

SPANISH STUDIES ABROAD

The Center for Cross-Cultural Study



Know Before You Go: A Survival Guide to San Juan, Puerto Rico



Know Before You Go: A Survival Guide to San Juan, Puerto Rico

As part of your cross-cultural experience, you will encounter different cultural attitudes and behaviors while you are abroad. This is a guide to help you better understand the cultural norms of where you will be studying, as well as to offer useful information about the city and country. The Handbook relates to Spanish Studies Abroad policies and program-related information, and it is equally important to review that information as well. Think of this as an insider's guide to help you quickly and effectively acclimate to your new city and become a *puertorriqueño/ puertorriqueña* in no time. ¡Buena suerte y buen viaje!

Country Profile: Puerto Rico

At the end of your program, you'll know more about Puerto Rico than you ever could have expected. The following information will give you some idea about Puerto Rican life before you go. Further up-to-date details on Puerto Rico can be found on the website of the [U.S. State Department](https://www.state.gov/puerto-rico).

BRIEF HISTORY OF PUERTO RICO

Before Columbus landed in Puerto Rico in 1493 on his second voyage to the new world, Taíno Indians inhabited the territory. They called the island *Boriken* or *Borinquen* which means: "the great land of the valiant and noble Lord" or "land of the great lords". Today, this word - used in various modifications - is still popularly used to designate the people and island of Puerto Rico.

Upon Columbus' arrival, the natives showed him the gold nuggets in the river and allowed him to take all that he wanted. Originally the newcomers called the island **San Juan Bautista**, for St. John the Baptist and the town **Puerto Rico** because of its obvious excellent potentialities. It was not until later that the two names were switched. Thanks in part to the enthusiasm of ambitious Juan Ponce de León, a lieutenant to Columbus, the city of Puerto Rico ("*rich port*") quickly became Spain's most important military outpost in the Caribbean.

In the early 1500's Spain started heavy colonization on the island. They began building churches, school and sugarcane processing plants. Spain began sending slaves to the island to help with the sugar cane plantations as well. Around this time, problems between the colonists and the natives started to arise. Many Spaniards came looking for gold and did not bring women with them, and those who stayed married Indian women.

Concerned about potential threats from European enemies and recognizing the strategic importance of Puerto Rico, Spain began constructing massive defenses around San Juan in 1539. The construction of San Felipe del Morro Castle began. The fort featured 18-foot-thick walls; San Cristóbal and San Gerónimo Forts also garrisoned troops, were built with the financial subsidy from the Mexican mines. Next, the Spaniards constructed a wall, parts of which still survive, around the entire city. In 1634, King Philip IV of Spain began fortifying the San Cristóbal Fort (the largest Spanish fort in the New



World), along with six fortresses linked by a line of sandstone walls surrounding the city. Throughout the 1600s and 1700s there were many attempts to take over the island from various European forces such as British and Dutch.

On August 10, 1815, the Royal Decree of Grace (commerce liberty) was issued, allowing all foreigners to be admitted to Puerto Rico and Islanders to trade with other nations. At the same time Puerto Rico's meager gold supply was exhausted, islanders struggled to develop an agricultural economy. Cattle, sugarcane, tobacco and coffee were the main investments. Slavery was not abolished in Puerto Rico until 1873.

On January 6, 1868 Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances and Segundo Ruiz Belvis (from their exile in the Dominican Republic) founded the Revolutionary Committee of Puerto Rico ("Comité Revolucionario de Puerto Rico"). Then in the same year in September 23, several hundred women and men revolted against Spain for Puerto Rican independence. The revolt took place in Lares and is better known as **El Grito de Lares** ("the cry of Lares"). The rebellion was planned by a group led by Dr. Ramón Emeterio Betances (who was not given permission to enter the island) and Segundo Ruiz Belvis. The most important figures in the uprising were Manuel Rojas, Mathias Bruckman, Joaquín Parrilla, and Francisco Ramírez. Manuel Rojas' plantation located in Lares became the headquarters for like-minded revolutionaries who would push for a split from Spain. Then, in 1869 the first political parties in Puerto Rico were formed.

On November 25, 1897 the "*Carta Autonómica*" (Autonomic Charter) was approved in which Spain conceded political and administrative autonomy to the island. It allowed the island to retain its representation in the Spanish Cortes, and provided for a bicameral legislature. Puerto Rican officials began talking with United States officials, hoping they would include them in the same interventions they had planned for Cuba. They told them about the presence of Spanish military on the Island. This was the lead up to the Spanish American War. From May to August 1898, Spanish and US forces fought in Puerto Rico and the US won, acquiring many Spanish territories including Puerto Rico. On August 12, 1898 the peace protocols were signed.

On April 2, 1900 the Foraker Law, officially the Organic Act of 1900, was approved, establishing civil government and free commerce between the island and United States. Puerto Rico became the first unincorporated territory in the U.S. The new government had an American governor, with five Puerto Rican Cabinet members. The first civil governor (Charles H. Allen) of the island under the Foraker Act was inaugurated on May 1 in San Juan.

In 1902, the Official Languages Act (under the Foraker Act) was instituted which declared that in all insular governmental departments, courts, and public offices, English was to be regarded as co-official with Spanish, and when necessary, translations and interpretations from one language to the other would be made so that all parties could understand the proceedings.

On March 2, 1917 President Woodrow Wilson signed the Jones Act. With this law:

1. Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States ("organized but unincorporated,")
2. A bill of rights was created.
3. The three governmental powers divided into: the legislative, executive and judicial branches.
4. United States granted Puerto Ricans U.S. statutory citizenship, which means that Puerto Ricans were granted citizenship by act of Congress, not by the Constitution and citizenship is therefore not guaranteed by it. (The Puerto Rican citizenship ceased, it was not until 1927 that it was re-established for residency purposes only.)
5. As citizens, Puerto Ricans were now allowed to join the army; only 300 rejected the citizenship and many others refused to join the army. During World War I, over 18,000 Puerto Ricans served.
6. Established that elections were to be celebrated every four years.
7. English was decreed the official language of Puerto Rico.

