



DISCOVER
Puerto Rico

INTERNATIONAL PRESS CLIPPINGS REPORT

May, 2021

OUTLET	KEY MESSAGING	MARKET	DATE	UMV CIRCULATION	AD VALUE/ EAV (USD)		
TravelWeek	Brad Dean interview placement	Canada	07/05/21	180,000	10,000	Online	https://www.travelweek.ca/blog/puerto-rico-is-open-and-ready-for-canadians/
FT.com	Puerto Rico's strong recovery in the travel industry	UK	12/05/21	670,531	40,000	Online	https://www.ft.com/content/515e73c2-9a32-45ef-a652-369f4e2c9ccd?shareType=nongift
Financial Times	Puerto Rico's strong recovery in the travel industry	UK	15/05/21	183,904	82,500	Print	N/A
Gay Voyageur	LGBTQ DPR	France - Request completed as per DPR request	15/05/21	n/a not market applicable	n/a not market applicable	Online	https://www.gayvoyageur.com/puerto-rico/
The Daily Mirror	Celebrating 500 years of San Juan	UK	22/05/21	388,718	9,959	Print	N/A

OUTLET	KEY MESSAGING	MARKET	DATE	UMV CIRCULATION	AD VALUE/ EAV (USD)		
The Daily Star	Celebrating 500 years of San Juan	UK	22/05/21	237,266	6,706	Print	N/A
The Sunday Mirror	Celebrating 500 years of San Juan	UK	23/05/21	316,962	9,571	Print	N/A
The Irish Sunday Mirror	Celebrating 500 years of San Juan	UK	23/05/21	51,072	1,347	Print	N/A
TOTAL COVERAGE: 8				TOTAL UMV/ CIRCULATION: 1,844,549	TOTAL EAV: 160,083		



Puerto Rico is open and ready for Canadians

When it's safe for Canadians to travel once more, Puerto Rico will be ready. The destination is "absolutely" open to tourists, says Brad Dean, CEO of Discover Puerto Rico, with stringent health and safety protocols in place not to mention COVID-19 testing capabilities in destination that will allow Canadians to meet Canada's pre-departure requirement with ease. In this week's Take Five, Brad Dean, CEO of Discover Puerto Rico, tells us exactly what the destination has done and is doing to keep travellers safe, and also answers the all-important question, when is cruising coming back?

1. Is Puerto Rico currently open to tourists? And where is the destination at in terms of recovery?

Absolutely, Puerto Rico is open to tourists, however safety entry requirements are in place. Travellers entering any of the island's three open airports, whether on commercial or private aircraft, are required to fill out a Travel Declaration Form and upload negative PCR molecular COVID-19 test results (taken no more than 72 hours prior to arrival) to the Puerto Rico Health Department's online portal, which produces a QR code required to proceed. It's important to note that currently, there is no distinction between vaccinated and unvaccinated passengers within Puerto Rico's executive order and entry requirements are applicable to all passengers flying to Puerto Rico from any international or U.S. destination, regardless of transit route.

Puerto Rico took immediate actions early on and implemented a number of Island-wide protocols, ensuring the health and safety of residents and visitors as our main priority. We know that trust is the new tourism currency and we have, and will continue, to provide a safe destination for tourists. This, in conjunction with regularly reviewed local measures outlined in our executive orders, has meant the destination has been able to receive tourists safely throughout the pandemic, and continue to do so as we look ahead to our continued recovery in 2021 and beyond.



In terms of what this means for our recovery at the moment, we have seen incredible visitor, hotel and rental occupancy numbers in March 2021. The recent numbers put the year-to-date lodging demand only 13% off the record-setting pace of 2019. Throughout 2020, the total lodging demand was 38% off the 2019 high so this sharp increase in the return of travel to Puerto Rico is a good indicator as we look ahead to what's to come in 2021. Also, given the faster hotel booking pace and record-setting rental usage in March, there is the potential for more visitors in 2021 than even 2019. This is an exciting concept indeed, forecasting possible recovery even before the return of the cruise and meetings segments (both of which are big markets for Puerto Rico).

Also, crucial to our recovery is targeting responsible travellers for 2021. As a research-based organization Discover Puerto Rico is utilizing tools and in-house sales and marketing experts to do exactly that, creating a new targeting criteria across the majority of our media channels that specifically identifies those travellers more likely to care about travelling safely. This demonstrates Discover Puerto Rico's commitment to not only creating a safe environment for tourists, but actively positioning the destination for such minded travellers in our recovery strategy.

Speaking of strategy, key to mention here is Discover Puerto Rico's experience of crisis management, from hurricanes to earthquakes and now COVID-19. Puerto Rico's expertise sets it apart from other destinations in how the Island has and will continue to recover, and deftly implement crisis recovery strategy and management, ensuring a peace of mind for Canadian, and international travellers, looking to return once again.

2. How is Puerto Rico ensuring health and safety, for when Canadians can safely travel again?

Ensuring the health and safety of Puerto Rican residents and visitors is our main priority. Island-wide [local measures](#) developed by the Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC) have been implemented and are continually reviewed, including social distancing, mandatory face coverings in public areas, and a variety of mandates for businesses that travellers can both expect to see and adhere to when in destination. The Department of Health has also increased resources to make sure everyone in Puerto Rico is abiding by these local guidelines.

