



# San Juan

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HISTORY



The capital of Puerto Rico, San Juan ranks high on the list of most historic cities in the New World, with early explorers establishing a settlement there 15-years after Columbus's monumental first voyage. The city has been the scene of many historic events, from naval battles to pirate attacks. Modern San Juan, now a top Caribbean tourism destination, embraces its long and fascinating history.

## In The Beginning

The first settlement on the island of Puerto Rico was Caparra, founded in 1508 by Juan Ponce de León, a Spanish explorer, and conquistador best remembered for his quixotic quest to find the Fountain of Youth in 16th-century Florida. Caparra was deemed unsuitable for a long-term settlement, however, and the residents soon moved to an island a short distance to the east, to the present site of Old San Juan.

## Luis Muñoz Marín

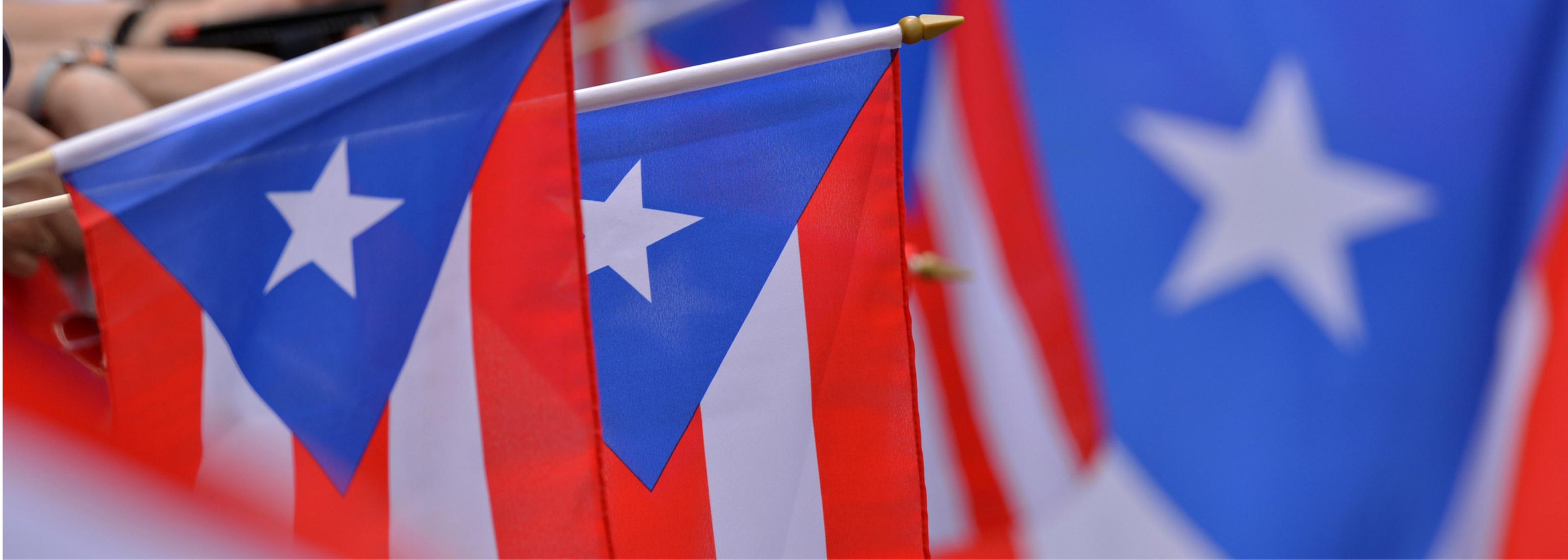
Born February 18, 1898, San Juan, Puerto Rico—died April 30, 1980, San Juan), a statesman who served for four-year terms as the elected governor of Puerto Rico. Early in his career, he advocated independence for the island, but later he worked for its social and economic progress in partnership with the United States.

## The Spanish-American War

The city of San Juan played a minor role in the Spanish-American War, which broke out in early 1898. The Spanish had fortified San Juan but did not anticipate the American tactic of landing troops at the western end of the island. Because many Puerto Ricans did not oppose a change of administration, the island basically surrendered after a few skirmishes. Puerto Rico was ceded to the Americans under the terms of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Spanish-American War. Although San Juan had been bombarded for a time by American warships, the city suffered relatively little damage during the conflict. The U.S. Army moved out of El Morro Castle in 1961. Today, San Juan takes its place among the Caribbean's top tourism destinations. Old San Juan has been extensively renovated, and sights like the El Morro castle draw large crowds.