On the other hand, the Foraker Act still determined economic and fiscal aspects of government.

On June 4, 1951, Puerto Rican voters approved a referendum that granted them the right to draft their own constitution. The constituent assembly began its deliberations in the following September. In March 1952 the electorate approved the new constitution, and on July 25 Governor Muñoz proclaimed the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. In 1952, Puerto Rico officially adopted the flag based on a flag designed by a group of patriots in the year 1895. Law Number 1 of 1993 declares English and Spanish as the official languages of Puerto Rico.

On September 20, 2017, one of the most devastating hurricanes in Puerto Rico's history struck the island. Hurricane Maria, a nearly Category 5 hurricane, directly hit the island in a rare, catastrophic event that left most of the residents without electricity and access to clean water for months – some of which still needs to be restored, and resulted in the largest blackout in U.S. history. The devastation to Puerto Rico's infrastructure has made recovery from this disaster very slow, and the island is still recovering over one year later. The death toll as a result of this hurricane has reached 2,975 people. More than 135,000 Puerto Ricans, who are U.S. citizens, have left home and settled in the continental U.S. since the storm. It's estimated that nearly half a million residents will leave the island by the end 2019, as a direct result of Maria's devastation. However, despite this catastrophe, Puerto Rico is steadily recovering and has demonstrated a strong sense of community and resilience as they work tirelessly to rebuild their beloved island.

Source: <http://www.topuertorico.org/history.shtm/>

Source: <https://www.mercycorps.org/articles/united-states/quick-facts-hurricane-marias-effect-puerto-rico>

Source: <https://www.oxfamamerica.org/take-action/save-lives/puerto-rico-hurricane-maria/>

COUNTRY OVERVIEW

This island located in the Caribbean sea, populated for centuries by aboriginal peoples, was claimed by the Spanish Crown in 1493 following Christopher Columbus' second voyage to the Americas. In 1898, after 400 years of colonial rule that saw the indigenous population nearly exterminated and African slave labor introduced, Puerto Rico was ceded to the US as a result of the Spanish-American War. Then in 1917, Puerto Ricans were granted US citizenship. In plebiscites held in 1967, 1993, and 1998, voters chose not to alter the existing political status with the US, but the results of a 2012 vote left open the possibility of American statehood.

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| Capital: | San Juan |
| Population: | 3,620,897 |
| Land Area: | 8,870 sq km |
| Religions: | Roman Catholic (85%), Protestant and other (15%) |
| Languages: | Spanish and English |

Above information from CIA world factbook: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/rq.html>

Principal Government Officials

Governor – Wanda Vázquez Garced
House of Representatives delegate – Jenniffer González
Political Party in Power: PNP (*Partido Nuevo Progresista*)

SAN JUAN OVERVIEW

San Juan, the capital of Puerto Rico, is the oldest city on US territory founded in 1521. The metropolitan area known as San Juan has 3 distinct areas: Old San Juan, the Beach & Resort area, and other outlying communities, the most important: Río Piedras, Hato Rey, Puerta de Tierra, and Santurce. San Juan is the largest processing center of the island; the metropolitan area has facilities for petroleum and sugar refining, brewing and distilling and produces cement, pharmaceuticals, metal products clothing, and tobacco. The port is one of the busiest in the Caribbean. San Juan is the country's financial capital, and many U.S. banks and corporations maintain offices or distributing centers there. San Juan is center of Caribbean shipping and is the 2nd largest sea port in the area (after New York City).

| | |
|--------------------|------------------------------------|
| Population: | 420,326 people (metropolitan area) |
| Land Size: | 122 km ² (47.5 sq mi) |

Government & Legislature

Puerto Rico is a self-governing commonwealth in association with the United States. The chief of state is the President of the United States of America. The head of government is an elected Governor. As a commonwealth of the US, the inhabitants of Puerto Rico possess all the rights and obligations of United States citizens such as possessing a US passport, paying Social Security, receiving federal welfare and serving in the armed forces, except for the right to vote in presidential elections and the obligation to pay federal taxes.

Source: <http://www.topuertorico.org/government.shtm/>

Political Parties

The major political parties in Puerto Rico are: Popular Democratic Party, *Partido Popular Democrático* (PPD), which supports an enhanced commonwealth status. The New Progressive Party, *Partido Nuevo Progresista* (PNP), which supports full U.S. statehood for the island. And the Puerto Rican Independence Party, *Partido Independentista Puertorriqueño* (PIP), which supports the independence from the US.

Other political groups are: Armed Forces for National Liberation (FALN); Volunteers of the Puerto Rican Revolution; Boricua Popular Army (also known as the Macheteros); and, Armed Forces of Popular Resistance.

Source: <http://www.topuertorico.org/government.shtml>

Economy

Puerto Rico has fairly strong economy especially with its ties to the US which provides tax incentives. Although sugarcane was a large cash crop until the 1940's, it has now dwindled in importance. Important industries currently include pharmaceuticals, electronics, textiles, petrochemicals, processed foods, clothing and textiles. Sugar production has lost out to dairy production and other livestock products as the main source of income in the agricultural sector. The principal livestock are cattle, pigs and poultry. Tourism has traditionally been an important source of income for the island, with estimated arrivals of nearly 3.9 million tourists in 1993, and a 7% of the Island's GNP, the tourism industry employees over 60,000 people.

Source: <http://www.topuertorico.org/economy.shtml>

People

Due to its history of intermixing with people from white, indigenous and black races, many Puerto Ricans are a mix of these races. During the 1800's and 1900's many Europeans and Americans came to the island in search of a better life and more opportunities and this has influenced the ethnic makeup as well.

