

# School Tours of America Puerto Rico Information Guide



## ***Puerto Rico***

Puerto Rico is located in the Caribbean Sea as part of an archipelago consisting of the main island, four smaller islands, and hundreds of cays and islets. The island is 100 miles long and 35 miles wide - small but with an incredible diversity of sights and culture.



The people of Puerto Rico blend Taino, Spanish, and African cultures and are known to be hospitable, joyful, and charismatic. Their history is long and rich, and the blending of cultures has created an identity that includes traits from all three groups: Spanish architecture with centuries-old buildings, food and dances rooted in African culture, and language that goes back to the Taino tribe.

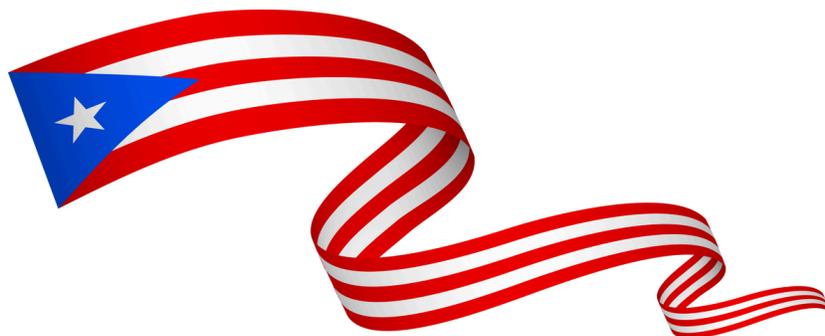
The first inhabitants of Puerto Rico were the Tainos, who lived in communities called 'yukayekes' led by a cacique. Their society was matrilineal, with leadership passed down on the mother's side. The Tainos were farmers who cultivated yucca and corn.



The arrival of the Spanish, led by Christopher Columbus, in 1493 led to the extinction of the Tainos. The Spanish diversified the island's agriculture, adding sugar cane, coffee, and tobacco crops. As the Taino population decreased, there was a demand for more workers, so Spain brought enslaved Africans to Puerto Rico. These enslaved people played a crucial role in developing the economy and culture of Puerto Rico.

Columbus christened the island San Juan Bautista after John the Baptist. When gold was discovered in the island's rivers, the name was eventually changed to Puerto Rico, which means "rich port." The capital city was also named San Juan.

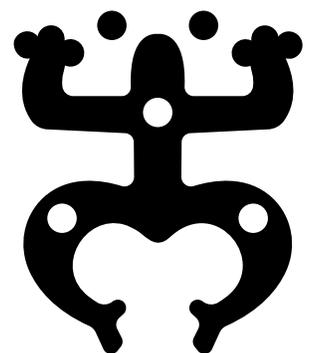
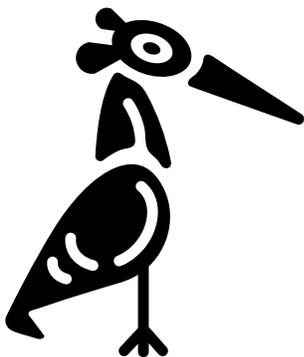
Puerto Rico gained independence from Spain in 1897. However, it didn't last long. When Spain lost the Spanish-American War to the United States, it ceded Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam to the victors. The Jones Act made Puerto Rican citizens US citizens in 1917. In 1952, Puerto Rico became a commonwealth, which means it has its own constitution, leadership, and government.



## Taino Landmarks



Evidence of the Taino tribes' presence in Puerto Rico is best seen in the form of petroglyphs, which were carved on rocks throughout the island. Discover caves that provide the opportunity to see real Taino drawings and seek out more of them on hikes along trails the Indigenous tribe actually used. Visit the Caguana Ceremonial Indigenous Site, an archaeological site that was built by the Taino people. It is the largest such site in the West Indies. It houses ten courts on which the Taino played a game called Batey, many petroglyphs carved into stone monoliths, a dance area, and recreated Taino homes.



## ***Old San Juan***



Old San Juan, founded by the Spanish in 1521, is the oldest city in the United States and its territories and the second-oldest European settlement in the Americas. It lies on the western part of Isla San Juan, a small island connected to the main island of Puerto Rico by three bridges.

## ***San Juan Cathedral***



San Juan Cathedral was built in 1532 and is the oldest cathedral in the United States. It houses the oldest spiral staircase in Puerto Rico and America, with 88 steps leading to the church bell tower.