MONEY



Puerto Rico's monetary unit is the United States Dollar (USD) as it is a commonwealth country of the United States of America. Puerto Ricans refer to the US Dollar as the 'peso' or 'dollar'. The dollar is made up of 100 cents, called 'centavos' or 'chavitos' by locals. Nickels or 5c pieces are known as 'ficha' or 'vellons' by Puerto Ricans and they refer to quarters or 25c pieces as 'pesetas'. US dollar bills come in the following denominations: \$1, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50 and \$100. Coins come in the following denominations: 1c, 5c, 10c, 25c and 50c.

## Credit Cards

In San Juan and at all the big resorts on the island, even some of the smaller inns, credit cards are commonly accepted. All major credit cards are widely accepted: American Express, Visa, Diner's Club, Discovery, Mastercard and other Bank credit cards.

## Debit Cards

Visa and MasterCard Debit Cards are accepted most widely throughout Puerto Rico.



# Visitors From The USA

Less than a three-hour flight from Miami, this island is a U.S. territory (in case you didn't recall from high school history class). So when you're shopping in San Juan, you can pay for your souvenirs with American bills.

## ATM

ATMs located around Puerto Rico are linked to banking networks throughout the world. Banking hours are from 9:00 am to 3:30 pm.

HELPFUL INFO

## Climate

The climate in San Juan is hot, oppressive, windy, and partly cloudy. Over the course of the year, the temperature typically varies from 72°F to 89°F and is rarely below 69°F or above 91°F. The best time of year to visit San Juan for hot-weather activities is from early December to mid-April.

## Electricity

In San Juan the power plugs and sockets are of type A and B. The standard voltage is 120-V and the standard frequency is 60-Hz.



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## Technology & Communication

The best way to call home is by purchasing an international calling card, which you can buy at a drugstore or gift shop; calling cards can be used with pay phones or hotel phones. Roaming agreements exist with most international mobile phone operators. Be sure to ask your mobile provider if separate fees exist for roaming in Puerto Rico; some companies do not consider the island part of the USA under their contract plans and levy separate rate for Puerto Rico. Internet access is available in all cities and large towns; you can also find terminals in hotels and business centers.

# Infrastructure & Transport

Many visitors flying into San Juan depart for other islands aboard the huge cruise ships based in the city's deepwater harbor, one of the more sheltered ports in the Caribbean. The city is also a major commercial port for transatlantic and regional shipping. Port activities are controlled by the Puerto Rico Maritime Shipping Authority, which the government privatized in 1995. The island has a comprehensive and efficient road system. Traffic is particularly heavy in and around San Juan. Operational since 2005, San Juan's metropolitan rapid transit system, Tren Urbano (Urban Train), serves the city and its suburbs as well as parts of the nearby cities of Guaynabo and Bayamón.

San Juan's international airport, located 5-miles (8-km) outside the city, handles most passenger and freight traffic. Near Aguadilla in the northwest, another airport (formerly a U.S. Air Force base) also handles international flights. Local and regional air service is available in Ponce and Mayagüez and at the smaller Isla Grande Airport of San Juan.



## In Case Of An Emergency

In San Juan in the case of an emergency (police, ambulance or fire), call 911. If there is no 911 service or for non-life-threatening emergencies, such as a traffic accident without injuries, call the Puerto Rico police department phone number, which is generally the regional prefix plus 2020.

## Language

Spanish is the dominant language in San Juan and throughout Puerto Rico. English is also widely spoken and understood (approximately one-third of the population speaks English "Very Well" or better according to the U.S. Census). Most businesses within the tourist areas of the city are fully fluent in English and those businesses tend to hire employees who are bilingual, thus speaking English very well. As a visitor, be prepared to use some high school level Spanish to drivers to communicate about luggage, restaurants, or anything not a normal tourist spot.



## LGBT Travel

Puerto Rico is probably the most gay-friendly island in the Caribbean. San Juan has a well-developed gay scene, especially in the Condado district (and also now in Santurce) for Puerto Ricans and visitors. Vieques and Culebra have become popular destinations for an international mix of gay and lesbian expatriates and travelers. Rincón, whilst some way behind these other destinations in specifically gay venues, is a gay-friendly destination too.