So what do these measures look like for tourists? To start with, strict measures are in place at airports including mandatory facemasks, increased cleaning protocols and enhanced health screenings of all arrivals. At [Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport](#) (SJU) in San Juan pre-screenings are completed using thermographic cameras to monitor temperatures. Puerto Rico was actually the first U.S. destination to use thermographic cameras demonstrating the destination's commitment to COVID-safe hygiene standards. SJU has also received ACI accreditation, which is a great marker of safety and only 19 other airports have this currently. Travelling across the Island, certified transportation carriers are disinfecting vehicles, drivers are wearing gloves when handling doors and luggage, and all new ridesharing regulations adhered to.



On the Island itself, public beaches and natural reserves are open with social distancing implemented and masks mandatory. Some key local attractions are also open following COVID-safe guidelines, and businesses including restaurants, casinos, museums, and pools at hotels are operating at reduced capacity. In terms of accommodation, thoroughly sanitised properties that follow PRTC standards are certified with Island-specific health certification seals for tourists to look out for. Guests will also receive a Health & Safety guide detailing the specialised measures implemented by each property individually. Tourists can expect to see temperature checks, symptoms screening, and luggage disinfection at hotels and of course, high standards of housekeeping in accordance with CDC and EPA guidelines. Short Term Rentals are also thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, following health and safety protocols developed by government officials and PRTC.

Puerto Rico was also proudly the first U.S. destination to be included in the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) Safe Travels Stamp certification programme, which was established to assist consumer confidence in destinations, another guarantee of our COVID-safe hygiene standards.

Full health and safety measures can be found on our Discover Puerto Rico [Travel Advisory page](#), which is regularly updated.

3. Cruising is such an important sector for Puerto Rico, the absence of which has no doubt devastated the economy. Can you tell us whether there have been any developments as the resumption of cruising?

You're right, cruising is an important sector for Puerto Rico. The Caribbean in general represents the largest sailing region for the industry, claiming 39% of the global cruise capacity. Not only a cruise destination, the Caribbean is also home to many seasonal home ports with departures from San Juan leading the way. Ponce has also recently gained attention as a potential home port option.

Whilst the cruise industry has been successfully operating from Europe and Asia with no cases, and many more cruise lines gearing up for strong restarts worldwide, the Canadian government and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) have so far been less amenable to an industry resumption, and the North American cruise market remains frozen. Puerto Rico, as a U.S. territory, is subject to such regulations. Having said this, the industry has continued to lobby DC and on April 28, 2021 the CDC shared a public letter to the cruise industry, with updated guidance that paves the way for a meaningful return to service from U.S. ports. Whilst both cruise lines and destinations alike are currently reviewing the latest updates and conditions, this is no doubt an incredibly positive development for the industry restart, and demonstrates a step forward in constructive dialogue between the cruise industry and the CDC.

Despite the many challenges, the industry is resourceful, creative and world over has used the time away from sailing to ensure the industry provides an incredibly COVID-safe return, and service onboard. The wider Caribbean region in particular has already been gearing up for the industry comeback in 2021. As the CDC is now 'committed' to the U.S. cruise industry resuming operations by mid-summer, we very much look forward to cruises departing from San Juan once again this year.

4. Canadians are currently required to take a PCR test in destination prior to returning home. Where and how can Canadians get a PCR test in Puerto Rico and how much does it cost?

Linked on our Discover Puerto Rico [Travel Advisory](#) page, travellers will be able to find the Department of Health & Human Services website which lists the available COVID-19 testing sites on the Island, with filters that will allow tourists to find sites offering the requirements they need for their departure. Additionally, as on the mainland, CVS and Walgreens also provide on-site PCR testing at selected locations around the Island. Prices vary and some sites offer appointments which can be booked in advance for travellers wishing to do so in destination.



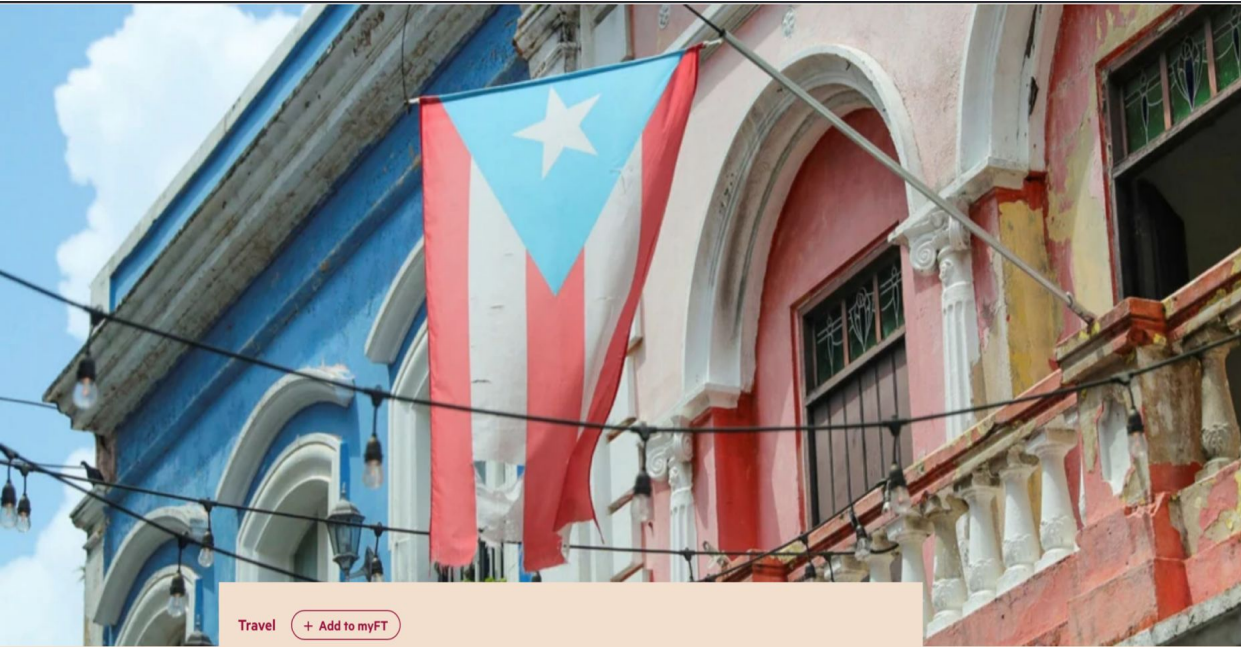
The Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (SJU) in San Juan does offer PCR molecular COVID-19 tests on-site in order to facilitate testing for incoming and outgoing passengers. The service costs \$110 USD and is offered from 6:00 AM. to 8:00 PM, seven days a week, at three molecular test collection centers located at terminals A, B, and C. The service will soon be available at other airports on the Island as well.

