Bienvenidos



Puerto Rico:
Land of Rum Mastery

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RUM CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

Autorizado por la Oficina del Contralor Electoral OCE-SA-2024-01459.



Raices Fountain at Paseo de la Princesa in Old San Juan.



CLARISA JIMENEZ

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Welcome to Puerto Rico, a Caribbean Island with more than 500 years of history, where Taíno, African and Spanish cultures masterfully merged to give way to friendly people with big hearts and hospitable by nature.

In a geographical area of 100 x 35 miles, small compared to most land areas on the planet, Puerto Rico offers abundant charm, which is why it is known as the Island of Enchantment. Getting from one end of Puerto Rico to the other is easy, not only because of our territorial size but because there is a highway that goes around the island and the connecting routes are well labeled. If you need backup, you can always use the GPS to locate yourself and navigate faster to your destination for the day. When planning your daytrips, don't leave out El Yunque, the only rainforest in the United States National Forest System. It truly is a natural gem where you can hike, bathe in a waterfall, enjoy the panorama from atop the mountains and listen to the coquí, sometimes even during the day.

Puerto Rico's entertainment offering is just as bountiful and varied. We love to party! In addition to cultural events and festivals taking place throughout the year, you will find large-scale events and concerts at our Fine Arts Centers, at the state-of-the-art Convention Center, or at the emblematic Coliseo de Puerto Rico Jose Miguel Agrelot, also referred to as the Choliseo, among other iconic venues.

Another must see or visit is the T-Mobile District, an entire entertainment center that has become the go-to place for a good time during the weekend, whether watching a game at the Medalla Arena, catching a movie in the 270-degree screen at Caribbean Cinemas, playing at the Toro Verde arcade or tasting its curated restaurant experiences, among other possibilities. Let's not forget our vibrant casinos, where chance, risk, and entertainment converge in an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation. They provide plenty of game options as well as delicious cocktails and good music in a safe and friendly environment.

As you can see, Puerto Rico has it all. Enjoy your stay on the island where old-world charm meets a vibrant contemporary lifestyle in a paradisiac setting!



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Puerto Rico HAS IT ALL

It's a tropical island, of course you will bathe in its paradisiac turquoise beaches! Afterwards, go explore Puerto Rico's bountiful eateries and delight your palate with choices from fine dining—with restaurants nominated and winners of James Beard awards—or enjoy the creativity and convenience that food trucks offer. Do not skip chinchorros - a small, casual, and often rustic roadside or neighborhood bar. It is a place where locals gather to socialize, enjoy drinks, and sometimes food in a laid-back atmosphere They often provide the most authentic Puerto Rican food experience, always served with a smile, music, and quaint atmospheres.

Speaking of atmospheres, Puerto Rico's breathtaking views are the best backdrop for idyllic weddings. The natural beauty of the panoramas that this island offers, both on the beach and in the mountains, have become a favorite of couples who want an unforgettable destination wedding. With amazing teams of planners and service providers, and an array of accommodation options—from international hotel chains to resorts, boutique hotels and impressive rental properties—it-s a breeze to make it happen.

In short, Puerto Rico offers a complete and enriching experience for every visitor. From its history and cultural roots to its magnificent beaches and entertainment options, we have everything you need to have an extraordinary vacation.

Visit every corner and discover the charm for yourself. We guarantee you will not regret it!




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Official Visitors Magazine of the Puerto Rico Hotel & Tourism Association

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Media&Marketing partners&co., corp.

PUBLISHED BY
Media & Marketing Partners
1612 Ponce de Leon Ave.
2nd. Floor San Juan,
Puerto Rico 00909

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Discover Puerto Rico, the Island's Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), unveiled earlier this month a third iteration of their successful campaign, **'Live Boricua'**, the brand's invitation to visitors to embrace the vibrant culture of the Island like a Boricua (a person of Puerto Rican descent). Led by local voices, this campaign celebrates the state of mind, way of life, spirit, flavor, and rhythm that can only be experienced in one place on earth – Puerto Rico.

With 'Live Boricua 3.0,' the DMO has a very simple yet powerful intent: to show the world not only WHAT Puerto Rico has to offer but WHO Puerto Rico is. From late-night salsa dancing on the streets to taking a dip in majestic waterfalls and clapping cheerfully as the airplane lands in Puerto Rico's ground, the campaign is an invitation for travelers to not only visit Puerto Rico, but to experience it like a local. Throughout the brand campaign, Boricuas, the diaspora community, local industry, and loyal brand partners will be sharing with the world what it means to 'Live Boricua.'

DELVE DEEPER INTO WHAT IT MEANS TO 'LIVE BORICUA' WITH THESE UNIQUE EXPERIENCES:



IMMERSE IN BOMBA

In Puerto Rico, you don't just listen to bomba, you feel it! Bomba is an essential expression of Puerto Rican culture that originated on the island through the African ancestors years ago. This Afro-Puerto Rican style of traditional music and dance is interactive, with the musicians taking cues from the dancers. There are many places where visitors can #LiveBoricua by learning Bomba drumming and dancing with locals like the **Don Rafael Cepeda School of Bomba** or **El batey de los Hermanos Ayala**. Travelers can also enjoy a night of live percussion, songs, and dance at places like La Terraza de Bonanza in Santurce, La Vergüenza in Old San Juan, and others that offer weekly performances.



CONNECT WITH NATURE

Puerto Rico offers endless opportunities for visitors to go outside and create their own Boricua adventure! The Island is ecologically diverse, with habitats ranging from the most extensive tropical dry coastal forest at **El Bosque Seco de Guánica**, where travelers can hike numerous paths, to the renowned **El Yunque**, the only tropical rainforest in the United States, where many swimming holes are waiting to be discovered. For an out-of-this-world nature experience at night, Puerto Rico is home to three glowing bioluminescent bays. Visitors can paddle or splash the water to agitate the microorganisms that live there, causing them to light up in a neon blue-green color, resembling shining stars.



ENJOY VIBRANT ENTERTAINMENT & NIGHTLIFE

Travelers can experience some of the Island's best dining, art, entertainment, music, technology, and hospitality at **Distrito T-Mobile**, the ultimate entertainment center in Puerto Rico. They can admire the colorful murals and 3D pieces around the space, and visit the **Toroverde Urban Park**, complete with a 120-foot-long zipline across the complex and the largest indoor rope course in America. Visitors can end their day by enjoying a variety of culinary options, whether it's fine dining at **La Central by Mario Pagán**, relishing authentic Puerto Rican flavors at Sazón, or indulging in late-night ice cream and churros at **Dulcinea**.

The DMO is eager to welcome travelers to the Island, where they'll be invited to experience the Island and to #LiveBoricua.

DISCOVER Puerto Rico

Share your **#LiveBoricua** experiences with Discover Puerto Rico on social media.



The Olympia Forest School in Adjuntas is a community program of conservation, investigation and education.



MIGDALIA MEDINA

Publisher and Chief Editor

Broaden your Horizons AND CREATE MEMORIES

Everyone is guilty of routine. That's a part of life. But routines do lead to complacency. Travel presents new challenges, people, cultures, experiences and encourages personal growth.

The truth is travel is not just a luxury, it's an essential part of life.

Life is too short, and every moment must count since none of us can foresee the future. Waiting for that right time can mean missing out on incredible experiences.

And Puerto Rico is a perfect place to broaden your horizons, create memories, and relieve stress.

Whether it's hiking or biking in the central mountains, strolling on ancient blue cobblestone roads surrounded by colorful buildings in Old San Juan or watching a breathtaking sunset over a pristine beach in the west coast, Puerto Rico as a premier tourism destination offers so much to its visitors.

So, open your heart, broaden your mind, and fill your life with memorable stories to tell. Visit Puerto Rico, you'll thank me later.



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WHAT'S IN







VIVA CITY

20 Mural, Mural on the Wall

26 Beyond Museums

28 La Goyco thrives as a cultural and social anchor for Calle Loiza

SCENE AND BE SEEN

30 The spirit of local crafted rums distills the next chapter in Puerto Rico's rum industry

36 Take a Shot

38 Leave the stress at home in Aguadilla

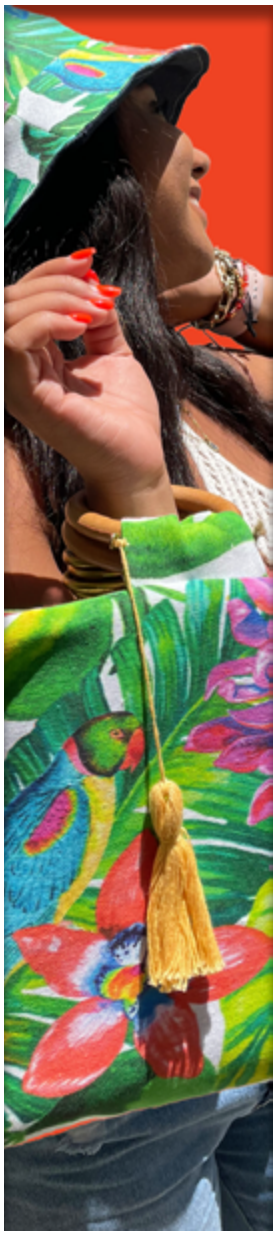
CULINARY GUSTO

40 San Juan: The Place to Sip and Savor

46 Culinary magic unleashed at Sushi by Bou

48 Fly Dining takes guests to new heights

50 Pizza in Puerto Rico: It's a Local Thing



I'LL TAKE IT

56 Lala: A Symphony for the Senses

60 As the sun shines a new style of shades emerges

62 Handbags inspired by the Caribbean's bright colors



I DO

65 Choosing to marry that special someone in Puerto Rico



INSIDE LA ISLA

70 Lush and Luscious Sink your teeth into Puerto Rico's cacao at Hacienda Chocolat



SPORTS AT A GLANCE

74 Shine On

77 Beach Tennis and Pickleball is all the rage on the sands in Puerto Rico

78 Bright Lights, New Heights

83 MEMBERS DIRECTORY

Rum: Tasting history

Let us start with the word: rum

By CARLOS GONZÁLEZ TORRES



According to Charles Coulombe in his book "Rum: The Epic Story of the Drink that Conquered the World," by 1667 this sugar cane derived spirit was already known as rum in English, and ron in Spanish, just over a decade after the beverage was first reported in the West Indies, specifically in Barbados.

The origin of the word itself is as mysterious as it is interesting.

The word rum is believed to originate from rumbullion or rombustion, which in turn, according to Coulombe meant a "great tumult." It is not difficult to associate this definition to the effect of one-to-many shots of rum might have on a person.

Today rum is a sought-after spirit in stylish drinks and is the center of attention in tastings by connoisseurs. Its main purpose however was to produce sugar, which was the main reason sugar cane was brought to the Caribbean as early as Christopher Columbus travelled to the region.

All colonial powers – the English, Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and even the Danish – covered their respective colonies with this tall grass called sugar cane - to satisfy the sweet tooth of the Europeans.

The process of cultivating sugar yielded two by-products: sugar cane juice and molasses.

It is believed that sugar cane farmers passed the task over to slaves and their descendants, who toiled in these plantations, so that the upper echelon of Europe could sweeten their tea, coffee, and pastries.

According to Coulombe, the poor settlers on the islands discovered that they could ferment these by-products, especially molasses, into a stiff alcoholic drink that would offer some kind of respite.

Farmers took note and decided to partake not only in the drinking, but also in its production and commercialization, and brought over from Europe the technology used to distill other alcoholic spirits aimed at refining the characteristics of the product.

It seems that the Spanish were not that keen in rum as a commodity in their Caribbean goods and concentrated on the cultivating of sugar cane for the purpose of producing sugar.

However, it is a known fact that something was being distilled in these Spanish properties. As far back as the 18th century, the chronicler friar Iñigo Abbad y Lasierra in his "Geographic, civil and natural history of the island of Saint John the Baptist of Puerto Rico" praised the quality of the aguardiente, a type of distilled alcoholic spirit that contains between 29% and 60% alcohol by volume, produced in the Haciendas of Toa Baja.

This aguardiente was usually produced for local consumption, being less aged and easier to produce than rum. It was made from cane juice and not molasses. The aguardiente produced in the Hacienda of Agustín Lasua in Toa Baja is said to be one of the best produced in Puerto Rico, and even hints that there were alcoholic spirits distilled on the island in other locations.

Puerto Rico has certainly come a long way since the times of Abbad y Lasierra, becoming known as one of the top producers of high-quality premium rums - a reputation that began in the late 1800's and solidified in the 20th century.

The late 1800's saw the birth of rums like Don Q and Ron Barrilito, two brands that have become icons of premium rums produced on the island.

Furthermore, in the 1930's Bacardi, which was originally founded in Cuba, launched rum production operations in Puerto Rico, further strengthening Puerto Rico's reputation as a producer of top-quality premium rums.

And while legacy brands like Don Q, Bacardi, and Barrilito paved the way and cemented Puerto Rico as rum capital of the world, the latest upsurge in local craft rums such as Ron Artesano, that aim to offer a unique tasting experience, are already writing – or distilling – the next chapter of the island's rum history.

The process is important

So, when you sip that cocktail made with rum, or just enjoy a nice dark rum on the rocks, keep in mind that in a way you are tasting history!

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While our rums are made with local top-quality ingredients, we also pour in the joy, unique passion, and vibrant culture of the Puerto Rican people, making our rums stand out globally.

So, without further ado, we invite you to go out, enjoy yourself a cocktail or two, with one of our rums and **take a sip of the Puerto Rican spirit. ¡Salud!**

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This is your chance to go behind the scenes, see for yourself what goes into making the Rums of Puerto Rico and taste the results!

Seal of quality in every bottle

Puerto Rico is the only place in the world with a quality seal for rums. The seal was created to position the rums manufactured on the island as a premium product so we can maintain the standard that defines our rums. If you come across this black and gold seal with the three oak barrels and sugar canes, you know you're about to taste an exquisite rum aged to perfection. The oak barrels symbolize where our rums must be aged for at least a year and the sugar cane is where molasses, the main ingredient in our rums, is extracted from.

The Rums of Puerto Rico seal of quality is part of what sets our rums apart from any other rum in the world. The seal can't be applied to any product that doesn't meet the standards of quality set by Rums of Puerto Rico Program. Our rum-making legacy goes back more than 400 years, resulting from the island's history of sugar cane production. The rum industry brings in an annual revenue of approximately 500 million dollars to the Puerto Rican economy. More than 75% of the rum consumed in the USA, is produced in the island.



