

# ADVENTURE IN PUERTO RICO

A TROPICAL AND CULTURALLY EXHILARATING GOLF AND TRAVEL ADVENTURE AWAITS ALL WHO VISIT RIO GRANDE, PUERTO RICO, WHERE FRIENDLY LOCALS, WAVING PALMS, WARM CARIBBEAN BREEZES AND SPARKLING TURQUOISE WATERS LAP ON SANDY SHORE LINES. WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROSANNE ZINNIGER



In 1493, Christopher Columbus claimed Puerto Rico and until 1898, remained under Spanish rule, ceding to the United States after the Spanish-American War. The Spanish influences are evident today in the colonial architecture throughout the old cities, especially Old San Juan. Latin culture flows in their Spanish-Caribbean infused cuisine, their colorful arts and flair for Latin music. You will find Puerto Ricans to be heritage-proud, rich with family values, and are hardworking individuals.

Travel to Puerto Rico from abroad is relatively easy, as it is the second largest cruise port in the western hemisphere. Seventeen airlines fly in and out of Luis Muoz Marin International Airport from over 50 destinations. English and Spanish are widely spoken and if you are a U.S. Citizen, you do not need your passport, only a driver's license to get by.

Island climate is tropical with temperatures ranging from the 70s to 90s Fahrenheit year-round, perfect for outdoor activities. Most days are consistently in the 80s, although tropical rain showers may make an appearance every now and again. However they never last very long. For those over the top for golf, you will be pleasantly surprised by the 20 courses on the island, with the most popular located in the east, especially in Rio Grande.

## GRAN MELIÁ AND TRUMP INTERNATIONAL

Stay at the Gran Meliá, a stunning Coco Beach Resort that has views of the El Yunque National Rainforest, backdrop of mountains and panoramic ocean views. It is also home to the Trump International Golf Club and the PGA Puerto Rico Open.

Stroll the tropically lush, manicured property to experience fine-dining with a choice of eight lounges and bars, hopping nightlife in their open air bar and casino, lagoon style pools with Bahia beds, and for well-deserved down time, the YHI Spa offers over 60 pampering treatments. You will find yourself in a relaxation paradise, as every room is a spacious, oversized junior suite supplied with the finest amenities with views ranging from the lush mountains, soothing ocean, or tranquil garden.

This all-inclusive resort is the perfect

stay-cation and since it is situated on the northeastern coast on a flourishing peninsula minutes from the airport and Old San Juan City, you can easily take a taxi out to experience local culture.

At Trump International, there are two 18-Hole Tom Kite designed courses, the Champion and the International, and was renovated when Donald Trump took over. In 2008 Trump lengthened the tees in the Champion course, repositioned bunkers and reworked the greens for faster play.

Both courses are set on 1,000 acres of tropical landscape that encompasses lush groves, man-made lakes and water ways, ocean front and El Yunque Rain Forest Views, and are the only ones sited on green mangroves and features silica sand bunkers. The clubhouse in itself is grandeur, and has an air of Casablanca elegance.

## EL CONQUISTADOR

Another great choice would be the El Conquistador Resort, which is a Waldorf-Astoria property and has many activities for all ages. Choose from five villages with five different levels of experience from peaceful relaxation to pure indulgence with 24-hour service in a private villa.

This four-diamond resort is perched over 300 feet above the ocean, and so panoramic views are abundant at the Grand Hotel guest rooms, villas, the casino, restaurants, and swimming pool areas. Take the family to the property Coqui water park, which is equipped with Slide Tower, La Mina Lazy River, Rope Bridge, and the Coqui Kids Slide, and then enjoy a bite at the Oasis Bar and Grill, which overlooks the private marina.

For a private afternoon getaway, take a short shuttle boat ride to the private island and beach of Palomino, and you will be set for sunning and water sports. The 100-acre private oasis beckons you to lounge under palm trees, sip a tropical drink and snorkel among the coral reef that separates Palomino and Palominito Islands.

## PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

The ultra-small Palominito Island was used in filming the "Pirates of the Caribbean" series. In order to make this

OPENING: Trump International Golf Club - Hole 12. RIGHT FROM TOP TO BOTTOM: Trump International Golf Club - Hole 1; Back lobby at Gran Meliá; Main pool; Ocean front junior suite.



a full-relaxation experience, you must wander through the property gardens to the Golden Door Spa and indulge in its Ayurvedic Body Treatment, which is a 5,000 year old eastern Indian health tradition that helps in achieving balance of body, mind and spirit. The "Spirit of Life" incorporates a combination of these treatments where both body and mind become calm.