5. What are your thoughts on vaccination passports? Do you think this is something that can easily be implemented in Puerto Rico?

Discover Puerto Rico definitely recognizes the growing development of digital health certificates. We believe that recovery in travel starts with building traveller confidence and maintaining it. As the vaccination rollout continues, a digital health certificate is one of many solutions being put forth by experts in a conscious effort to grow consumer confidence. The DMO's stance will remain in alignment with the Government of Puerto Rico and key tourism stakeholders, continuing to prioritise the health and safety of our visitors and residents.

Governor Pierluisi did just announce that he will set aside US\$1.5 million to create a digital health certificate, adding that people's personal information would be protected. More details will be shared as this is developed for Puerto Rico specifically.

FINANCIAL TIMES



Travel [+ Add to myFT](#)

Resilience and exuberance in Puerto Rico

The island hopes to bounce back from the pandemic to hit record visitor numbers this year but it remains little known beyond the US

Ruaridh Nicoll MAY 12 2021

The night boat cuts fast across a pitch-black sea and arcs into a narrow mouthed bay. Captain Cachi douses all but the navigation lights and heaves-to not far from the mangrove shore. He orders me overboard and I tumble in.

It's as if I have climbed up into the night sky. I am swimming through stars, diving through nebulas. I plunge faster until, like the Enterprise, I hit warp speed. Galaxies pass. I stop, clap and sparks fly.

Finally I float to the sea's warm surface. I am not far from La Parguera on the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico, in a bioluminescent bay where dinoflagellate plankton gather and thrive. The sea, it seems, is as incandescent as the people who inhabit this land.

The moment my flight from Florida touches the tarmac of San Juan's Luis Muñoz Marín airport all the passengers start whooping. "I don't know why we always do that," says my neighbour. Lin-Manuel Miranda, the genius behind *Hamilton: the Musical*, once explained: "I clap every time a plane lands and so do most Puerto Ricans. That's like our thing. I love it. We cheated gravity and we're alive."

Puerto Rico is emerging as one of the strongest recovery stories in the travel industry. Year-to-date accommodation bookings are down only 13 per cent on 2019, which was a record year, and the tourist board says it sees potential for 2021 to set a new record for visitor numbers. Data from online travel agent Priceline shows Puerto Rico as the fourth most popular flight destination among US travellers in the second quarter of 2021.



Calle San Sebastián in Old San Juan, site of an annual festival

Yet even in pre-Covid times almost all the tourists were from the US — of which Puerto Rico is effectively a colony. Only about two per cent of arriving visitors come here from Europe, odd for the Caribbean. For many in the wider world, the island conjures little more than some half-remembered choruses from *West Side Story*, but its cultural impact on the US has been out of all proportion to its mere 100 by 35 miles.

“

Despite its wild and beautiful coastline, warm seas, and perfect beaches, Puerto Ricans look inland for their soul

In recent years, Puerto Rico and its diaspora have offered up not just Miranda, but J-Lo, Marc Anthony and Bad Bunny. That’s music. In politics there is AOC, New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Let’s not even start on baseball.

I’ve longed to visit since working in a bar in Brooklyn where half my clientele were Puerto Rican. Reading Jorge Duany’s *Puerto Rico* before arriving, I discover that despite its wild and beautiful coastline, warm seas, and perfect beaches (Flamenco, on the satellite island of Culebra, is among the finest I’ve ever seen), Puerto Ricans, long put upon by outsiders (first Spain then the US), look inland for their soul.

So, after picking up wheels from Charlie Car Rental, I head for the hills. I want to find the children of the *Jíbaro*, the venerated early settlers who scratched a living in bare feet and straw hats, machetes in hand.