So, now that you know what the seal is about, we encourage you to look for it and make sure to take a sip of the Puerto Rican spirit. **Welcome to the Rum Capital of the World!**

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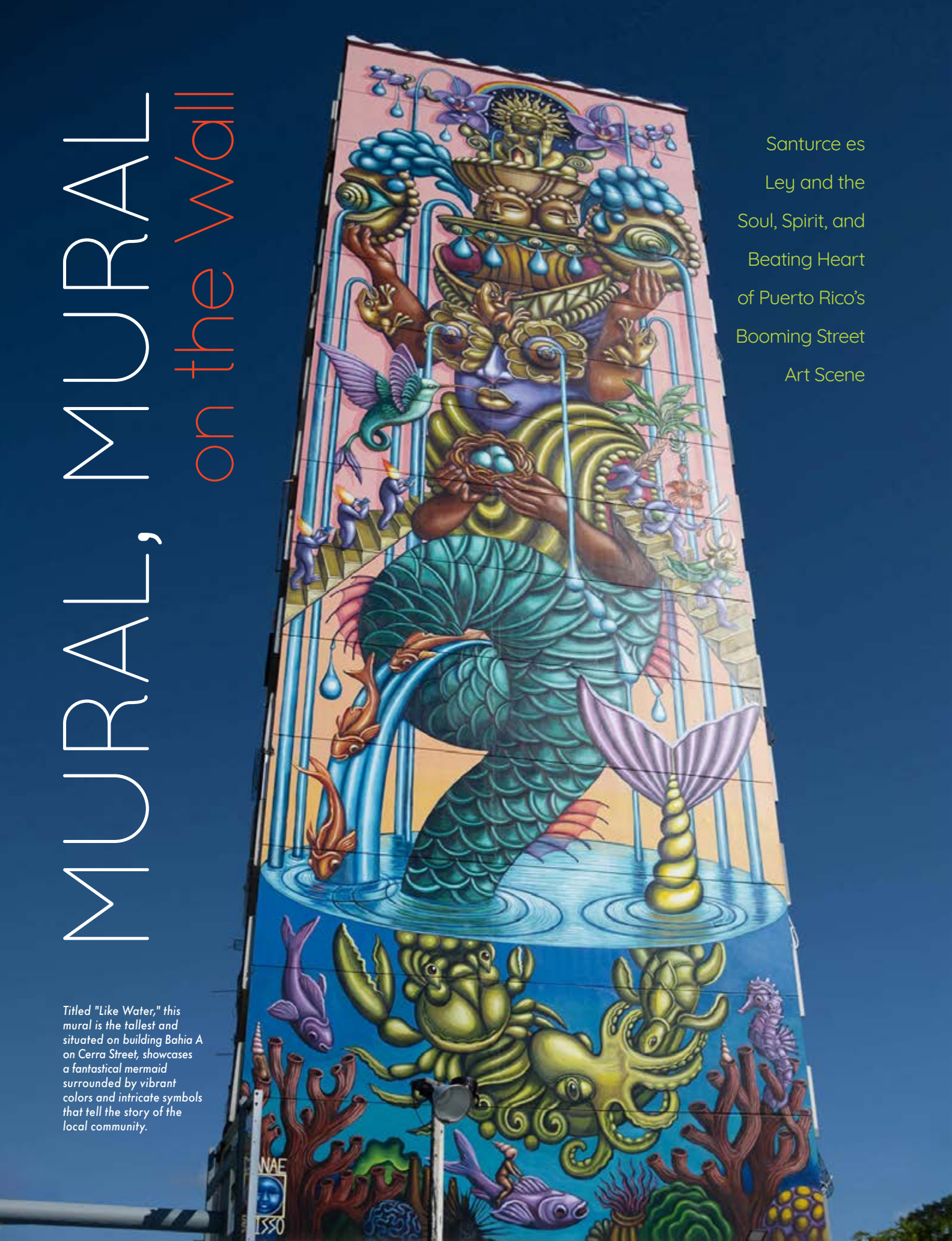
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MURAL, MURAL on the Wall

Santurce es Ley and the Soul, Spirit, and Beating Heart of Puerto Rico's Booming Street Art Scene



Titled "Like Water," this mural is the tallest and situated on building Bahia A on Cerra Street, showcases a fantastical mermaid surrounded by vibrant colors and intricate symbols that tell the story of the local community.



By DARIEN RIVERS

Art is everywhere in Puerto Rico. World-class museums, flourishing galleries, a rich tradition, and a deep pool of unique and talented artists make the island archipelago a natural choice for travelers looking for profound cultural experiences beyond the shining sun, sandy beaches and sparkling seas that draw people to the Caribbean. Case in point is the stellar street art scene, which is justly celebrated for an ever-growing array of stunning murals that breathe new life into storied urban centers and bring art out into the open for all to soak in.

Nowhere is this democratization of art more evident than in Santurce, a thriving San Juan neighborhood within strolling range of the capital city's tourism hub that boasts a myriad of murals soaring alongside and over a growing roster of galleries, restaurants, shops, and other hang out spots. On a logistical note, the muralist hot-zone is within easy reach of both the Puerto Rico Art Museum and the Museum of Contemporary Art of Puerto Rico.

Although it has been likened to Miami's Wynwood Arts District, Santurce's Calle Serra area stands apart as an accessible avenue into an evolving world inhabited by building-size paintings that speak to the unique experiences of Puerto Rico and of the local and international muralists who put their works on display for all passers-by. Walking among the transformed cement canvasses in this working-class and cultural focal point leaves one with the sense that Puerto Rico's street artists, and perhaps the island itself, are still early in an upward arc where the sky is the limit.

It is no coincidence that the area gave rise to Santurce es Ley, an annual street art festival dating back more than a decade that is unrivaled



Nowhere is this democratization of art more evident than in Santurce, a thriving San Juan neighborhood within strolling range of the capital city's tourism hub.

in the Caribbean and has spawned offshoots and similar-focused events across the Puerto Rico archipelago. In the process, local artists have deployed their passion and perspectives along pathways in downtown areas in virtually all the island's 78 municipalities, or pueblos, with particularly notable concentrations in the Loiza Street area of San Juan and the southwest coast town of Yauco among other muralist strongholds.

Founded by local artist Alexis Bousquet, Santurce es Ley is centered on the sector's vibrant Calle Cerra, where murals are birthed before our eyes in real time during an annual festival that has grown to incorporate music, gastronomy, and other cultural elements. It is a feast for the senses that encapsulates the spirit, soul and beating heart of Puerto Rico's street art universe. Bousquet has launched another public art initiative in the downtown area of Río Piedras, in the shadow of the flagship University of Puerto Rico campus, where a long-thriving commercial, cultural, and intellectual hub stands at the cusp of rebirth and renewal along the pedestrian walkway known as the Paseo de Diego.

As Santurce es Ley and the murals that mark it have grown in popularity and reach, it is perhaps important to reflect that the festival's foundational core remains the artists and the community – both the cement and asphalt one in which their works live and breathe as well as the one that coalesces around their collective creations. Santurce was and is the cradle of Puerto Rico's street art scene, with works at nearly every turn that shed light and provide insight on what Puerto Rico is and what it is to be Puerto Rican as interpreted by a cadre of top-notch creators.



With that in mind, BIENVENIDOS spoke with some of the muralists who have taken part in Santurce es Ley about their pathways into street art, their work and more.

SOFIA MALDONADO

Developing a sensibility for art at a very young age, Maldonado dove into the study of painting and ceramics at La Central High School, a public arts school in Santurce that was also her launching pad into murals. She went on to earn a bachelor's degree from the Escuela de Artes Plasticas before pursuing a master of fine arts degree from Pratt Institute, the renowned art school in New York City, and embarked on a thriving, diversified career that has seen her design the poster for the 2020 Latin Grammy Awards, teach budding artists at her alma mater and the University of Puerto Rico, study pre-Colombian painting techniques as an artist-in-residence in Puebla, Mexico and exhibit her works at prestigious events including the Whitney Biennale.

Maldonado made clear she was deeply shaped by her time as a high school student and subsequent studies in New York City, where her thesis professor expanded her perspective on studio practice by encouraging her to mix the street with academia. It was at La Central High School - surrounded by creative classmates including graffiti writers, painters,



and musicians – that her journey to murals began in earnest, according to the artist, who noted that stretches of Santurce were marked by unused buildings in the early 2000s.

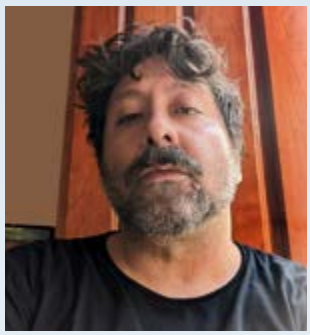
"Imagine a big playground for creative kids in search of self-expression," Maldonado said, recalling that she painted with leftover house paint picked in those early days. "Five bucks a gallon! Plus, they had dope colors," she said.

Maldonado's early focus was painting organic designs covering the dilapidated walls and abandoned structures. "The concept was no backdrop color. The architecture - and its imperfections - was my background," she said, adding that because many of her murals were put up guerilla-style in those days she essentially painted in anonymity under the tagline "Sofia" for several years. One of Maldonado's first wrap-around building murals was on La Torre building in Rio Piedras, a gathering place for poets and philosophers in the 1960s.

The multifaceted artist has also focused on painting female figures, which were initially characters inspired by women with an autobiographical aspect. "Reflecting back, they could have been the many women that inhabit me, ancestors, and personalities. Nowadays, with a deeper understanding of myself, all those characters were a crucial part of my journey into self-discovery, and layer shredding in order to evolve into the woman I am today," Maldonado said.

Maldonado's multi-track career finally landed her at Santurce es Ley for the 2023 edition. "The Santurce es Ley team has done a beautiful job of inviting local and international artists to paint murals in Puerto Rico," Maldonado said "I recognize the impact that these types of festivals have on local communities, therefore it has been an honor to be able to share my perspective of street art from a much mature state. I've been painting murals for 20 years - color abstraction is a visual respite within a society loaded with images and stimuli." Her mural for the festival included the planting of roughly a dozen plant varieties "with an aggressive character in their survival" because the sun hits the mural site very hard. "The experience of sharing this concern – is an essential part of my public art project. My artistic language is diverse, acknowledges its surroundings and respects the divine order of Mother Earth," according to Maldonado.

Outside of Santurce, Maldonado recommended mural hunting in the Hato Rey and Rio Piedras areas of San Juan as well as the Instituto de Subcultura, an exhibition space by the founders of Santurce es Ley, and The Spot, an urban art gallery and residency on the capital city's Loiza Street. "Puerto Rico is a very creative place; each municipality has its own artistic charm. I encourage you to venture outside the metro area," Maldonado urged.



JUAN GUTIERREZ

San Juan-native Juan Gutierrez found his way into the art world in far-flung places but right within reach of his fingertips.

"As a young kid I loved the photographs in National Geographic. They allowed me to travel without leaving home and got me thinking about what I was seeing from a young age," Gutierrez said, adding that he's an avid collector of magazines to this day.



In both his murals and smaller scale works, the 43-year-old is known for graphic and colorful works that have included insightful departures from classic images. Take for example his celebrated two-story tall, masked cowboy whose six-shooter unloads a volley of hearts from the wall of an Urban Train station in Bayamon, a booming metropolitan area city that itself is emerging as an important center for the arts in Puerto Rico.

Gutierrez said he was drawn to murals as an architecture student early in the street art movement boom as the elusive Banksy began making waves around the world. "I decided to ride that wave," he said. "Also, I was studying architecture and was looking at the city with new eyes. I suddenly saw the city walls as blank pages to share and communicate my ideas."

Close to home in the capital city, Gutierrez said his participation in Santurce es Ley has always been a fulfilling and enriching experience that represents positive momentum directly or indirectly for everyone creating art in Puerto Rico.

Looking out across the island, the literal and virtual traveler sees a surging muralist movement that is marked by its quality, variety, and evolution. "The talent, much like in music and sports, is world class. And you know where there is strong competition there will probably be a great product, in this case amazing mural art," he said.

Gutierrez pointed fellow travelers to muralist strongholds including Calle Loiza in the San Juan tourist zone, the southeast coastal town of Humacao, and the southwest coastal town of Yauco, where street art is brewing against the backdrop of a rich coffee-growing tradition.

The die-hard National Geographic fan urged people to poke around a bit. "Because you will probably find murals in almost every pueblo around the island."



PATRICIA ESPERANZA

Santurce-native Patricia Esperanza made an unexpected leap toward becoming an artist in her mid-20s when a Play Dough figurine she made caught the eye of a co-worker at the San Juan advertising agency where she worked as an event and promotion executive. Within a year, she was painting murals and, on the way, to earning a second degree in fine arts at the Escuela de Artes Plasticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico to add to a degree in communications and marketing from Sagrado Corazon University.

Studying color theory at the Escuela de Artes Plasticas y Diseño de Puerto Rico was pivotal to her journey into and path within a career as a professional artist and art teacher. "That class sparked my fascination with color and motivated me to bring life and movement to otherwise plain, uninteresting spaces. As an artist, I'm on a constant quest to find beauty in the simple and transform it," she said.

Abstract and optical in style, the works of the 37-year-old artist, whose mother is from Ponce and father is from Chile, often revolve around themes of intense color, motion, and transformation. "I love to use bold, dynamic color, abstract designs to breathe life into spaces that were once mundane and unadorned," the muralist, ceramist and educator said.



I love to use bold, dynamic color, abstract designs to breathe life into spaces that were once mundane and unadorned.

Patricia Esperanza sees Santurce es Ley as an "incredible platform" for artists in Puerto Rico. "For me, it represents a celebration of artistic expression and a chance to connect with a vibrant community of creators. My experience as a participating artist has been enriching, and it has allowed me to reach a broader audience," she said.

"Puerto Rico boasts a wealth of talented muralists," Patricia Esperanza continued. "The art of mural painting has gained recognition, and our island is becoming known for its vibrant street art scene. Many artists are using this medium to tell powerful stories and share their creative perspectives."

In addition to Santurce, Patricia Esperanza urged mural-seekers to explore other areas including Rio Piedras, Bayamon, Ponce, Yauco, the offshore island town of Culebra, and many other pueblos. "These areas provide a wonderful opportunity to witness the diversity of artistic work being done on the island," she said.

"Art has the incredible power to transform spaces and uplift communities," Patricia Esperanza said. "I believe that as an artist, my purpose is to contribute to the beauty of the world and inspire others to see the extraordinary in the everyday. Art has a unique way of connecting people and transcending boundaries, and I'm grateful to be part of this creative journey."



GUANINA COTTO

The first steps into art came early and organically for Guanina Cotto, a 30-year-old from the northwest coast town of Aguadilla who credits her artist mother for encouraging her to study and practice her budding interest from a very young age.

Over time, Cotto's often autobiographical work has been marked by personal and sociopolitical themes ranging from the erotic to exploration of what it is to be a woman of the Caribbean.

Cotto embraces her role as a creator against the backdrop of Santurce es Ley, a gathering she champions as a community event where the art is readily accessible to all who pass through. "I loved the experience," she said.

The artist posits that while Puerto Rico is home to a lot of talent in general, the economic, social political and political pressures of living and working on an island with an unresolved colonial status presents challenges – and provides inspiration – that can soak into the concrete walls that serve as soaring canvases for Cotto and her fellow muralists.

"I think many of us take those obstacles and disadvantages and transform them into art," she said.

While Santurce is clearly the cradle and continued hotbed for the art form in Puerto Rico, Cotto



noted that quality works can be found in urban centers across many of the island's 78 municipalities, or pueblos, and pointed aficionados to the western region towns of Lares and Yauco.



Beyond Museums in Puerto Rico



By ANA BEATRIZ UMPIERRE

Puerto Rico's artistic setting continues to grow exponentially. Through its diverse forms, artists are finding new ways to portray expression and cultural awareness. While Puerto Rico has a wide range of museums throughout the island, independent art galleries are growing in popularity.

Conceived by local creatives, these new spaces offer emerging artists an opportunity to present their work in a more casual setting. Vibrant and lively neighborhoods such as Santurce and Miramar have become a hotspot for contemporary and urban art.

Miramar's Calle Cerra, for example, is blooming with street art after last year's event Santurce es Ley. This public art event welcomes local and international artists to showcase their work across buildings and local shops bringing a vibrant and colorful look to the area. Those who visit Miramar are encouraged to look across this muralist strip.

The area has traditionally been art-driven whether in music or art. Angel Alexis Bousquet, the artistic curator and orchestrator of Santurce es Ley, has seen firsthand the evolution of the area and the blooming of local art galleries, including his own Instituto de Subcultura formerly known as Gallery C787 located in the bohemian corner of Santurce on Calle Cerra.

The Institute founded in 2009 was conceived as a contemporary art gallery focused on emergent, plastic, and urban artists as well as muralists. It also serves as an artistic residency where creatives can live and exhibit their work. Additionally, the gallery serves as a workshop for Bousquet and other artists.

Over 50 artists have showcased their works at the Institute including local and international talent. To increase attendance the gallery has been alternating between showcasing individual artist's works and those from collectives.

The most popular are interactive exhibitions, those containing sound or 3D sculpture elements that transform into experiences for the spectators. Bousquet explained that they try to find young artists who have innovative ways of using space and creative ideas on how to interact with the public. "We focus on starting from the ground up with these new artists and work with them and see their progress," said Bousquet.







Each space that opens to exhibit art is an opportunity for the artistic guild to grow and be known.

He added that this surge in artistic spaces has been positive. For example, artists who have never dared to come to the area are changing their views and are open to doing work in the region. While he recognizes that the number of galleries has decreased, the cultural exchanges between local and international artists as a result from Santurce es Ley, has produced networking and collaboration opportunities including hosting international artists as well as showcasing Puerto Rican artists across the Caribbean and Latin America.