Golf at the nearby Arthur Hills Golf Course, opened in 1993, is a 72-Par, 18 hole experience for all skill levels. It is challenging, yet player friendly with well-planned bunkers, daunting hills, and unforgettable views of the El Yunque Rainforest and the Atlantic Ocean from every hole.

With an elevation change of more than 200 feet, which is quite rare

among Caribbean golf courses, you will find open fairways that are palm-tree lined, lush island botanicals and dotted with planned trouble to make your game even more challenging.

One of the truly majestic holes is 18, where spouting fountains can be found everywhere and a spectacular waterfall awaits. Some of the most daunting holes can be affected by the well-known Caribbean trade winds, which will require an intense evaluation of club selection and shot shape.

Speaking of which, Hole 5, a Par 4 at 431 yards from the back, is named Diente De Viento, meaning “Teeth of the Wind”, which refers to playing into the wind. Aim should be down toward the right of the wide fairway, away from the lake on the left.

But the most memorable hole of the course must be the 15th, called Nido de Aguila, or “Eagle Nest”, with its vertical drop of over 200 feet. Perched above this Par 5, a drive to the left will set you in perfect position to use a long iron for placement just in front of three bunkers.

### ST REGIS BAHIA BEACH

If you are travelling with a significant other, staying at the St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort and Golf Club will give you a sense of being marooned on your own private island in opulence. Set on 483 acres of lush native maritime

forest, richly lined with coconut palms and on the edge of the Atlantic Ocean, this magnificent property boasts grand luxury villa rentals from a one bedroom plus den, to an estate home located on 2 miles of sandy beach.

Guests will be able to enjoy sailing, windsurfing, paddle boarding, canoeing, kayaking, sports and fitness, and of course, golf, along with nature walks and hiking on 65 percent of the property that is also a preserved sanctuary.

For a whole body renewal, the Remède Spa is the spot for world-class treatments ranging from a body polish to the Taino Warm Native Stone Ritual, where Obsidian stones cultivated from the region will revive fatigued muscles and rebalance the body, combined with an intense deep tissue massage for a renewed feeling.

Outside, an extraordinary golf trip awaits at the Robert Trent Jones Jr. designed 18-Hole Championship course. Built around a network of saltwater lagoons throughout the 483 acre property and designed smartly to include the preservation of the natural terrain and lush forest fauna within the very scenic 6,979-yard layout; its last three holes overlooks a magnificent visage of the Atlantic Ocean. This course pleases the most demanding players with the highest levels of course maintenance and service.

In chatting with Robert Trent Jones Jr., he says, “I don’t have one particular favorite hole, however if you are a great hand player, then holes 9 and 10 will stand out; holes 14 and 18 have a fantastic great setting, and for a wonderfully challenging finish stretch of holes, then 16 through 18 will provide that for you.”

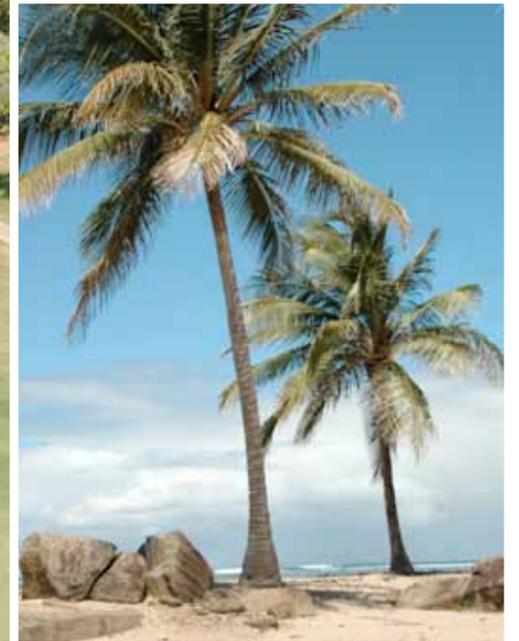
On his other 18-hole layout, the Bahia, Trent-Jones Jr. affectionately calls it the “New Diva”, and he says, with a twinkle in his eye, “I named her the New Diva because she is so beautiful, she dances with you and the wind, and is all too demanding!”

Set on a picturesque setting, the Bahia is both daunting and distracting, especially the finishing holes. If you are not tending to your game, you will end up in the turquoise grave of the nearby ocean or lost in the lush, pristinely manicured vegetation.

Referring to the spectacular views from the golf course, club professional Jeff Wilkenson commented, “In playing this course, you will definitely tend to use your camera more than your golf clubs!”