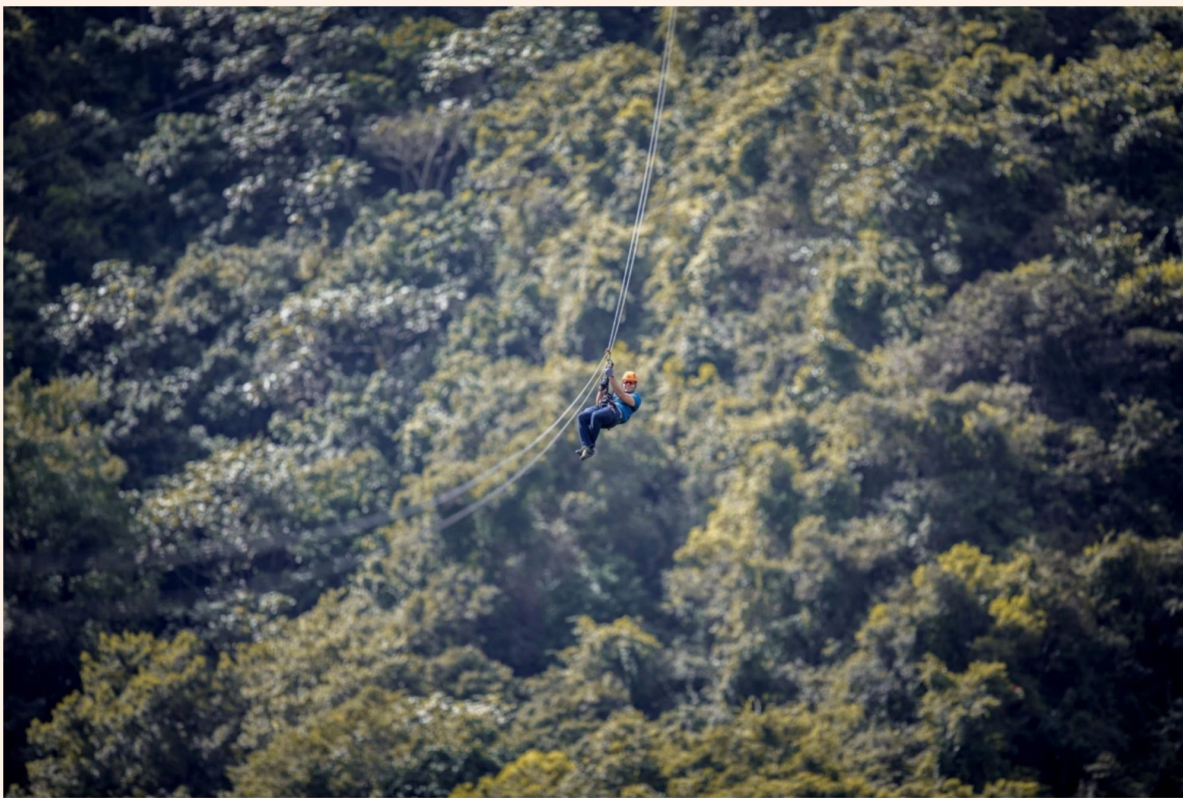
'Flamenco beach, on the satellite island of Culebra, is among the finest I've ever seen' © Alamy

My fellow road users suggest there's been a change of accessories. I'm joined by a *Mad Max* medley of vehicles: trucks with snarling grilles, super-sprung dune buggies and hatchbacks pumping music with all the power of mobile nightclubs.



The road narrows and switchbacks upwards. Before long I am traversing the spines of ridges where houses, veranda skirted, perch on the tops. It's fearless architecture given the troubles Puerto Rico has faced in recent times. Hurricane Maria hit in 2017, killing an estimated 3,000. Then came earthquakes.

Near Orocovis, a local company, Toroverde, has created the world's second longest zipwire (the longest one, also by them, is in UAE). I strap in. Many Jíbaros were Corsicans who arrived in the early 1800s and now, as I arrow downwards, I can see why they felt at home among the ravines and sharp edges — at least until the wind blessedly pushes my Covid mask over my eyes.



The world's second longest zipwire at Toroverde Adventure Park in Orocovis stretches for about 1.5 miles © Johnny De Los Santos

Back in the car, I drop down the island's southern slopes and stop at Hacienda Jacana, in the hills above Adjuntas. Jonathan Pérez Marín bought the farm in 2015 "in the interest of being self-sustaining". He has bananas, guavas, papaya, chickens, dogs, beautiful horses and tanks full of tilapia.

"After the hurricane we focused on quality coffee," he says, making me an espresso from his single-source Latitude 18, roasting the beans in front of me. They used to say of the island's crop that it's the coffee of kings and popes, which seems fair.

When I suggest he's a hipster Jíbaro, he smiles kindly. In truth he's an example of *resiliencia*, a buzzword after the hurricane and the US's widely criticised response to it, and now gaining a new currency.

Everyone I meet has been affected by Maria. On the western edge of the island, I fly-fish with Francisco Rosario, a guide with an international reputation. His bookings fell to nothing in the wake of the storm, and he turned in his boat licence rather than pay its \$7,000 a year insurance. Instead we paddle-board among the mangroves, casting into the gaps for tarpon and spooking huge iguanas so they tumble into the water.



Francisco Rosario, a fly-fishing guide, on his paddle board

There is a lot of American clutter to Puerto Rico. The highway encircling the island is clogged with car dealerships. Charm returns only when I pull off at the Royal Isabela resort, the creation of Stanley and Charles Pasarell. Charles was the US's top ranked tennis player in 1967.

At first Royal Isabela seems like a standard high-end golf destination. The main house resembles a sugar mill, like those in Barbados or Antigua, and from its central courtyard, you can gaze through a door to a perfectly framed ponytail palm. Beyond, the green of fairways give on to the bleach-scoured cobalt of the Atlantic Ocean.

But then I play, and it becomes like a sci-fi version of golf. There are tees that require drives over chasms that fall 100 feet to the unruly ocean, the trade winds the player's only friend. From clifftop greens I look down to where vast rollers crash against reefs, whitewater flooding a deserted golden beach to reach the sun-dappled dunes.

The resort's 20 casitas are set against a slope with views to the blue horizon. They are big and comfortable and have outdoor Jacuzzis and large terraces (and are a steal at \$325 per night). Dinner of local snapper is prepared by Jeremie Cruz, who opens a bottle of red and tells me about the vegetable and fruit farm he has created on the edge of the course.