Over the years, other galleries began to emerge including Recinto Cerra, Publica Espacio, and El Kilometro. Founded in December 2015 by local artists Karlo Andrei Ibarra and Yiyo Tirado Rivera both of whom graduated from Puerto Rico's School of Plastic Arts and Design, El Kilometro was conceived as a discussion and investigation platform related to contemporary artistic practices in Puerto Rico, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Since its inception, they have showcased over 100 exhibits and collaborated with more than 100 artists from Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Latin America. The El Kilometro is now located at Stop 18 in Santurce. One of its particularities is that it offers a cultural calendar and a cocktail bar allowing for entertainment while supporting emerging artists.

"Each space that opens to exhibit art is an opportunity for the artistic guild to grow and be known. These spaces bring opportunities to other groups, people, and younger artists," concluded Yiyo Tirado Rivera.



Instituto de Subcultura
(Galeria C787)
734 Cerra St. San Juan

Publica Espacio Cultural
1057 Ponce de León Ave.
San Juan

El Kilometro
619 Cerra St. (Stop.15)
San Juan



La Goyco thrives as a cultural and social anchor for Calle Loiza

By JOHN COOPER MARTÍNEZ

It may seem that in the past years Loiza Street in Santurce has slowly morphed from a road lined with all sorts of retail establishments into a culinary thoroughfare, featuring trendy restaurants, pubs, and coffee shops for all tastes and styles. And while locals and tourists alike may enjoy a bite and a drink, and then go back to suburbia, their hotels or bed-and-breakfast, they overlook the fact that Loiza Street is the heart and home of a vibrant community that has existed for more than a century.



"Like we like to say: aquí vive gente, people live here," said Mariana Reyes, the director of Taller Comunidad La Goyco, a truly unique project that has transformed the former Dr. Pedro Geronimo Goyco Elementary School into a thriving locale where programs, initiatives and activities keep the cultural and historic character and richness of the community alive, as well as offer resources that address the quality of life and well-being of its residents.

"One of our goals is helping the



Workshops, classes, orientations were happening, and we saw an opportunity at La Goya to bring everything together as well as retain a space that was emblematic of the community itself.

community thrive, defending the right of a livable city, becoming not only a cultural anchor but a place where the community can come together to tend the challenges it faces."

The structure of Taller Comunidad La Goyco itself is a testament to the history of the community, having served as an elementary school for generations of children from 1923 to 2015, when it was closed, and the property then passed from the central government to the San Juan municipal government. It was around 2018 when the community began vying for La Goyco to become a cultural and social center since there were already successful cultural, social, and educational initiatives in the neighborhood.

"Residents would offer services to members of the community in different spaces even in their own homes," said Reyes, who has called the neighborhood home for more than 20 years. "Workshops, classes, orientations were happening, and we saw an opportunity at La Goyco to bring everything together as well as retain a space that was emblematic of the community itself," said Mariana Reyes, director of Taller Comunidad La Goyco.



While Taller Comunidad Goyco, Inc. was formally incorporated in 2020, the community had already begun revamping the property, that consisted of three buildings with a total of 24,000 square feet. They had to deal with termites to refurbishing former classroom spaces for their new endeavor.

"It was a very inclusive process. We believe that everything has something to offer and could add value," said Reyes, whose late husband Tito Matos, a renowned master of plena music; was one of the most ardent supporters of La Goyco and held plena and bomba music workshops and classes at the former school seeing an opportunity to keep it alive as well as these musical traditions.

While La Goyco has hosted cultural events that range from exhibitions and concerts by artists, both well-known as well as emerging and cutting-edge talent, the role it plays as a purveyor of services that tend the well-being of the community cannot be understated.

"We view health as an integral part of the community, which is why we provide resources that range from a psychologist to a yoga instructor who volunteer their service as well as health-related clinics and activities," said Reyes, adding that something as simple as workshops on how to use a mobile phone or computer can be empowering to senior members. "We serve as a place to meet, talk and resolve challenges."

One of these challenges is the proliferation of short and mid-term vacation rentals in the neighborhood.

"La Goyco can be a unique and enriching experience for visitors, who can immerse themselves in the social and cultural life of the community. We believe more visitors are looking for this type of involvement," Reyes concluded.

The spirit of local crafted rums distills the next chapter in Puerto Rico's rum industry

By CARLOS GONZÁLEZ TORRES



Puerto Rico has made a name for itself in rum history, with brands that have placed the island on the map when it comes to the quality of the distilled spirit. Now a new batch of trailblazers are looking to add to the legacy by producing rums that take the experience to a next level. They are small-to-mid-sized operations that instead of concentrating of producing industrial quantities of the product, focus on developing rums that provide a unique tasting experience, where it is more than just an ingredient, it's the protagonist in a feast for the senses.

The process is important in rum production, which is why they are considered handcrafted or artisanal rums.

"We are looking for the sublime," said Jose Muñoz, CEO of Ron Artesano, which is distilled in the mountain town of Jayuya at La Destileria Craft Spirits. "We want to offer a product that aims to provide that uplifting experience to the person who tastes it."

This dream was born after Muñoz, who has had vast experience working in the alcohol industry, met Javier Herrera, a world-renowned rum master with knowledge in everything from sugarcane cultivation to the distilling process and blending, both agreed that Puerto Rico still had untapped trends in the distilled spirits world.

"We identified two microtrends, one in aged rums (añejos, in Spanish), and the other in the artisanal distilled spirits," said Muñoz. "Our goal was to create a rum that would be handcrafted, and produced in limited quantities so it could to stand out at an international level."

Getting the project off the ground was quite the challenge, but Muñoz and his partners decided to reach out to potential investors to raise capital through Puerto Rico's first equity crowd funding, where basically you could invest whatever amount in the company. And it worked, with investors chipping in anywhere from $100 to $10,000, and becoming a virtual stockholder in the company.



Artesano Pot Still is a white rum described as complex with a combination of strong flavors and aromas.



Overproof Rum is distilled at La Destileria Craft Spirits in Jayuya.



In photo from left to right, Luis J. Cruz, Distillery Chief Operations Officer at Ron Artesano, CEO and Founder Jose Munoz and Rum Maestro Javier Herrera.

"They believed in the brand and vision and helped us make it happen," said Muñoz, who highlighted the crafted aspect of the production of Ron Artesano, which is the use of alambiques (stills) for the distilling process, in contrast with large industrial rum producers that use large columns for this process.

Artesano Añejo's rum is aged between 3 to 5 years in white oak barrels which are typically used to hold bourbon. The rums is described as having sweet notes of dried fruits such as raisins, figs or dates, and aromas of cane honey and toasted wood refined with vanilla and cocoa to round off all the taste notes, as well as compote and candied fruits.

The company also produces Artesano Pot Still, a white rum described as complex with a combination of strong flavors and aromas yet a smooth experience. Both rums have already garnered awards by the American Spirits Council of Tasters Awards and the American Distilling Institute (ADI), the largest trade association dedicated to craft distilling in the world.

"Puerto Rico is certainly known worldwide as a top producer of rum, but this has been mainly in the white rum category in the U.S. mainland, which is produced at an industrial scale," said Muñoz. "We believe that besides the states, there is a great opportunity for Puerto Rican handcrafted dark, aged rums in Europe and Asia."



Tresclavos Ronsanto is the first Antillean rum blend made in Puerto Rico.

While technically sugar is not grown commercially in large scale in Puerto Rico, rum distillers must import the molasses used for their product mostly from Brazil and the Dominican Republic. Yet, there is one rum operation that opted to grow its own sugar cane on local soil.

"We said to ourselves why not?" said Jose Alvarez, founder of San Juan Artisan Distillers, which produces Ron Pepon in the coastal town of Vega Baja and is the first and only Sugarcane Estate Distillery in Puerto Rico. "Why not grow our own sugar cane for our rum, and make it a truly farm to table artisanal craft rum."


José Álvarez, founder of San Juan Artisan Destillers, which produces Ron Pepon.

As he worked on the growth of San Juan Artisan Distillers, Alvarez headed west to Central Coloso in Aguada. While it had ceased operation as a sugar cane mill in the early 2000's, it had nurtured a variety of sugar cane strands that had been grown in Puerto Rico. Alvarez drove back to San Juan with six-foot-long stalks of five varieties of sugar cane. From these, 25 pieces were planted in five rows on 2.9 acres of land, which eventually became close to 10 acres and then nearly 72.8 acres of sugar cane. To grind the sugar cane, the company acquired a sugar mill from Colombia and to distill the rum it purchased potstills that were previously used to produce French cognac.

The concept to produce an artisanal rum came to Alvarez from the experience of distillers in the French West Indies. In the 1970's, these French islands saw their sugar cane commercial production decimate by competition from sugar cane growers in Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia, which had more land. He decided to find a niche in the rum industry with what became known as rohn agricole. This rum agricole differs from other rums because it's produced from freshly squeezed sugar cane juice, instead of molasses, which is a by-product of the process of making sugar.









Tresclavos Ron Caña is a traditional Puerto Rican artisanal rum with that uses fruit in its fermentation process.

"The result is a rum that is very aromatic, with inimitable profiles and notes that make it a unique tasting experience," said Álvarez. "We definitely concentrate on quality rather than quantity."

While Ron Pepon Blanco Agricola is described as a well-balanced funky Agricola Rum with notes of subtle herbal aromas of freshly cut sugarcane, mineral and sugar honey, Ron Pepon Añejo, which is aged from 24 to 36 months in American Oak Whiskey Barrels, delivers aromas of vanilla, charred wood, whiskey and the herbal notes and funkiness of Ron Pepon Blanco Agricola. In 2021, Ron Pepon Blanco won a Fifty Best gold medal in the white rum category. All bottles are marked as limited editions by bottle, batch, and year of manufacture.



San Juan Artisan Distillers also delved into the production of what is known as ron caña or pitorro, a traditional Puerto Rican artisanal, or home-made rum, which is characterized by the of use fruit in its fermentation process. Thus, Tresclavos Ron Caña Agricola rum was born.

"We wanted to create a premium ron caña, that would take the characteristics of this type of rum to another level," said Alvarez, adding that to achieve it San Juan Artisan Distillers use fresh locally produced fruits, like passion fruit and pineapple, among others. "We could save a lot by importing frozen fruit, but we wanted a fresh product with ingredients that have not been processed to give Tresclavos its own taste, and help promote local farmers."

Meanwhile, out west in Puerto Rico there is also some distilling going on.

"We had been mulling over the idea as far back as 2006, but it wasn't until Hurricane Maria in 2017 that we started the process, with the goal of creating a business to boost the economy of Rincon and help the community," said Bret Pittman, founding Partner and Brand Director at Rincon Rum. Pittman added "we wanted it to be authentic to the original rums created in the west coast of the island. Porta Del Sol is the region where Puerto Rican rum was born – most people don't know this."
Pittman added, "I made myself familiar with various pitorros over the years, and essentially set out to create a high-end pitorro for this first product. One without the heat from being overproof, and as refined as we could make it."

Rincon Rum Silver is a blend of rums – one rum is distilled from Grade A molasses and the second is distilled from Puerto Rican sugar cane, then both are blended.

"The rum made with molasses is fairly neutral in flavor, whereas the sugar cane-based rum gives the note of grassy sweetness in the nose and palette," said Pittman. "We worked hard to balance the blend so that it would be authentic to its origin, while also being a crowd-pleaser."

According to Pittman the advantage of being a small operation is that it is allows for greater creativity and quality control. The challenge is "having to do everything themselves."

This is what probably allowed Rincon Rum to weather the COVID pandemic storm when the brand was launched in 2020, which posed challenges that ranged from bar and restaurant closures to supply chain shortages.

"We made it because we were doing everything ourselves and built the brand one step at a time," said Pittman. We were even able to help many businesses in Rincon during this period by selling the rum at our own cost for about 18 months."

The perseverance paid off, surprising Pittman with an overwhelming positive response to the rum.

"We had zero expectations going into this, so it's been wild to see so many people embrace it," said Pittman. "Rincon is not only a small town, but it's a world-famous surf destination – two qualities that can make a place insular…so I've been particularly blown away with how the town has supported us and allowed us to be a representative of such a special place."

Pittman is optimistic with what the future holds for Rincon Rum.

"We should have the first aged Rincon Rum called Ron Rincon Reserva ready in 2024," said Pittman. "The rest, I'll keep a secret for now…" B



Rincon Rum Silver is a blend of two rums, one distilled with molasses and the other with Puerto Rican sugar cane.



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TAKE a Shot

By DARIEN RIVERS

Puerto Rico's hotel casinos are a sure bet for people looking for a good time in a lively environment. And while casinos are certainly safe, they are just as clearly not tame. From the bright lights surging from a sea of slot machines to the edge-of-your-seat thrills around a wide array of gaming tables, casinos offer something for everyone willing to try their luck and test their skill. All this in the company of an eclectic mix of welcoming locals and players from around the world. Every great scene like this deserves a soundtrack and in Puerto Rico that often comes in the form of live music ranging from torch singers to full-blown salsa bands and everything in between.

Sports betting brings an exciting new dynamic in Puerto Rico's sizzling gaming scene - and now reaches into cyberspace

The island's tried-and-true casinos are characterized by their unwavering efforts toward renewal through investment in cutting-edge innovations while maintaining all the classic gaming options sought out by a diverse customer base. In short, the casinos continually work to satisfy high rollers and casual players alike as evidenced by their forays into sportsbooks. Sportsbooks represent a relatively new and increasingly popular addition to the island's ever-expanding gaming menu. Quickly gaining momentum since their introduction, sportsbooks are rolling along and have now entered a novel realm with the launch of online applications.

Look to industry leading sportsbooks Caesar's, which operates at Casino Metro at the Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel in the heart of the bustling San Juan Convention District and BetMGM, which operates at the Casino del Mar at the trendy La Concha Resort in Condado.

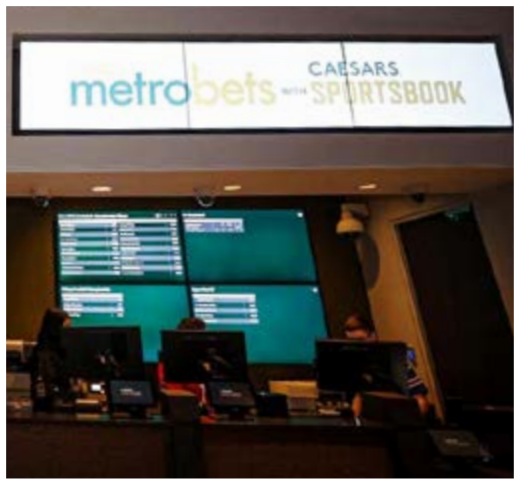
Both sportsbooks opened in 2022 and offer retail betting onsite on a full roster of sports leagues. But they didn't stop there. Both launched licensed mobile apps in 2023 that allow casual and more serious sports betting enthusiasts to get in on the action online. IGT arrived on the scene later in 2023 after entering a pact with the Ponce Plaza Hotel & Casino to provide retail and online sports betting via its IGT PlaySports platform. Other players are set to join in on the action as the Puerto Rico Gaming



Another stellar way to get paid for playing is the Jackpot del Encanto, which contemplates cash prizes reaching into the tens of thousands of dollars with minimal bets through special slot machines.



BetMGM operates at the Casino del Mar at the trendy La Concha Resort in Condado.



Metro Bets is located at Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel in the heart of the bustling San Juan Convention District.

Commission continues to field and approve applications to provide services in the emerging industry that generates economic activity and vital revenues for the government that go to essential needs including the University of Puerto Rico.

The first step for bettors into this new online arena is registering. A good option is to head through Casino Metro's "MetroBets with Caesars Sportsbook" portal - https://casinometro.com/en/metrobets/ - to get started. The mobile app is a leading-edge complement to the retail sportsbook at the casino that includes multiple betting windows and self-service betting kiosks for customers to place wagers. Dozens of LED TVs and odds boards to deliver a world-class sports viewing experience in San Juan.

JACKPOT DEL ENCANTO

Another stellar way to get paid for playing is the well-established, multi-progressive Jackpot del Encanto family, which contemplates cash prizes reaching into the tens of thousands of dollars with minimal bets through special slot machines at all 17 participating casinos around the island.

The Jackpot del Encanto family has been expanded to include Jackpot del Encanto Deluxe and Jackpot del Encanto Rapid. The latest addition, Jackpot del Encanto Rapid, offers players more game options and prizes at all participating casinos in expanded denominations range of from a penny to $5, appealing to low-denomination, medium-denomination, and high-denomination players in one game.

