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TRAVEL AND TOURISM MAGAZINE / Nº52



Puerto Rico

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[04] SAN JUAN OF PUERTO RICO

[50] EL YUNKE NATIONAL PARK

[27] STROLLING THROUGH OLD SAN JUAN

[64] PIÑONES AREA

[44] GASTRONOMY IN OLD SAN JUAN

[69] CULTURAL TOUR IN LOÍZA



Puerto Rico is more than a destination: **it is an experience for all the senses.**

In **Old San Juan**, colonial charm unfolds on every cobblestone street, with its wrought-iron balconies and historic walls whispering tales of pirates and conquistadors. Not far away, El **Yunque National Park** invites you to immerse yourself in the lushness of its tropical rainforest, where winding trails lead to crystal-clear waterfalls that refresh the adventurous spirit.

Our journey continues toward the **Piñones area**, a coastal strip where golden beaches and the aroma of fried seafood beckon for relaxation. Close by, in **Loíza**, the *Bomba workshop* pulses with the energy of Afro-Caribbean heritage, among drums and dances full of life. Along the way, the flavors of Puerto Rican cuisine — from *mofongo* to *lechón* — turn every meal into an unforgettable gastronomic journey. Does our proposal entice you?

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Nº 50 - Era III - Year XVII

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ISSN: 1887-410X

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PUERTO RICO

AN ISLAND OF EXPERIENCES

Text by David Bigorra - Photography by Daniel Herrera & David Bigorra

“LIVING BORICUA” IS AN INVITATION TO IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE TRUE ESSENCE OF PUERTO RICO. THE ISLAND OF BORINQUEN, AS THE TAÍNOS CALLED IT, OFFERS AN EXPERIENCE WHERE EVERY CORNER REFLECTS THE PASSION AND CULTURE OF ITS PEOPLE. FROM PARADISIACAL BEACHES TO THE WARMTH OF ITS INHABITANTS, PUERTO RICO IS A PLACE WHERE TRADITION BLENDS WITH MODERNITY. LIVING BORICUA MEANS ENJOYING THE MUSIC, THE GASTRONOMY, AND THE HISTORY, WHILE FEELING THE UNIQUE ENERGY OF THIS INCOMPARABLE DESTINATION AT EVERY MOMENT.





Bastion of San Sebastián

BASTION OF SAN SEBASTIÁN

From a historical perspective, the **Bastion of San Sebastián** in San Juan, Puerto Rico, represents a crucial component of the defensive fortifications that shaped the island's military history during the Spanish colonial era.

Built in the late 16th century, this bastion is part of the complex system of walls and fortifications designed to protect San

Juan, one of the main ports and strategic settlements of the Spanish Caribbean.

The **Bastion of San Sebastián** is located at the northwest corner of the walls surrounding Old San Juan and played a vital role in defending the city against enemy attacks, especially during Sir Francis Drake's siege in 1595 and Sir George Clifford, the Earl of Cumberland's, attack in 1598. Its construction was driven by the strategic need to protect the island



The Bastion of San Sebastián is located at the foot of the main entrance to the Castillo de San Cristóbal.

from the constant incursions of pirates, privateers, and rival European powers seeking to control the Caribbean.

This military structure is an outstanding example of Spanish Renaissance fortification architecture, characterized by its robust design, thick stone walls, artillery platforms, and its strategic position that allowed visual and military control over the entrance to the harbor and surrounding waters. The **triangular**

shape of the bastion, with its protruding angles and parapets, was designed to maximize artillery fire and minimize blind spots, a significant military innovation of the time.

In addition to its military value, the Bastion of San Sebastián is also relevant from a historical and cultural perspective, illustrating how geopolitics and cultural exchange in the Caribbean shaped Puerto Rico's identity and history.



Watchtowers and extremely thick walls are the main characteristics of the bastion.

This bastion, along with other components of San Juan's defensive system, is part of the San Juan National Historic Site, designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983, highlighting its importance as a testament to Spain's colonial presence and resistance in the New World, reflecting its crucial role in military history.

Today, the **Bastion of San Sebastián** is not only a monument to military engineering and colonial history but also a symbol

of the cultural interaction and resilience of the Puerto Rican people over the centuries. Its preservation is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of power, defense, and daily life in the Caribbean during the 16th and 17th centuries.

CASTILLO DE SAN CRISTÓBAL

The **Castillo de San Cristóbal** in San Juan, Puerto Rico, is one of the largest fortifications built by the Spanish Empire



View of the spectacular walls of the Castillo de San Cristóbal, built from the sea's edge.

in the New World. From a historian's perspective, this castle, completed in 1783, represents a masterpiece of military engineering from the colonial era. Built to defend the city of San Juan from land attacks, the **Castillo de San Cristóbal** spans approximately 11 hectares, making it the largest fortification of its kind in the Americas.

Construction began in 1634 in response to constant threats from privateers,

pirates, and rival European powers. Its star-shaped design includes massive stone walls, bastions, dry moats, and an intricate network of underground tunnels. These features were conceived to maximize defense against artillery attacks and prolonged sieges. Within its walls, you can find barracks, powder magazines, and sentry boxes like the famous Garita del Diablo, shrouded in local legends about the mysterious disappearances of soldiers.



Main courtyard of the Castillo de San Cristóbal.

The **Castillo de San Cristóbal** is a must-visit for those who wish to understand Puerto Rico's history and enjoy its natural beauty. Visitors can explore the tunnels and secret passages that once allowed the castle's defenders to move unseen or walk along the ramparts and enjoy spectacular views of the Atlantic and San Juan Bay.

The castle offers various interactive exhibits and informational panels that

narrate its history, from its construction to key moments such as the British attack of 1797, led by Sir Ralph Abercromby. Guided tours organized by the park provide fascinating details about the defensive architecture and the daily lives of the soldiers who lived there.