The Condado Vanderbilt resort in the capital San Juan © Magda Biernat

I continue to the capital, San Juan, a journey of a little over an hour. As the city builds, resorts appear along the coast — party places like the Fairmont, with interlocking pools, sun cabanas, and its fresh bistro Caña. Or the Condado Vanderbilt, with a star-studded history and a truly spectacular French restaurant, 1919.

Here is where the Miami-fication of the Caribbean is most apparent, and it draws vast numbers of American holidaymakers. People wander about wearing very little, heading to the shops, or mall-style bars, or to the beach. Later they might head to the new El Distrito, a vast entertainment complex across town.

The authorities are doing their best to mitigate the dangers of people flying in. Everyone needs a PCR test and afterwards a daily email asks for symptoms. Unlike in Miami, distancing, temperature-taking, mask wearing and hand-sanitising are all enforced by a nervous population.

I keep going into the old town. It's on an islet at the mouth of the bay, a colonial city of pastel-washed houses packed tight to provide shade. Its tip is the Morro, a vast fortress.

From Columbus' first visit in 1493, this was the first port of call for Spanish ships riding the trade winds west. Captains would round the fortress and drop anchor off a tiny beach, climb a short path and give thanks at the cathedral, the second oldest in the Americas.



Looking towards the Castillo San Felipe del Morro, which guards the entrance to San Juan Bay

The Palacio Provincial is next door. It opened in January, the first significant new hotel in Old San Juan in two decades. It is a beautifully proportioned building from the early 1800s, that once played host to Infanta Eulalia on her way to the world fair in Chicago in 1893, five years before the US took Puerto Rico from Spain by force.

Now the cloisters that surround two central courtyards give on to cool, calm rooms. There is a pool on the roof which looks out over the bay, to where smart yachts pass and Bacardi makes rum on the opposite shore.



The Palacio Provincial, dating from the early 1800s, opened in January

Breakfasting in the courtyard, I meet the only other Brit I see in three weeks. On hearing my accent, a bull head swivels like a gun turret on a Union Jack neckscarf. It's the UK's honorary consul, Tony Phillips, and we become friends.

With the sun rising, I explore the old town with Pablo Garcíá Smith of Spoon Experience. It's less a tour than a detour, in that we're forever stopping off in cafés, bars and restaurants.

“

It becomes like a sci-fi version of golf. There are tees that require drives over chasms that fall 100 feet to the unruly ocean

We drop by El Convento, an extraordinary hotel in itself. The convent was founded in 1642 by Doña Ana, its first Mother Superior, a young widow rich enough to surround herself with nunnish friends. We explore the many crevices of La Factoria, regularly listed as one of the best bars in the world. The main room retains the name of a previous establishment on its wall: *Hijos de Borinquen*.

Borinquen, meaning “noble”, was what the indigenous Arawak called their island. Their *hijos* (children) are the few — less than five per cent — who still believe in full independence from the US. Pablo tells me his mother is one: “This is where she'd meet other independence activists.” Not long ago he discovered the family had an FBI file.

Currently the island's 3.2m inhabitants have US passports but no vote in Congress. At a referendum last November, Puerto Ricans voted to become a US state; a bill for full statehood was introduced in the US Congress in March, only to be talked down by Chuck Schumer, the US Senate majority leader. He says the referendum — 53 per cent to 47 per cent — wasn't emphatic enough and attacked the island as a tax haven. Few expect a change soon.

It seems that for the moment Puerto Rico will continue to survive through its force of character. I turn up for a walking tour in the second city of Ponce. Melina Aguilar Colón (who had introduced me to the coffee farmer Jonathan) is my guide.

We don't walk far. By the city's historic fire station, painted red and black like some knight errant's tent, we fall in with a crowd of undertakers, widows and fiends. I find myself in the back of a big pick-up truck and cops on big Harleys are roaring past to shut off the streets ahead.



A 'vejigante', or a costumed reveler, in the carnival of Ponce, Puerto Rico's second city © Alamy

A vast sound system leads our 35-car convoy. It turns out to be the last day of Ponce's carnival, and Melina, now transformed into a pink demon — a *vejigante* — has decided I should be part of it.

Residents emerge from their homes, and begin to dance. As the evening grows darker, the barrios become more far-flung, and, in truth, more sketchy. I turn to see two men with the long, moustachioed faces of Sergio Leone gunslingers gazing up at me, cold eyed.

I wave my tiny Ponce flag, and mutter to Melina: "This wasn't the tour I was expecting." The men suddenly grin and my demon guide laughs. "To be honest," she says, looking round, "I'm no longer sure where we are."

Details

Ruaridh Nicoll was a guest of [Discover Puerto Rico](#), staying at the [Palacio Provincial](#) (doubles from \$195), [El Convento](#) (\$149), [Royal Isabela](#) (\$325) and [St Regis Bahia Beach Resort](#) (\$599). The tour of Old San Juan was run by [Spoon](#), Ponce and Hacienda Jacana by [Isla Carib](#), and the bioluminescent bay by [Paradise Tours](#). [British Airways](#) offers return flights to San Juan via Miami from £498 return.

Puerto Rico is currently open to most tourists but, like the mainland US, not those from a list of countries that includes EU members, the UK, China, India, Brazil and South Africa. All arriving travellers must show a negative coronavirus test, even if they have been vaccinated. There is currently a curfew between midnight and 5am; restaurants, museums and hotel pools are limited to operating at no more than 30 per cent of their capacity. See [discoverpuertorico.com](#) for more. The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is currently advising against travel to Puerto Rico, and recommends US residents delay all domestic travel until they are vaccinated

FINANCIAL TIMES

The night boat cuts fast across a pitch-black sea and arcs into a narrow-mouthed bay. Captain Cachi douses all but the navigation lights and heaves-to not far from the mangrove shore. He orders me overboard and I tumble in.