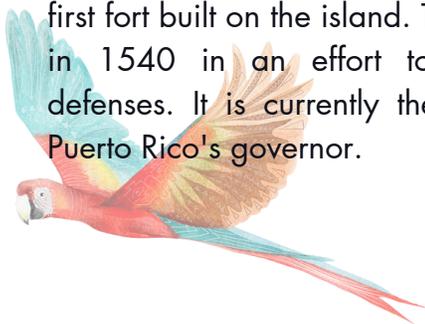
## ***La Casa Blanca***



La Casa Blanca was built in 1525 as a home for the Spanish explorer Ponce de Leon, who became the first Spanish governor of Puerto Rico.

## ***La Fortaleza***

La Fortaleza means "The Fortress" and was the first fort built on the island. The fort was completed in 1540 in an effort to secure the island's defenses. It is currently the official residence of Puerto Rico's governor.

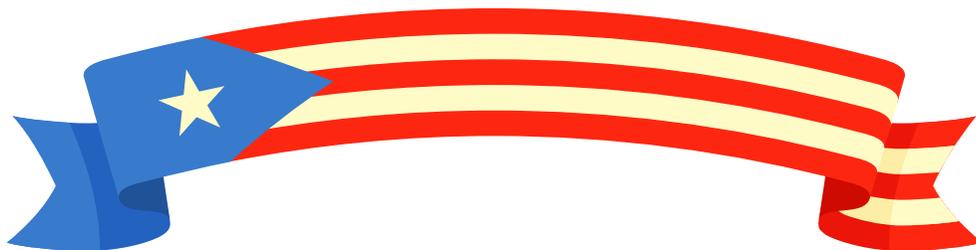


## ***Castillo San Cristóbal***

Puerto Rico was important due to its location and rich resources. The Dutch, French, and English made many attempts to conquer the island, forcing Spain to expand the protections around San Juan.



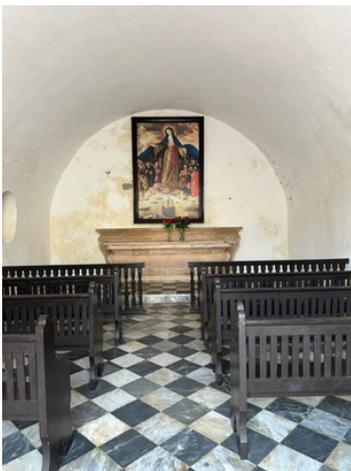
Castillo San Cristóbal (San Cristobal Castle) was built from 1634 until 1765 (131 years!) and has stood for centuries guarding the eastern gate of Old San Juan. It was named after Saint Christopher, the patron saint of travelers, and is the largest fortress built in the Americas. Castillo San Cristóbal was built to prevent attacks by land. Follow the long, dark tunnels to the depths of the fort to reach the dungeon and see drawings on the walls, including one of five Spanish galleons, created by former prisoners. It was designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983.



## Castillo San Felipe del Morro

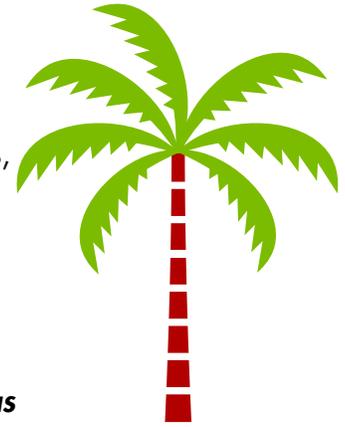


Castillo San Felipe del Morro (Promontory Castle of Saint Philip), is commonly known as El Morro (which means “The Promontory” in English: a point of high land that juts out into a large body of water). It is a large fortress in the historic quarter of Old San Juan that was designed to guard the entrance to San Juan Bay, and defend the Spanish colonial port city of San Juan from enemies that attack by sea. Construction started on the fortress in 1539 and work was completed in 1787. Like Castillo San Cristobal, El Morro was designated a World Heritage Site in 1983.



## ***Puerto Rican Cuisine***

Puerto Rican cuisine is significantly influenced by Afro-Caribbean flavors, featuring a diverse range of ingredients. The culinary traditions of enslaved Africans brought to the island play a vital role, alongside contributions from Spanish, Caribbean, and American cuisines.



### ***Alcapurrias***

Alcapurrias are torpedo-shaped fritters made from shredded root vegetables like *yuca* and *yautía*, stuffed with a choice of meat. Alcapurrias are usually stuffed with ground beef, crab meat, chicken, fish, octopus, conch, or other types of seafood.



