

Suggested Itinerary: Puerto Rico

Officially a U.S. commonwealth, Puerto Rico lies about 1,000 miles (1,600 km) southeast of Miami. Begin your trip in San Juan, then head outside the city to find lively culture and natural wonders including spectacular beaches and parks.

San Juan

Suggested: 3 - 5 days

San Juan, the island's capital and its largest city, is the perfect home base for your Puerto Rico adventure. Explore its iconic sights including the 400-year-old El Morro fort, with its six levels of walls, towers and batteries that were built, rebuilt and added to over the centuries. As befits such a cosmopolitan city, San Juan's dining options are incredibly varied, from resort-style dining to tiny family-owned restaurants tucked into the narrow streets of Old San Juan to colourful food stands and food trucks selling authentic island treats. Shopping aficionados will find a similarly wide range of options. Shop for locally created ceramics, jewellery and handmade lace in Old San Juan's historic buildings. The 200-plus shops of the contemporary Plaza Las Américas shopping mall include many familiar brands. And along Ashford Avenue in the Condado neighbourhood, find high-end, brand-name stores as well as shops selling the work of Puerto Rico's most-celebrated designers. After dark, this Latin city really heats up as nightclubs, discos and bars overflow with music and enthusiastic dancers.

El Yunque National Forest

Suggested: 1 day

El Yunque National Forest is a tropical rainforest and national reserve known for its biodiversity – the forest includes some 150 fern species and 240 tree species (23 of which are found only in this park). Here, hike on lush trails to gorgeous views and waterfalls with pools you can swim in. Sections of the forest receive more than 130 inches (340 cm) of rain annually, accounting for its verdant surroundings.

Ponce

Suggested: 2 days

Puerto Rico's second-largest city, Ponce is known for its fanciful architecture, a mix of art nouveau and neoclassical styles. Visit the Museum of Ponce Architecture to learn about the city's architectural and cultural history, including strong links to Catalanian culture. The most striking building in the city is its black-and-red-striped Parque de Bombas (firehouse), now a museum. Built in the architectural style of 1880s Spain, the museum resembles a Gothic castle or a Moorish-influenced Spaniard mansion of that era. The adjacent Plaza Las Delicias (the town's main square and a popular gathering place) features a large fountain and the neoclassical Ponce Cathedral with its large pipe organ. Explore the nearby Museo de Arte de Ponce and Castillo Serrallés, a Spanish Colonial Revival mansion that's been turned into a museum highlighting the history of Puerto Rico's rum industry.

Vieques

Suggested: 2 – 3 days

An island off Puerto Rico's eastern end, Vieques is prized for its 40 gorgeous beaches and for Bioluminescent Bay, where night-time kayak tours reveal microorganisms that give the water a blue-green glow. On land, see wild horses that roam this 135-square-mile (350 km²) island, much of which is preserved as the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. Visit the Fuerte de Vieques, a partially restored mid-19th-century Spanish fort that houses the Vieques Museum of Art and History.

Rio Camuy Cave Park

Suggested: 1 day

Back on the Puerto Rican mainland, head underground to visit the Rio Camuy Cave Park, a 268-acre (108 hectares) network of 200-plus caverns carved by the world's third-largest underground river. Discover stalagmites, stalactites and a giant sinkhole with overlooks that reveal the river 400 feet (120 metres) below.

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