Ethnic Composition

The diverse people of Puerto Rico are 76.2% white (mostly Spanish origin), 6.9% black, 0.3% Asian, 0.2% Amerindian, 4.4% mixed, and 12% other (2007). The racial composition of Puerto Rico's population has not changed significantly. The first census by the United States in 1899 reported a population of 953,243 inhabitants, 61.8% of them classified as white, 31.9% as mixed, and 6.3% as black. Recently, due to the economic depression in the Dominican Republic (on the island of Hispaniola that neighbors Puerto Rico), there have been many immigrants arriving to find work in Puerto Rico.

Source: <http://www.topuertorico.org/people.shtml>

Language

Spanish and English are the official languages, but Spanish is without a doubt the dominant language. English is spoken by about 1/4 of the population-with limited capabilities. English is required in all federal matters. English is spoken in all major tourist areas (80% Spanish, 20% other).

Source: <http://www.topuertorico.org/descrip.shtml>

Practical Information

The following section includes some additional information and tips to help further prepare you for your time abroad and lessen any confusion you may have on simple tasks such as making calls, handling money, and knowing what to expect from the weather. Reading these tips could save you that extra headache or frustrating moment.

MAKING PHONE CALLS

Puerto Rico is a part of the US, so most US cell phone plans work. Some students, though, find that the easiest and cheapest way to call home is through [Skype](#). However, if your family needs to know how to call your landline or cell phone number in Puerto Rico, or if you need to be able to reach them by phone, here is some information for making phone calls.

Puerto Rico is served by the North American Numbering Plan (NANP), the same as the US. This means that numbers have 10 digits (area code + 7-digit number). Dialing is done the same way as calling a mainland US number. All mobile phones have the area code 939 and landlines have either area code 787 or 939.

The major calling codes you will need to be aware of:

- Puerto Rico's country code is 1 (same as U.S.)
- Puerto Rico has two area codes: 787 or 939

Although dialing is the same, you should check with your carrier to determine if there will be any roaming or additional charges.

EMERGENCY NUMBERS WITHIN PUERTO RICO

General Emergency – 911

HOW TO HANDLE MONEY IN PUERTO RICO

The currency of Puerto Rico is the United States dollar (USD). The US dollar is divided into 100 cents (¢) and referred by locals as "peso".

Coins: 1¢, called the centavo or chavito (penny); 5¢, called the *bellón* or ficha (nickel); 10¢ (dime); 25¢, called the peseta (quarter); and the seldom-seen 50¢ (half-dollar) coin and \$1.

The best way to deal with spending money in Puerto Rico is to use a combination of a credit card, an ATM/debit card to get cash, and then keeping some traveler's checks on hand in case of emergencies. A few notes on each:

Credit Cards*

All credit cards (Visa, Mastercard, American Express, Discover, etc) are widely accepted in Puerto Rico. You can use them for purchases at most stores and at nicer restaurants, but be aware that many small restaurants, shops, pharmacies, and bars may accept cash only. It is better not to depend on cash advances from your credit card for spending money, but rather to use an ATM or Debit Card. The interest on cash advances is often very high.

ATM/Debit Cards*

If you have an ATM/debit card, it can be used just the way you would use your credit card, as long as it has a visa or mastercard logo. It can also be used at most ATMs all over the city. Any card that is on the Plus or Cirrus network will work at Puerto Rican ATMs; check the back of your card to be sure that those symbols are listed. Please note that your PIN must be **four digits long** so if yours is not, you will have to change it before you go to Puerto Rico. Since your local bank will most likely not be available in Puerto Rico, you may want to rethink how frequently you will withdraw money while in Puerto Rico. Also be aware that you may not be able to see your balance on the Puerto Rican ATM. Make sure you can either check your balance online or have someone check it for you at home.

In addition to any transaction fees that your home bank may charge, local ATMs can charge fees as well, so be sure to pay attention. There are numerous ATMs located throughout San Juan and Puerto Rico, including Citibank, Doral, Banco Popular, Banco Santander, BBVA and Scotiabank. These are the most popular.

*Note on Credit and ATM/Debit Cards

Since Puerto Rico is considered a U.S. territory, your credit and debit cards should work. Some banks/credit card companies block transactions from new destinations for security purposes, so make sure you inform your bank/credit card company that you will be in Puerto Rico and the length of time. You should also inquire at your bank about any additional charges you might encounter when using your ATM card or Credit Card in Puerto Rico. If the fees seem unreasonable, you may want to shop around to see if there is another company/bank that you want to set up an account with before you go abroad.

Traveler's Checks

Traveler's checks are good to keep on hand in case you lose your credit card or debit card. You can cash them at several places, including banks, the airport, and any number of currency exchange windows in the touristy parts of town. Because they are in US dollars you may be able to use them anywhere checks are accepted, but generally it is better to cash them. One of the advantages of traveler's checks is that if they get stolen, they will be replaced by the issuing company. Read the instructions provided with your traveler's checks very carefully for more about this. Also, if your credit/debit card is lost, stolen or demagnetized, your bank may not have a quick and efficient way of replacing it. That is why it is best to have a backup of traveler's checks in a safe place in your home. It's probably a good idea to bring \$300-\$500 in the form of traveler's checks. Also if you end up not using them while in Puerto Rico, you can always cash them back in when you return home.

If you need to receive money while you're in Puerto Rico, there are a few ways to do that. By far the easiest is if your parents or someone at home can simply deposit money into your bank account for you to withdraw at the ATM. Some banks even allow free transfers from one account to another if you both have the same bank. Aside from that, however, you can have money wired to you through Western Union or MoneyGram, which are readily available throughout the island.