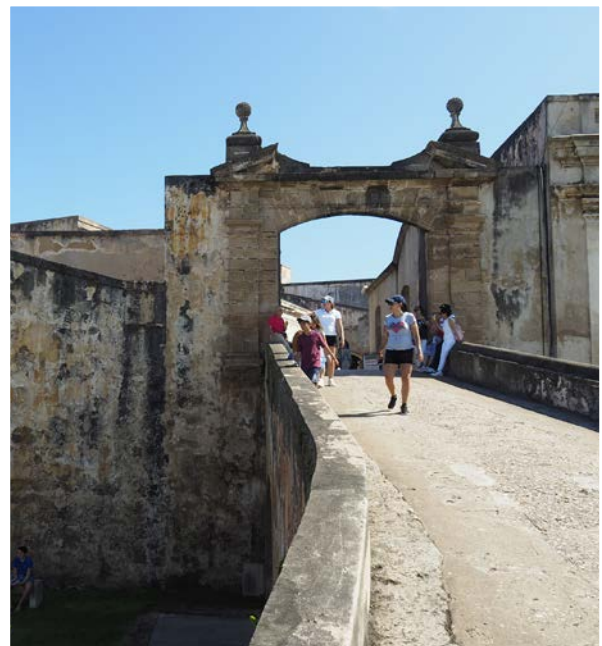
From the heights of the castle, tourists can capture panoramic photos of the Old San Juan historic district, with its colorful colonial buildings and cobblestone



THE DEVIL'S WATCHTOWER IS ONE OF THE OLDEST IN THE CASTLE, BUILT BETWEEN 1634 AND 1644. ACCORDING TO LEGEND, IT IS HAUNTED. THE SOLDIERS' SOLITUDE IN THE PLACE, GAZING AT THE ENDLESS SEA, CAUSED THEM TO HALLUCINATE, SEEING BEAUTIFUL WOMEN WHO SEDUCED THEM, LEADING THEM TO DESERTION OR DISAPPEARANCE.

streets. The **Castillo de San Cristóbal** is also within walking distance of other attractions such as **Castillo San Felipe del Morro**, **San Juan Bautista Cathedral**, and numerous historic plazas full of life, shops, and restaurants.

Visiting **Castillo de San Cristóbal** offers not only a tour of Puerto Rico's military history but also a connection to the island's cultural essence, making it a great experience.





El Morro with La Perla in the foreground and, in between, the cemetery of Santa María Magdalena.

CASTILLO DE SAN FELIPE DEL MORRO

Located at the northwest tip of Old San Juan, it is one of the most iconic historical monuments in the Caribbean. Built by the Spanish between the 16th and 18th centuries, **El Morro**, as it is colloquially known, was a strategic fortress that protected the Bay of San Juan from naval attacks for over four centuries. Its imposing structure, which includes walls up to 6 meters thick,

bastions, and cannons, is a testament to the colonial military power that faced enemy attacks.

El Morro not only defended the island from pirates, corsairs, and privateers but also played a crucial role in battles against powerful European powers such as England and the Netherlands. In 1595, Sir Francis Drake, the famous English privateer, unsuccessfully attempted to seize the fortress. Years later, in 1625,



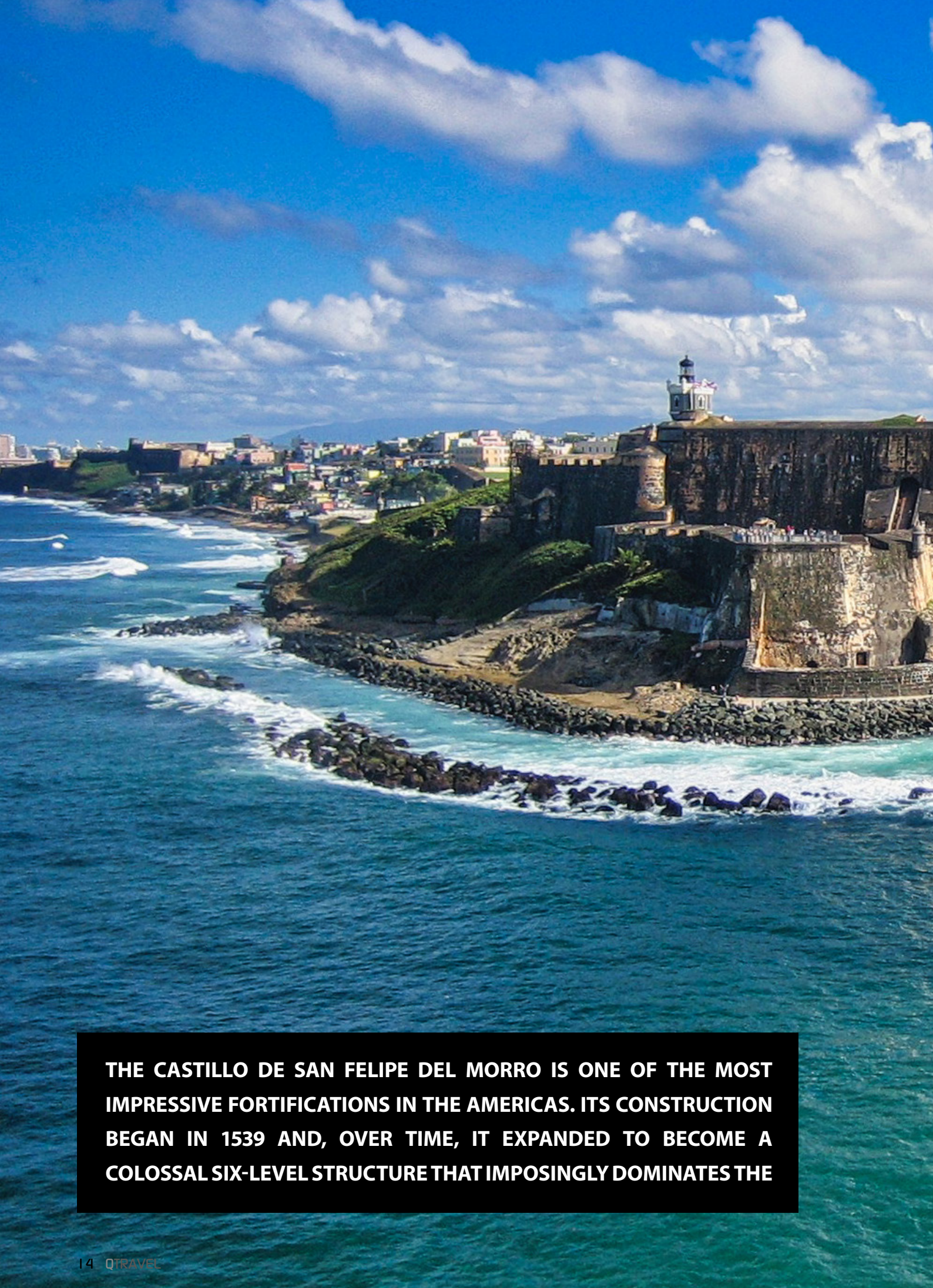
Entrance to the castle through the dry moat.

the Dutch, led by Boudewijn Hendricksz, invaded the city of San Juan, but **El Morro** held strong, effectively demonstrating its unparalleled effectiveness as a defensive stronghold.

