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contact:

tel: 17878090252

+17876378356

<http://www.kayak-pr.com>

location:

P.O. Box 1637, Canovanas

PR, 00729-1637

Canovanas PR 00729

hours:

Bio Bay tours are M-Sat 6:30p

and 9p, by appointment for

other locations

Las Tortugas Adventures

DESCRIPTION: Las Tortugas Adventures offers guided kayak tours of the Rio Grande River and the bioluminescent bay in Fajardo. The Rio Grande tour, just outside of Loiza, takes kayakers through a mangrove estuary and docks for lunch at a private beach. The biobay kayak tour in Fajardo is not to be missed! Kayakers can opt to leave at sundown or 8pm. The tour moves through a mangrove estuary and into the phosphorescent bay, where guides provide educational talks on the unique ecosystem. It's like kayaking through the stars. Charter tours to Monkey Island can also be arranged. © NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Las Tortugas Adventures.

Day 4 - Puerto Rico

QUICK NOTE

DAY NOTE: We arranged for a day sailing trip out to a nearby island.

contact:

tel: +1 787 860 4401
fax: +1 787 863 5253
<http://www.egbc.net/>

location:

PO Box 718
Puerto Real 00740

hours:

10a-5p call for bookings and
customizing overnight sails

1 Erin Go Bragh

DESCRIPTION: Relax and enjoy a unique sail cruise to picturesque Palominos, Icacos or Palominitos aboard this luxurious fifty-foot sailing ketch. The crew offers customized guided snorkeling tours, including gear, as well as overnight cruises to the island of Vieques where a nocturnal visit to a bioluminescent bay will leave you beaming. Dine on the captain's legendary BBQ fixings midday and enjoy the convenience of an open bar. The boat can accommodate up to six guests and private rooms are available. © wcities.com



Day 5

DAY NOTE: We arranged for transportation to the airport straight from the resort.

San Juan Snapshot

Local Info

Many believe San Juan is a small Spanish colonial town with but a few bustling avenues. However this impression does not aptly describe the breath and depth of this fine old-world city. Modern-day San Juan encompasses a vast metropolis that covers seven unique and distinct districts. This makes for an eclectic combination of sights and sounds that is essential to the wonder and joy of visiting San Juan.

Old San Juan/Puerta de Tierra

San Juan is a traditional, colonial city that is bordered by walls. As the seat of the island's bicameral government, it houses La Fortaleza, home of the Governor and El Capitolio, the seat of the House of Representatives. The Senate, on the other hand, is located in nearby Puerta de Tierra. However, both districts can be found on the islet of San Juan and are connected to the mainland via several bridges. Old San Juan itself consists of narrow streets encompassing over four hundred years of history and tradition. Dine in one of the great establishments on Fortaleza Street, party in San Sebastián until dawn, or simply stroll along the charming avenues and thoroughfares. Similar to Europe, a famous tradition in Old San Juan is to people-watch, and there is no better place to indulge in this activity than from one of the several plazas that are located throughout the city. This town has something for all ages, young and old. A must-see is the impressive Spanish fort El Morro located on the north side of the islet. Puerta de Tierra houses hotels such as the famous Caribe Hilton. While a lot of Old San Juan has been in a state of disrepair, the current renovations are making this once decrepit community an acceptable tourist destination.

Condado

El Condado, as the locals say, is the island's most glamorous district, featuring boutiques, a variety of restaurants, and some of the finest hotels on the island. Contrary to popular belief, many nationals do reside here in the exquisite turn-of-the-century mansions. You'll notice the populace on any given day to be a good balance between tourists and locals. If you are an avid jogger, you'll love the expanse of open area. This district spans from the

Condado Plaza Hotel& Casino in the west to the Ocean Park area in the east.