Tipping

Tipping in Puerto Rico is more or less the same as in the US. Sometimes restaurants will add this into the bill, so you will want to check or ask your server. Otherwise it is customary to leave 15-20% of the bill as a tip. This is also the same with taxis and other services that you would normally leave a tip in the US. However as always, tipping is at your discretion.

WEATHER IN SAN JUAN

San Juan and its metropolitan area have a tropical climate with very little variation in daily temperatures year round. It is typically warm, humid, with tropical rain throughout the year. Be aware that although temperatures are mostly warm throughout Puerto Rico, they are typically cooler in the Central Mountain Range and warmer in the southern part of the island than in San Juan.

- The hottest season of the year is from late May to late October with average lows of 78 °F and highs of 89 °F.
- The cooler part of the year is early December to early March with average lows of 72 °F and highs of 82 °F.
- Although it rains all year, the rainiest months are May and October and the least rainy are February, March, and April.

Hurricane Season

Given its location, Puerto Rico is subject to tropical storms and hurricanes. Hurricane season lasts from June through November although Puerto Rico rarely suffers major storms. Through weather tracking technologies, it should not be difficult to prepare for a storm if necessary.

Being a Mainland American in Puerto Rico

Before you travel to Puerto Rico, it is helpful to be aware of and understand the relationship between the Commonwealth and mainland United States. You already know that no passport is required for Americans to study in Puerto Rico, but do you know why?

Puerto Rico is American, right?

Understanding the relationship between Puerto Rico and the United States of America can be confusing. Keep reading below to hear from Zain Deane from About.com. Zain asks and answers some of the most common questions to clear up this relationship. Click [here](#) to read the full article.

Is Puerto Rico a U.S. State?

No, Puerto Rico is *not* a state, but rather a **Commonwealth** of the United States. This status provides local autonomy to the island and allows Puerto Rico to publicly display its flag. However, the government of Puerto Rico, while ostensibly a

local responsibility, falls ultimately on the U.S. Congress. The elected governor of Puerto Rico occupies the highest public office on the island.

Are Puerto Ricans U.S. citizens?

Yes, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens, and make up about 1.3% of the total population of the United States. They enjoy all the benefits of citizenship, save one: Puerto Ricans who live in Puerto Rico cannot vote for the U.S. President in the general elections (those who live in the United States are allowed to vote).

Does Puerto Rico Want to Become a U.S. State?

In general, there are three schools of thought on this issue:

- The vast majority of Puerto Ricans want to keep the status quo and remain a Commonwealth.
- A less popular but vocal camp is in favor of becoming a U.S. state. Their reasons center on the right to vote and increased funding from Washington, DC.
- A small minority want independence for Puerto Rico, arguing that national pride and complete autonomy will be worth the growing pains of a new nation that is not supported by Federal aid.

In What Way Is Puerto Rico autonomous?

For the most part, the day-to-day governing of the island is left up to the local administration. Puerto Ricans elect their own public officials and their model of government closely resembles the U.S. system; Puerto Rico has a Constitution (ratified in 1952), a Senate and a House of Representatives. Both English and Spanish are the official languages of the island. Here are some other quirky examples of Puerto Rico's semi-independent status:

- The winner of the 2006 "Miss Universe" pageant was Miss Puerto Rico, *not* Miss USA.
- In the Olympic Games, Puerto Rico fields its own athletic team, *separate* from the Americans.
- Puerto Ricans don't file federal income tax returns, unless they work for the Federal government.

In What Way Is Puerto Rico "American"?

The simplest answer is that it is at the end of the day U.S. territory and its people are U.S. citizens. In addition:

- Puerto Rico's currency is the U.S. dollar.
- Puerto Ricans serve in the U.S. armed forces.
- The island uses the U.S. Postal Service.
- The American flag flies over Puerto Rico's Capital.

Representing your country

Americans and other foreigners in general may have a bad reputation in parts of the world. They can be perceived as demanding, noisy, not speaking the local language and expecting everyone else to speak theirs—and that doesn't even begin to cover whether people in other nations agree with your government's policies and actions. It is important to recognize that these stereotypes exist, but it is also your job to represent your country in a positive light and try to demonstrate that not every American fits the above stereotypes.

Below are some helpful tips to think about before you go abroad so that you can come across as knowledgeable and culturally aware.

1. Educate yourself about Puerto Rico, San Juan, Santurce and the culture there - This guide is a resource to assist you with learning background information and the cultural norms of the commonwealth, but you can also read books and go online to find out additional information before you go.
2. Read basic factual and historical information on your host country - Be prepared for questions that Puerto Ricans may ask you about mainland United States or Canada such as basic history, politics, and current events.
3. Learn about current events in Puerto Rico - It is also helpful to be aware of what is currently going on in the country in regards to the economy, politics, news, etc.

CULTURE SHOCK

Culture shock is a natural and common feeling that many students may experience when they study abroad. Basically, it is a feeling of being overwhelmed and confused by how unfamiliar your new surroundings seem. Although it might feel unconquerable when you experience it, you'll get through it as everyone does. Culture shock is generally broken down into a number of stages:

1. **Honeymoon Phase:** You arrive in Puerto Rico and you think, "This is great! Everything is new and exciting and I love it here!" You're having tours of the city, you're meeting new people, getting to understand the language more easily; everything is going really well and you're so glad you decided to study abroad.
2. **Hostile Phase:** After the excitement of being in Puerto Rico starts to wear off, you may start to feel negative and frustrated with adjusting to the culture. You might feel like it takes forever to get anything done, you can't talk to your parents as much as you like, you're tired of all the new foods, locations, daily routines, and having to speak Spanish all the time. You might even start to wonder why you ever decided to study abroad in the first place.
3. **Understanding/Sense of Humor Phase:** After a while, you accept the cultural differences that surround you, and things start to feel okay again. As you get to be more familiar with the Puerto Rican culture and lifestyle, you start to appreciate it more and become more confident in your surroundings. You are able to laugh at the misunderstandings that once made you so angry.
4. **Integration Phase:** You become accustomed to the good and bad aspects of Puerto Rican culture and you incorporate them into your own life. Puerto Rican lifestyle becomes part of your lifestyle; you feel comfortable and happy in San Juan. This phase will last for the rest of your time abroad.
5. **Re-entry Shock:** When you go home again, you will experience another type of culture shock. You find that things at home have changed and that you have changed too. You don't know any of the songs on the radio or the phrases people are using. You may feel frustrated by others' lack of knowledge about issues that affect the place you've grown to love. You will miss your daily life in Puerto Rico and worry that you're talking too much about your experiences abroad.
6. **Re-Integration Phase:** You will get comfortable at home again soon; you'll be happy to see your family and friends, and you'll always remember your time in San Juan. You'll be able to express to people what was so meaningful about your experience and will be able to take the lessons you've learned abroad with you as you go on in life. You'll find that you are a changed person, more mature, more experienced, and with great memories of Puerto Rico.

If you feel like your culture shock is overwhelming you to the point where you need to talk to somebody about it, please speak directly with the Resident Director. Our San Juan staff is very supportive and always available to help you get through any difficulties you may experience while you're abroad.

LGBT (LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER) STUDENTS ABROAD

Same-sex relationships have been legal in Puerto Rico since 2003, but same sex marriage, unions, and adoptions are prohibited. LGBT communities and some social scenes are present in some of the neighborhoods in San Juan including Ocean Park, Condado and Santurce.

Some traditional conservative values do exist, particularly among the older generations and among those residing in rural areas of the country. If you identify yourself as LGBT and you intend to share this fact with others while studying abroad, be prepared to answer occasionally frank questions from your peers. Also, be aware that all people in Puerto Rico are protected by the same bias crime laws as in the mainland US.

When talking with others about your sexuality, it is up to you to decide whom to tell and when to tell them. The Resident Director, as well as our staff in both Puerto Rico and the United States, is always available to answer your questions and concerns, so you can feel comfortable speaking with them on this subject. Whether or not you identify as LGBT, recognize that there may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender students on your Spanish Studies program and in your classes in San Juan. It is important to be respectful and to approach this reality with an open mind.

Please visit this [website](#) for more resources for the LGBT community and study abroad.

RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Puerto Rico is 85% Catholic, 8% Protestant, and 7% other. Freedom of religion is protected, and there are a variety of churches and houses of worship on the island.

If you are observing religious traditions different from Catholicism, it is important to explain to your Puerto Rican friends what the tradition means to you. Keep an open mind about people's reactions to your religious beliefs; it is possible that they've never met someone with of your religious persuasion before. If you are respectful of other people's spirituality, they will be respectful of yours. Additionally, keep in mind that if you are Catholic, you may find that there are many differences from what you are accustomed. In some cases, Catholicism is influenced by Santería, Taíno, or other indigenous spiritual practices thereby appearing a bit different to U.S. Catholic practitioners.

Communities of religious minorities can be found in metropolitan centers. For example, Puerto Rico has the largest Jewish community in the Caribbean. In San Juan, you can find a Jewish Community Center and synagogue Shaare Zedeck. It is possible to become involved in any religious community while studying abroad, just ask our staff and they'll point you in the right direction!

RACE AND ETHNICITY IN SAN JUAN

Puerto Ricans identify as Boricua, taken from *boriken*, an acknowledgement of their Taíno roots. The primary ethnicity is Hispanic, and approximately 75% of Puerto Ricans identify as white, approximately 12% identify as black, 11% identify as other, 0.5% identifies as Amerindian, and 0.2% identify as Asian.

Many say that race in Puerto Rico is seen on a continuum of colors: white, mulatto, and black. Historically, Puerto Ricans have roots from Spain, Africa, and of course the indigenous persons that first inhabited the island, the Taíno. There are racial tensions that exist, just as anywhere with racial and ethnic diversity. For example, as an outsider, one may observe tension between Puerto Ricans and Dominicans on the island. Dominicans are the largest foreign-born population, and it is thought that roughly one-third are undocumented.

As a racial minority in Puerto Rico, it is not your responsibility to change the views of the whole country. Comments and rude behavior from strangers do not merit a response on your part; on the other hand, we don't want you to pretend that nothing has happened. One way to get through the discomfort you might feel is to talk about it. If you feel uncomfortable in any situation or if you just need to talk about your feelings, contact the Resident Director, and let her know what is going on. Crossing cultural boundaries always involves some degree of social discomfort, at some point or another. While it is possible that students of color may encounter isolated instances of racial prejudice in Puerto Rico, these incidents should not make your overall study abroad experience any less enjoyable.

SAFETY

As a visitor in another country, it is always a good idea to not draw attention to yourself as an outsider. To avoid being labeled as a typical tourist, there are a few rules you should follow:

1. Don't speak English loudly in the streets. This can easily attract pickpockets and scam artists, and could get you in even more trouble late at night—especially if you are in a less safe area of a city.
2. Don't walk by yourself at night. Just as in any large city, nighttime is when many thieves will try to target tourists who are heading back to their hotels. Either walk with a friend or take a taxi any time you are out late. Any restaurant or club will call one for you.
3. Don't wear clothes that will instantly identify you as a tourist (e.g. shorts, flip flops, baseball caps).
4. Don't invite thieves by wearing expensive jewelry or by carrying cameras, cell phones, or electronic music players. Do not take out your wallet on the street. Also, if you are at a restaurant, never put your purse on the back of your chair or on the floor where it can be easily snatched up. Try to keep it in your lap or somewhere where you can

keep a close eye on it.