### ***Limber***

A limber is a frozen treat made with fruit juice and served in a cup. The story is that they are named after the famous aviator Charles Lindbergh, who visited the island in 1928. The Spanish pronunciation of his last name has evolved into the word "limber."



### ***Tostones***

Tostones are crispy, savory slices of green plantains. The plantains are sliced, fried, smashed, then fried again until crispy. They're typically served as a snack or side dish, and are enjoyed with dipping sauces, like mayo-ketchup (a mixture of mayonnaise and ketchup).



### ***Mofongo***

Mofongo is a Puerto Rican dish consisting of mashed fried green plantains, often served with garlic, salt, and olive oil. It's typically paired with meat, seafood, or stew. Mofongo is typically served as a side dish or a main dish.

## ***El Yunque Rainforest***



El Yunque is the only tropical rainforest in the US National Forest system. It offers many attractions, including natural pools with beautiful waterfalls, hiking trails, and birdwatching. The name is believed to come from the Taino word Yuke, or "white earth," referring to the clouds that gather around the forest's mountainous peak.



## ***Luquillo***



The city of Luquillo covers 26 square miles on the northeast coast of Puerto Rico, right between the Atlantic Ocean and the El Yunque rainforest. The city is known as La Capital del Sol (The Sun's Capital) and is home to 14 beautiful beaches. Luquillo is built in the Spanish tradition - the town has a central plaza, the municipal buildings (city hall), and a Catholic church.

## ***Finca Don Manuel Fruit Farm***



Finca Don Manuel was formed in the 1700s and is now a leading tropical fruit farm in Santa Isabel. It produces fruit year-round and uses wind turbines to produce clean energy.

It began as a sugar cane farm and continued as such until the 1940s. It was abandoned for a time before being revived in 2013. Today, the farm grows pineapples, plantains, papayas, squash, and other crops for local markets.

Finca Don Manuel is a perfect example of agritourism. The farm combines agriculture and tourism to offer visitors a chance to learn about farming techniques, energy generation, water conservation, harvesting, and packaging processes. It also is a prime example of sustainable agriculture. The farm works hard to protect the environment, conserve resources, and support its local community.

**Ponce** Ponce is the second largest city in Puerto Rico and is located on its southern coast.

### ***Parque de Bombas***



One of the most famous landmarks in Ponce is the red and black Parque de Bombas, the old fire station. The building housed the city's central fire station for many years and now houses a small museum. The Parque de Bombas was Puerto Rico's first-ever fire station.

### ***Catedral de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe***



This beautiful cathedral sits within the Plaza Las Delicias and is the seat of the Bishop of Ponce and the Roman Catholic Diocese of Ponce. It is painted gray and blue and boasts two bell towers.

### ***Plaza Las Delicias***



Plaza Las Delicias is the main plaza in Ponce. It dates back to 1670 when the Spanish settled the city. It consists of two squares, Plaza Muñoz Rivera on the north and Plaza Degetau on the south, and is the center of the Ponce Historic Zone.



### ***Bomba Dancing***



Bomba is a dance style that originated in Puerto Rico. It was developed by enslaved Africans and their descendants during the 17th century. It is the island's oldest musical tradition. In this dance, the drummer attempts to follow the dancer, and not the more traditional form of the dancer following the drummer.

## ***Mangrove Cays (pronounced 'keys')***

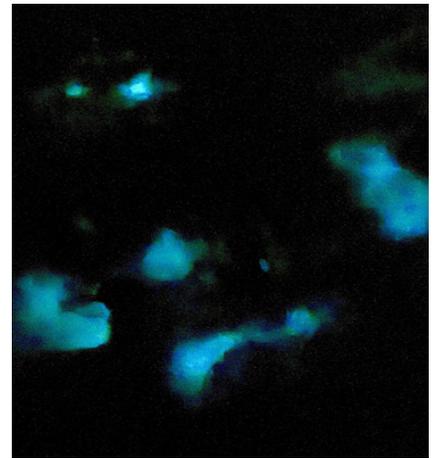


Mangrove cays are small sand islands built upon reefs covered by mangrove plants. Mangroves are tropical plants that grow in wet, salty soil and are essential because they act as a natural barrier against the sea, protecting the land from the impacts of hurricanes and other weather events. They also provide a vital habitat for marine life.