Isla Verde

Isla Verde is home to high-rise apartment buildings, huge clubs and luxurious hotels. This area is actually part of the municipality of Carolina, connected to San Juan via several highways and streets. It spans from the Punta Las Marías area (adjacent to Ocean Park) to the land just beyond the International Airport. Isla Verde hosts world-class hotels that include the Ritz-Carlton and El San Juan. Its nightlife is exciting, and the enormous balneario, or public beach, is where locals and guests come to sunbathe and get their fill of people-watching.

Hato Rey

Hato Rey is several miles from Old San Juan but is easily accessible. It is the island's central commercial district, where the local wheelers and dealers conduct their business. Thus, its restaurant scene caters to more business people than anywhere else on the island. Roosevelt, the district's residential area, can be found just off Highway 52. It is one of the most famous venues for nightlife in San Juan, and the Plaza Las Américas, the Caribbean's largest mall, is also located here.

Santurce/Miramar

Both the Santurce and Miramar districts are located just off Condado and Old San Juan, but north of Hato Rey. Santurce was originally an upper-class neighborhood and entertainment. Today, there are office buildings and abandoned structures with a small but very good marketplace (Plaza del Mercado). A major campaign is under way by City Hall to restore the sector's vitality.

Río Piedras

This district is known as University City because it houses the University of Puerto Rico. Visiting Río Piedras is enlightening for those who want to explore the real Puerto Rico first-hand. The district has a traditional Plaza del Mercado and a very hometown atmosphere.

©

History

It has not been an easy road for Puerto Rico, a land rich in history. Many trials and tribulations have marked her peoples' historic journey. Their courage to endure and face new challenges and consistently struggle for a better life is very much a part of the social and cultural fabric. Their progress and successes after periods of disillusionment, defeat, and grief demonstrates the great character of the Puerto Rican people.

History indicates that the Archaics (nomadic descendants from the North American Indians) were the very first inhabitants of the island of Puerto Rico. Very little is known of their culture, however, so their legacy was minimal. The Igneri people followed, sailing in from what is now Venezuela. Their many skills made way for technical advancements. Their civilization built advanced canoes and used the soil to make pottery.

After the Igneri era, the Arawaks inhabited Puerto Rico. They were known as the Taínos, a peaceful people armed with expert agricultural skills. Historians and archaeologists have uncovered their rich culture, which is today memorialized at the Tibes and Caguana Ceremonial Parks, in the municipalities of Ponce and Utuado, respectively. Many of today's Puerto Ricans are direct descendants from the Taínos.

On November 19, 1493, Christopher Columbus first sighted the western shore of Puerto Rico. Some of his Spanish crew landed, but left shortly thereafter. It was not until 1508 when Juan Ponce de León and 50 of his compatriots arrived that the Spanish influence began to take hold. They established a small community, called Caparra, near what is known today as Guaynabo. By 1511, the Spanish began to move to a small islet across the bay from Caparra, which they then fortified. Ironically, it was first called Puerto Rico, while the country was named San Juan. The names were later reversed as we know them today. In 1518, due to a critical labor shortage, African slaves were brought over to the island. The Taínos were killed off earlier as a result of wars and famine.

During the almost 400 years of Spanish dominance, San Juan experienced sporadic growth. Conditions of life in the city were

San Juan Snapshot continued

controlled mainly by the homeland of Spain and its strategy for colonialization. During this period, San Juan became heavily fortified with walled fortresses such as El Morro and San Cristóbal. And while the Spaniards endured numerous crippling attacks by the English and Dutch military forces, San Juan remained a stronghold. During the 19th Century, an independence movement took hold. The height of this activity occurred during the late 1860s and was called the "Grito de Lares." Attempts at revolution were conducted to free the island from Spanish dominance. By 1873, when slavery was completely abolished and Spain granted Puerto Rico autonomy, the Spanish-American War exploded and American troops invaded the island.

After the Spanish-American War, several significant changes occurred in San Juan. The United States flag replaced the flag of Spain and the American president appointed the Governors. During this period two key laws were passed. The Foraker Act of 1900 and the Jones Act of 1917 granted Puerto Ricans self-government and American citizenship, respectively. The periods of Prohibition and the Great Depression caused further havoc in the city where smuggling and bootlegging became part of the social commerce of the day. Puerto Rican men participated in World War I and II as American citizens while still desiring their own autonomy.