It's as if I have climbed up into the night sky. I am swimming through stars, diving through nebulas. I plunge faster until, like the Enterprise, I hit warp speed. Galaxies pass. I stop, clap and sparks fly.

Finally I float to the sea's warm surface. I am not far from La Parguera on the Caribbean island of Puerto Rico, in a bioluminescent bay where dinoflagellate plankton gather and thrive. The sea, it seems, is as incandescent as the people who inhabit this land.

The moment my flight from Florida touches the tarmac of San Juan's Luis Muñoz Marín airport, all the passengers start whooping. "I don't know why we always do that," says my neighbour.

Lin-Manuel Miranda, the genius behind *Hamilton: the Musical*, once explained: "I clap every time a plane lands and so do most Puerto Ricans. That's like our thing. I love it. We cheated gravity and we're alive."

Puerto Rico is emerging as one of the strongest recovery stories in the travel industry. Year-to-date accommodation bookings are down only 13 per cent on 2019, which was a record year, and the



ades. It is a beautifully proportioned building from the early 1800s, that once played host to Infanta Eulalia on her way to the world fair in Chicago in 1893, five years before the US took Puerto Rico from Spain by force.

Now the cloisters that surround two central courtyards give on to cool, calm rooms. There is a pool on the roof which looks out over the bay, to where smart yachts pass and Bacardi makes rum on the opposite shore.

Breakfasting in the courtyard, I meet the only other Brit I see in three weeks. On hearing my accent, a bull head swivels like a gun turret on a Union Jack neckscarf. It's the UK's honorary consul, Tony Phillips, and we become friends.

With the sun rising, I explore the old town with Pablo García Smith of Spoon Experience. It's less a tour than a detour, in that we're forever stopping off in cafés, bars and restaurants. We drop by El Convento, an extraordinary hotel in itself. The convent was founded in 1642 by Doña Ana, its first Mother Superior, a young widow rich enough to surround herself with nunnish friends. We explore the many crevices of La Factoria, regularly listed as one of the best bars in the world. The main room retains the name of a previous establishment on its wall: *Hijos de Borinquen*.

Borinquen, meaning "noble", was what the indigenous Arawak called their island. Their *hijos* (children) are the few – less than five per cent – who still believe in full independence from the US. Pablo tells me his mother is one: "This is where she'd meet other independence activists." Not long ago he discovered the family had an FBI file.

Currently the island's 3.2m inhabitants have US passports but no vote in Congress. At a referendum last November, Puerto Ricans voted to become a US state; a bill for full statehood was introduced in the US Congress in March, only to be talked down by Chuck Schumer, the US Senate majority leader. He says the referendum – 53 per cent to 47 per cent – wasn't emphatic enough and attacked the island as a tax haven. Few expect a change soon.

It seems that for the moment Puerto Rico will continue to survive through its force of character. I turn up for a walking tour in the second city of Ponce. Melina Aguilar Colón (who had introduced me to the coffee farmer Jonathan) is my guide.

We don't walk far. By the city's historic fire station, painted red and black like some knight errant's tent, we fall in with a crowd of undertakers, widows and fiends. I find myself in the back of a

tourist board says it sees potential for 2021 to set a new record for visitor numbers. Data from online travel agent Priceline shows Puerto Rico as the fourth most popular flight destination among US travellers in the second quarter of 2021.

Yet even in pre-Covid times almost all the tourists were from the US – of which Puerto Rico is effectively a colony. Only about two per cent of arriving visitors come from Europe, odd for the Carib-

Resilience and exuberance

Puerto Rico | The island hopes to bounce back from the pandemic to

They are big and comfortable and have outdoor jacuzzis and large terraces (and are a steal at \$325 per night). Dinner of local snapper is prepared by Jeremie

bean. For many in the wider world, the island conjures little more than some half-remembered choruses from *West Side Story*, but its cultural impact on the US has been out of all proportion to its mere 100 by 35 miles.

In recent years, Puerto Rico and its diaspora have offered up not just Miranda, but J-Lo, Marc Anthony and Bad Bunny. That's music. In politics there is AOC, New York congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Let's not even start on baseball. I've longed to visit since working in a bar in Brooklyn where half my clientele were Puerto Rican.

Reading Jorge Duany's *Puerto Rico* before arriving, I discover that despite its wild and beautiful coastline, warm seas, and perfect beaches (Flamenco, on the satellite island of Culebra, is among the finest I've ever seen), Puerto Ricans, long put upon by outsiders (first Spain then the US), look inland for their soul. So, after picking up wheels from Charlie Car Rental, I head for the hills. I want to find the children of the Jibaro, the venerated early settlers who scratched a living in bare feet and straw hats, machetes in hand.

My fellow road users suggest there's been a change of accessories. I'm joined by a *Mad Max* medley of vehicles: trucks with snarling grilles, super-sprung dune buggies and hatchbacks pumping music with all the power of mobile nightclubs.

The road narrows and switchbacks upwards. Before long I am traversing the spines of ridges where houses, veranda skirted, perch on the tops. It's fearless architecture given the troubles Puerto Rico has faced. Hurricane Maria

hit in 2017, killing an estimated 3,000. Then came earthquakes.

Near Orocovis, a local company, Toroverde, has created the world's second longest zipwire (the longest one, also by them, is in the UAE). I strap in. Many Jibaros were Corsicans who arrived in the early 1800s and now, as I arrow downwards, I can see why they felt at home, among the ravines and sharp edges — at least until the wind blessedly pushes my Covid mask over my eyes.