5. Don't leave your belongings unattended-no wallets placed on bars, no purses left at your table, no jackets left on the backs of chairs, and don't leave anything on the ground next to you.
6. Be extra cautious while using public transport (bus, train) and hold on close to your belongings. Backpacks and purses are easy targets, so make sure to have your zippers somewhere where you can see them. It is best to keep them in front of you.

Students unaccustomed to city life will learn to be more cautious when walking the streets of San Juan. To help maintain your safety while living in San Juan, you should still follow the same safety precautions you would in any big city in the U.S., and basic common sense should rule your actions. The most common crimes against tourists, although rare, are theft and mugging. Most parts of San Juan are well populated and safe, but it is suggested that you avoid La Perla neighborhood (adjacent to El Morro) and much of Puerta de Tierra (beyond the hotels) at night. Additionally, you should avoid the beaches at night as they are unprotected and sparsely populated.

If an emergency situation does arise, please contact the Resident Director immediately.

Travel the Land...

You may be used to having a car, but obviously while abroad you will not have one. Many people in Puerto Rico travel in their own cars, but there are also public options such as bus, metro, and ferry as well as taxis. Remember, you will be living in a residence hall with a Puerto Rican roommate and the vast majority of your hall mates will be Puerto Rican as well, so you may very well find plenty of friends who you can hitch a ride with to other parts of San Juan and Puerto Rico.

GETTING AROUND THE CITY

You will be living on the USC campus, so getting to and from class will be a short walk. There are three modes of public transportation to get around the city, the metro (Tren Urbano), Metropolitan Bus Authority (AMA), and Metrobus (there is also a free trolley in Old San Juan). Rides cost less than a dollar and the riders are able to transfer for free between the three systems using a stored-value card, similar to the Metrocard system used in New York City. Conveniently, there is a Tren Urbano/bus stop stop right in front of USC. For more information on the public transit system in San Juan, visit <http://www.dtop.gov.pr>.

Taxis are another popular way to get around San Juan. They can be hailed on the street or called in advance to come pick you up. They have fixed rates inside of tourist zones and a meter for the rest of the city. Please be advised that there may be surcharges for bags and tolls are not included in the fare. Cab drivers are typically given a tip of 10% to 15% of the fare.

GETTING AROUND PUERTO RICO

The most common and cheapest way to visit other cities in Puerto Rico is to take a shared car or van called a *público*. These shared cars typically leave from *público* terminals or town squares. They can even be called in advance to pick you up at an agreed upon time. There are also a number of ferries that connect San Juan to nearby locations such as Cataño, Culebra, and Vieques, and other locations in Puerto Rico.

If you are interested in flying, there are short range flights to destinations in Puerto Rico available through [Cape Air](#), [Air Flamenco](#) and [Vieques Air Link](#).

GETTING AROUND THE CARIBBEAN

Given that Puerto Rico is about the size of Connecticut, you may want to visit some other destinations in the Caribbean or Central and South America. For longer distances, travel by plane is often the only option; however, ferries connect Puerto Rico to nearby island such as the Virgin Islands and the Dominican Republic. **Please note that although you are not required to bring a passport to Puerto Rico, you should bring one if you intend on visiting a foreign country.**

FUN PLACES TO VISIT

In and Around San Juan:

El Morro – This fort was built by the Spanish in the 1500s to protect the island against invasion from other European nations. This fort remains in excellent condition and is worth a visit!

Castillo de San Cristóbal – Built in the 17th century, this fort along with El Morro was erected to defend the city. Now it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and preserved by the US National Park Service.

Old San Juan – Explore the charming heart of the city and take a step back in time. There are many shops and restaurants to explore. Most of the historic sites are also located here.

Museums – There are many museums in San Juan (many in Old San Juan).

Museo Las Américas – Near El Morro and focuses on the history of both North and South America.

Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Puerto Rico (Santurce) –

Casa Blanca and Museo Juan Ponce de León – Historic residence built by descendants of Ponce de León. The museum is furnished with antiques, paintings, and artifacts from the 16th through the 18th centuries.

Museum of the Conquest and Colonization of Puerto Rico – Displays historical documents, exhibits and artifacts.

Asilo de Beneficencia – houses the **Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña** (Institute of Puerto Rican Culture) offering exhibits galleries every day, features an impressive collection of artifacts from pre-European Puerto Rico, including pottery, stone tools and relics, and a recreation of a Taíno village.

Casa de los Dos Zaguanes/Museo del Indio – Features exhibits on the indigenous peoples of the Caribbean region, with exhibits, ceramics and archaeological digs.

San Juan Museum of Art and History – Built in 1855 as a market and restored in 1979 as a cultural center, showcases Puerto Rican art and music, including concerts and festivals.

Historic Sites – You will most likely see these during your orientation or other study visits, however not to miss are: Puerta de San Juan, Paseo de la Princesa, Cementerio de San Juan, Casa de los Contrafuertes.

Centro de Bellas Artes (Santurce) – Center for art, theatre and concerts.

Beaches – Located on the Caribbean Sea, San Juan has some beautiful beaches. Most tourists come to San Juan to go to Condado or Isla Verde and you can enjoy these beaches while you are studying abroad!

DAY/WEEKEND TRIPS FROM SAN JUAN

Although you will likely go on a few group excursions during the semester or summer, here are some places you should be sure to check out if you have a day or weekend free!

Luquillo Beach – Known as one of the most beautiful beaches in Puerto Rico and is also a nature reserve.

El Yunque Rainforest – The only rainforest that is part of the United States. You can hike and find waterfalls and even try ziplining! Over 240 species of trees and plants dominate the area which is constantly being preserved by the Puerto Rican government.

Rio Camuy Caves – The cave system, which gets its name from the 13-mile-long Camuy River, forms the third-largest cave system in the Western Hemisphere. Worth exploring!

Western Beaches of Rincon, Aguadilla, and Isabela – Known for great surfing, you can try your hand at it or keep up with surfing while you are living in Puerto Rico. Or maybe you just want to watch!

