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ALL YOU NEED TO PLAN YOUR PERFECT TRIP



alicesoup

# Old San Juan 1 day walking tour

## **San Juan, 1 Day**

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# Guide Description



**AUTHOR NOTE:** This trip can be done in a sort of circle around the Old city, starting with either fort and working your way to the other side. There's not much to do in San Cristobal, although the views are nice (see photo), but El Morro is worth the trek up and into the different rooms and displays. Many of the other stops are quick photo ops (such as La Rogativa, the Totem, the churches), so they don't take that much time. El Convento is a beautiful hotel, great to stay at, but you can also stop for a cocktail in one of the outdoor patio restaurants. The museums are also small, but intriguing and unique, and housed right next door to each other. A word to the wise, the city itself is compact, but the hills can be steep (nothing along the lines of San Fransisco however) so be prepared; wear walking shoes and light clothing. Walking around in the heat, we were really grateful to stumble upon carts dishing out perfect-sized servings of pirqaguas (shaved ice with fruit syrup) and sorbets.

# Itinerary Overview

things to do  
restaurants  
hotels  
nightlife

## Day 1 - San Juan

**DAY NOTE:** We started off on the San Cristobal side, with breakfast at La Mallorca, and then toured the Cristobal Fort. From here we walked along Norzagaray St., on the water, over to El Morro. Most of the museums and historic points of interest are on this side. El Morro takes a little more time to tour than Cristobal. We were a bit tired and hot at this point (wear comfortable shoes and be ready for the bright sun!), so we stopped and rested at El Picoteo in the beautiful El Convento hotel. We ordered a few tapas and cocktails, and although ready for a nap, moved on. The two museums are right next to each other, and are small, so we did those pretty quickly. A lot of the the other sites are quick photos, but worth a look at. We ended this side by taking El Paseo de la Princesa, outside the city wall, which is a nice walk, but brings you back to the other side of the city. So then we had to double back to explore the many shops along San Francisco and Fortaleza. Streets. After shopping, we went up to El Jibarito and had a huge dinner! It was a long, full day, but there's so much to do in Old San Juan at the same time. It's a charming city!



### Catedral de San Juan

A Minor Basílica



### Capilla del Cristo Chapel

Charming Chapel



### El Jibarito

Classic criollo cuisine



### San Cristobal Fort

Smaller than El Morro, but offers impressive views of Old San Juan, the Atlantic ocean, and neighboring Condado.



### Cafeteria Mallorca

Venerable Old San Juan institution



### Fort San Felipe del Morro

No trip to Old San Juan is complete without a trek to see this fort.