The jackpot of Jackpot del Encanto Rapid features a mystery progressive jackpot that starts at $30,000 and must be won before $45,000. The mechanism is very similar to the one already existing in Jackpot del Encanto Deluxe under the Dragon Link games, in which Mysterious Progressive starts at $40,000 and must be won before $60,000.

All the new Lightning Dollar Link titles - Checkered Flag, Chica Bonita, Kung Fu Master and Corrida de Toros - feature the popular Hold & Spin bonus, in which three bonus spins are awarded, and cash-on-reels symbols lock in place.

Players have a chance to win a major progressive or fixed jackpot (minor & mini) value up to three times from a single Hold & Spin symbol. In addition to the Hold & Spin bonus, Checkered Flag and Chica Bonita offer bonus games with the popular "Symbol Reveal" mechanic, while Kung Fu Master and Corrida de Toros offer bonus games with "Twin Spin" reels.

Leave the stress at home in Aguadilla



Crash Boat Beach in Aguadilla is one of the most popular beaches on the northwestern coast.

By ANA BEATRIZ UMPIERRE

If you are looking for a carefree weekend escapade, Aguadilla is the place to go. Located on the northwestern region of the island, this seafront town is idyllic for beach lovers. Visiting Crash Boat beach should be on the top of your list due to its captivating turquoise water. There are plenty of water-based activities to choose from including paddle boarding, swimming, snorkeling, or even just floating on the water.

Another must-see attraction is Peña Blanca beach, a small hidden gem, just a 12-minute drive from Crash Boat. Do get there early, as this beach has become increasingly popular, and seating space is limited. The best time to visit Peña Blanca is from late spring and summer (May to August), but depends largely on the tide.

After a long day of enjoying paradise and sunbathing, a night out with great food and drinks is the best way to put a perfect day to bed. The vibrant nightlife throughout Aguadilla's waterfront has something for everyone.

Rooftop bars and restaurants have become increasingly trendy in Puerto Rico, and Aguadilla is no exception. Sal de Mar Rooftop and Restaurant is highly known in the area, with a stunning view overlooking the town's bay, it will feel like dining in front of a painting. The menu is diverse, but as you enjoy the coastal lifestyle why not enjoy the catch of the day and the local seafood. Due to its popularity, a reservation will be needed, so don't forget to call in advance.

If you are looking to get a drink and soak in the warm ocean breeze, you can head over to Aguadilla Rooftop Experience (ARTE), just an 11-minute walk from Sal de Mar through Aguadilla's boardwalk. While ARTE has food available as well, its wide range of cocktails are something to try, including the variety of "Mules" including Moscow, London, Mexican, Kentucky and Jager.

However, if you are in the mood for a more spirited activity and an instagrammable picture, you can visit the Punta Borinquen lighthouse ruins. Only a 13-minute drive from Peña Blanca beach, the ruins predate the Spanish colonial area and are located in the Ramey Air Force Base. There are also hiking trails available for those who are looking to get in some exercise during vacation.

From there you can visit "el avión", an abandoned airplane close to the city center that offers street artists a chance to let their creativity flow; visitors a unique experience to immerse themselves onto a plane, and an Instagram worthy spot to close out a memorable trip.

As most locals will tell you, Aguadilla is always a good idea. And just a weekend trip to get away from the hassle of the city will revitalize your mind and body.

The 10 most popular Puerto Rican artists that appear on road trip playlists:

1. Bad Bunny
2. Luis Fonsi
3. Daddy Yankee
4. Marc Anthony
5. Pedro Capo
6. Farruko
7. Residente
8. Wisin & Yandel
9. Ricky Martin
10. Don Omar

SOCIAL

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San Juan: The place to sip and savor

By PETER MARTIN





These nightspots have making drinks in their DNA, and you can expect flavorful and inventive tapas and bar food, and in many cases full on dinner menus.



With the best nightlight and culinary scene in the Caribbean, San Juan unsurprisingly is home to several establishments that are places to drink and eat, mixing serious craft cocktail-making with cutting edge culinary creations that complement the libations on offer.

The city is full of tapas bars, gastropubs, speakeasies, taverns. Whatever you may want to call them. They have the soul of a bar, but formidable kitchens on par with the city's finest. Many are dominated by prominent bars, and several have enchanting exterior spaces. These nightspots have making drinks in their DNA, and you can expect flavorful and inventive tapas and bar food, and in many cases full on dinner menus.

It's not just San Juan either. You'll find sophisticated spots to sip and savor flavorful high end bar food all across Puerto Rico, including in the tourist-centric West. Check out Timber and Blues in downtown Aguadilla, for some "prohibition era-inspired" cocktails and bar food (or after dinner desserts) that rambles in and around a renovated historic building a block from the city's downtown harbor. La Jibarita, in Mayaguez, is a college bar known for its brunch and brick oven pizza, while wine (or live music) lovers may want to check the Set the Bar locale here or in Aguadilla. Rincon is not to be outdone with several options, but what is better than watching the sun go down at Marias Beach from the deck of Caddys Calypso Cafe, rum punch in hand and savory Caribbean smells wafting in the breeze?



The Roofyard at Loiza street is a great spot for a meal in its cool hipster interior.



Barullo Taberna Española at San Juan's T-Mobile District provides a traditional Spanish tavern experience that specializes in tapas or a full-on meal.





Out East, way out on Vieques island, there's the Mar Azul, right next to the ferry, an old school waterfront watering hole at heart with sumptuous food and views, while the dreamy Carambola restaurant at the Inn on the Blue Horizon has a gorgeous circular bar overlooking the south coast and fine Caribbean and seafood offerings.

You can find the gastropub experience across San Juan, but the city's historic downtown districts of Miramar and Santurce have perfected the art of drinking and eating like nowhere else, including along the Loiza Street district by Ocean Park. No spot captures the neighborhood's exuberance more than Loiza Roofyard, a rooftop bar and terrace with a wonderful menu of tapas and full dinners that overlooks the stretch of bars, boutiques, and restaurants of all stripes. There's often live music and dancing.

Roofyard's surrealism-inspired, arty interior bar mixes modern design elements with antique furnishings and chandeliers, and impactful murals and paintings. With a few stylish seating options, you feel like you are in an art gallery while enjoying a copper cup cocktail and the delicious mahi mahi ceviche or a Hawaiian pork belly slider.

The outside terrace is tropical minimalism at its finest, letting the sky, city views and tropical flora take center stage. You can get selection of fine Spanish meats and cheeses, or empanadas, for the table while enjoying a refreshing tinto de verano or the namesake house Roofyard cocktail, a mix of Banhez Mezcal Espadin with a passion fruit liqueur, Cointreau, and sauvignon blanc reduction. Other great finger food to help you power through your happy hours are garlic shrimp in roasted garlic parsley cream sauce or montaditos stuffed with Cuban shredded beef ropa vieja or codfish serenata.



The Roofyard also is a great spot for a full meal, with tasty salmon and churrasco entrees, among others. You can do it in the cool hipster interior or on the breezy patio. There's always something going on at Roofyard, including art exhibits and live events.



Barullo offers craft and classic cocktails, including the house specialty San Sebastián (a mix of gin, lime, and ginger beer) and flavorful spritzers and sangria blends.

San Juan's T-Mobile District, the convention and entertainment center where Miramar meets Condado and Puerta de Tierra, is the city's latest party scene where the art of drinking and eating have been taken to new heights – nowhere more so than at the fabulous Barullo Taberna Española, which provides a traditional Spanish tavern experience in sleek, modern surroundings at any time of day or night. Known for its self-serve "wine wall," this emporium of Iberian pleasure has some of the finest vintage varieties on offer in Puerto Rico and a range of craft and classic cocktails, including the house specialty San Sebastián (a mix of gin, lime, and ginger beer) and inventive and flavorful spritzers and sangria blends.

Barullo is the spot whether you want a drink and snack before or after a show at the Coca Cola Music Hall or a full-on meal. It specializes







Timber and Blues is a speakeasy bar located in downtown Aguadilla, a few steps away from the comforting waters of the Atlantic Ocean.







Set the Bar in Mayaguez in one of the best spots in the west coast with a great ambiance to have some drinks or eat tapas.







Carambola at the Inn on the Blue Horizon has a gorgeous circular bar overlooking the south coast and fine Caribbean and seafood offerings.

in tapas, like patatas bravas or roasted eggplant, delectable cheese boards with fine Spanish meats and other toppings like infused honey, marinated olives and spiced nuts, and crispy Spanish flatbread pizzas. The paella, crafted with bomba rice, sofrito and pimentón, is specialty and a natural choice for a full meal, but certainly not the only one, with seared bacalao or salmon and grilled hanger steak also on offer.

You can also try Fideua, which is a Valencian dish like paella but crafted with noodles.

Barullo's serves weekend brunch and delicious sandwiches, pastries, coffee, and smoothies from its Cafecito to-go bar. Try Spanish deli specialties like Cubano sandwiches and croquettes or the house version of avocado toast, with cilantro, red onion and radishes drizzled in extra virgin olive oil, which is unique and amazing.

Also in Miramar is Jamon Jamon, a wine and tapas bar that offers a delightful mix of Spanish and Italian food, a great wine list and effervescent craft drinks. This is a fun, lively spot with a big outdoor terrace overlooking downtown San Juan's main avenue. Have a refreshing St. Germain spritz or the lemon zazzy ginger house cocktails while devouring traditional appetizers like tomato garlic bread or a meat and cheese board, or dig into the unique like risotto balls or mushrooms stuffed with sauteed veggies. The house shrimp with prosciutto, tomatoes, and mushrooms, and the oh so buttery and lemony pork scallopini.



and live music, and the thumping DJ dance music.

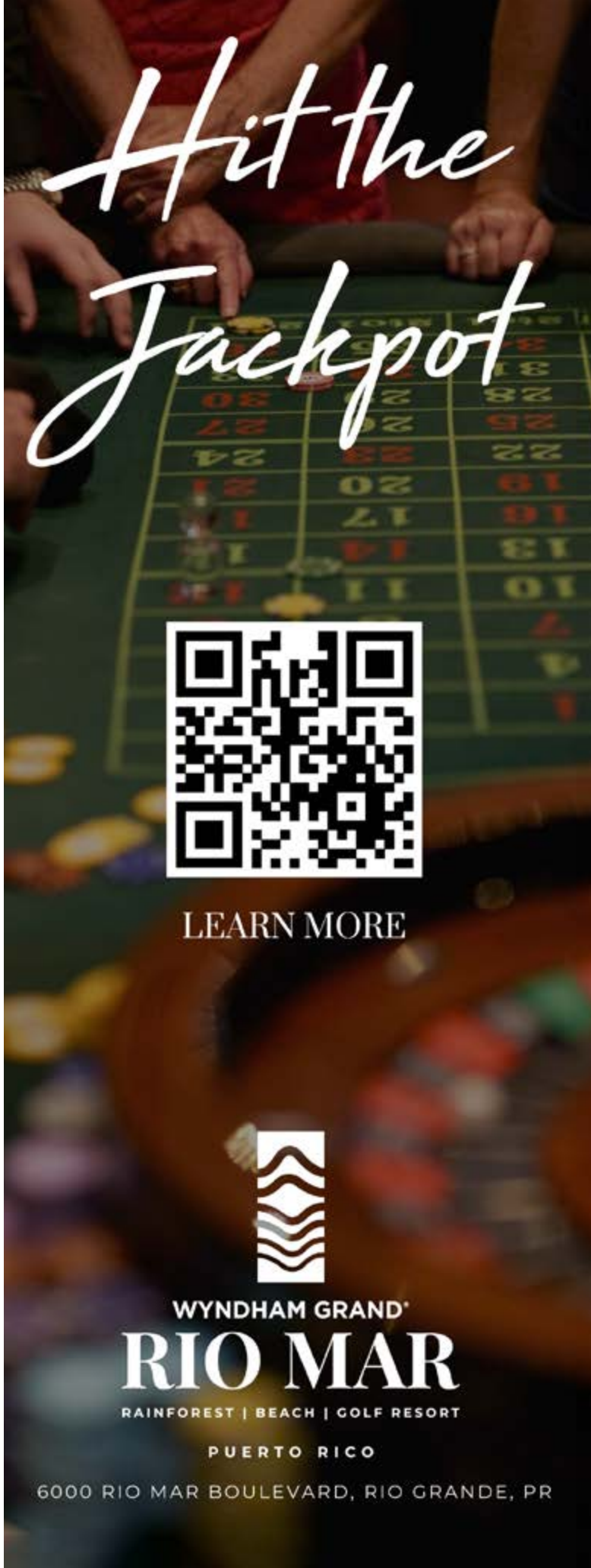
La Factoria, in Old San Juan, however, is not to be outdone. Its main entrance is on the old town's party strip, San Sebastian Street, in the former Hijos del Borinquen bar, but a "secret passageway" wind through several historic buildings and through six distinct club zones, some with live music or DJ music and dance floors, and others offering neighborhood tavern ambience, including a wine bar with great bar food. Regularly voted one of the best 50 bars in the world and a recipient of the coveted James Beard Award, this is a spot for serious cocktailing. Creative concoctions include the cucumber splash and champagne floater, not to mention a whole menu of rum drinks.

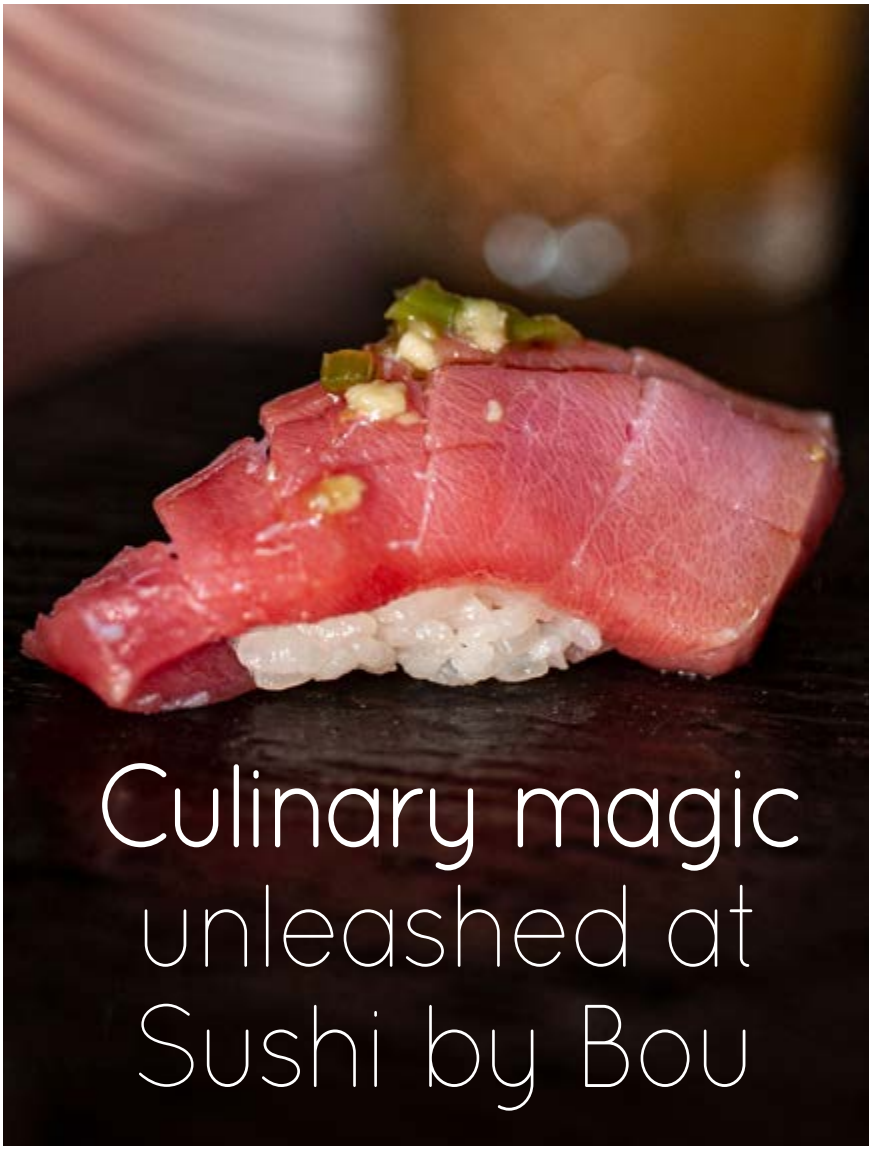
The Santurce arts district, where urban art comes alive, is lined with buildings whose facades are the canvas for huge murals, and is another area proving San Juan is THE spot to eat and drink.