Ponce and Mayagüez, as sizeable university cities, are also liberal places.

## Religion

Puerto Rico is an island that's constitution allows all adherents to practice their faith freely with no fear of interference. This has helped to make Puerto Rico an inter-confessional country. There are many religions on the island, but the two main religions in Puerto Rico which are practiced are the Catholic faith, which holds the majority with 85% of the population, and the Protestant faith, which is followed by only about 8% of the people.



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## Getting There

International flights arrive at and depart from San Juan's busy Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport, which is about 8-miles east of Old San Juan. Daily direct flights arrive from Miami, Atlanta, Dallas, New York City and the US Virgin Islands. Within the Commonwealth, flights from San Juan include Ponce, Aguadilla, and Mayagüez. Several airlines serve Luis Muñoz including United, Delta, JetBlue, and Seaborne Airlines. Almost 20 cruise lines call on San Juan, with many cruisers starting and ending their voyages here. It's the second-largest port for cruise ships in the western hemisphere, serving nearly two-million passengers each year. Most ships dock at the piers along Calle La Marina near the Customs House, just a short walk from the cobblestoned streets of Old San Juan; others dock at the Pan American Pier on nearby Isla Grande.

Popular cruise lines serving San Juan include Royal Caribbean and Viking Ocean Cruises.

## Driving

Puerto Rican road maps are hard to come by throughout the country and foreign navigation systems may not operate well. In other words, you could end up completely lost. Hope you know Spanish! But if "hola" is as far as you can go, then it's a good idea to take a Spanish phrasebook or dictionary with you in case you need to ask for directions. You could also try printing out directions from an online map source before heading out on the road. A lot of road signs are identifiable by symbols used in other countries, but there can be differences. For instance, distance is in kilometers, but speed limits are measured in miles. In many rural areas, road signs are nonexistent, and roadways can be narrow and winding. So narrow in fact, that a two-lane road actually becomes a one-lane road. Drivers must honk to let others know they are trying to get by, especially at night and on blind turns and curves.

Automatic chip-driven system mostly used by Spanish drivers.

THE EXPERIENCE

## Culture

Old San Juan is the most beloved place on the island for residents of Puerto Rico, the epicenter of culture, music, food, and traditions. In San Juan, there's always a reason to celebrate, dance and gather with family and friends.

Locals from towns across the island come to San Juan to enjoy the year-round cultural events, great entertainment, excellent food & drinks, and dance to the sounds of salsa from live music played at the elegant squares and plazas around the city. Visitors can immerse themselves in the warmth of the vibrant Puerto Rican culture, traditions, arts and music, sure to create memories that last a lifetime. In San Juan, visitors are sure to have much more than a cookie cutter Caribbean experience.

## Bucket List

Visit the Bacardi Rum Factory

Explore San Juan Cemetery

Go on Spoon Food Tours

Go sightseeing at Museo de las Americas

Go diving at the Aquazone dive center

Go to the Museum of Art of Puerto Rico

Visit San Jose Church

Explore Plaza las Americas

# Family Travel Highlights

Have fun at Ocean Park Beach

Explore the Old San Juan

Get starry-eyed at Arecibo Observatory

See the night time bioluminescent display

Tour Museo del Niño de Carolina

# Tourism Authority

The Puerto Rican Tourism Company operates offices around the island and numerous regional offices in countries around the world. Main Branch details are listed below.

Puerto Rico Main Office

La Princesa Bldg. #2 Paseo La Princesa

Old San Juan, P.R. 00902

(787) 721-2400

1-800-866-7827



## Foods To Try

Tostones

Arroz Con Gandules

Alcapurrias

Empanadillas

Mofongo

Pernil

Rellenos de Papa

Pastelon

Pasteles

Asopao

## Drinks To Try

Coco Rico

Coquito

Cafe con Leche

Mavi

Malta

Medalla



# Photography Hot Spots

Castillo San Felipe del Morro

Fuerte San Felipe del Morro

Old San Juan

Pearl of the South

Casa del Callejon

## Souvenirs To Buy

Mundillo: handmade lace

Pilón: wooden mortar and pestles

Vejigante Masks: figure from folklore

Santos: hand-carved wooden or ceramic figures of saints

Güiro: a percussion instrument

Jewelry

Ceramics