### RIO MAR

For those preferring a more laidback trip, a stay at Rio Mar Beach Resort with give just that. A Wyndham Property set on 500 lush acres, Rio Mar Beach has 600 guest rooms set on



TOP PICTURES (FROM LEFT CLOCKWISE): Rio Mar – Hole 1 of Ocean Course; Old San Juan – view of the Fort from the streets; Gran Meliá beach.

BOTTOM PICTURES (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT): Robert Trent Jones, Jr. on fairway of 18; View of Bahia Beach at Hole 18; Robert Trent Jones, Jr.

one mile of secluded beach with two swimming pools, the Mandara Spa, and a 7,000 sq.ft. casino for those looking for some excitement at the tables.

Golf at the Rio Mar courses is exemplified by a Tom and George Fazio 18-holer and a Greg Norman tract. Choose between playing by the ocean or along a river walk but if you are looking for some quick lessons, the Chip Koehlke Golf Academy is worth looking into. Chip and his staff can create a private development package which includes one-on-one personal instruction featuring a personalised practice plan and full swing video analysis, with optional on-course instruction.

The Ocean Course is a mature 35-year-old with upturned greens, providing an interesting challenge for the player looking at testing his short game. A par-72 at 6,782 yards it is a

little shorter than the River Course, which at 6,945 yards, is styled as a championship golf course with many challenging hot spots.

At the 177-yard par 3 10th, water to the left and large bunkers to the right make for a harrying tee shot. More challenge erupts at the par 5 15th, a 544-yard hole where you are forced to snake mid-fairway to avoid numerous bunkers and lush flora. This course will test your abilities to shoot straight and accurate for sure.

### WALKING OLD SAN JUAN

Squeeze in some culture along the way by checking out the San Juan Metro Area of Old San Juan, also referred to as the historic Viejo San Juan district, located next to the Bay of San Juan. In addition to casinos, exclusive shopping, museums, fine dining and trendy

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: View from Yokahu Tower to Ocean; El Yunque – Yokahu Tower Observation Point at 1575 ft.; Backside of Bacardi Factory – view from across the bay



nightclubs, you will find perched above the bay the El Morro Fortress landmark and Fort San Crisóbal, both of which protected Old San Juan from invaders for hundreds of years and boasts six terraces of ramps and rooms.

Don't miss the Plaza San Jose, which is the oldest of the old city's plazas. Surrounded by old structures like the Dominican Convent (a monastery for Dominican Friars) and the 15th Century San Jose Church (the second oldest in the New World), there is certainly an air of antiquity that pervades each step of the way.

After a tour of the old town, nosh on Puerto Rican cuisine at the very quaint El Jibarito Restaurant where they serve authentic local specialties like the Mofongo (mashed plantains) with Conch. Most of the island cuisine is a fusion of Creole cooking, Spanish and Latin American styles, which results in an exotic blend of spices, seasonings and ingredients indigenous to the region, including papaya, plantain, coriander, cacao and yampee.

Thereafter, venture to the El Yunque Rainforest, one of the most spectacular in the world and also the only one in the U.S. National Forest System. This Caribbean national forest is home to over 240 species of tropical trees, wildlife and exotic flowers. If you are fortunate enough to see the Coqui, the region's tree frog, it is considered a sign of good luck. There are numerous trails for all skill levels as well as a Portal education centre where you will learn about the history of the forest and the fauna and flora that flourish within it.

For a phenomenal finish to the day,

travel to Vieques, Mosquito Bay or Bioluminescent Bay for an evening kayak ride. The bay lights up and glows from the harmless bioluminescent organisms that live there, and as you kayak through overgrown canals that lead to the bay, the glow is much more visible.

In addition to the multi-million pharmaceutical and biotech industries that attributes to a large proportion of the region's economy, the production of rums has been a staple since the 1600's. With Christopher Columbus introducing sugar cane to the New World back in 1493, the Puerto Rican sugar cane fields flourished, and by 1650, Puerto Ricans were utilising the waste product from the sugar cane, which was distilled, to make rum, the

most famous of which is Bacardi.

A trip to the Bacardi Rum Distillery located on the far side of San Juan Bay is a must as it is the largest rum factory in the world with an interactive visitor centre and that operates a guided tour every half hour. The onsite gift shop offers souvenirs from clothing to bottles of Bacardi rums in all sizes.

A vacation in Puerto Rico provides the sort of luxury that can be described as 'natural'. Spa treatments, endless rounds of golf, a little culture and adventure coupled with some fine Puerto Rican cuisine and nightlife is the fix one should take every now and then for sanity's sake. 📍

[www.seepuertorico.com](http://www.seepuertorico.com)

## PUERTO RICO IN BRIEF

**Gran Melia Golf Resort**  
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