One of the better options, an arty spot-on Calle Cerra to savor the sounds and flavors of evening is Galería, which offers "sips & kitchen" to youthful night owls. Come here for the cutting-edge craft cocktails and the changing "pop up" culinary options and for the art exhibits



The lunch menu at Calypso Cafe in Rincon features a variety of options including mouth-watering burgers.





Culinary magic unleashed at Sushi by Bou





Sushi by Bou is not just dining, it's a pioneering Japanese experience under the omakase cuisine concept that tantalizes the senses, invites curiosity, and celebrates the art of sushi at Fairmont El San Juan Hotel in Isla Verde.

In this restaurant, the chef chooses what you eat based on the seasonal availability of the fish, vegetables, and other ingredients.

Sushi by Bou offers two menu options of 12 or 17 courses for an exclusive group of up to 12 people, there's limited seatings per night. This arrangement creates an interactive dynamic with the chef to create a captivating culinary experience. Besides getting individualized attention by the chef, guests have the treat of enjoying their own mixologist and private host to satisfy every need.

The ingredients originate from all over the world, mainly from the oceans of Japan and the best fish markets in Tokyo. Therefore, each piece of sushi is prepared adjusting to existing ingredients making every visit unique and every bite masterful. The menu offers handrolls and other a la carte choices including desserts like







the coveted mochi ice cream, artisanal cocktails, highballs, imported saki, saki flights and a selection of Japanese beers.

Sushi by Bou is located just steps from the charming hotel lobby, like a speakeasy where everyone wants to discover it. The restaurant has the appeal of the architectural elements of El San Juan hotel but with a modern and polished touch due to its furnishings, design, and lighting. Each one of its locations is characterized by its interior design, with a different and exclusive theme that is adapted to the character of where each is situated. Thus, the space in Puerto Rico emulates an entertaining, youthful, and energetic ambiance with vanguardist murals designed by local artists.

The Sushi by Bou concept was created by SimpleVenue in New York. During the last years, SimpleVenue has engraved a footprint in the U.S. mainland opening numerous state-of-the-art sushi concepts specializing in the omakase experience. The restaurant is open Mondays and Thursdays from 6 p.m. to 11 p.m., Fridays from 6 p.m. to 1 a.m., Saturdays from 5 p.m. to 2 a.m., and Sundays from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. For information or to make reservations, visit www.sushibybou.com.



Fly Dining takes guests to NEW HEIGHTS

By ANGEL JOSE DE LEON



Have you ever visited a restaurant that elevates your senses while eating? Well in San Juan there is one that lifts you before your dining experience begins.

We are talking about Fly Dining, where gourmet cuisine meets breathtaking heights at over 100 feet above ground level. Your seat is part of a unique structure that accommodates 24 guests around a table and bar along with a staff that includes a chef, host, waiters, and DJ.

The thrilling experience starts as soon as you arrive at 1807 Loiza Street. All guests are fitted with a wristband and escorted to a waiting room that is a bar where you can order a drink or appetizers while you wait for your boarding time.

Guests are presented with a menu that changes every two months. The arugula salad with beets, smoked goat cheese with nuts, tomatoes and vinaigrette dressing as well as the pumpkin soup with carrots, pear and ginger are the same food items for all but guests can choose their main dish. The options are roasted chicken breast with mushrooms and parmesan cheese; beef ribs in sauce with vegetables or shrimp with polenta, herbs, and cheese.

Dessert options include vanilla and lemon cheesecake with raspberry





Chef Adrián Acosta, Fabiola German, N Bella, Cristian Alvelo, DJ Jay Vega and Hollis Wheeler, make your dinner in the sky special.







sauce or a white chocolate tart with strawberries and merengue.

When it's time to fly, the host will direct you to your seat and when all guests are securely strapped in that's when the fun begins. There are no weight limitations but it is highly recommended that guests are at least 55 inches tall to be able to sit comfortably and reach the table.

Once seated, guests are served champagne but you can request your beverage of choice. The DJ creates the festive setting and the chef begins to prepare dinner. Slowly the entire structure is lifted by a single crane to suspend guests in the air.

At the top, the aerial setting gives you 360-degree views of Loiza Street, parasailing in Isla Verde and Ocean Park, the planes arriving or departing to or from Luis Munoz Marin airport, but nothing beats seeing a spectacular sunset from a different perspective while sipping bubbly with the cool breeze caressing your face.

Gradually the food plates are parading in front of you and the attentive staff guides you through the entire experience.

Once it's time for dessert, the music continues even though the dinner experience is about to end. The staff provokes guests to dance in their seats, sing Happy Birthday and even throw confetti. The ambiance is so fun that you don't even realize your being lowered to the ground.

When safely landed, the staff helps take off the safety belts and everyone passes to the waiting room.

Fly Dining is open from Wednesday to Sunday and offers several experiences. They serve Brunch with a View on Saturday and Sunday and the experience lasts about 45 minutes and includes a 3-course meal along with a few alcoholic and nonalcoholic beverages. There is Happy Hour in the Clouds available from Wednesday to Sunday with one seating daily at 4 p.m. This is a 35-minute experience and includes unlimited house bubbly served with a few appetizers. And the Dinner amidst City Lights available Wednesday to Sunday at 5:30 p.m. or 7:30 p.m. seating. The 55-minute experience includes a four-course meal just before or after sunset.

Fly Dining also provides a kid's menu with items like peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, mac and cheese with chicken and French Toast with strawberries and cream.

There's no doubt Fly Dining is entertaining, adventurous and most of all unique. B



Pizza in Puerto Rico: It's a Local Thing

By PETER MARTIN

The abundant variety and authentic deliciousness of pizza in Puerto Rico may surprise you, but it shouldn't. Puerto Rico pizzaioli for decades have been serving up the real deal -- whether it's the gooey, golden scorched glory of a tomato and shredded cheese New York-style slice, or the velvety crunch of a Napoleantan wood-fired pie delicately balancing a symphony of fresh herbs and vegetables.

If pizza's your thing, San Juan's got you covered.

It's unlikely you will find consistently better pizza anywhere in the Caribbean and large swaths of the U.S.; the best of San Juan's pizza parlors can compete with any pizza capitals. San Juan's pizza culture has been growing steadily over the years since first taking root in the 1970s, and a number of young chefs are behind a more recent wave of authentic and unique Neapolitan and wood-fired pizza spots flourishing in the city, and taking Puerto Rico pizza-making to new heights in the process.



Feast on Neapolitan pizza at Casa Pimenton in Santurce.



The island's ties to New York date back longer than West Side Story, and this includes familiarity with the lush flavors of legendary Big Apple pizza emporiums. The frequent stateside sojourns taken by local chefs who often spread their wings out in the world before coming home to roost their prodigious talents, has also helped develop the sophistication and worldliness of island pizza-making.



The city's rising pizza culture also includes new culinary upstarts that are doing pizza on their own terms.

In addition to the U.S. East Coast influence, the city's pizza culture owes a debt to the Argentine establishments that have opened up here over the last 30 years, which offer sturdy, wood-fired pizza along with traditional grilled churrasco and chicken and a few strategically selected Italian entrees.

The city's rising pizza culture also includes new culinary upstarts that are doing pizza on their own terms, and whose creative renditions measure up against the best of California pizza kitchens.



La Santurcina is a neighborhood spot in Santurce that serves Neapolitan-style sourdough pizza with farm fresh ingredients.





Fidela in Santurce serves woodfired sourdough pizza and refreshing Aperol Spritz.





Some of the new pizzaioli are part of a broader authentic, back-to-roots culinary movement by young city chefs that embrace both local flavors and varied techniques of global cuisine. Another strong influence, however, stems from the years-old establishments in San Juan, places like La Cueva del Chicken Inn or Faccios, whose unique takes on this Italian-American classic have defined pizza for generations of sanjuaneros, and helped forge the local standard, which embraces the familiar flavors of an East Coast slice with a bit more heft in the cheese and crust components.

There are many measures of a city's culinary chops, and I'll submit that taking the temperature of the local pizza scene is among the best indicators for gauging the quality of the broader cuisine available. San Juan passes the test with flying colors, providing additional evidence of the city's continued status as the Caribbean's gastronomic capital because of the plethora of Americas, European, Asian and local comida criolla dining options.

There's great pizza at street stands and food trucks, stand-alone pizzerias, established restaurants and







Enjoy a wood-fired brick oven pizza with a view at the dreamy Eclipse Restaurant at Villa Montana in Isabela.

bars. Even out on the island, at music and artisan fairs, or during Patron Saint festivities, you'll likely find thin carnival pizza slices, splattered with oily and herby bubbling cheese and tomato sauce on crispy, cracker-thin crust. Local pizzerias are as ubiquitous as local fondas serving comida criolla or Chinese and fast food restaurants across the island.

Want evidence that pizza fever is not confined to San Juan? Take a drive through the northwest, from Quebradillas to Rincon, and see the steady stream of roadside pizza trucks and standalone pizzerias. Or you can enjoy a wood-fired brick oven pizza with a view at the dreamy Eclipse Restaurant at Villa Montana, Isabela or at some beachside pizza truck you will undoubtedly pass by en route. If you make it all the way to Mayaguez, try the authentic Napoleantan at Julio Cesar restaurant, right off the city's historic main square. The restaurant will likely be the most beautiful you have visited in recent memory, and pizza lives up to the surroundings.

So when you happen upon a slice in Puerto Rico, go ahead and take a bite. It's sure to pass the "no flop" barstool pizza test, and you're likely to find the pizza as flavorful as the locals do.

Nowhere is the pizza revolution more apparent than in downtown Santurce, where several pizzerias have opened up among traditional lunch spots serving Puerto Rican food to office and construction workers.

La Santurcina is a friendly neighborhood spot that serves glorious Neapolitan-style sourdough pizza with farm fresh ingredients that will delight hard core pizza fans and veggie loving gormands alike. The kitchen crew is the same team that backs the amazing Viranda, a nearby farm to table bistro, and they bring the same expert work with herbs and vegetables, as well as a solid cocktail and wine menu, to the pizzeria. The Beeteroni, a beet pizza with the flavor of traditional Italian sausage, and the La Del Chef, a wonder of caramelized onion and pancetta, are among the signature pies here. La Santuricina also has a mix of Italian-American and Spanish appetizers, and an eggplant parmigiana that would have credibility in any Brooklyn dining room.

Born in a food truck near Santurce's Plaza del Mercado, Fidela's move to a proper restaurant has not diminished the seductive flavor of its woodfired sourdough pizza, or the long lines of adoring fans who know what's worth the wait. Don't shy away from a basic pomodoro or margarita pie here because the char is always perfect and the really special thing is the balance between the dough and cheese. Other house favorites include the honey pepperoni and the cacio e pepe white pie. Start out with the marinated peppers and olives appetizer or the fresh country salad here, and by all means throw back a refreshing Aperol Spritz that will make you feel black shades and Vespa chic.

Also nearby is Casa Pimenton, located in a restored residence near





Casa Pimenton is located in a restored residence near the Santurce marketplace.

the Santurce marketplace. Here too you can feast on Neapolitan pizza that is baked in a traditional Italian brick oven at intense heat that seals the melange of flavors. Artisan beer is available through self-service taps along one wall, and there is an ample wine selection. Pizza is the specialty but traditional pasta and risotto dishes, along with Italian appetizers, round out the menu.

Via Appia has been a fixture on Condado's Ashford Avenue since the 1970s and still draws a crowd every day and night, with its classic East Coast style pizza and red sauce Italian classics. There's a relaxed Jersey shore feel to the spot, with its huge outdoor terrace, no frills food market style seating and a more formal dining room, and the kitchen still rocks after all of these years. One of the most beloved pizzerias in San Juan, Via Appia also makes a killer clams posillipo and probably the best chicken parmigiana in the city.

Pirilo Pizza Rustica, with locations in Old San Juan, Ocean Park and Dorado, first brought artisan pizza to scale in the city. Order one of the chef's craft pizzas or build your own rustic pizza delight. The menu is chiseled from from Italian, South American and Spanish influences, with an awesome chicken milanesa, tapas like Spanish sausage in wine sauce or Puerto Rican rice croquettes, and a selection of homemade pastas. The Old San Juan location, which sprawls across two floors of a historic building and features upstairs and downstairs bars, is a great spot to hang out and grab a bite.



Pirilo Pizza Rustica, with locations in Old San Juan, Ocean Park and Dorado, first brought artisan pizza to scale in the city.

Selena, over in Río Piedras by the University of Puerto Rico, serves New York City-style extra-large, grab and go slices, with a unique twist on traditional offerings. The namesake Selena slice blends pepperoni, bacon and maple syrup, while the Teresa combines three different types of onions and balsamic vinaigrette. Selena's magic is in the dough, which is made fresh daily through a unique fermentation process and results in a crunchy yet delicate thin crust that will enchant you.

Puerto Rico's pizza craze has also hit the popular Loiza Street area near Ocean Park, with several spots offering fine slices. Loiza 2050 is an area institution, however, with its ultra thin, ultra crispy pizzas, as well as its craft whiskey and beer offerings, drawing a loyal following for more than two decades. Traditionalists will be satisfied with the meat lovers or regular pizza option, but the place is also known for its inventive twists like coconut and pumpkin crust. Combinations include pork with Colby cheese and bourbon sauce, toasted almond and pesto and a smoked salmon Brie cheese and caramelized onion pie.


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Style and substance share center stage at Bad Bunny's stellar eatery at the Mall of San Juan

Lala A Symphony for the Senses



By DARIEN RIVERS

Puerto Rican musical artist Bad Bunny has followed that recipe on his path to global superstardom, delighting tens of millions of fans around the world along the way. Luckily for food lovers, the same blend of qualities is on full display at Lala, his stellar new restaurant at the gleaming Mall of San Juan.

Located within a quick hop from a range of travel hotspots, Lala is accessible and elevated with a menu, setting and staff that combine to deliver a remarkable culinary experience. There's magic in the air here – a symphony for the senses – as the elements combine to meet the eatery's mission to be a destination for foodies, the adventurous and those seeking a night (or day) out that is beyond the ordinary.

Setting the scene, Lala strikes a balancing act in being both modern and homey. The airy space - soaring ceilings, contemporary colors, and chic furnishings – is exhilarating and inviting at the same time. Soaking in the settings as your host guides you to your table it becomes clear that plenty of thought and talent went into the shaping of the space which artfully incorporates a raw bar, cocktail bar, chef's table, two private dining rooms and wine cellar with more than 300 labels. A DJ booth adds to the heady concoction.

Arguably the most striking feature in this stunning locale is the open-air kitchen, not surprising for a restaurant where substance never plays second fiddle to style. Simply put, while the ambience draws you in, it is the food that will keep adventurous diners coming back for more. Yet there is no clank and clatter from the kitchen, rather a sustained hum as the chefs compose remarkable dishes that mash up global flavors with top-notch ingredients.



The menu clearly marked by notes of Asian fusion is out of this world.

The menu, while clearly marked by notes of Asian fusion, is out of this world. Worth noting is that offerings range from luxurious to familiar on a menu that serves Lala's aim to make visitors feel at home regardless of where they are coming from.

Start with something from the raw bar, whether a progressive flight of oysters, a sample of nigiris or a selection from the crudo offerings. All super fresh and scrumptious. The appetizer offerings are no less impressive as the new spins are taken on salads, seafood, and other fare. Try the A5 Wagyu beef on a hot stone and prepare for liftoff.



At Lala's, you can indulge in various delectable dishes to tantalize your taste buds.



Mezcalita.



The Wellington.



Manchego Croquettes with Candied Papaya.

Turning to Lala's pasta course, think carefully edited rather than all encompassing. They regularly do about four pasta plates and they do them very well. No directions from us here, just know that you can't miss regardless of which direction you choose to go.

On to the crescendo, the entrees, where crispy skinned salmon and swordfish schnitzel hold down the deep end along with pan seared Maine dayboat scallops. Grounding dishes include filet mignon, eggplant steak and pan roasted chicken. And although we can't get into the myriad elements and techniques that go into each offering, suffice it to say the production team is at full stride.