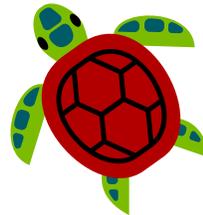
## ***Bioluminescent Bay***



Puerto Rico is home to three of the only five bioluminescent bays in the world. They are Mosquito Bay, Laguna Grande, and La Parguera. When disturbed, these bays contain microscopic organisms called dinoflagellates that produce a blue-green glow-in-the-dark effect. These organisms make their food through photosynthesis, which creates the glow.

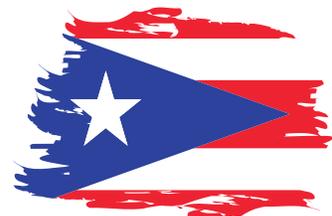


## ***La Parguera***



La Parguera is a picturesque seaside resort in southwestern Puerto Rico. Founded in the 1820s as a fishing village, it has become a popular tourist destination. The town has no beaches, just pristine cays, mangrove channels, and rocky inlets. Its main square is a lively spot with food kiosks, live music, and beautiful views of the Caribbean Sea.

*Viva Puerto Rico*



## ***Santurce***

Santurce is the largest and most populated neighborhood of San Juan, Puerto Rico's capital. It was first settled between the end of the 16th century and throughout the 17th century by freed and escaped enslaved people from rural Puerto Rico and other islands in the West Indies. Geographically, Santurce is a peninsula connected to the mainland of Puerto Rico.

This colorful, vibrant, and artsy neighborhood has emerged as the capital of art in the Caribbean, most notably for its world-class street art. Murals covering a wide range of themes and styles are everywhere around Santurce, and each tells a unique story.

### ***La Calle Cerra Mural Tour***



Calle Cerra, once a neglected street, has become a vibrant part of the art scene in Santurce. In the early 2000s, artists and community activists worked to transform this area by painting murals on the walls of abandoned buildings. It now offers an immersive experience that takes visitors on a journey through the history, culture, and identity of Puerto Rico. Each work of art showcases a fantastic palette of colors that tell stories and spark the imagination.



## ***Samuel Lind Art Studio***

Samuel Lind is a world-renowned artist who was born and raised in Loiza. His vibrant artwork embodies Puerto Rico's cultural identity through painting, sculpture, and silkscreen. Lind's artwork has strong ties to the natural and mythical world, as well as iconic Puerto Rican imagery with the vejigante mask and Bomba dancers. He is a humble and gracious man who welcomes visitors into his home/art studio to learn about his work.

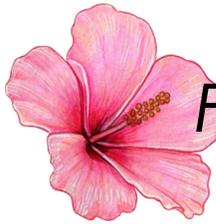


## ***Yauco***

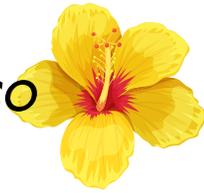
Yauco is a significant city in the Puerto Rican coffee industry, often referred to as "El Pueblo del Café" (Coffee Town) due to its reputation for producing rich and flavorful coffee bean varieties. Additionally, Yauco is sometimes called "La Capital Taína" (The Taíno Capital), a name that reflects its historical connection to the Taíno people.

The city is also known for its vibrant urban art, featuring brilliantly colored murals throughout the town. One notable mural, called "Brisa Tropical" (Tropical Breeze), creatively incorporates 19 homes and stairways to form an eye-catching and colorful pattern.





## *Fun Facts About Puerto Rico*



1. The Puerto Rico Trench is the deepest point in the Atlantic Ocean
2. Puerto Rico boasts one of the brightest bioluminescent bays in the world
3. El Yunque National Forest is the only tropical rainforest in the U.S. National Forest System
4. Puerto Rico has more than 300 miles of coastline and over 200 beaches
5. San Juan is the oldest continuously inhabited European-established settlement in the United States
6. Puerto Rico does not have its own citizenship
7. Puerto Ricans don't pay U.S. federal income tax
8. The song "Maria" from West Side Story helped support Puerto Rican recovery after Hurricane Maria
9. La Fortaleza is the oldest executive residence in continuous use in the Western Hemisphere
10. American citizens can travel to Puerto Rico with only a government ID
11. Puerto Rico is an archipelago, not just a single island
12. Puerto Rico competes as its own team in the Olympics and Miss Universe
13. The piña colada was invented in Puerto Rico
14. Puerto Rico has the largest shopping mall in the Caribbean
15. Cerro de Punta is Puerto Rico's highest point



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