### Plaza del Totem

Impressive Pole



### San Jose Church

The second oldest church in the western hemisphere



### Museo de Nuestra Raíz Africana

Museum of African culture



### Hotel El Convento

Former 17th century convent



### El Picoteo

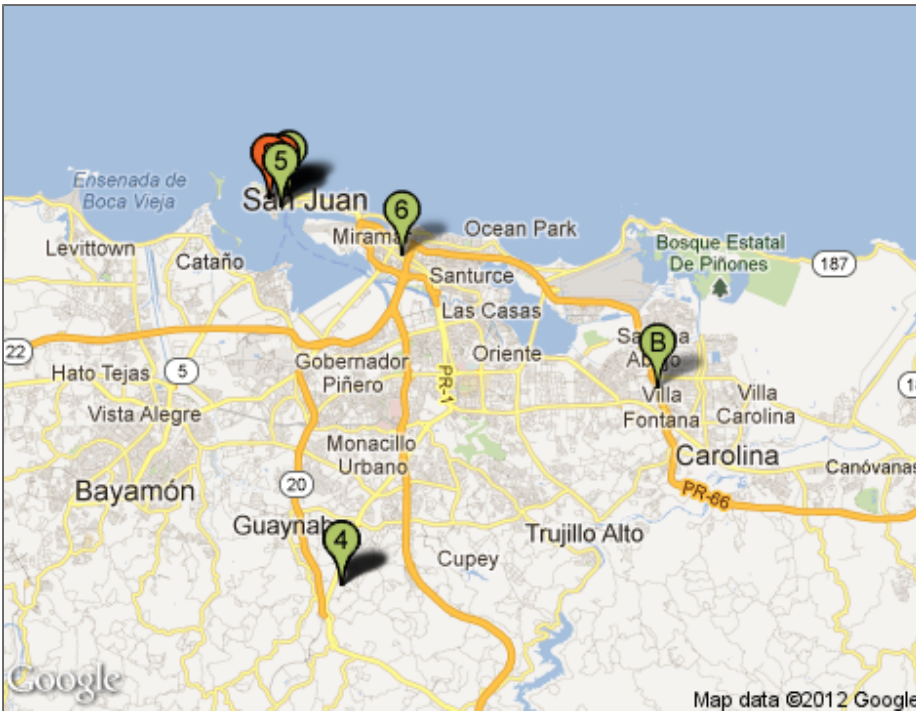
Spanish tapas in a beautiful hotel



### Plazuela de la Rogativa

Lovely plaza

# Day 1 - San Juan



## QUICK NOTE

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### contact:

tel: +1787-729 6960

<http://www.nps.gov/saju>

### location:

Corner of San Francisco and Norzagaray, across from Plaza del Colon  
San Juan 00901

### hours:

Sun-Sat 9-5

## 1 San Cristobal Fort

**DESCRIPTION:** Constructed from 1634 to 1790, a UNESCO world heritage site. Military buffs can ask for an appointment to peruse the military archives



Photo courtesy of Tomas Fano

**contact:**

tel: 1 787 724 4607

**2 Cafeteria Mallorca**

**location:**

300 Calle San Francisco, Old San Juan  
San Juan PR 00901

**DESCRIPTION:** No trip to Old San Juan would be complete without a stop at this venerable institution for a mallorca and café con leche.

**hours:**

Open daily 7a-6p

**contact:**

tel: +1787 729 6960

fax: +1 787 289 7972

<http://www.nps.gov/saju>

**3 Fort San Felipe del Morro**

**location:**

501 Norzagaray  
San Juan 00901

**DESCRIPTION:** Construction of El Fuerte San Felipe del Morro or just El Morro, was started in 1540 to protect the coast from invading enemies. The fort is the main attraction of Old San Juan and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The 16th century citadel is monumental in size and breathtaking to look at. The grounds that surround it make it an even more majestic place. Enjoy the area like locals do; by flying kites, eating piraguas (shaved flavored ice) or just laying on the grass, feeling the wind that comes from the Atlantic sea.

© NileGuide



Photo courtesy of Tomas Fano

**contact:**

tel: +1 787 721 2400

**4 Plaza del Totem**

**location:**

Plaza del Quinto Centenario  
San Juan PR

**DESCRIPTION:** Within Plaza del Quinto Centenario(Quincentennial Square) you can't miss this 40-foot(12m) totem pole, conceived in 1992 and designed to commemorate Indian culture. Visitors flock to take photos of this imposing and stark centerpiece. The controversial sculpture has drawn some criticism as being too contemporary for the old city. It's displayed in its own sub-plaza; the 'Plaza del Totem' located between Castillo del Morro and the Ballajá Barracks. Plaza del Quinto Centenario is a favorite spot for skateboarders, rollerbladers and for those seeking a lunch break or a stroll. The plaza is also a central meeting place and host area for neighborhood events as well. © wcities.com



**hours:**

24 hours daily

**contact:**

<http://www.gotopuertorico.com/puerto-rico-san-jose-church.php>

**5 San Jose Church**

**location:**

Calle Cristo, Plaza San Jose,  
close to the Plaza del Totem  
San Juan PR 00901

**DESCRIPTION:** Built in 1532 by Dominican friars, the church housed the first governor Juan Ponce de Leon's remains for 300 years.