On the simpler side, but no less expertly delivered, are grilled selections finished on Japanese charcoal. Whole branzino, a 50-ounce tomahawk, Kurobuta double pork chops and a 16-ounce New York strip speak to Lala's insistence on letting world-class provisions shine through.

But please save room for the finale – dessert.

There is a not-so-secret ingredient



Tres Leche.



Chocolate Praline Bar.



Personable and professional staff make up this must-do dining experience.

at play that really pushes Lala over the top – which it its knowledgeable, personable, and professional staff of servers, runners, bartenders, and other pieces of the puzzle that make up this must-do dining experience. To watch them in action is something, a choreographed dance of constant motion that is efficient yet unrushed, considerate but never intrusive. Don't hesitate to pepper them with questions regarding food and drinks, they know their stuff. And don't shy away from taking recommendations on putting together a meal course-by-course.

The gastronomic offer can be paired with a wine list that includes nearly 300 labels from wine regions around the world. Added to this is a designer cocktail menu that includes the Electric Lemongrass, Be humble, Jasmine, Yao Min, Chlorophyll, Lalalandia and Quickie.

In addition, Lala offers several dessert options such as the Chocolate Praline Bar and the Tropical Tart.

Lala encapsulates a multitude of representations rolled into one culinary haven. B











As the sun shines a new style of shades emerges

By ANA BEATRIZ UMPIERRE

2017 marked a before and after for Puerto Ricans, it was a mandatory pause, remembers Christie Milagros Sánchez. But while a lot can be said of the challenges faced during that time, for others it was a new opportunity.

Having an interest in all forms of art, Christie Milagros Sánchez took a leap when, after 18 years of working for Puerto Rico's Department of Education, launched her own sunglass brand, Bori.

Thus emerged a new style of wood-based sunglasses and accessories. Committed to the environment, Christie aimed to bring novel eco friendly and accessible shades to the Puerto Rican market. Walking away from traditional heavy frames, she started looking for more lightweight options such as bamboo -which is water resistant and floats- and wood from old skateboards.

At the beginning her sunglasses were made from the materials she would find around her, but as demand and production increased she had to find other ways to do it faster and make it more affordable.

"I decided to focus on design and work alongside suppliers to help with the manufacturing," explained Christie. "This allowed me to offer affordable prices. Sometimes you would look for polarized sunglasses and they were very expensive. I wanted everybody to have the opportunity to have their Boris".

Each one of the lenses are regulated and approved by the FDA and each goes through a series of quality tests. While people may think it's an easy process, the frames are also tested to ensure they are impact-resistant.

Throughout the years, Bori has been diversifying to other wood-inspired products such as purses, ties, and earrings. A collection of trendy caps with wooden and cork-based stamps completes the assortment of this local store.

Inspired from her experience





participating in numerous pop-up shops and bazaars that contributed to her brand's growth, she decided to open Bori Local Market, a local brand store that houses 16 other vendors.

"When I decided to open my [physical] store, it was originally meant for Bori, but something in my heart said 'let's do something as a collective and that's when I selected the brands that best aligned with the concept of Bori Local Market", said Christie.

Throughout the years, Bori has been diversifying to other wood-inspired products such as purses, ties, and earrings.

Located in Caguas, just a 30-minute drive from San Juan, this local market sells an array of products ranging from hand-made soaps, jewelry, clothes, coffee, tea, lamps and pet products.

The idea is "to help other entrepreneurs have a place to sell and showcase their products".

Bori Local Market is located at the Avenida Degetau in Caguas.





Handbags inspired by the Caribbean's bright colors



By ANA BEATRIZ UMPIERRE

At a young age Rachely Mota, 29, was mesmerized by the art of sewing. Her paternal grandmother would make her dresses and she would stare at every stitch from the sewing machine. In her free time, she would gaze at the TV for hours watching fashion shows enthralled by the designs.

These interests did not go unnoticed by her mother. At the age of eleven, she was gifted her very own sewing machine.

Her earlier work included clothing for her dolls and other smaller items. In middle school she took home economics where she learned about fashion illustration, allowing her to create her first drawings and sew her first bag.

During high school, she studied at the trade school Miguel Such, where she focused on tailoring and confectioning clothes. She later went on to major in interior and graphic design.







Interior design was eye opening and laid the groundwork for what would later inspire her biggest work. She continued to toil at a fabric store where she gained more knowledge in terms of types of fabrics, color schemes, materials, and designs.

After a while she decided to begin sewing handbags. For almost a year, Rachely took on two jobs to outfit a second room in her apartment that would soon house the operations of MOTA Handbags. "I must do what I love to do. Because if not, what point is there in living a life that we don't want", Rachely told herself as she took on the challenge of launching her brand.

The Covid-19 pandemic catapulted the sales and the brand. Her social media accounts grew and her brand became more and more recognized. She began participating in markets and pop-up shops.

"MOTA's focus is to represent Caribbean women," explained Rachely. Her bags are inspired from the Caribbean's bright colors, the palm trees, Amapolas (poppy flowers), and even Puerto Rico's iconic losetas criollas (national floor tiles). "I want people who wear my bags to feel represented everywhere they go."

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MOTA is something beautiful because it is done with love.

In her crafting process, Rachely wanted to ensure that each product was multipurpose. Driven from her experience of working at a textile shop, the fabrics used in these purses are for upholstery, bringing a high-quality and resistant product. A plus side is they can be hand washed without losing quality. Other materials include bamboo -which is also recycled- and wood. She also aims to take advantage of all the material available. Any remnants of fabric from larger purses are upcycled and turned into smaller purses or wallets.

Rachely's dream is for MOTA to be an international brand. She currently presents as a vendor annually at New York City's iconic Chelsea market that welcomes international entrepreneurs.

"MOTA is something beautiful because it is done with love. I am an empowered woman," celebrated Rachely. If you are in Puerto Rico, be sure to stop by her cart in Plaza las Americas in Hato Rey and get a Caribbean stylish memento. You can also visit her web page and order online at motahandmadebag.com.



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Choosing to marry that special someone in Puerto Rico

By ANA BEATRIZ UMPIERRE

Destination weddings are incredibly attractive. Its perks? Visiting a place you have never seen before but always wanted to, or for some it means going back home and celebrating your most special day in the place that watched you grow. Regardless, it is guaranteed to make your special day even more unforgettable.



Grand Ballroom at the Fairmont El San Juan Hotel in Isla Verde.



San Juan´s Casa España.

The global destination wedding market has become increasingly popular, even so that in 2023, the online platform Research and Markets reported that it grew to $28.31 billion.

In the same way that planning a vacation with many people can be daunting so can be planning a wedding overseas. Luckily, wedding coordinators in Puerto Rico are up to the challenge and thrive on delivering the most romantic wedding.

Luisa Echevarria, a wedding coordinator with over six years of experience, attributes Puerto Rico's attractiveness as a wedding destination to three main factors, the same one that generally attracts everybody - warm weather, cuisine, and the people.

From her experience, clients who chose to have their weddings in Puerto Rico are threefold: those who have heard and investigated the island and have fallen in love with it at first sight; those who have vacationed here and have experienced all its beauty first hand; and lastly those who grew up on the island, but live elsewhere.

For each of them, a tailored list of venues is proposed according to their needs and interests. Some of these weddings are generally three-day events that include experiences and activities for the guests. For this reason, hotels generally pick her client's interests as ideal wedding venues because they tend to facilitate transportation and mobility logistics for their guests.

Some of these include familiar, yet beautiful options such as the Condado Vanderbilt Hotel, La Concha Renaissance San Juan Resort, Fairmont El San Juan Hotel, among others in the region. The Old San Juan area is particularly attractive as it offers a taste of Puerto Rico's culture and history in a nutshell. Which is why other iconic venues including Casa de España, Antiguo Casino de Puerto Rico and Museo Casa Blanca.



Hacienda Siesta Alegre in Rio Grande.

However, couples who live in Puerto Rico tend to be more adventurous when it comes to local venues, said Echevarria. Since guests are also familiar with the lay of the land, they tend to partake in a more natural and outdoorsy selection.

Because in the metropolitan area there are not many "Haciendas" -aside from the beautiful Hacienda Campo Rico in Carolina- those considering this type of venue must travel farther into the west or eastern coast of the island.

Since guests are also familiar with the lay of the land, they tend to partake in a more natural and outdoorsy selection.

On the other hand, for those searching for a more alfresco alternative, Yaska Crespo, a wedding coordinator with over 15 years of experience, pointed out two additional venues for that fairytale wedding spot outside of the metro area.

On the eastern coast of the island you can find Hacienda Siesta Alegre, situated near the foothills of the Yunque Rainforest in Rio Grande, which offers an encounter with nature, surrounded by luscious green landscapes and historic architecture.



Hacienda Campo Rico in Carolina.



Royal Isabela is situated in the municipality of Isabela.

The Spanish colonial-style hacienda offers four main options to host weddings. The garden's classical portico provides a perfect outdoor background to say "I do." Similarly, the small river bank allows for a more intimate ceremony surrounded by calming water sounds. An open-air courtyard transforms into a dance floor with string lights crisscrossing offering a magical ending to an unforgettable day. Lastly for those searching for a country vibe, Siesta Alegre's Barn also offers ample space to dance under the stars.

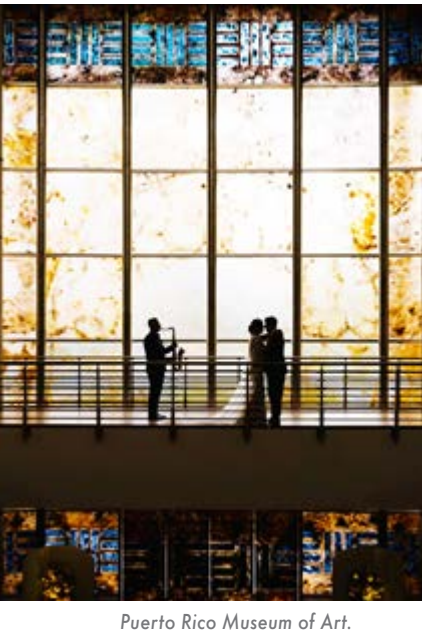
Another venue Crespo suggested was Royal Isabela which recently hosted the wedding of local urban artist Jay Wheeler and Venezuelan singer Zhamira Zambrano last December. Located in the northwestern town of Isabela, this luxurious oceanfront resort offers many breathtaking landscapes that not only characterize the region but will also make those wedding pictures iconic.



Condado Vanderbilt Hotel in San Juan.



Fairmont El San Juan Hotel in Isla Verde.



Puerto Rico Museum of Art.



Condado Vanderbilt Hotel in San Juan.

Lastly, if the countryside, the beach, and formal ballrooms are not your style, there are still some other options to explore. For more intimate weddings, both coordinators coincided on two other wedding venues that could be a perfect fit; the Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC) and the Miramar's Museum of Art and Design (MADMI).

Iconic for its brickstone architecture, the MAC offers a charming setting with the option to host the ceremony in the stunning exterior garden while hosting the reception at the inside patio. The venue has a glass ceiling which will come in handy in case it rains.

The MADMI on the other hand differs in style from the MAC, as it is more modern in style. However, the museum has an outdoor terrace where the breeze is fresh, and an indoor salon surrounded by glass walls.

Clearly, there are plenty of wedding venues to choose from depending on budgets, wedding styles, and the couple's aesthetic. Nonetheless, no matter the venue, the Puerto Rican way of doing weddings will not disappoint and will ensure that your special day is the most memorable. B



Banyon Tree at the Fairmont El San Juan Hotel in Isla Verde.



LUSH AND LUSCIOUS

Sink your teeth into Puerto Rico's cacao at Hacienda Chocolat

By DARIEN RIVERS

Nestled on the verdant flank of the towering El Yunque rainforest in the northeast coastal town of Fajardo, Hacienda Chocolat is a feast for the senses. Seabreeze sweeps up from the glistening Atlantic Ocean across the coastal plain and up into the foothills. Parrots and coquis add their songs to the otherwise hushed tones of the steep, tree-covered terrain that appears little changed since the Spanish arrived on Puerto Rico's shores more than half a millennium ago. The air is fresh amid a riot of green.

Driving up the sparsely marked road, the eyes will wander toward expansive ocean and mountain views. With so much natural beauty at every turn, it is easy to feel that you are ascending through a portion of paradise.

The mind may well turn toward Puerto Rico's traditional agrarian past, a richly diverse history in which cacao once played a driving role in the island economy along with sugar, coffee, and tobacco. But Hacienda Chocolat is not about a nostalgic look at once was but rather a shining example of a movement that is breathing new life into Puerto Rico's cacao industry that is marked by respect for the environment and a focus on quality over quality.

Hacienda Chocolat is not a theme park. It is a working cacao farm where proprietor Yadira Vazquez is doing her part to revive and reposition Puerto Rico as a leading light in the production of this magical and treasured commodity. And she and her team are doing it on their own terms with a commitment to sustainable growing methods, planting in harmony within the natural canopy and shunning pesticides and fertilizers.

While fertile volcanic soil and a tropical climate make Puerto Rico prime for cacao cultivation, no less important to the finished product is the high quality "fine flavor" cacao grown at Hacienda Chocolat. Harvested and produced in small batches, this is a labor of love that results in award-winning, single-estate artisanal chocolate bars that stand apart for their flavor, aroma, and complexity.

But don't take our word for it. Go see and taste for yourself. Soak it all in.





The working cacao farm is open on weekends for a range of guided tours and events that must be booked in advance online. Private events can be arranged during the week.

The basic package is a two-hour, guided walking tour that sheds light on the cultivation of cacao and its processing into chocolate. The interactive experience sheds light on the history and origins of one of the world's most sought after, but somewhat still mysterious, superfoods. Visitors will be able to taste cacao beans as well as the celebrated chocolate produced and sold onsite. Hot chocolate, cheese and crackers are also offered. The walking tour is moderately intensive.

Time permitting, we encourage you to opt for one Hacienda Chocolat's signature weekend tasting events that pair the farm's chocolate with wines, whiskeys, rum and even art. Each of the pairings starts with a guided tour through the cacao farm.

The wine and chocolate tasting seminar includes a welcome glass of sparkling wine, four wines to taste paired with fresh cacao fruit, 3-4 artisanal chocolate bars made with 100% cacao from Hacienda Chocolat and roasted cacao beans. It also includes water and a charcuterie board with artisanal cheeses and breads, cold cuts, homemade jams, fresh fruits, and other delights.

The whiskeys and chocolates of the world seminar, explores the perfect pairing between exquisite whiskeys and delicious artisanal chocolates. It includes tastings of four whiskeys and four single-origin artisanal chocolates. Included are two whiskey cocktails and a charcuterie board with beef sliders, artisanal local cheeses, almonds and nuts, artisanal local jams, fresh and dried fruit, and other tasty foods. The whiskeys change from event to event but are sure to be top shelf.

The art, wine and chocolate offering include direction from and established local art instructor and materials to create a work of art on canvas. For sustenance and inspiration, participants are provided two glasses of sparkling, white, or red wine, a charcuterie board with local cheeses and bread, cold cuts, artisanal jams and fruits and a tasting of 3-4 of Hacienda Chocolat's single-estate artisanal chocolate bars.

Or opt the rum, tobacco, and chocolate tasting, which the hosts bill as the "perfect trinity." The seminar includes tastings of four rums and four single-origin artisanal chocolates, two cocktails and a full charcuterie board with beef sliders, local artisanal cheeses, almonds and nuts, local artisanal jams, fresh and dried fruit, and other foods. B



Yadira Vazquez is the owner of Hacienda Chocolat, which is a working cacao farm in Fajardo.



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Shine On



Puerto Rico's sports museums shed light on the island's rich stellar athletic legacy and standout competitors

By DARIEN RIVERS

In Puerto Rico, the popularity of sports has surged to an all-time high with no signs of slowing down. Local leagues continue to grow in strength and competition, expanding both player and fan bases at the same time. The relatively small Caribbean archipelago has consistently produced standout athletes which are celebrated locally and around the globe and Puerto Rican competitors continue to make prominent marks in the world of sports. And while the future holds great promise, it is worthwhile to revisit and celebrate the longstanding Puerto Rican legacy of being a sports heavy hitter.

A great way to get to know the island and dig into its sporting history is by visiting the sport museums and halls of fame that dot the island. Since these visits don't have to be all-day activities, they provide an excellent opportunity to combine with other experiences to pack in a full slate of fun.