Back in the car, I drop down the island's southern slopes and stop at Hacienda Jacana, in the hills above Adjuntas. Jonathan Pérez Marín bought the farm in 2015 "in the interest of being self-sustaining". He has bananas, guavas, papaya, chickens, dogs, beautiful horses and tanks full of tilapia.

"After the hurricane we focused on quality coffee," he says, making me an espresso from his single-source Latitude 18, roasting the beans in front of me. They used to say of the island's crop that it's the coffee of kings and popes, which seems fair.

When I suggest he's a hipster Jibaro, he smiles kindly. In truth he's an example of *resiliencia*, a buzzword after the hurricane and the US's widely criticised response to it, and now gaining a new currency.

Everyone I meet has been affected by Maria. On the western edge of the island, I fly-fish with Francisco Rosario,

host a record number of visitors this year — but its beaches, barrios and rich history remain little known beyond the US. By Ruaridh Nicoll

Clockwise from top left: balconies in Old San Juan; Flamenco beach; fly-fishing guide Francisco Rosario on his paddle board; pastel-coloured houses in Old San Juan; Jonathan Pérez Marín of Hacienda Jacana in his Jeep; the world's second longest zipwire, near Orocovis; looking towards the Castillo San Felipe del Morro at San Juan Bay; the Palacio Provincial, which opened in January

Alamy, Johnny De Los Santos, Getty Images, Ruaridh Nicoll

Despite its wild and beautiful coastline, warm seas, and perfect beaches, Puerto Ricans look inland for their soul

a guide with an international reputation. His bookings fell to nothing in the wake of the storm, and he turned in his boat licence rather than pay its \$7,000 a year insurance. Instead we paddle-board among the mangroves, casting into the gaps for tarpon and spooking huge iguanas so they tumble into the water.

There is a lot of American clutter to Puerto Rico. The highway encircling the island is clogged with car dealerships. Charm returns only when I pull off at the Royal Isabela resort, the creation of Stanley and Charles Pasarell. Charles was the US's top ranked tennis player in 1967.

At first Royal Isabela seems like a standard high-end golf destination. The main house resembles a sugar mill, like those in Barbados or Antigua, and from its central courtyard, you can gaze through a door to a perfectly framed ponytail palm. Beyond is the green of fairways and the cobalt Atlantic.

But then I play, and it becomes like a sci-fi version of golf. There are tees that require drives over chasms that fall 100 feet to the unruly ocean, the trade winds the player's only friend. From clifftop greens I look down to where vast rollers crash against reefs, whitewater flooding a deserted golden beach to reach the sun-dappled dunes.

The resort's 20 casitas are set against a slope with views to the blue horizon.

Cruz, who opens a bottle of red and tells me about the vegetable and fruit farm he has created on the edge of the course.

I continue to the capital, San Juan, a journey of a little over an hour. As the city builds, resorts appear along the coast — party places like the Fairmont, with interlocking pools, sun cabanas, and its fresh bistro Caña. Or the Condado Vanderbilt, with a star-studded history and a truly spectacular French restaurant, 1919.

Here is where the Miami-fication of the Caribbean is most apparent, and it draws vast numbers of American holidaymakers. People wander about wearing very little, heading to the shops, or mall-style bars, or to the beach. Later they might head to the new El Distrito, an entertainment complex across town.

The authorities are doing their best to mitigate the risks of tourism. Everyone needs a pre-arrival PCR test and afterwards a daily email asks for symptoms. Unlike in Miami, distancing, temperature-taking, mask wearing and hand-sanitising are all enforced by a nervous population.

I keep going into the old town. It's on an islet at the mouth of the bay, a colonial city of pastel-washed houses packed tight to provide shade. Its tip is the Morro, a vast fortress. From Columbus' first visit in 1493, this was the first port of call for Spanish ships riding the trade winds west. Captains would round the fortress and drop anchor off a tiny beach, climb a short path and give thanks at the cathedral, the second oldest in the Americas.

The Palacio Provincial is next door. It opened in January, the first significant new hotel in Old San Juan in two dec-

ades. Big pick-up trucks and cops on big Harleys are roaring past to shut off the streets ahead.

A vast sound system leads our 35-car convoy. It turns out to be the last day of Ponce's carnival, and Melina, now transformed into a pink demon — a *veji-gante* — has decided I should be part of it. Residents emerge from their homes, and begin to dance. As the evening grows darker, the barrios become more far-flung, and, in truth, more sketchy. I turn to see two men with the long, moustachioed faces of Sergio Leone gunslingers gazing up at me, cold eyed.

I wave my tiny Ponce flag, and mutter to Melina: "This wasn't the tour I was expecting." The men suddenly grin and my demon guide laughs. "To be honest," she says, looking round, "I'm no longer sure where we are."

i / DETAILS

Ruaridh Nicoll was a guest of Discover Puerto Rico (discoverpuertorico.com). He stayed at the Palacio Provincial (doubles.com \$195; palacioprovincial.com), El Convento (\$149; elconvento.com), Royal Isabela (\$325; royalisabela.com) and St Regis Bahia Beach (\$599; marriott.com). The tour of Old San Juan was run by Spoon (thespoonexperience.com), Ponce and Hacienda Jacana by Isla Carib (islacaribpr.com), and the bioluminescent bay by Paradise Tours (paradisescubasnorkelingpr.com). British Airways flies from London to San Juan via Miami from £498 return (ba.com).

Puerto Rico is currently open to most tourists but, like the mainland US, not those from a list of countries that includes EU members, the UK, China, India, Brazil and South Africa. At present the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is advising against travel to Puerto Rico, and recommends US residents delay all domestic travel until they are vaccinated.