Bioluminescent Bay (Vieques Island, Fajardo, or La Parguera) – Take an evening boat ride and see the ocean lit up! The luminescence is caused by micro-organisms which glow leaving a trail of neon blue. This exists in very few places in the world!

There is plenty more information about where to visit on our [Facebook page](#).

Live the Life...

You will probably find that your daily life in San Juan is not too different from your daily life in the States. You will spend most of your time studying, hanging out with friends, exploring the city and participating in extracurricular activities that interest you. Although the lives of college students in Puerto Rico and mainland United States are fairly similar, here are some differences that you should be aware of.

MEETING PUERTO RICAN FRIENDS

You will quickly find that Puerto Ricans are friendly, and generally eager to meet new people. You will have many opportunities in San Juan to meet Puerto Rican friends. Some of the best ways are through the Speaking Partners program (a conversation exchange with a Puerto Rican), Spanish Studies fiestas, just by hanging out on campus, and most naturally, through your roommate, neighbors, and dormitory-life in general. Additionally, depending on what courses you are in, you could have the opportunity to make Puerto Rican friends as they could be your classmates.

Your roommate will be Puerto Rican, and you should be open and friendly to your roommate and your roommate's network of friends. Additionally, as part of the program you will be assigned a Speaking Partner; try to meet with this person on a regular basis, as he or she will introduce you to friends and show you their favorite spots around the city. If it is not working out and you are not able to meet up very often, inquire about a new Speaking Partner.

UNIVERSITY LIFE: *Universidad del Sagrado Corazón (USC)*

Universidad del Sagrado Corazón (USC) is located in San Juan, in the *barrio* of Santurce. Established in 1880, USC is one of the oldest universities in Puerto Rico. The university is home to roughly 6,000 students. You will likely find that the USC campus will have much in common with your home university campus. You will have access to a modern student center, cafeterias, fitness center, tennis courts, Olympic-sized swimming pool, computer labs, and more.



97% of students at USC are from Puerto Rico (63% from the San Juan metropolitan area, 34% from other urban and rural areas of the island). 3% of students are from abroad.

HOUSING

With Spanish Studies Abroad in San Juan, you will live in a single-sex dormitory with a Puerto Rican or Spanish-speaking roommate. As a resident, you will have access to laundry facilities, computer lab rooms with Internet access, Internet wireless access, and a recreational area with access for visitors. Security and first-aid services are also available at all times in the dormitories.

FOOD OPTIONS ON CAMPUS

You will have access to a kitchen in your dormitory, and there is a grocery store named *Pueblo* within walking distance from campus (open 24 hours!). There are also options on campus to eat at a cafeteria or snack bar. On the first floor of the student center, there is a cafeteria that serves meals, sandwiches, and light snacks and is open Monday – Saturday,

6:30am – 8pm Monday-Thursday; 7am – 4pm Friday-Saturday. Additionally, there is a snack shop on the first floor of the Barat building that serves sandwiches and quick snacks, open from Monday-Friday 6:30am – 6pm, and Saturday 7am – 3pm.

WHAT YOU MIGHT EXPECT FROM PUERTO RICAN FOOD:

Although influenced most recently by American food, Puerto Rican food has historically been influenced by the same groups that have shaped the population of the island: Spanish, African, and Taíno. From this mix, Puerto Rican food is frequently referred to as *cocina criolla*. Additionally, sofrito serves a base for many dishes in Puerto Rico, and is a blend of sweet peppers, recaó, onions, garlic, cilantro, oil, spices, olives and capers, and some type of meat.

Arepas or Rellenos – Puerto Rican dumplings; fried rounds of flour-based dough. They are sometimes stuffed with seafood. This dish is particular to the Eastern and Southern parts of Puerto Rico

Arroz con habichuelas – Rice and beans, a staple in Puerto Rico. Pink and red beans are the most common. The beans are cooked together with seasoning, stock, ham, and potatoes. Sticky medium-grained rice is more popular in Puerto Rico than long grain rice



Mofongo – a popular dish made from fried green plantains or fried yuca, seasoned with garlic, olive oil and pork cracklings, then mashed. Mofongo is usually served with a fried meat and a chicken broth soup

Cuajitos en salsa – Pork belly in a red hot sauce

Pollo frito – Puerto Rican style fried chicken

Carne Guisada – Puerto Rican beef stew

Arroz con pollo – Chicken and rice cooked in the same pot. Traditionally, chicken is seasoned with adobo, and then placed in a pot with rice, seasoning, sofrito, and other vegetables

Empanadas – Breaded meat, usually made of steak, beef, turkey, chicken, or veal

Bacalaítos – These are fritters made from a pancake-like batter containing codfish, flour, and seasoning

Tortilla – Puerto Rican style omelette with potatoes. Although it is an omelette, this is not a breakfast item

Tostones – twice-fried plantains



SPECIAL DIETARY NEEDS: VEGETARIANS, VEGANS, AND GLUTEN-FREE

There are relatively few vegetarians in Puerto Rico. As you can see from the description of the importance of ham and other meats, Puerto Rican culture is not particularly vegetarian-friendly. It is possible, however, to be a vegetarian in Puerto Rico. You will have access to a full kitchen and will be able to prepare your own meals. Although, keep in mind that the selection at the grocery store may be different than you are accustomed to in your college town. Additionally, as a vegetarian, you should be very careful in restaurants and make sure that the bean dish you are ordering doesn't have meat in it.

If you would like to dine out, you can use Vegguide.org as a resource, as it lists vegetarian and vegan-friendly establishments in San Juan.

If you plan to change your diet and begin eating fish, meat, or dairy, you should start incorporating these foods into your diet before you leave, so that you will not be sick at the start of your program in San Juan.