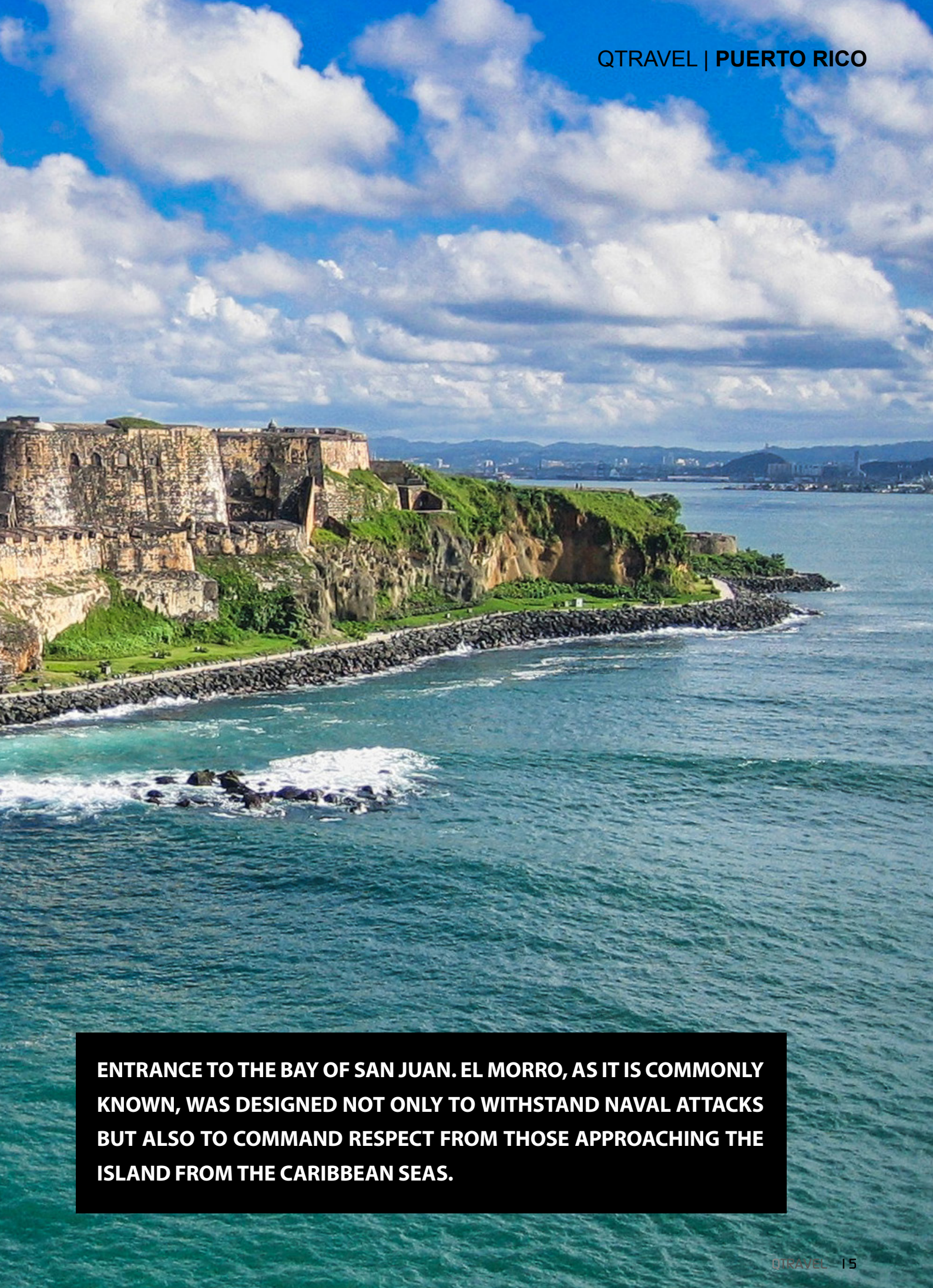
Over time, the fortress was modernized to adapt to advances in military technology until it was **occupied by U.S.** forces following the **Spanish-American War** in 1898, when Puerto Rico became a **U.S. territory**.

Today, **El Morro** is part of the **San Juan National Historic Site** and was officially designated a **UNESCO World Heritage Site** in 1983. Its well-preserved bastions, sentry boxes, and breathtaking panoramic views of the Atlantic attract hundreds of thousands of visitors annually.