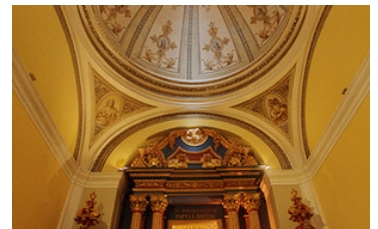


Photo courtesy of Shayan (USA)

**hours:**

8a-3p M-W

**contact:**

tel: +1 787 724 4294 / +1 787 724 4184

<http://www.icp.gobierno.pr/my/museos/m16.htm>

**location:**

Casa de los Contrafuertes  
San Juan 00901

**hours:**

9:30a-5p Tu-Sa, 11a-5p Su

**6 Museo de Nuestra Raíz Africana**

**DESCRIPTION:** African heritage has played a strong role in influencing Puerto Rican culture. This adobe-styled museum chronicles the history of Africans in Puerto Rico from the early days of slavery to modern day. Here you will find African art, literature, sounds, and pictures. Browse through nine exhibition rooms. Admission is free. © wcities.com



wcities.com

**contact:**

tel: +1 787 723 9020 / +1 800 468 2779 (Toll Free)

fax: +1 787 721 2877

<http://www.elconvento.com/>

**location:**

100 Cristo St  
San Juan -- 00901

**7 Hotel El Convento**

**DESCRIPTION:** This once Carmelite Convent was built in 1651. The convent has changed purpose many times, but was finally restored and became a hotel in 1962. The inside is warm though a bit gloomy, but that changes once I reach the open-air courtyard, and it is a marvelous sight. When the hotel opened in the early 60s, celebrities flocked to enjoy the exuberance and mysticism that can be felt here. Today, the hotel is one of the most beautiful places to stay in San Juan. It was modernized with air-conditioned rooms and many other amenities. © NileGuide



Hotels.com

**contact:**

tel: 1 787 723 9202

**location:**

Hotel El Convento, 100 Cristo St.  
San Juan PR 00901

**8 El Picoteo**

**DESCRIPTION:** Offers an extensive tapas menu and other Spanish fixtures such as paella, you can enjoy a full meal or graze on simple plates of meats, cheese, and olives as you sip sangria and enjoy the the ambience of the large indoor patio in the centuries old El Convento hotel.

**hours:**

11-11pm Tues-Sunday

**contact:**

<http://www.nps.gov/saju/planyourvisit/placestogo.htm>

**location:**

Caleta Las Monjas  
San Juan PR

**9 Plazuela de la Rogativa**

**DESCRIPTION:** Plazuela de la Rogativa's four statues (sculptured by Lindsay Daen) pay tribute to a San Juan legend. Dating back to 1797, as the story goes, a bishop and his congregation marched through the city singing hymns and carrying torches during a British attack, and as result were able to scare off the potential invaders. La Rogativa (Plaza of Religious Procession) is a great spot to rest your weary feet after a walking tour of the city, and affords an excellent view of the San Juan Bay. © wcities.com



**contact:**

tel: +1 787 722 0861  
fax: +1 787 722 1881  
<http://www.catedralsanjuan.com/>

**location:**

153 Calle Cristo  
San Juan 00901



## Catedral de San Juan

**DESCRIPTION:** The Catedral de San Juan is considered a 'Minor Basilica' by the Roman Vatican. It is located on Calle del Cristo, facing the plaza that's right next to the Convento Hotel. The cathedral's construction began in 1521 inspired in Gothic architecture. The vaulted tower, ceilings and its circular staircase are all original elements that can still be seen. The remains of Puerto Rico's first governor, Juan Ponce de León are interred here.

© NileGuide



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**contact:**

tel: +1 787 721 2400 (Tourist Information)

**location:**

Parque de las Palomas  
San Juan 00901



## Capilla del Cristo Chapel

**DESCRIPTION:** A legend tells the story of how the Cristo Chapel was created as a thank you to a saint for saving a boy that fell over a citadel precipice. Sadly, recent studies show that the legend is far from real. The boy died and the chapel was made by then secretary Don Tomas Mateo Prats as a way to prevent future accidents. It is beautifully designed with a gold and silver altar inside and right in front of a very high citadel. The chapel is a landmark in Old San Juan and a masterpiece that serves as an anchor of busy Cristo street. © NileGuide



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**contact:**

tel: 1 787 725 8375

**location:**

280 Calle Sol, Old San Juan  
San Juan PR 00901

**hours:**

Open daily 11am-9pm



## El Jibarito

**DESCRIPTION:** A very casual dining room on a quiet residential street on Old San Juan, this is a local's institution for favorites like mofongo, churrasco, and mariscos. Lunch and Dinner daily

# 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.

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