Heading south? Make a stop at the Olympic Museum in Salinas. The drive down is worth the trip alone. As you climb over the soaring Cordillera Central - the mountain range that splits the island north and south - you will drop down into the Caribbean Sea side of the island and be surprised by the marked shift in climate and flora. The Olympic Museum of Puerto Rico is located within the Albergue Olimpico German Rieckehoff, the Puerto Rican government sponsored Olympic training center where top athletes can live and train.



The Olympic Museum of Puerto Rico is located within the Albergue Olimpico German Rieckehoff in Salinas.



The museum is dedicated to safeguarding, showcasing, and promoting nearly a hundred years of Puerto Rico's Olympic trajectory. Interestingly, despite being a U.S. territory, Puerto Rico has always sent its own delegations of athletes to the Olympics and other international competitions which are backed by fiercely proud local fans. The museum's collection includes Olympic mascots, uniforms, equipment, torches, and medals. Also on display is the uniform worn by tennis ace Monica Puig when she captured Puerto Rico's first ever gold medal in 2016 summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro. After learning about Puerto Rico's impressive Olympic history take your crew to unwind and have some fun in the sun at next door's Campo Chico Minigolf or the Olimpia Water Park. While in Salinas, make sure to drop anchor for a meal in the town's coastal culinary hub - celebrated for its fresh seafood and Mojo Isleño, a tasty criollo sauce comprised of tomatoes, onions, olive oil and bay leaves which has its origins in Salinas.

Due west along the Caribbean coast is the city of Ponce, which is known as the Pearl of the South because of its historic and cultural richness. Ponce is Puerto Rico's second largest city and boasts diverse attractions such as captivating colonial architecture and landmarks, museums and a seaside boardwalk complete with restaurants, bars, kiosks, and ferry service to the breathtakingly beautiful Caja de Muertos Island, making Ponce one hot hangout spot. There is an abundance of iconic museums in the area such as El Museo de Arte de Ponce which has gained international recognition and is known as among the best art museums on the island, El Parque de Bombas, a historic antique fire station and one of the island's most notable buildings, and the Castillo Seralles, former home to the owners of the Don Q rum distillery.

Ponce is also home to the Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League Hall of Fame, located within the island's first sports museum - the Museo Francisco "Pancho" Coimbre. This museum and hall aim to celebrate Ponce's rich sporting history and the legacy of professional baseball in Puerto Rico. In the words of league president Juan A. Flores Galarza: "This hall will help preserve the extensive history of our professional baseball." The





museum is dedicated to Francisco "Pancho" Coimbre, the Coamo-born and Ponce-raised baseball great who went on to shine in the stateside Negro League in the 1940s, and contains a collection of his memorabilia. It also highlights and immortalizes other beloved Ponce athletes.

The Hall of Fame area celebrates the history of the Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League, showcasing "winter league" memorabilia and honoring its prolific players such as Santos Alomar Conde, father of Cooperstown Hall of Famer Roberto Alomar and big-league catcher Sandy Alomar. Ponce is a fitting location to celebrate Puerto Rican ball. Baseball is baked into Puerto Rican culture, but the sport holds a special relationship with the city and has become an important bastion in honoring the history of the island's winter ball. In 1938, the Liga de Beisbol Profesional de Puerto Rico was launched in Ponce, later renamed in honor of Roberto Clemente. A visit to the Roberto Clemente Professional Baseball League Hall of Fame is a must for any sporting history fan and an excellent way to learn about the league that has showcased Show's brightest stars. While in the area, catch a Leones de Ponce ball game at the nearby Estadio Francisco Montaner and have some local exciting fun.



Salón de la Fama del Deporte Vegalteño

Traveling along the island's stunning and picturesque Atlantic coast you'll come across the town of Vega Alta. Known as the Heart of The North, this coastal town offers an exciting array of outdoor fun, boasting parks, rock climbing, mountain biking and scenic beaches including Cerro Gordo.

It also provides entertaining avenues to soak up local culture such as the San Juan Artisanal Distillers, the Lin-Manuel Miranda Gallery, and the Vega Alta Sports Hall of Fame. Located in the Las Colinas Sports Complex, the Vega Alta Sports Hall of Fame is a space dedicated to recognizing, celebrating, and honoring the excellence of Vega Alta's rich sporting history and the feats of their athletes. The hall preserves and adds to the Vega Alta sports legacy, showcasing historic memorabilia, paying tribute to its standout athletes, and inducting them into the hall's ranks.

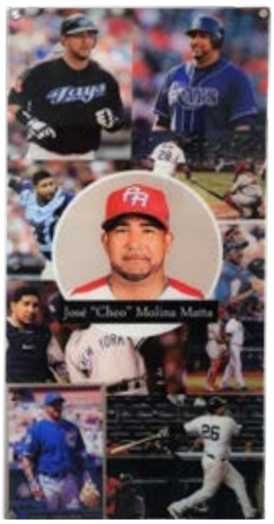
Some notable Vega Alta athletes include the Molina Brothers trio of stellar big-league catchers – Yadier, Bengie and Jose - as well as New York Yankee great Bernie Williams, boxer Ángel Chacón and wrestling brothers Dennis Rivera and Savio Vega. If you're feeling active, burn some energy and have some fun at the adjacent sporting complex where recreational sporting classes such as boxing, table tennis and aerobics are offered free of charge or unwind and catch a local ball game at the Estadio Julio Davila. While in the area make sure to check out neighboring Vega Baja, the hometown of slugger Juan "Igor" Gonzalez and Latin Trap superstar Bad Bunny, and the neighboring town of Dorado, which is known for its upscale resorts, picturesque beaches and culinary offerings.



Benjamín "Bengie" Molina Matta



Yadier Molina Matta



José "Cheo" Molina Matta



Beach Tennis and Pickleball is all the rage on the sands in Puerto Rico

By ANA LÓPEZ DELGADO

It seemed that in the 1970's, tennis enthusiasts in Italy, the epicenter of beach tennis, could not get enough of the sport, even when relaxing at the beach. And today Puerto Rico is no exception to this phenomenon.

Local lore credits tennis player Tommy Mora as the one who brought the sport of beach tennis a decade ago to Puerto Rico after a trip to Barcelona.

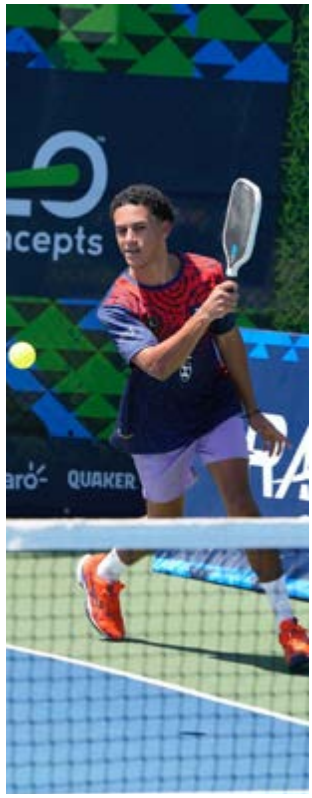
The popularity of beach tennis, a variant of the sport played on the sand, grew to the point that there is a Puerto Rico Beach Tennis Federation, which currently maintains an active calendar of events and is governed by the International Tennis Federation.

But beach tennis is not only the realm of professional players.

The game has attracted folks of all ages and backgrounds who dig the blend of sport and beach vibes, not to mention that it's a fun way of keeping fit and after a tough match a refreshing plunge is just steps away.

The rules and scoring are like those in standard tennis, and the object is to hit the ball in a way that your opponent is unable to return it. However, the net is lower than the one used in standard tennis and the ball is depressurized. The paddle used in beach tennis is smaller than the average tennis racket, but larger than those used for regular beach paddle board. Games can be played in singles and doubles. The sport is not limited to the beach, however. Courts have sprouted in towns such as Guaynabo, Bayamon, and San Juan, in public as well as private locations, such as parks.





"These off-beach locations in part came up, because people who could not get to beach, say when they were at school or at work in late afternoon or when the sun sets, have a place where they can take lessons or play beach tennis," said Luis Reyes Peñalverty, a top-ranking player as well as beach tennis instructor. "It is a good time for beach tennis in Puerto Rico, because not only we are making our mark in the sport at a professional level, but also because more and more people are discovering the sport and integrating it into part of their healthy lifestyle."

Pickleball is taking Puerto Rico by storm

Pickleball is another fast-growing marvel on the island. There are over 50 courts available and most tennis centers have courts available for rent and offer classes.

This hybrid sport is not tennis, not badminton nor is it ping pong. Pickleball is a combination of these three sports and it's no secret that it is taking Puerto Rico by storm.

Everyone from kids to seniors can play. It was first introduced in 2018 in Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rico Pickleball Association was established that same year.

Pickleball is an entertaining and social way to stay fit and active while combining strategy and skill that keeps you on your toes with its scoring system and rules. The rules are simple and the game is easy for beginners to learn, but can develop into a fast-paced, competitive game.

For many, pickleball has become more than a game, it is a lifestyle. Once you pick up a paddle, it's possibly you'll never want to put it down.



Bright Lights, New Heights

Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan.

Puerto Rico's top-tier professional basketball and baseball leagues building better on long legacies

By DARIEN RIVERS



Kansas City Royals outfielder Nelson Velazquez played with the Criollos de Caguas during winter league baseball.

Puerto Rico is passionate about its sports and its world-class competitors. The relatively small Caribbean archipelago has always punched above its weight at the highest levels of athletics, producing a long line of diamond greats, ring legends and hoops standouts. But the winning ways are not limited to the three big Bs of baseball, boxing and basketball. Take tennis ace Monica Puig for example, who captured Puerto Rico's first Olympic gold in Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Making his money as a big man who can shoot and stretch the floor, Cousins' arrival in the BSN brought a next level of talent to Puerto Rico and has lured even more NBA standouts to the island.

While Puerto Rican athletes shine at the highest levels of sport around the globe, locals have long known that they don't have to look far afield to see top-flight talent on display a lot closer to home. Case in point are the island's top-tier professional sports leagues - the Baloncesto Superior Nacional (BSN) and Liga de Beisbol Profesional Roberto Clemente (LBPRC) – both of which have been around for decades and are currently reaching new heights of popularity.

With teams spread out across the island, a game can probably be found close to wherever you happen to be staying. And with attractive ticket and concession prices, both leagues present an affordable option for the whole crew. You'll be rubbing elbows with a high-energy and knowledgeable local crowd base that knows how to have a good time and is known for rolling out the welcome mat for visitors.



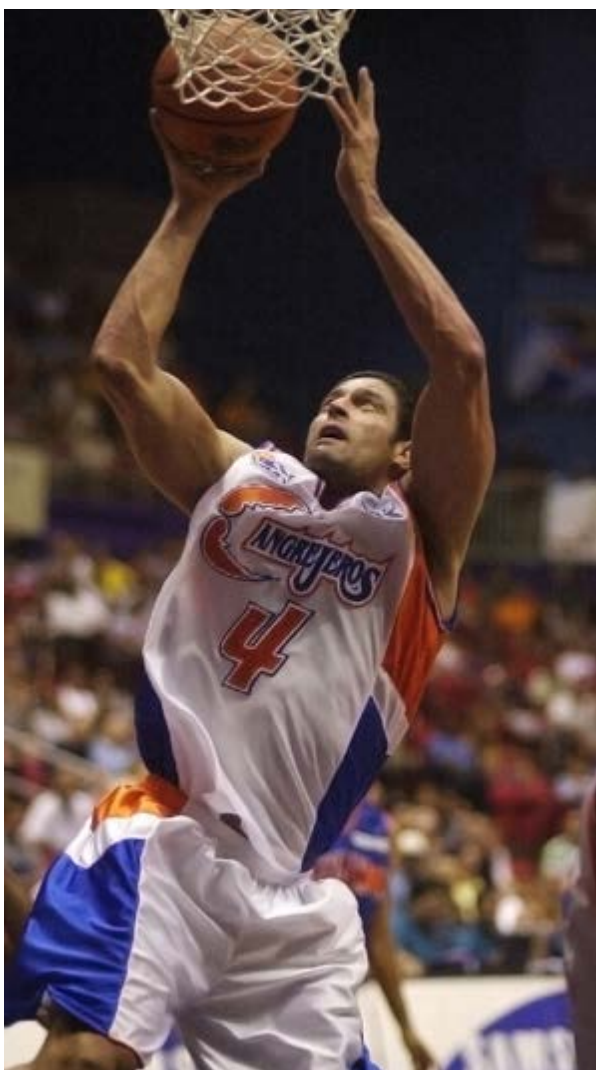
St. Louis Cardinals minor league catcher Jonathan Morales signed a multiannual contract with the Criollos de Caguas.



Infielder Vimael Machin will be playing his seventh season with the Criollos de Caguas this year.

BSN

The BSN, which dates to 1930 and is overseen by the Puerto Rican Basketball Federation, has served as a launching pad for Puerto Rican players to make the jump to the NBA and leading international leagues including Butch Lee, who led Marquette University to an NCAA championship in 1977, and J.J. Barea, the big-hearted point guard who exploded in the finals to help the Dallas Mavericks claim the NBA title in 2011. Other BSN players who reached the NBA and made their marks at the international level include Jose "Piculin" Ortiz and Carlos Arroyo, who was the face and driving force the Puerto Rico national team that rocked the basketball world when it took down the heavily favored United States team at the 2004 Olympics in Athens. The longshot win marked the first Olympics loss for a USA men's basketball team with NBA players and just the third loss in USA men's basketball team Olympic history.



Jose "Piculin" Ortiz is a former Baloncesto Superior Nacional player who made his mark at the international level.

An exciting new dynamic has been building in recent years as one-time NBA players opt to play professionally in Puerto Rico including Hassan Whiteside, Tyreke Evans, Robert "Tractor" Traylor and Brandon Knight. That trend hit a new high in the 2023 season when DeMarcus "Boogie" Cousins signed with the Guaynabo Mets as a 32-year-old free agent and four-time NBA All-Star. Cousins, a 6'10" power forward who was the fifth overall pick in the 2010 NBA draft coming out of the University of Kentucky, had a stellar NBA career that included productive stints with the Sacramento Kings, New Orleans Pelicans, Golden State Warriors, Los Angeles Lakers, Houston Rockets, Los Angeles Clippers, Denver Nuggets and Milwaukee Bucks. Making his money as a big man who can shoot and stretch the floor, Cousins' arrival in the BSN brought a next level of talent to Puerto Rico and is widely expected to lure even more NBA standouts to the island.

But it isn't just players that are shining the brightest spotlight yet on the BSN. Celebrated Puerto Rican urban artists are



Bad Bunny, the King of Latin Trap, took an ownership stake in the Cangrejeros de Santurce basketball team in 2021.



The BSN has served as a launching pad for Puerto Rican players like George Conditt from the Gigantes de Carolina and Ysmael Romero of the Vaqueros de Bayamon to make the jump to the NBA and leading international leagues.

now lending their considerable star power to the league. None bigger than global sensation Bad Bunny, the King of Latin Trap and ruler of the airwaves, who took an ownership stake in the Cangrejeros de Santurce team in 2021. Born Benito Martinez Ocasio and raised in the north coast town of Vega Baja, Bad Bunny has skyrocketed to the top at a worldwide level, earning multiple Grammy Awards, Latin Grammy Award, Billboard Music Awards and more than a dozen Lo Nuestro Awards along the way to being crowned Artist of the Year by Apple Music in 2022. All that and it still feels like Bad Bunny is bound for even greater heights.

He's not alone among musical heavyweights who have set their sights, and invested their money, in the BSN. Reggaeton master Ozuna, a San Juan native who is among the top-selling Latin music artists of all time and a solid basketball player in his own right, revived the Osos of Manati in 2022 when he bought the Brujos de Guayama in 2022 and relocated them from the southeast coast town to the north coast town of Manati with a new monicker.

And then there is Yadier Molina, who is among the latest and is arguably the greatest in the long line of Puerto Rican catchers to reach legendary status in Major League Baseball (MLB), who bought his hometown team, the Vaqueros de Bayamon, outright in 2020. In addition to a sure spot in Cooperstown, it seems the future first-ballot Hall of Famer has a nose for business, picking up the winningest



Lakers superstar Lebron James stunned Puerto Rican basketball fans with a surprise appearance to one of the local games.