Local leader Luis Muñoz Marín became governor of the island, thanks to a 1947 act, which granted free elections for that post. Initially all of his efforts were prompted toward obtaining independence for the island. However as time went on, Muñoz felt that it was in the best interest for his people to opt for a degree of self-autonomy. This gave birth to what has been labeled the Estado Libre Asociado (Associated Free State), or Commonwealth of the United States. Under this status, Puerto Ricans do not vote in American Presidential Elections nor do they have representation in Congress (aside from one non-voting member). In turn they pay no federal taxes, yet they receive federal financial aid. "Operation Bootstrap," under the leadership of Muñoz Marín's government, transformed the island's industry from an agricultural to a manufacturing-based economy. As a result, the island, for better or worse, experienced significant growth and development in a number of sectors.

The people of Puerto Rico today have the highest per-capita income in Latin America and have one of the most stable economies in the Southern Hemisphere. The standards of living are higher than most other Latin countries, but still lags behind the United States. The island has a tri-party system. The PDP (Popular Democratic Party) defends the commonwealth. This is the party that was founded by Muñoz Marín. The second party is the NPP (New Progressive Party) which advocates statehood. And the much smaller third party is called the PIP, or Puerto Rican Independence Party. The first two parties have consistently battled back and forth for power since 1968. Today, most Puerto Ricans enjoy prosperity and still strive to improve their standard of living.

©

Hotel Insights

Puerto Rico's accommodation options range from quaint paradors, or country inns to all-inclusive resorts and upscale urban hotels geared towards business clientele. An often overlooked option is the charming down-to-earth guest home alternative. San Juan's primary hotel districts are Condado and Isla Verde, while both Old San Juan and Miramar serve travelers as well.

Puerto Rico is a commercial mecca, which tends to separate it from other Caribbean destinations. The trade and shipping industries are much more sophisticated here. Puerto Rico is an airline hub where there is ample access to quality goods, brands, and foods. Consequently, the needs of the traveler or visitor are easily met in Puerto Rico.

Old San Juan/Puerta de Tierra

This old city has some intriguing hotels for those who like to overnight in historic surroundings. Here you experience a city-within-a-city. Visitors like the eclectic grouping of hotels that are located here. The most popular is the Hotel El Convento, in the center of Old San Juan. It's been highly publicized and repeatedly featured in prestigious travel and travel publications. The Hotel Milano is well positioned in the heart of the restaurant district on Fortaleza Street. Book early at the delightful guesthouses like La Caleta and La Galería. These, and the Hotel Plaza de Armas,

provide budget accommodations within the city limits.

Puerta de Tierra has two major hotels. The legendary Caribe Hilton, which underwent an extensive renovation, is a favorite amongst the locals. In close proximity is the Normandie Hotel which architecturally has the appearance of a cruise ship.

Condado

El Condado is San Juan's hotel district par excellence. It features over 25 different lodging options from budget guest houses to the exquisite Condado Plaza Hotel & Casino and the San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino. For those on a budget, try the Alelí by the Sea, a charming little guesthouse with good rates. If you are looking for a pleasant, small boutique hotel, El Canario by the Sea is a fine choice. In this district the guest room rates usually run higher than elsewhere.

Isla Verde

The Isla Verde district in Carolina has a wide variety of hotels. Some of the island's best are located here. The El San Juan, the InterContinental San Juan and the exclusive Ritz-Carlton are just a few of the more prestigious hotels. If you are looking for limited service accommodations, there are several alternatives including the Hampton Inn and several other private guest houses.

Miramar

The urban Miramar district has some limited, but acceptable accommodations such as the Olimpo Court Hotel and the Courtyard San Juan Marriott. Both cater to business travelers and have excellent restaurants (Chayote and Augusto's, respectively).

