

Ask anyone who's been to Puerto Rico about their vacation and most will say they walked the streets of Old San Juan learning the history of the island. (The United States captured Puerto Rico from Spain, with the island becoming a U.S. territory in 1898.)

El Morro, an old Spanish fortification, is the No. 1 attraction, followed by hiking in [El Yunque National Forest](#), kayaking in a bioluminescent bay and sunbathing on one of the island's many breathtaking beaches. Popular, too, is the [Arecibo Observatory](#), the largest of its kind in the Western Hemisphere.

But few will mention having fully immersed themselves in Puerto Rico's rich culture.

Although the concept of experiential travel isn't new, the idea is still in its infancy throughout much of the Caribbean. Unlike the U.S., most local businesses on the island don't have an internet presence. Even Puerto Ricans rely on word of mouth to learn about those hidden gems.

Experiential travel in Puerto Rico requires three things:

- An open mind.
- An adventure-seeking spirit.
- A willingness to step outside your comfort zone.

Adventurous Things to Do in Puerto Rico: Historical

[Taíno Ceremonial Centers](#)

Prior to Christopher Columbus's arrival to the new world during the late 1400s, the islands of Cuba, Hispaniola, Jamaica, the Bahamas and Puerto Rico were populated with indigenous people known as the [Taíno](#).

Puerto Rico is home to two ceremonial grounds of the Taíno. Archeologists believe the [Caguana Indigenous Ceremonial Center](#) in Utuado is one of the most important archeological sites in the Greater and Lesser Antilles. Tanamá, as it's known locally because of its proximity to the Tanamá River, was built by the Taíno approximately 800 years ago. It's home to [30 ball courts](#) (also known as bateyes), where two teams played the game with a rubber ball. Along with the bateyes, Tanamá has an impressive collection of monoliths and petroglyphs, given its relatively small size of 7 acres.

About 30 miles southeast of Tanamá is the [Tibes Indigenous Ceremonial Center](#) in the outskirts of Ponce. Sitting on 40 acres, Tibes has a large plaza (presumably a multifunctional site that housed meetings), seven ball courts, pottery, petroglyphs and a museum.

This master course in air travel will have you flying with swagger. It's perfect for the frequent flyer and will help boost the confidence of someone who dreads the airport.

Loíza: Where West African Heritage Has Been Preserved

Not often mentioned when exploring unique things to do in Puerto Rico is Loíza. Located on the northeastern coast, the city of Loíza was founded by former slaves in 1692. It is one of the only regions on the island that has maintained its West African roots.

In Loíza you'll find the [Piñones State Forest](#): 3,500 acres featuring mangroves, sea turtles, walking and biking trails, and 46 endangered bird species.

Festivals in Puerto Rico: Odes to Food, Saints, Hammocks and More!

Puerto Rico boasts more than 40 festivals annually. Each municipality has a festival honoring a patron saint. Additionally, many towns have a second or even third festival. You'll find odes to plantains, hammocks, coffee, hats, [a circus](#) (cruelty-free), flowers, agriculture, [saints](#), rum and West African-inspired music.

If you're considering timing your visit to Puerto Rico during a festival, you'll find a frequently updated list [here](#).

The Rush: Step out of Your Comfort Zone

["Conquer the Monster"](#) is the slogan of the biggest zip line in the Americas and the Caribbean. If you get a rush zipping through the air at speeds over 90 mph, the Monster, located in Orocovis is definitely for you. The tour lasts about one hour, with you strapped to a 1½ -mile cable. If that scares the heebie-jeebies out of you, ToroVerde offers seven other zip line tours ranging from "Wow! That was pretty cool!" to "OK, I've done them all and now I'm ready to conquer the monster!"

[A day on the island](#) from [Emmanuel German](#) on [Vimeo](#).

Scuba Divers' Paradise

Puerto Rico is known for its stunning beaches. Vacationers and locals alike love swimming, surfing, parasailing and snorkeling, while some come for the scuba diving. If you're a diver, few experiences can beat being underwater accompanied by a master diver with a camera, a service offered by diver/tour guide/professional fisherman Emmanuel Markham.



Glamping at Finca Viernes, Utuado, comes with a captivating view.

(Photo:Finca Viernes)

Glamping in the Mountains

Whether you're an adventure-seeker, a history buff or love being surrounded by thousands of people at a festival, you have to sleep sometime. [Finca Viernes](#) (Friday Farm) is the island's first glamping site. Located in Utuado, at an elevation of 1,887 feet, Finca Viernes sits on 64 acres and overlooks one of the town's two lakes. Pop your own tent or rent one that comes with a bed and electricity.

If roughing it in the mountains isn't quite your thing, Finca Viernes also has a two-bedroom, one-bath [house](#) with a full kitchen, living room and both an indoor and outdoor dining area.

For an extra \$10 per person, general manager Sheila Ocasio will serve you her homemade vegetable sancocho, made fresh that day. Sancocho is Puerto Rican stew made with locally grown root vegetables, potatoes, corn on the cob, carrots, tomatoes, squash, cilantro and sofrito (a blend of herbs and spices, garlic, cilantro and tomato sauce).

Making the Most of Your Puerto Rico Vacation

While English is spoken outside the San Juan metro area, it's hit or miss who speaks it well. If you aren't bilingual, don't fret. Puerto Ricans are some of the friendliest people on Earth: helpful with directions and recommendations or just friendly conversation. When meeting a Boricua person for the first time, it's better to start off speaking Spanish – even if it's Spanglish. The conversation will usually be easier than if you start speaking in English.

Here are some key phrases to know beyond “Hello,” “Please” and “Thank you.”

- “Buscando [fill in the blank]” means “I’m looking for _____.”
- “Buen provecho” is said to friends, family, coworkers and even strangers. It means “Have a nice meal.”
- “La comida estaba buena” means “The food was good.”
- “Gracias por su paciencia,” means “Thank you for your patience.”

Puerto Ricans are very accustomed to tourists and approaching them with a combination of friendliness and respect will go a long way toward your having an amazing vacation.

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