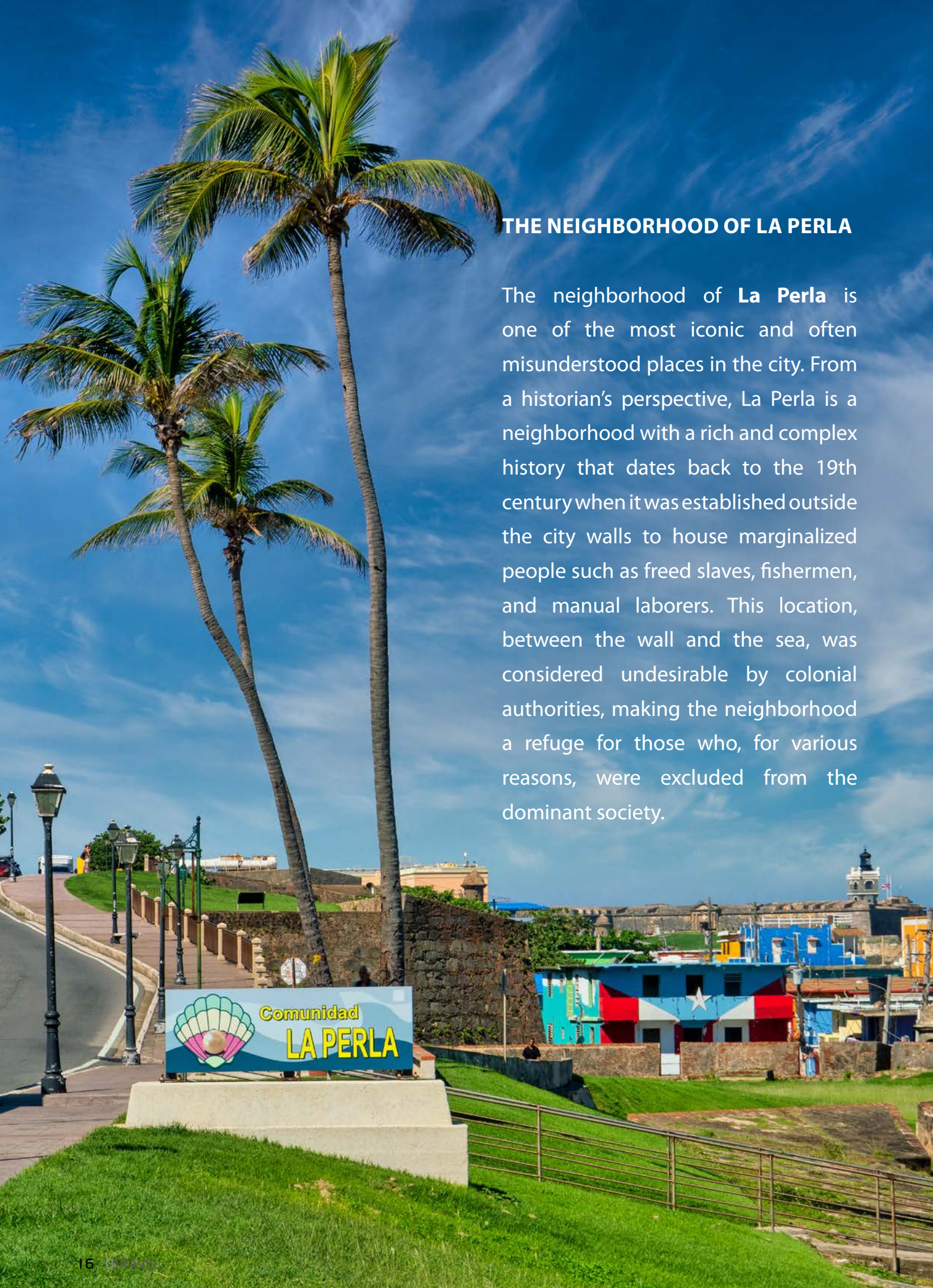
The castle offers a fascinating window into Puerto Rico's colonial past and is a space where history, architecture, and nature uniquely and harmoniously converge.



THE CASTILLO DE SAN FELIPE DEL MORRO IS ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE FORTIFICATIONS IN THE AMERICAS. ITS CONSTRUCTION BEGAN IN 1539 AND, OVER TIME, IT EXPANDED TO BECOME A COLOSSAL SIX-LEVEL STRUCTURE THAT IMPOSINGLY DOMINATES THE



ENTRANCE TO THE BAY OF SAN JUAN. EL MORRO, AS IT IS COMMONLY KNOWN, WAS DESIGNED NOT ONLY TO WITHSTAND NAVAL ATTACKS BUT ALSO TO COMMAND RESPECT FROM THOSE APPROACHING THE ISLAND FROM THE CARIBBEAN SEAS.



THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF LA PERLA

The neighborhood of **La Perla** is one of the most iconic and often misunderstood places in the city. From a historian's perspective, La Perla is a neighborhood with a rich and complex history that dates back to the 19th century when it was established outside the city walls to house marginalized people such as freed slaves, fishermen, and manual laborers. This location, between the wall and the sea, was considered undesirable by colonial authorities, making the neighborhood a refuge for those who, for various reasons, were excluded from the dominant society.



Houses in the unique La Perla neighborhood.

Throughout its history, **La Perla** has been a symbol of resistance and survival in the face of adversity. For decades, the neighborhood was considered a forbidden zone for visitors and was often stigmatized as a dangerous place. However, this perception has changed in recent years as La Perla has begun to be recognized for its unique local culture, urban art murals, and resilient community, which has managed to maintain its identity despite economic and social difficulties.

La Perla offers a unique experience for those who want to explore Old San Juan beyond its cobblestone streets and colonial buildings. This picturesque neighborhood, with its colorful houses and privileged location facing the Atlantic Ocean, is an ideal destination for lovers of urban art and photography. Its walls are full of murals that reflect both the history and the contemporary spirit of the place, created by local and international artists.



Photo: Michael Au

La Perla neighborhood seen from the sea. Above it, the Bulevar del Valle.

One of the neighborhood's most notable attractions is its small beach, a quiet and hidden space where visitors can enjoy the sea in a local and authentic setting.

Additionally, the community regularly organizes cultural events and festivals celebrating **Puerto Rican music**, dance, and gastronomy, offering tourists the opportunity to experience the vibrant, living culture and unique history of **La Perla**, which has endured for centuries.

For those visiting the neighborhood, it's important to do so with respect and an open mind, understanding that **La Perla** is above all a living, active community. It is recommended to enter through the main access next to the Puerta de San Juan and consider taking a guided tour to learn more about the neighborhood's history and development through the eyes of its own residents, who take great pride in preserving their unique cultural identity and traditions.



REGGAETON IN LA PERLA

La Perla has played a crucial role in the evolution and popularization of the reggaeton music phenomenon in Puerto Rico. This neighborhood, located in **Old San Juan**, is not only a cultural icon because of its history and vibrant community but also because it is a symbolic space in the development of one of the most influential musical genres of the 21st century.

From its origins, reggaeton has been an expression of the marginalized voices from urban areas and neighborhoods with a strong community identity, making it a natural platform for this kind of musical expression. With its mix of Jamaican dancehall, American hip hop, and Latin rhythms like salsa and merengue, reggaeton found in **La Perla** a place to grow and evolve, reflecting the social reality, struggles, and dreams of young Puerto Ricans.



All the houses in La Perla are painted in vibrant colors and adorned with slogans of all kinds.

One of the most significant moments that catapulted **La Perla** to the center of the reggaeton phenomenon was the filming of the music video for “Despacito” by Luis Fonsi and Daddy Yankee in 2017. This video, which became one of the most-watched in YouTube history, features vibrant images of **La Perla’s** streets, colorful houses, and murals, showing the world an authentic image of the neighborhood and its unique energy. Following this success, **La Perla** became a visual symbol of reggaeton for

fans of the genre who want to see the setting of one of its most iconic videos.

La Perla has been home to many reggaeton artists and has inspired lyrics and songs that talk about urban life. Its relevance to the reggaeton phenomenon also stems from the fact that it represents the spirit of struggle and the voice of marginalized neighborhoods for many of the early artists, like Vico C, Tego Calderón, and Daddy Yankee.