©

Restaurants Insights

Puerto Rico is a melting pot of cuisines from around the world. The eclectic choices are truly global and are dependent upon your individual preferences. Here you can find French, German, Greek, Asian, Italian, Spanish and of course Caribbean, just to name a few. You'll delight in Nouveau Latino cooking (traditional Puerto Rican creations updated with modern cooking techniques). From casual to haute cuisine,

San Juan Snapshot continued

dining in Puerto Rico offers travelers an international taste sensation.

Old San Juan

In Old San Juan, Puerto Rico's most historic wining and dining neighborhood, one can choose from Il Perugino (one of the best Italian eateries on the island), Bombonera (Caribbean traditional) or Siglo XX (Spanish tapas delights). Another fine Italian dining experience can be found at the quaint Ambrosía on Calle del Cristo. Discover fine-dining excellence at El Picoteo and Café del Nispero, both located in the Hotel El Convento. If you favor American, Old San Juan has a Hard Rock Café. Gourmets will enjoy the gourmet creations at Trois Cent Onze. Nouveau Latino cuisine can be experienced at its best at The Parrot Club or Amadeus. The Café Berlin is known for its vegetarian specialties. Also, La Mallorquina and El Patio de Sam offer the some of the best Puerto Rican cuisine in the old city. Grab a drink at the very popular Nono's. Perfect for a pre or post-theater meal, Toro Salao is located adjacent to the Tapia Theatre.

Isla Verde

The Isla Verde district is not to be overlooked when seeking restaurant alternatives. Some of Puerto Rico's top choices are tucked away inside Isla Verde's hotels. Some very excellent choices include the Ritz-Carlton, InterContinental San Juan and El San Juan Hotel & Casino. Oriental cuisine is served at Momoyama, and Yamato. Love Italian? Try Ciao Mediterraneo Restaurant and La Piccola Fontana. Puerto Rican and Caribbean cuisine can be sampled at the excellent Metropól or Casa Dante. The Ranch offers American specialties. Steakhouses include the superb Ruth's Chris and the elegant The Palm. The Tequila Bar and Grill offers excellent Mexican cuisine. For cocktails with lots of atmosphere, try the lobby lounges within some of these hotels or stop in at Lupi's (Mexican cantina) for one of their special margaritas.

Condado

Condado is a real find for those who crave gourmet seafood. Some of the island's best restaurants are to be found in Condado. Prime examples include the award-winning Spanish eatery, Compostela. Magdalena Street showcases several great restaurants including Antonio's, Cielito Lindo, the

very cosmopolitan Urdín, José José, and Ramiro's. Also included on Condado's recommended dining spots are Hermes and Pikayo (featured in Conde Nást magazine). The St. Moritz (authentic Swiss cuisine) and Tuscany inside the San Juan Marriott are also highly rated. Condado's dining options seem endless! Try to plan at least one meal at Miró (Catalan seafood) or the famous Ajili-Mójili. Martino's serves up great Italian cuisine and the Greenhouse is often a stop-off point for an after-concert taste treat. If you hunger for a down-to-earth, hearty, grab a bagel from the Big Apple.

Hato Rey

The island's main business district offers ample lunch and dining options. Restaurants include the elegant Zipperle, the popular Yuan, and the Coachman Steakhouse. For a fun atmosphere and something different at reasonable prices, go Middle Eastern at Al Salam, and Tierra Santa. Or, for an Oriental meal you may want to check out the Yum Yum Tree or Kimpo Garden. Sample Puerto Rican home-style dining at Cueva del Chicken Inn. Upscale cuisine is available at the intimate Los Chavales. You'll find that Il Cuoco and Metropól offer two distinctly different styles of cuisine (Italian and Cuban) at affordable prices. Grab a casual drink and a bite from El Mesón y Algo Más on Roosevelt.

Guaynabo

In recent years this San Juan suburb has increased its share of fine restaurants. Guaynabo is home to Burbuja's Café (Spanish) and El Caribe. This district is gaining in popularity and will surely be offering more choices in the upcoming years.