J.J. Barea and Carlos Arroyo are ex NBA players from Puerto Rico.





Yadier Molina is a Puerto Rican former MLB catcher who coached the Criollos of Caguas during Puerto Rico´s Winter League tournament in 2023-24.

franchise in BSN history with an unmatched 16 championship titles. Molina's arrival in the ownership box brought even more shine to Bayamon, whose professional basketball team boasts some of the most die-hard fans to be found anywhere and have the solid backing of the city's government and business community.

Interestingly, the BSN has served as proving ground for upstart coaches that went on to make their marks running teams in the NBA including Basketball Hall of Fame members Dr. Jack Ramsay, Red Holzman, Del Harris, P.J. Carlesimo, Bernie Bickerstaff and Herb Brown. Let's not forget the legendary Phil Jackson, who spent stints calling plays for the Piratas de Quebradillas and the Gallitos de Isabela before making it back to the NBA where he won a record 11 championships - six at the helm of the Michael Jordan-led Chicago Bulls and five more as skipper of the Los Angeles Lakers with rosters that included Shaquille O'Neill that the late great Kobe Bryant.

Building on a strong legacy, the future looks bright indeed for the BSN. Get out there and take in a game during a long season that stretches this season from April 2, 2024 to June 29, 2024. If you are staying in the San Juan metropolitan area, the home games of both the Cangrejeros de Santurce and Vaqueros de Bayamon are easily reached via the Tren Urbano, the mass transit rail line that includes stops just steps from either stadium. The eastern edge of the capital city tourism zone is the land of the Gigantes de Carolina, who are the defending BSN champions after grabbing the crown from the Vaqueros de Bayamon to cap a well-attended 2023 season.



LBPRC

Winter ball. Those two simple words when put together are as Puerto Rican as rice and beans, café con leche or bomba y plena – combinations that are fundamental elements of the island's culture that never, ever go out of style. While the popularity of some pastimes may ebb and flow over time, baseball abides in Puerto Rico. That is true across the calendar as year-round tropical weather ensures that there are teams facing off in a ballpark in some corner of Puerto Rico virtually 365 days per year. No wonder the island produces a seemingly endless stream of players who not only make it to the MLB but shine. The list of Puerto Rican players who have made lasting marks in the big leagues is too long to attempt on these pages – but it is safe to say that the basepaths of the vast majority ran through island's celebrated winter league.



The winner of winter ball goes on to represent Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Series in February to face off against heavy hitters from the top level of regional neighbors.

Not to mention some of the renowned LBPRC team managers who have vast experience in the MLB. Molina, ex all-star catcher of the St. Louis Cardinals, who oversaw the Criollos de Caguas; Edwin Rodriguez, the first Puerto Rican MLB manager who held the reins of the Miami Marlins, led the Leones de Ponce.

Founded in 1938, the LBPRC was renamed in honor of Roberto Clemente, the Carolina-native who secured his place among the very greatest to ever play the game as a Pittsburgh Pirate before his remarkable life was tragically cut short in 1972 when the plane, he chartered to deliver tons of relief supplies to earthquake-ravaged Nicaragua crashed shortly after taking off from the San Juan airport in 1972. A rare gem on the diamond, Clemente remains beloved in Puerto Rico, across the Unted States and Latin America and further far-flung points for the way he lived his life beyond baseball.

Usually getting into full swing in November and reaching into January, the winter league has long provided an "off-season" home for high-level homegrown talent as well as big league players, managers and coaches looking to stay hot or get warmed up ahead of spring training back up on the mainland.

For the 2023-2024 season, the LBPRC boasted six teams – the Criollos de Caguas, Cangrejeros de Santurce, Gigantes de Carolina, Indios de Mayaguez, Leones de Ponce and RA12, which is a squad owned by Hall for Famer Roberto Alomar. The winner of winter ball goes on to represent Puerto Rico in the Caribbean Series, or Serie del Caribe, in February to face off against heavy hitters from the top level of regional neighbors such as the Dominican Republic, Panama, Mexico, Curacao and Venezuela among others. The roughly three-month period packs a punch – each team plays 40 regular season games. The top four teams in the standings progress into the post-season, which consists of a pair of best-of-seven game series leading into a best-of-nine game championship series.

The slogan for the 2023-2024 season was El Futuro esta en el Terreno, or The Future is on the Field, which focused on shining light on young local talent as the winter league celebrated its 85th anniversary. And while you can watch a televised game from your hotel room, lobby or favorite watering hole, nothing beats a day or night at the ballpark. The sights, sounds and smells simply can't be transmitted in full beyond the bleachers.

"Our primary aim for this season was to further motivate baseball lovers to come out to the ballparks to enjoy the games in a safe, family atmosphere," LBPRC President Juan Flores said. "We encourage everyone to visit the ballparks to see first-hand what promises to be a hotly contested season."

And that was exactly what happened with a record breaking 390,000 plus baseball fans attending games.

Night games from Monday to Thursday started at 7:10 p.m. while games on Friday and Saturday started at 7:45 p.m. and Sundays at 4:10 p.m. with exception of games at the Roberto Clemente Walker stadium which began at 6:10 p.m.

The Cangrejeros de Santurce and RA12 teams both play at the Hiram Bithorn Stadium in San Juan, the home of the Gigantes de Carolina is the Roberto Clemente Walker Stadium, the Criollos de Caguas play at the Yldefonso Sola Morales Stadium, the Leones de Ponce play at the Francisco "Paquito" Montaner Stadium, and the Indios de Mayaguez are at the Isidoro "Cholo" Garcia Stadium.

HOTELS

METRO AREA

AC Hotel San Juan Condado	(787) 827-7280
Acacia Boutique Hotel	(787) 727-2023
Aloft San Juan	(787) 936-2500
At Wind Chimes Boutique Hotel	(787) 727-4153
Blue Horizon Boutique Resort	(787) 741-3318
Canario Boutique Hotel	(787) 725-0668
Canario Lagoon	(787) 722-5058
Caribe Hilton	(787) 721-0303
Casa Azul Boutique Hotel	(787) 727-2397
Casa Sol Bed and Breakfast	(787) 980-9700
Comfort Inn San Juan	(787) 721-0170
Condado Ocean Club	(787) 625-6000
Condado Vanderbilt Hotel	(787) 721-5500
Conturce Hotel	(787) 520-8855
Coqui Del Mar Guesthouse	(939) 428-9087
Coral Princess Hotel	(787) 977-7700
Courtyard By Marriott SJ Miramar	(787) 721-7400
Decanter Hotel	(787) 925-1490
Dorado Beach, a Ritz-Carlton Reserve	(787) 626-1100
Dos Aguas	(787) 585-7010
Dream Inn PR	(787) 640-9368
Dreams Hotel	(787) 688-5818
El San Geronimo Hotel	(787) 721-1515
Embassy Suites Dorado Del Mar Beach Resort	(787) 796-6125
Embassy Suites San Juan Hotel & Casino	(787) 791-0505
Fairmont El San Juan Hotel	(787) 791-1000
Hampton Inn & Suites San Juan	(787) 791-8777
Holiday Inn Express San Juan	(787) 724-4160
Hosteria del Mar	(787) 727-3302
Hyatt House San Juan	(787) 977-5000
Hyatt Place Bayamon & El Tropical Casino	(787) 779-5000
Hyatt Place San Juan City Center	(787) 721-3000
Numero Uno Beach House	(787) 726-5010
Olive Boutique Hotel	(787) 705-9994
Residence Inn by Marriott San Juan Isla Verde	(787) 961-1155
San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino	(787) 722-7000
Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel & Casino	(787) 993-3500
SOFO Hotels LLC / Hotel Casablanca	(787) 977-0770
The Condado Plaza Hotel	(787) 721-1000
The Ivy Hotel	(787) 289-9191
The Royal Sonesta San Juan	(787) 791-6100
The Tryst	(787) 965-5239
The Wave Hotel	(787) 721-9010

OUT OF METRO AREA

Aqua Marina Beach Club	(787) 823-2593
Caribe Hotel Ponce	(787) 841-1000
Club Seabourne	(787) 742-3169
Combate Beach Resort	(787) 254-2358
Coqui Cabana @ Sea Beach Village	(787) 379-2249
El Conquistador Resort	(787) 863-1000
Hacienda Margarita	(939) 484-2662
Hacienda Siesta Alegre B & B Inn	(787) 887-7500
Hacienda Tamarindo	(787) 741-8525
Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino Resort	(787) 259-7676
Holiday Inn Mayaguez & Tropical Casino	(787) 833-1100
Holiday Inn Ponce & Tropical Casino	(787) 844-1200
Hyatt Place Manati	(787) 854-1000
Hyatt Regency Grand Reserve Puerto Rico	(787) 657-1234
Las Casitas Village	(787) 863-1000
Luquillo Sunrise Beach Inn	(787) 889-1713
Parador Costa Del Mar	(787) 266-6276
Parador Palmas De Lucia	(787) 893-4423
Parador Guanica 1929	(787) 821-0099
Parador Maunacaribe	(787) 861-3330
Ponce Plaza Hotel & Casino	(787) 813-5050
Rainforest Inn LLC	(787) 809-3333
The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort, Puerto Rico	(787) 809-8000
Tierra Adentro B & B	(787) 944-5794
Tres Sirenas Beach Inn	(787) 823-0558
Villa Cofresi Hotel	(787) 823-2450
Villa Coral Guesthouse	(787) 741-1967
Wyndham Grand Rio Mar Puerto Rico Golf & Beach Resort	(787) 888-6000
Wyndham Palmas Beach & Golf Resort	(787) 850-6000

CASINOS

METRO AREA

Casino del Mar @ La Concha Renaissance San Juan Resort	(787) 721-7500
Casino Metro @ Sheraton Puerto Rico Hotel	(787) 993-3500
Foxwoods El San Juan Casino @ Fairmont El San Juan	(787) 936-7777
Oasis Casino @ Embassy Suites San Juan Hotel	(787) 791-0505 x.2901
Stellaris Casino @ San Juan Marriott Resort	(787) 722-7000
Tropical Casino @ Hyatt Place Bayamon	(787) 995-8300

OUT OF METRO AREA

Casino de la Plaza, Ponce	(787) 813-5050
Casino Hilton Ponce Golf & Casino Resort	(787) 259-7676
Tropical Casino @ Fairfield by Marriott Luquillo Beach	(787) 889-8600
Tropical Casino @ Holiday Inn Mayaguez	(787) 265-4200
Tropical Casino @ Holiday Inn Ponce	(787) 844-1200

RESTAURANTS

Aurorita's Restaurant San Juan	(787) 783-2899
Barullo Taberna Española Distrito T-Mobile, Miramar	(939) 439-4584
Bistro Tartine Caguas	(787) 961-4044
Cervecería Takabru Condado	(787) 418-3393
Donde Olga Bar & Restaurant Piñones	(787) 791-6900
Fogo de Chao Brazilian Steakhouse San Juan	(787) 727-5100
Holly's Café at Holiday Inn & Tropical Casino Mayaguez Mayaguez	(787) 833-1100 x.110
Pamela's Restaurant at Numero Uno San Juan	(787) 723-5010
Social Condado	(787) 625-6000
Toro Verde Restaurant Orocovis	(787) 867-6606

ALLIED MEMBERS

2Phito Control LLC	(787) 608-8844
Aristocrat	(702) 270-1000
Assa Abloy Hospitality Panama - Former "Vingcardelsafe"	(507) 390-7155
Avis Rent A Car System, Inc.	(787) 253-5903
Bacardi Corporation & Casa Bacardi Tourist Attraction	(787) 788-1500
Ballester Hermanos, Inc.	(787) 788-4110
B. Fernandez Hnos.	(787) 288-7272
Budget Rent A Car	(787) 253-5903
Caguas, City of Promotion & Economic Development Department	(787) 653-8833 x.2915
Cape Air	(787) 645-1800
Caribbean Culinary Consulting, Inc.	(787) 722-1459
Caribbean Hotel & Tourism Association	(305) 443-3040
Carolina Autonomous Municipality Touristic Development Office	(787) 701-5137
Carrion Laffitte and Casellas Inc.	(787) 641-2738
Castillo Sightseeing Tours & Travel Inc.	(787) 728-2297
Catamaran Spread Eagle	(888) 523-4511
Charter Coach / Gray Line Puerto Rico	(787) 766-0789
Coliseo de Puerto Rico José Miguel Agrelot	(787) 777-0800
Cotton International, Inc.	(939) 286-6190
Dave & Buster	(787) 422-1550
DDC Design & Decor Center Yanez Diaz	(787) 782-2040
Delta Air Lines, Inc.	(939) 292-3067
Destileria Serralles, Inc.	(787) 707-1000
Destination Puerto Rico / Travel Services, Inc., a DMC Network Company	(787) 982-1200
Deya Elevators Service, Inc.	(787) 268-8777
Distrito T-Mobile	(787) 796-5656
Dragon Fly Adventures DMC	(787) 889-7430
E-Vacations Travel	(407) 924-8854
East Island Excursions, Inc.	(787) 860-3434
Ecolab Manufacturing, Inc.	(787) 796-1290
Escuela Hotelera de San Juan	(787) 766-0606
First Class Destination Solutions	(787) 296-5466
First Class Services, Inc.	(787) 722-8536
Fitness for Life Caribbean	(787) 993-5450

Friends of San Juan National Historic Site	(617) 275-1169
Fulcro Insurance, Inc.	(787) 725-5880
Grainger Caribe	(787) 275-3500
Group Services, Inc.	(787) 863-6890
Handcrafted Weds & Events, Inc.	(787) 990-9630
Hertz Rent-A-Car	(787) 791-0808 x.39
HI Development Puerto Rico Corporation	(787) 723-0121
Hopper	
Honorary Member - PRHTA / Santoni, Juan	(787) 510-2741
Human Capital	(787) 622-3380
Interlink Development Counselors Co., Inc.	(787) 753-8455
JAK Water Sports Rental	(787) 644-7112
Joe Colon Studio, Inc.	(787) 669-6929
Jones Lang LaSalle Puerto Rico, Inc.	(787) 777-5800
José Pabón / JJ Investment Group	(787) 777-5800
Jose Santiago, Inc.	(787) 288-8835
Kevane Grant Thornton LLP	(787) 754-1915
Kitchen Cleaning Services, Inc.	(787) 993-5030
LGA Strategies, LLC	(787) 963-1831
Lucerna Hospitality	(787) 462-1550
MCS Life Insurance Company	(787) 758-2500
Mall of San Juan	(787) 759-6262
Management Search & Supporting Services	(787) 758-7700
Marey Heater Corp.	(787) 727-0277
Marsh Saldaña	(787) 721-2600
Media & Marketing Partners & Co.	(787) 723-5220
Mendez & Company, Inc.	(787) 793-8888
Municipio de San Juan	(787) 722-0200
Nuovo Corpo Talaso Spa	(939) 337-1212
Openhotel, Inc.	(702) 628-5014
O'Neill & Borges	(787) 282-5767
Office Depot	(787) 424-5125
One Film & Video Productions	(787) 649-6886
Paradigm Associates, Inc.	(787) 782-2929
Pontificia Universidad Catolica de PR - Recinto de Mayaguez	(787) 834-5151
Puerto Rico Convention Center	(787) 722-3309 x.2470
Puerto Rico Shipping Association	(787) 722-1105
Puerto Rico Tourism Company	(787) 721-2898
Red Sismica de Puerto Rico / UPR	(787) 833-8433
Redbridge Puerto Rico, Inc.	(787) 726-1511
Royal Star Limousine	(787) 253-2355
RST / Rico Suntours	(787) 722-2080
Swirl Corp.	(787) 675-3825
Technetpr Systems	(787) 586-6017
The Bierman Group	(954) 894-6662
UPR Carolina, School of Hotel & Restaurant Administration	(787) 257-0000
USA Parking	(787) 253-8091
V. Suarez & Co., Inc.	(787) 792-1212
Vitro Caribe, Inc.	(787) 996-0910
Vivo Beach Club	(787) 648-5655
Vida Wellness Puerto Rico	(939) 377-0502
Villavicencio & Associates Construction	(787)790-9937
Vitifrigo America LLC	(954) 979-7737
Vitro Caribe, Inc.	(787) 996-0910
Vivo Beach Club	(787) 648-5655

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