Above La Perla, the Bulevar del Valle stretches dominantly.

BULEVAR DEL VALLE

The **Bulevar del Valle** is an urban corridor that not only connects different areas of the city but also offers a fascinating display of contemporary and traditional architecture in Puerto Rico. The boulevard is a living representation of San Juan's architectural evolution, where styles range from colonial neoclassical to Caribbean modernism, blending seamlessly with the natural beauty and vibrant culture of the island.

One of the most striking aspects of **Bulevar del Valle** is its diverse architecture. Along the boulevard, you can find examples of buildings with vibrant facades and ornamental details reflecting Spanish heritage, such as wrought-iron balconies, interior courtyards, and tiled roofs. These features are typical of the colonial style that predominates in many of San Juan's historic buildings. Additionally, restored buildings maintain original elements such as carved wooden doors and wooden

windows with shutters that evoke life in San Juan centuries ago.

Walking along **Bulevar del Valle** is an opportunity to observe this incredible architectural diversity while exploring one of the most dynamic areas of San Juan. Along the boulevard, you will find various points of interest such as small cafes, contemporary art galleries, and local shops housed in historically and architecturally valuable buildings that reflect the city's rich cultural heritage. Not to mention that, in its central part, you'll find the nearly hidden neighborhood of **La Perla**.

At the northern end of the boulevard,

you can visit the Intendencia Building, a historic construction that offers a clear example of neoclassical style with its columned facade, symmetrical details, and large windows.

Another highlight is the Miramar Building, an example of early 20th-century architecture, with an eclectic structure that combines European elements with a unique Caribbean touch.

For those who want to enjoy Old San Juan's architecture while exploring the local culture in a quiet and less crowded way than on the streets of downtown, Bulevar del Valle is an excellent showcase.







Without a doubt, one of the most photographed spots in Puerto Rico is the wooden door on Calle Imperial.

CALLE IMPERIAL

Calle Imperial is one of the most picturesque and vibrant corners of Old San Juan. This narrow alleyway, characterized by its welcoming atmosphere and rich history, has become a symbol of Puerto Rican culture and pride. One of the most striking features of Calle Imperial is the colorfulness of its houses, whose facades are presented in a wide range of vibrant tones like blues, pinks, yellows, and greens

that stand out under the tropical sun, creating a visual mosaic that captivates both visitors and locals alike.

In fact, we are talking about three streets: **Calle Imperial**, Calle de la Virtud, and General MacArthur Street. These three streets form a “U” around the Museum of Art and History of San Juan.

The houses retain the traditional architecture of Old San Juan, with



wrought-iron balconies, carved wooden doors and windows, and tiled roofs. This Spanish colonial style blends with the Caribbean color palette, offering a picturesque view that invites photography. The alley's narrowness, along with its blue cobblestone pavement, gives it an intimate and charming character, transporting those who walk through it to a bygone era while they enjoy its unique beauty and vibrant atmosphere, filled with history.

One of the most emblematic points is the famous door painted with the Puerto Rican flag. This mural decorates one of the doors at the end of the alley and is an expression of cultural pride and resistance. The door, painted in red, white, and blue tones, represents the Puerto Rican flag and has become a symbol of identity for the inhabitants of San Juan. It is not just a work of art but also a place of pilgrimage for those who wish to celebrate and reaffirm their love for the island.



General MacArthur Street.

This union of charming streets is one of the favorite spots for visitors who want to capture the essence of Old San Juan. Walking through here is an opportunity to closely appreciate the colonial architecture and the original urban art that characterizes the city. Often, street musicians set up in the alley, filling it with lively **Caribbean rhythms**.

For those interested in photography, **Calle Imperial** offers countless opportunities to

capture unique images: from the colorful facades to the iconic door with the flag. Additionally, the street is located near other points of interest in Old San Juan, making it easy to combine the visit with a broader tour of the area, including historic landmarks and scenic viewpoints.

Calle Imperial is more than just an alleyway; it is a testament to Puerto Rico's vibrant culture and a reflection of the joy of life of its people, deeply rooted in tradition.



It is a tradition, to some extent, to decorate houses with plants and flowers to add contrast and life.

STROLLING THROUGH OLD SAN JUAN

The streets of Old San Juan in Puerto Rico are a true reflection of its rich colonial history and vibrant Caribbean culture. From a historian's perspective, the colors and architecture of Old San Juan are a unique blend of European influences adapted to the tropical environment. This uniqueness makes the city a fascinating destination for any visitor interested in exploring the historical and cultural evolution of the Americas.

The colorful facades are one of the most characteristic aspects of the streets of Old San Juan. The houses, painted in vibrant tones like blue, pink, yellow, green, and coral, not only add visual charm to the city but also served a practical purpose. During the colonial era, bright colors were used to protect buildings from the intense humidity of the Caribbean and to keep them cool by reflecting sunlight. Additionally, these colors helped residents identify their properties at a time when



many people could not read. Today, this colorfulness has become a symbol of Puerto Rican identity, reflecting the joy and resilient spirit of its people.

The architecture of Old San Juan is a rich amalgamation of European styles with local adaptations. Spanish colonial buildings dating back to the 16th and 17th centuries are the most predominant, designed to withstand the tropical climate. Among their main features are thick masonry walls that help keep the interior cool and red-tiled roofs that facilitate rainwater drainage. The windows and doors are usually made of solid wood, adorned with hand-carved details and shutters that allow for air circulation without compromising privacy or security.

The wrought-iron balconies are another iconic element of Old San Juan's architecture. These balconies, often decorated with tropical plants, not only provide shade but also allow residents to enjoy the surroundings from the



La Fortaleza or the Palace of Santa Catalina, the official residence of the Governor of Puerto Rico.

comfort of their homes, a crucial aspect in a densely built city. Courtyards are equally characteristic, offering open, cool spaces in the heart of the homes where residents can enjoy natural light and ventilation.

Among the city's most emblematic buildings is La Fortaleza or the Palacio de Santa Catalina, the official residence of the governor of Puerto Rico since the 16th century. This building combines elements of Spanish Renaissance and Neoclassical

architecture and is recognized for its impressive facade and interior gardens. The San Juan Bautista Cathedral, one of the oldest in the Americas, presents a blend of Gothic and Neoclassical styles and houses the tomb of the conquistador Juan Ponce de León.