Río Piedras

The University City offers its share of fine restaurants, but excels in pubs and hangouts catering to the university crowd. Among the notable restaurants are Café Valencia, El Isleño and the El Tropical (delicious!).

Miramar

Miramar hosts three of the best restaurants in Puerto Rico, namely the ultra classic Augusto's, the chic and eclectic Chayote (Nouveau Latino) and the exquisite La Casona. Stop into, Havana's Café or the

excellent Pizzeria Uno at Centro Europa for more casual fare.

©

Nightlife Insights

San Juan is the capital of Puerto Rico's after hours nightlife. Most clubs, discotheques, and casinos are located in the Isla Verde, Old San Juan and El Condado areas. In Ponce and Mayaguez, you will find some additional excitement, albeit less intense as the big city. Tipping is a must. The laws for drinking alcoholic beverages are the same as the United States. Only adults over 21 are permitted.

While San Juan's entertainment options shouldn't be compared to Las Vegas or New York, there is still plenty to do here. Sanjuaneros, or the people of San Juan, are serious partygoers, and they know how to keep the party scene alive and well. Playing hard seems to be part of the island's culture.

Clubbing

Old San Juan is without a doubt the place for those who love classic and contemporary culture. The art, music, and fine dining are available at every turn in this historic pocket of the big city. San Juan is inviting to the night owls who want to groove in hot clubs such as Club Lazer, where you can party till dawn. Or, find fun at lively bars like Nono's and Don Pablo's. The best place to have a festive cocktail is along San Sebastián and Cristo Streets.

Condado attracts an upscale party crowd who flocks to its clubs and ubiquitous small cafés and bars. Stargate, with its wild bashes, is a prime choice for the party-hearty crowd. Among the pubs, Dunbar's in the Ocean Park sector stands out for its fun-loving people and tantalizing food. Take to the dance floor and learn the latest salsa moves at any of the hotel lobbies that provide this type of entertainment for visitors.

Isla Verde in recent years has been converted into a mega-party district, housing super clubs like Babylon and Area 51. There are plenty of cafés and street-side bars along this strip. The lobbies of the InterContinental San Juan and the Ritz-Carlton have excellent entertainment, but the ever popular El San Juan Hotel & Casino is, without question, the place to be.

San Juan Snapshot continued

Concerts

During the day, the City Hall offers several free concerts on the many plazas such as de Armas and Colón. On the first Tuesday of the month there are Gallery Nights where you can be exposed to cultural expositions.

Museums

If clubbing is not your thing, don't worry! There are plenty of museums and sights around the city to appeal to non-night owls. The Museo de Antropología, Historia y Arte and Museo de Arte e Historia are great places to catch up on local history and lore. For art lovers, there are the Museo de Arte de Ponce, Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico and Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico.

Performing Arts

This district has limited upscale entertainment but is rather important because it houses the Luis A. Ferré Performing Arts Center. The center is considered the axis of the local theater scene with famous local and international performers visiting regularly. There are plenty of traditional bars lining Fernández Juncos Avenue for a pre- or post-theater treat.

Cinema

You can always catch up with the latest flicks at one of San Juan's many movie theaters. Movies can be seen at the Cine Roosevelt, El Señorial Cinemas, Fine Arts Cinema or at the Metro. One of the most impressive venues is the megaplex, Rio Hondo 7-16.

©

Things to Do Insights

Old San Juan

This walking tour highlights the most important sights in San Juan's Old City, including Fuerte San Felipe del Morro (El Morro Fortress), Cristo Street, San Juan Cathedral and La Muralla (city wall). Old San Juan runs from the south to north end of the islet where Puerto Rico's Spanish roots are preserved. It's connected to the mainland by bridges and a causeway. Contemporary high-rise resorts hug the waterfront to the east and across the bay to the west. Strap on your walking shoes and commence your tour at the Doña

Fela parking lot on Recinto Sur Street. Or as an alternative, begin at the Plazoleta Rafael Carrión (just in front of the Banco Popular Building). Heading west you will pass the San Justo, Cruz, and San José intersections. This stretch is a bit steep but worth the effort, as it offers great views of the bay. Once you reach the Capilla del Cristo (Christ Chapel) you will be on Cristo Street. To your left (heading north), discover the lush landscaping at the Parque de las Palomas. Along the way, you will have plenty of opportunities to enjoy a respite at one of the lovely traditional Puerto Rican street cafés.