SOCIAL ACTIVITIES

We want you to have fun in San Juan; your social life is a big part of your education abroad. However, you are expected to meet all your academic responsibilities. Make sure you don't let hanging out with friends interfere with your school work.

There are a number of ways to get involved socially in San Juan such as going out at night, hanging out during the day or evenings, and various organized social activities. Below are a few suggestions:

- If you're more athletically inclined or if you just like to stay in shape, there are plenty of opportunities to do so. You can run or walk in the city, parks or beaches, or you can take advantage of all the wonderful sports and recreational amenities on campus. There are also different sports teams and clubs that you may be able to join. You can ask about these options at orientation.
- Students taking courses at the local universities may be able to join clubs and activities on campus. Be prepared to present your student ID card (from USC) to sign up. Also keep your eyes open for activities advertised on-campus and ask classmates what sorts of extracurricular activities they take part in. This will be a great way to get involved in activities with Puerto Rican university students and take advantage of your enrollment there.
- You will find that Puerto Ricans often like to go out and enjoy their famous coffee or other beverage at a café. There are many cafés with outdoor seating where you can enjoy the nice weather, especially along the beaches in the city.



For events going on in the city, Spanish Studies Abroad does a great job of keeping our students informed via email, Facebook, etc. Make sure to visit the [Facebook page](#) for your program as a planning tool for local events.



all parts of Santurce are safe to wander through at night.

NIGHTLIFE IN PUERTO RICO

You may find that nightlife in Puerto Rico starts a little later than you are accustomed to. Dinner is usually between 6:00-7:00pm, and then people go out afterwards. It is not uncommon to stay out until the sun comes up. There are many bars and restaurants open until late in Old San Juan.

Closer to home in Santurce, there are also options for nightlife. One recommendation would be to visit the Plaza del Mercado or *La Placita*. This open-air plaza is a popular hangout on the weekends, and has food, drinks, and is frequented by local young people. There are other local places, but make sure that you know where you are going; not

Learn the Language...

THE CARIBBEAN ACCENT

Coastal areas in the Spanish speaking world tend to share some linguistic similarities to the original explorers, most from the South of Spain; Andalucía. The most noticeable characteristic is the “dropping of the “s” in many words if they fall in the middle or end of the word. For example, “How are you? (Cómo estás?)” Sounds more like “como ehtah”. This is common in Puerto Rico as well as Dominican Republic, Cuba, Chile, Coastal Peru and Ecuador as well. They also tend to use personal pronouns more than other countries in order to make the distinction between “tu” and “usted” since they don’t pronounce the “S” at the end that usually differentiates the verb conjugation.

Although both English and Spanish are official languages of the island, Spanish is more often used. Street signs and other signs around the city will be in Spanish but sometimes in English. In restaurants you can usually find both Spanish and English especially in the more touristy areas but in non-tourist areas you will likely not see as much in English.

HELPFUL VOCABULARY AND EXPRESSIONS

- **Boricua** - used to mean Puerto Rican
- **Comida criolla** – local Puerto Rican food
- **Ay, bendito** – “Oh my God”
- **Jangear** – hanging out
- **Brutal** – extraordinary
- **Guagua** – bus
- **Pana** – best friend
- **Chillin** – extraordinary or relax
- **Está cool** – “It’s OK”
- **Jugo de china** - orange juice

SUGGESTED READING/VIEWING/LISTENING

To try and get an idea of what life might be like in Puerto Rico, it’s a good idea to do a little research. Here’s a listing of some recommended online resources, books, movies, and CDs. If you can’t find them elsewhere, most of these titles are available at Amazon.com or Netflix. You should also ask your Spanish professors or any students from Puerto Rico if they have any other suggestions for you.

Current Events

- [El Nuevo Día](#) – newspaper of Puerto Rico
- [El Vocero](#) – free newspaper in San Juan

Reference Books

- [Lonely Planet: Puerto Rico](#)
- [The Rough Guide to Puerto Rico](#)

Books

- Esmeralda Santiago, *When I was Puerto Rican: A Memoir*, 2006
- César Miguel Rondón, *The Book of Salsa: A Chronicle of Urban Music from the Caribbean to New York City*, 2008

Puerto Rican Films

- *Broche de Oro*, directed by Raúl Marchand Sánchez, 2012
- *Los Condenados*, directed by Isaki Lacuesta, 2012
- *I am a Director*, directed by Javier Colón, 2012
- *The Rum Diary*, Directed by Bruce Robinson, 2011
- *El Cimarrón*, directed by Iván Dariel Ortiz, 2007
- *Taínos*, directed by Benjamín López, 2005
- *Paging Emma*, directed by Roberto Busó-García, 1999
- *Héroes de Otra Patria*, directed by Iván Dariel Ortiz, 1998

- *Mi Día de Suerte*, directed by Santiago Pumarola, 1998
- *La Guagua Aérea*, directed by Luis Molina Casanova, 1993
- *La Gran Fiesta*, directed by Marcos Zurinaga, 1986

Movies Filmed in Puerto Rico

- *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides* (2011)
- *Fast Five* (2011)
- *The Reaping* (2007)
- *Dirty Dancing: Havana Nights* (2004)
- *Under Suspicion* (2000)
- *Amistad* (1997)
- *Assassins* (1995)

Music

Puerto Rico has a rich musical history and it is home to many famous singers and composers like Ricky Martin, Jennifer López, Lin Manuel Miranda (*Hamilton*, Broadway musical), Luis Fonsi (*Despacito*), Daddy Yankee and Chayanne. It has created several music genres like *Plena*, *Bomba*, *Seis Chorreao*, *Décima* and *Reggaeton*. Puerto Ricans in New York played a central role in the creation of Salsa music.

- Marc Anthony, *Marc Anthony*, (1999); *Amor sin Mentiras*, (2005); *3.0* (2013)
- Merengue
- Salsa
- [Seis Chorreao](#)