Gay stay in Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico is a small [gay friendly destination](#). Owned by the [United States](#), but located in the Caribbean, Puerto Rico is attracting more and more homosexual tourists to its territory. The main **gay friendly destination of the island is its capital San Juan**. Puerto Rico, where the locals are friendly, where the beaches are beautiful and the nightlife is rather hot. San Juan is very gay friendly. There are many bars, clubs and restaurants everywhere. Condado, is the tourist district to do, but also the **gay neighborhood of San Juan**. However, a visit to Puerto Rico does not stop only in San Juan.

Puerto Rico is often not a destination chosen other than by the Americans. Yet Puerto Rico is a beautiful gay friendly destination. Several seaside resorts are interesting to do. Especially for beaches and cocktails. There are also many establishments throughout the hotel, including hotels that display themselves as gay-friendly. A plus for homosexual tourists who visit this holiday destination.

For those looking to make discoveries, Puerto Rico is an interesting destination for sports. The outdoors is waiting for you everywhere on the island. You can go hiking in the morning and come back during the day to enjoy the beaches. A real exotic paradise just a stone's throw from the [United States](#).



A gay friendly holiday in Puerto Rico



“Of course, there is much more to explore than just San Juan. Road trips are an ideal way to discover the lush interior of the islands, including the iconic Panoramic Route, crossing the shore of the island to the shore from east to west, and the El Yunque Rainforest is also a must-see visit to escape the crowd and explore the wonders of wildlife up close in nature, including endemic birds, singing frogs and rare reptiles. As an archipelago, Puerto Rico also offers a plethora of offshore island getaways for guests to visit the hidden jewels of the Caribbean and tropical beaches on the islands of Vieques and Culebra. With nearly 300 beaches and 270 miles of Caribbean coast across Puerto Rico, sun lovers are spoiled for choice, even in high season, with a variety of beaches of happiness. - Puerto Rico Tourist Office

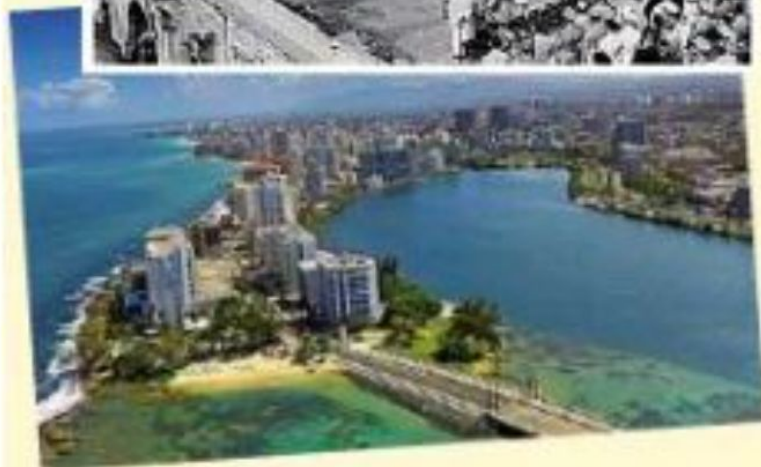
Destination Puerto Rico

Among the tourist attractions to do in Puerto Rico, there is the old district of San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico with its fifteenth century fort. You can also discover the El Yunque National Forest but also Fort San Felipe del Morro, a Spanish citadel of the sixteenth century. Of course, we discover Puerto Rico for its beaches. The number one tourist attraction.

Puerto Rico is one of the most LGBTQ-friendly islands in the Caribbean and is a perfect escape no matter the time of year and whatever your holiday style, from luxury beachfront hotels to the vibrant nightlife of San Juan, adventures in the rainforest and the wonders of wildlife. Celebrating its 500th anniversary in 2021, the cobble streets of San Juan are full of history, but are also where the old one blends perfectly with the new. There are many bars and clubs in the old San Juan, Condado and Santruce neighborhoods so guests can feel the rhythm of the sounds of bomba, *reggaeton*, salsa, merengue and Latin pop, and enjoy a rum punch or two. Alternatively, even during the high season, the seaside resorts along Isla Verde, Puerto Rico's first seaside destination, offer sumptuous and casual luxury. With the proximity of the heart of San Juan and a crystal clear view of the Caribbean Sea, the palm-lined stretch is a holiday paradise.

TIME TRAVEL

BY VICKY LISSAMAN



Saluting five centuries of Old San Juan

Puerto Rico is celebrating 500 years since Old San Juan was founded by Spanish settlers.

Loved for its colourful houses, cobbled streets and shady plazas, it's the oldest settlement within the island's capital of San Juan - the second most senior European-founded city in the Americas.

Few landmarks represent Puerto Rico's legacy within the Caribbean and the Americas quite as well as Castillo San Felipe del Morro, also known as El Morro. During most of its almost 500-year history, the six-storey fort was an important military outpost for Spain and later the United States.

Visitors can explore the landmark with self-guided tours, and there are stunning views across San Juan and the Caribbean Sea.

The Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico is one of the largest art institutions in the Caribbean. Music lovers are also drawn to the city where the streets ring with bomba, reggaeton, salsa, merengue and Latin pop.

The capital's latest venture is El Distrito, a new state-of-the-art venue combining the best in art, music, technology and hospitality, including a radio and television production studio, zipline, 24-hour nightclub, outdoor pools, micro-distillery and fitness studio.

The city features two new hotels - ALOFT by Marriott and Palacio Provincial by Preferred Hotels. It's also the birthplace of the piña colada and home of Bacardi rum.

discoverpuertorico.com