When you reach the Fortaleza Street intersection, the Governor's mansion is located on the left. Its official name is the Palacio de Santa Catalina, but it is known popularly as La Fortaleza. As you continue north, the San Juan Cathedral is visible on your right, across from the Grand Hotel El Convento. As your stroll continues, you'll pass Plaza San José, which leads to the historic church of the same name. From this strategic vantage point, you will be able to spy Plaza del Quinto Centenario on your left. Here the imposing six-level fort, El Morro will loom onto the horizon. Now part of the San Juan National Historical site, it operates under the auspices of the National Park Service. Tours are conducted via guides (free from 10a-4p), or you may choose to conduct a self-guided exploration. Wander through its dungeons, lookouts, barracks and vaults. Don't miss a visit to the small museum for a history lesson dating back to the 1500s.

El Morro

Here the imposing six-level fort, will loom onto the horizon. Now part of the San Juan National Historical site, it operates under the auspices of the National Park Service. Tours are conducted via guides (free from 10a-4p), or you may choose to conduct a self-guided exploration. Wander through its dungeons, lookouts, barracks and vaults. Don't miss a visit to the small museum for a history lesson dating back to the 1500s. Old San Juan is small—a seven-square-block area of pastel-colored colonial buildings surrounded by a 140-foot wall built to fend off invaders. From El Morro, go south via the trail off the Escuela de Artes Plásticas (plastics art school) and the Asilo de Beneficiencia (home for the indigent). After you pass the pink Casa Rosada you'll

reach La Rogativa, which is a small plaza with a huge bronze sculpture depicting a religious procession. Note La Fortaleza's guarded patio. Then continue your walk through the Puerta de San Juan (San Juan city gate) into the promenade and you'll reach the beautiful avenue, Paseo de la Princesa. From here the view of the bay is simply breathtaking. Proceed east and you'll be back at the Banco Popular Building, ready to begin your next adventure.

San Juan's Plazas

One thing for sure is that there is no shortage of plazas in San Juan. Begin this tour at the Doña Fela parking lot on Recinto Sur Street in Old San Juan. Walk east along Recinto Sur Street, where you will approach the beautiful Tapia Theatre and the If you need a distraction, take a short detour over to the Casino of Puerto Rico, where you can try your hand at a game of chance. Afterward cruise down San Francisco Street until you reach the intersection of Tanca and San Justo Streets. Your first destination is the Plaza de Armas, which is the central plaza in front of City Hall. Here you can rest or enjoy an afternoon concert at the Plaza, if your timing is right. If not, you'll want to take the opportunity to explore the many shopping opportunities in the area surrounding Plaza de Armas. This short tour is great for the daydreamer or the shopaholic!

Arecibo Observatory

The Arecibo Observatory, featured in movies like James Bond's "Goldeneye," is remarkable. It runs on a continuous 24 hour basis and all of the research is made available to the public. It is the world's largest single dish radio telescope and use of the telescope is available to scientists throughout the world. A true wonder of human invention. Operated by Cornell University, it consists of a large 20-acre radar dish laid on a sinkhole more than 550 feet deep. The Observatory is a center for the SETI program, which searches for extraterrestrial intelligence.

Rio Camuy Cave System

Puerto Rico's northernmost region features the extensive Río Camuy Underground Cave System, 268-acres of impressive caves. It is the largest system of its type in Puerto Rico and it is one of the largest cave systems in the world. Located in the town

San Juan Snapshot continued

of Camuy on Route 129, the world's third longest subterranean river runs through the attraction. The largest cavern is called Cueva Clara de Enpalme and it is 688 feet in length and 213 feet in height. The Tres Pueblos sinkhole is another fascinating feature in this cave system, it is 426 feet deep and 705 feet wide. Don't fall in!