Its narrow, cobblestone streets, made from old blue cobblestones brought from Spain, offer a charming contrast to the multicolored facades and allow exploration of every



The architectural heritage inevitably coexists with 21st-century transportation elements.

corner of the city on foot. Main streets like Calle San Sebastián, Calle Fortaleza, and Calle del Cristo are perfect for getting lost and discovering local cafes, craft shops, art galleries, and restaurants.

Exploring Old San Juan allows us to experience the vibrant atmosphere of a city that celebrates its past while living fully in the present. Every color, every facade, and every corner tells a story waiting to be discovered.





Fountain in the Plaza de Armas.

PLAZA DE ARMAS

Plaza de Armas is one of the most emblematic public spaces in Old San Juan and has been a historical and social landmark since the city's founding in the 16th century. Originally conceived as the main square, its name comes from the military drills that were held there during the colonial era. The plaza is surrounded by historic buildings such as the San Juan City Hall and the Intendencia Building,

which stand out for their Neoclassical architecture. In the center of the plaza, there are four statues representing the seasons of the year, commissioned in the 19th century as part of an urban beautification project.

Plaza de Armas is ideal for enjoying a coffee on one of its many benches while observing the city's daily life or listening to live music, often present in this vibrant and history-filled spot.



ART-DECO BUILDING OF BANCO POPULAR

The Art-Deco Building of Banco Popular, located on Tetuán Street, is a magnificent example of early **20th-century Art-Deco architecture** in San Juan.

Inaugurated in 1939, this building is characterized by its geometric lines and ornamental details that reflect the international style of the era. With its elegant and modern design, the building represents the spirit of progress in Puerto Rico during the early decades of the 20th century. For tourists, it stands as a point of interest that contrasts with the predominant colonial architecture of Old San Juan. A visit to the building offers the opportunity to appreciate how the city has incorporated different architectural styles throughout its history, enriching its urban landscape and offering a diverse visual experience.



Interior of the iconic La Mallorquina restaurant.

LA MALLORQUINA

Founded in 1848, **La Mallorquina** is the oldest restaurant in Puerto Rico and a true icon of **Old San Juan**. This establishment, which has operated continuously for more than a century, is renowned for its traditional atmosphere and exquisite criollo cuisine, which combines Spanish influences with local flavors.

The interior of **La Mallorquina** retains its

original charm, with high ceilings, tiled walls, and antique furniture, transporting visitors to a bygone era.

For tourists, it is the ideal place to savor typical dishes like arroz con gandules, mofongo, or piononos, while enjoying an environment that evokes Puerto Rican history and culture. Dining at **La Mallorquina** is undoubtedly a unique culinary and cultural experience in the heart of **Old San Juan**.



Watchtower of the Bastion of Las Palmas de San José.

BASTION OF LAS PALMAS DE SAN JOSÉ

The Bastion of Las Palmas de San José is one of the best observation points in Old San Juan. Built in the 16th century as part of the city's defensive system, this bastion offers stunning panoramic views of the cruise port and San Juan Bay.

From here, visitors can admire the vast stretch of the defense walls of Castillo San Felipe del Morro and the constant coming



and going of ships in the harbor. Historically, its defensive role was to protect the city from maritime attacks approaching the northernmost side of the castle and the natural entrance to the harbor.

Strolling through this area allows tourists to learn more about Puerto Rico's military and maritime history.

LA CASA ESTRECHA

La Casa Estrecha, known as the narrowest house in Puerto Rico and one of the narrowest in the world, is a fascinating example of how space in Old San Juan was adapted to the limitations of the urban environment. This tiny house, barely 1.5 meters wide, is located on Calle Tetuán and has become an architectural curiosity and a tourist attraction.

The story goes that the house was built in a small space between two existing buildings, ingeniously utilizing every available centimeter. Although small in size, the house is large in character and charm.





The Chapel of La Salud stands out because it seems to have been forcibly placed in the middle of the

CHAPEL OF LA SALUD

The **Chapel of La Salud**, built in the 18th century, is a small and charming church located in Old San Juan. This chapel was erected by the community as a place of prayer for those seeking healing and spiritual comfort, dedicating it to the **Virgin of La Salud**. According to legend, it was built to honor a miracle that occurred during a horse race on **Calle del Cristo**, where a young man was

saved from falling off a cliff after a prayer to **Cristo de la Salud**.

Its simple architecture, with a white facade and modest interior, is representative of the religious structures from the colonial era in Puerto Rico. Originally, it featured terracotta and white colors in the decoration of its friezes and arches. Visiting the **Chapel of La Salud** offers a moment of reflection and tranquility amidst the hustle and bustle of the city.



Gardens in Plaza de la Barandilla.

PLAZA DE LA BARANDILLA

The Plaza de la Barandilla is a public space with remarkable historical charm. Its name comes from the old iron railings that used to adorn the area, providing a protective barrier with views of the sea. This picturesque plaza offers an impressive panorama of the San Juan harbor and the Caribbean, making it a prime spot to admire the natural beauty of the coastline.

Surrounded by charming colonial buildings and the prominent Carlos Albizu University, the plaza serves as a vibrant meeting point for both locals and tourists.

Its relaxed atmosphere and historic setting make it a perfect place to stroll, unwind, and enjoy the characteristic ambiance of Old San Juan. Its stunning beauty and fascinating history make it an essential stop on any list of must-see places in the city.



The houses on Calle de la Luna have a Mediterranean air, an architectural legacy from that era.

COLONIAL HOUSES ON CALLE DE LA LUNA

Calle de la Luna is famous for its beautiful colonial houses in bright colors, which are a reflection of the identity and character of Old San Juan. These houses, with facades in vibrant shades such as blue, yellow, pink, and green, capture the sunlight and create a visual spectacle that delights both locals and tourists. It's a true manifestation of Puerto Rico's joyful spirit.

Built with masonry walls and tiled roofs, these colonial homes feature elegant architectural details like wrought-iron balconies and large wooden doors. Walking along the peaceful Calle de la Luna invites you to enjoy the charm of these colorful facades, ideal for photographs and for admiring the creativity with which the residents of San Juan have beautifully beautified their city over the centuries, now attracting thousands of visitors each year.



O'Donnell street.