Luquillo

The island's east coast is perfect for those who love nature. Here you will find breezy beaches and a very unique rain forest. A must are the roadside "kioskos" (informal restaurants) in the town of Luquillo that serve delicious local specialties. Luquillo's beaches are some of the finest on the island. Soft sand and a tranquil atmosphere make them a great option to the crowded beaches in San Juan. The Balneario de Luquillo is a government-operated beach that opens daily and offers full facilities. The El Yunque Caribbean National Forest is the crown jewel of Puerto Rico's natural resource portfolio and makes an excellent family day trip. More than 25,000 acres of lush vegetation, including 240 different tree species, are found here. The very rare Puerto Rican parrot is one of the most notable species living in the reserve.

Mayaguez & Rincon

Puerto Rico's western coast is just coming into its own. Long overlooked as a tourist destination, only the Rincon area was even mentioned in the guidebooks. Although there are many small beach villages here (such as Boqueron, Combate and Parguera), the standouts are Mayaguez and Rincon. Mayaguez offers visitors the only zoo in Puerto Rico, located right in the center of town. Art lovers should visit the city's Teatro Yaguez (a performing arts center), built in the Art Deco style. The downtown area's architecture recalls the Spanish colonial style. Rincon is known as the surf capital of the Caribbean and has several world-class surfing beaches. As a result, the town has evolved into a bustling tourist haven.

Ponce

The colonial city of Ponce is one of Puerto Rico's most beautiful and classic attractions. A full day is appropriate to appreciate its cultural wealth. Among the most important sights to visit is the Serralles Castle, built on top of a hill that overlooks the city. It would be a shame to

miss a visit to the Ponce Museum of Art, one of the Caribbean's best and host to several major international exhibitions. Love Native American cultures? The Tibes Indian Ceremonial Center is located off the town and depicts life five hundred years ago. The city center is a great district for leisurely walks, and at the Plaza de las Delicias, you'll find the Ponce Fire House (Parque de Bombas), one of the most photographed buildings in all of Puerto Rico.

Walking Tours Legends of Puerto Rico (+1 787 605 9060/ <http://www.legendsofpr.com/>) Visit the Coqui (<http://www.visit-the-coqui.com/>) Sunshine Tours (+1 787 791 4500/ <http://www.puerto-rico-sunshinetours.com/>)

Specialty Tours Bacardi Rum Tours (<http://www.casabacardi.org/>) Atlantic San Juan Tours (+1 787 644 9841/ <http://www.puertoricoexcursions.com/>)

Diving Tours Scuba Dogs (+1 787 783 6377/ <http://www.scubadogs.net/>) Ocean Sports (+1 787 268 2329/ <http://www.osdivers.com/>) Caribe Aquatic Adventures (+1 787 281 8858/ <http://www.diveguide.com/p2046.htm>) La Casa del Buzo (+1 787 758 2710/ <http://www.lacasadelbuzo.com/>)

Eco-Tours Acampa Nature Adventure (+1 787 706 0695/ <http://www.acampapr.com/>) Ecoquest (+1 787 616 7543/ <http://www.ecoquestpr.com/>) Copladet (+1 787 765 8595/ <http://www.copladet.com/>) Eco Action Tours (+1 787 791 7509/ <http://www.ecoactiontours.com/>)

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Travel Tips

Getting There

By Air

Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (SJU) +1 787 791 4670 <http://www.prpa.gobierno.pr/APMain.aspx>

Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport is located approximately 14 kilometers (8.5 miles) east of San Juan.