O'DONNELL STREET

O'Donnell Street is another hidden gem of **Old San Juan**, known for its colonial residences and for being one of the most picturesque streets in the city. The houses on this street are characterized by their stunning Spanish colonial architecture, featuring large windows, wrought-iron balconies adorned with tropical plants, and facades painted in warm tones. Many of these houses have

been restored, always preserving their original architectural elements, while housing modern boutiques, art galleries, and small restaurants that bring life and charm to the area.

Strolling along **O'Donnell Street** offers the opportunity to enjoy a tranquil and charming atmosphere, discover local life, and capture unforgettable photographs of the unique architecture of **Old San Juan**.

PLAZA COLÓN

Plaza Colón, located in the heart of Old San Juan, is an important historical, cultural, and tourist landmark. This iconic plaza honors **Christopher Columbus**, the Genoese navigator, with an imposing statue that dominates the center of the square. **Inaugurated in 1893**, the plaza has witnessed numerous historical events and celebrations over the years.

Its surroundings are lined with colonial architecture that reflects the rich history of San Juan. In addition to its historical value, **Plaza Colón** serves as a meeting point for both tourists and locals, offering a space to relax, enjoy the views, and immerse oneself in the cultural atmosphere of the old city. Its proximity to attractions such as **Castillo San Felipe del Morro** and the Museo de las Américas makes it a must-visit stop for those exploring the city.





Facade of the Old Casino of Puerto Rico.

OLD CASINO OF PUERTO RICO

The **Old Casino of Puerto Rico**, located right next to **Plaza Colón**, is a prominent historical and cultural monument in Puerto Rico. Founded in 1917 as a social club for the elite of the time, the building is a splendid example of neoclassical architecture, featuring intricate ornamental details that reflect its original grandeur. Designed by architect Luis R. Benítez, the casino boasts an impressive

facade with Corinthian columns and wrought-iron balconies, while its interior is beautifully adorned with luxurious finishes and a grand central hall.

During its heyday, the casino was the epicenter of **social life in San Juan**, hosting balls, dinners, and cultural events that attracted the island's high society.

Today, it serves as a cultural and event center for the city.



Small and beautiful Plaza de la Catedral.

PLAZA DE LA CATEDRAL

The **Plaza de la Catedral** is a site of great historical, cultural, and tourist significance. This small plaza, located in front of the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista, is the heart of the city's historic district. Founded in 1540, the cathedral is one of the oldest religious structures in the Americas, and its impressive Neo-Gothic and Baroque architecture makes it a historical landmark.

The Plaza de la Catedral has witnessed numerous events and celebrations throughout the centuries, from solemn masses to local festivities. Visitors can enjoy its well-maintained gardens, admire the colonial architecture of the plaza, and explore nearby cafes and shops. The plaza is also an ideal starting point for exploring the historic center, making it an essential stop for those who wish to immerse themselves in the spirit of the old city.





In any small downtown restaurant, you can enjoy simple traditional dishes.

OLD SAN JUAN GASTRONOMY

San Juan offers a culinary scene that is both a reflection of its rich history and a celebration of its cultural diversity. The cuisine of San Juan is the result of a mix of indigenous, African, Spanish, and American influences that have shaped the local food over the centuries.

Tourists can explore a variety of restaurants and cafes that preserve colonial culinary traditions while incorporating modern

touches. Spanish influence is particularly notable in dishes like arroz con gandules (rice with pigeon peas) and mofongo (mashed green plantains), which reflect the adaptation of local ingredients to European cooking techniques.

Coquito, a coconut punch with rum, is a festive drink with Spanish roots, adapted using local ingredients. Additionally, Afro-Antillean cuisine has made an indelible mark on the city's gastronomy.



Traditional dishes served at Casa Luna Rest.

The use of African spices and cooking techniques can be seen in dishes like pastelón (a kind of plantain lasagna) and bacalao a la vizcaína (cod in tomato sauce), which are especially popular during local festivals and celebrations.

For visitors, San Juan offers a culinary experience that ranges from traditional roast pork in small lechoneras on the outskirts of the city to elegant dinners in gourmet restaurants that present a modern version of



criolla cuisine. Restaurants like La Mallorquina, which has been operating since 1848, offer traditional dishes in an atmosphere that retains the historic charm of the city.



Example of traditional Puerto Rican dishes to share.

FLAVORS FOOD TOURS

Flavors Food Tours offers a unique immersion into Puerto Rican gastronomy and culture, allowing visitors to explore authentic local flavors while touring Old San Juan.

During the tour, participants have the opportunity to taste a variety of typical dishes in some of the best local restaurants and cafes, from the classic

mofongo—a delight made with mashed green plantains—to the delicious arroz con gandules and coquito, a drink similar to eggnog but with a Caribbean twist of coconut and rum.

For tourists, taking this tour is an excellent way to get to know Old San Juan in an immersive way, sampling dishes in places frequented by locals, hearing stories about the city, and discovering lesser-known but equally fascinating corners.



Bottles of local beer at Taberna Lúpulo.

LA TABERNA LÚPULO

La Taberna Lúpulo is a landmark in Old San Juan for those who want to experience the vibrant nightlife of the city. This bar, located on Calle San Sebastián, is known for its wide selection of craft beers, both local and international. With its relaxed atmosphere, La Taberna Lúpulo attracts both locals and tourists who want to enjoy a good drink while sharing stories and immersing themselves in the authentic



ambiance of San Juan.

For visitors, it's the perfect place to taste Puerto Rican craft beers, such as those from the local brewery Ocean Lab Brewing Co., and to experience firsthand the warm and festive spirit of the city.



Exhibition area at Don Ruiz Coffee Shop.



DON RUIZ COFFEE SHOP

Don Ruiz Coffee Shop, located inside the historic Cuartel de Ballajá, is a must-visit spot for coffee lovers. This cozy establishment, founded by a Puerto Rican family with a long tradition in coffee growing, offers a unique experience by combining the authentic taste of the island's coffee with the colonial charm of the barracks, built in the 19th century.

The shop is known for its high-quality coffee, cultivated and roasted locally in Puerto Rico's mountains. Visitors can enjoy a cup of exquisite Puerto Rican coffee while surrounded by the impressive arches and courtyards of a place filled with history and culture. It also has a small museum that showcases the process of coffee cultivation and production in Puerto Rico, allowing visitors to learn more about this important tradition.





Streams of El Yunque National Park.