The airport is a major interconnecting point to the Caribbean and provides service from airlines including:

Air Canada (+1 800 361 5373/ <http://www.aircanada.com/>) American Airlines (+1

800 433 7300/ <http://www.aa.com>) British Airways (+1 787 725 7000/ <http://www.ba.com>) BWIA (+1 800 538 2942/ <http://www.bwee.com>) Continental (+1 800 231 0856/ <http://www.continental.com/>) Delta (+1 800 221 1212/ <http://www.delta.com>) LIAT (+1 888 844 5428/ <http://www.liatairline.com/>) Lufthansa (<http://www.lufthansa.com/>) Northwest (+1 800 225 2525/ <http://www.nwa.com/>) United (+1 800 864 8331/ <http://www.ual.com/>) US Airways (<http://www.usairways.com/>) Virgin Atlantic (+1 800 744 7477/ <http://www.virgin-atlantic.com/>)

Public bus C45 provides transportation to and from the airport for only USD0.25-0.50. The journey to the city takes about an hour and requires a transfer to the A5 in Isla Verde if heading to Condado and another transfer to the B21 in Condado if going to Old San Juan.

Taxis are available at the Airport and average fares are around USD8 to Isla Verde, USD12 to Condado and USD16 to Old San Juan.

Rental car companies located at Luis Muñoz Marín Airport include:

Avis (+1 787 791 2500/ <http://www.avis.com/>) Budget (+1 787 937 0318/ <http://www.budget.com/>) Charlie (+1 787 721 6265) Dollar (+1 800 800 3665/ <http://www.dollar.com/>) Hertz (+1 800 654 3030/ <http://www.hertz.com/>) National (+1 800 227 7368/ <http://www.nationalcar.com/>) Thrifty (+1 787 253 2525/ <http://www.thrifty.com/>)

By Bus

Minivans known as *publicos* offer public transportation between big towns and major cities in Puerto Rico including San Juan. *Publicos* have a "P" or "PD" on their license plates and can be flagged down in any location.

By Car

San Juan is accessed via major highways 2 and 3 from the east and west and 52 from the south.

Getting Around

Public transportation can be slow and especially infrequent on weekends and after 9p, but very cheap. Metropolitan Bus Authority (+1 787 250 6064/ <http://www.dtop.gov.pr/>) costs USD0.25 and the Metrobus (+1 787 763 4141) is USD0.50,

San Juan Snapshot continued

both covering routes throughout the San Juan Metropolitan area.

Taxis are available throughout San Juan, mainly in Condado and Old San Juan, and are convenient particularly for those with limited knowledge of Spanish. Make sure to agree on a fare before traveling as drivers may not go by meters. Keep in mind that taxis run much less frequently after 10p, so it is a good idea to call in advance from a safe location. Major taxi companies in San Juan include:

Cooperative Major Taxi Cabs(+1 787 723 2460) Metro-Taxi Cab(+1 787 725 2870)

Driving can be a bit hectic in the city as Puerto Rican drivers can be somewhat unpredictable and aggressive and parking

is very difficult to find. Major car rental companies in San Juan include:

Avis(+1 800 874 3556/http://www.avis.com/) Bella(+1 787 792 4207) Champion(+1 787 782 3232) Charlie(+1 787 728 2418/ +1 800 289 1227) Hertz(+1 787 791 0840/ +1 800 654 3131/http://www.hertz.com/) L&M(+1 787 725 8307) Metro(+1 787 791 1870) Romero(+1 787 767 3004)
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Fun Facts

San Juan Territory: Puerto Rico **Country:** United States

San Juan by the Numbers:

Population: 434,000(city);
2,500,000(metropolitan) Elevation: 2.75 m/

9 ft Average Annual Precipitation: 134 cm/
53 in Average January Temperature: 25°C/
77°F Average July Temperature: 28°C/
83°F Number of City Municipalities: 78

Quick Facts:

Major Industries: pharmaceutical, tourism, service Electricity: 110-120 volts, 60Hz, standard two-pin plugs Time Zone: GMT-4; Atlantic Time Zone(AST) Country Dialing Code: 1 Area Code: 787

Did You Know?

San Juan is the oldest city in American territory, founded in 1521 by Ponce de Leon.

Baseball is Puerto Rico's national sport.
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