EL YUNQUE

El Yunque National Park, officially known as Bosque Nacional El Yunque, is a valuable natural treasure located in the eastern region of Puerto Rico. This park is the only tropical rainforest within the United States National Forest system and stands out as one of the most diverse ecosystems in the Caribbean. Covering approximately 11,000 hectares, El Yunque rises from the lowlands to the mountain peaks, with

its highest point at Pico El Yunque, 1,080 meters above sea level. Above all, this park offers an extraordinary diversity of flora and fauna, providing a unique experience of connection with nature.

FLORA AND FAUNA

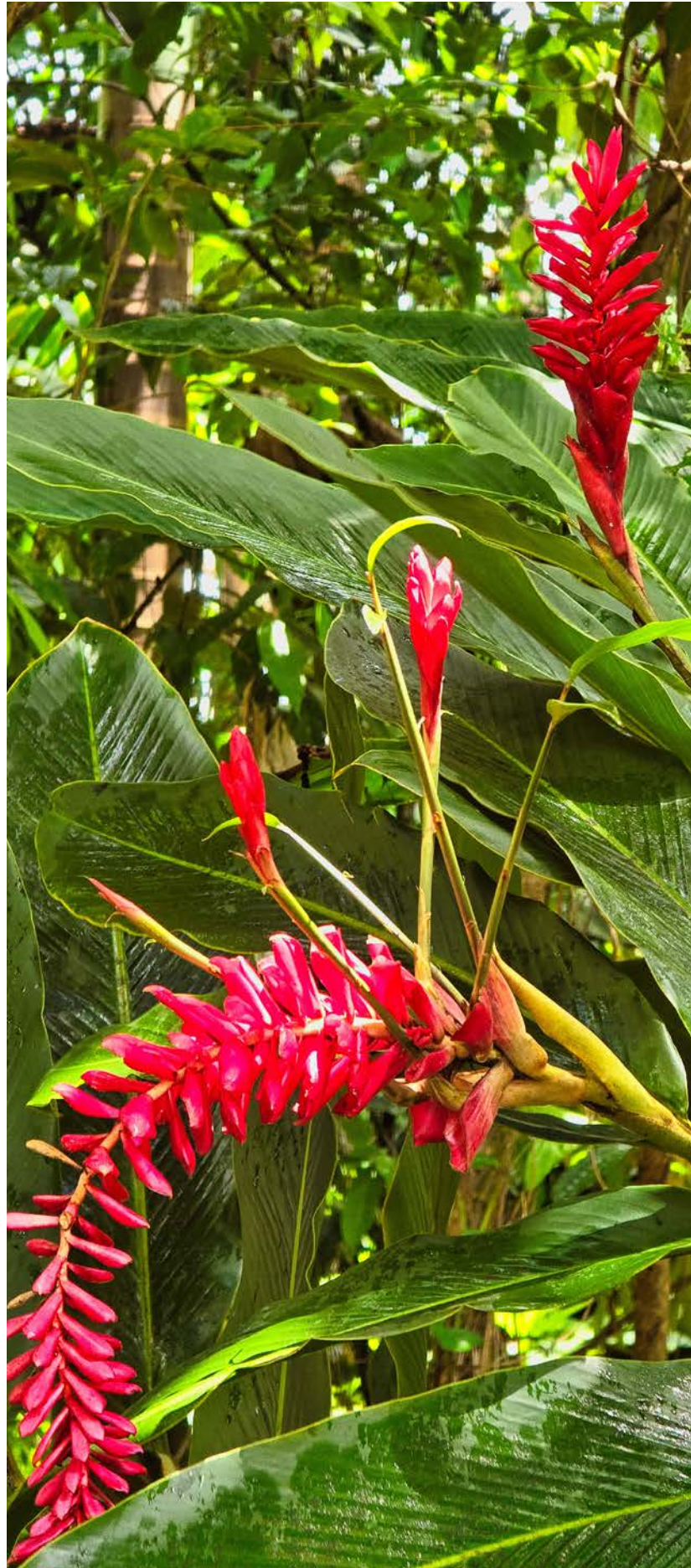
El Yunque is home to more than 240 species of trees, 50 species of orchids, and a rich variety of endemic plants. One of the park's most representative plants is the

sierra palm (*Prestoea montana*), which dominates the landscape in the higher, more humid areas. It is also common to find giant ferns, bromeliads, and trees such as the yagrumo, tabonuco, and palo colorado, each adapted to different elevations and climatic conditions within the park.

As for wildlife, El Yunque is home to an impressive diversity of species, including several endemic to Puerto Rico. One of the most emblematic is the **coquí** (*Eleutherodactylus spp.*), a small amphibian that has become a cultural symbol of the island.

This tiny animal, which measures between 1.5 and 5 cm, is known for its characteristic nocturnal call that sounds like “*ko-kee.*” The **coquí** is distinguished by being ovoviviparous, meaning its eggs develop without the need for water—a unique adaptation that allows it to thrive on the moist leaves of the forest.

There are 17 species of coquí in Puerto Rico, 13 of which





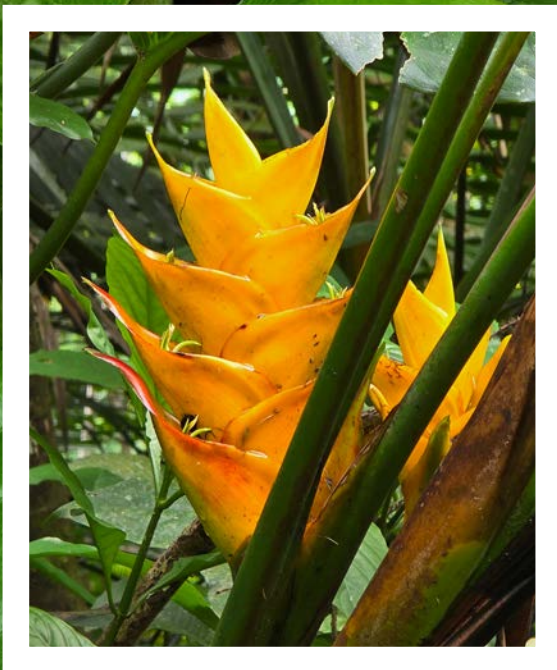
The Coquí, symbol of El Yunque and the island's biodiversity.

inhabit El Yunque. Of these, some are endangered, such as the golden coquí (*Eleutherodactylus jasperii*).

Another important inhabitant of this ecosystem is the **tree snail**, a unique land snail that lives in the trees of El Yunque. With its thin, disc-shaped shell adorned with bands of brown, white, and yellow, this snail camouflages perfectly among the bark and branches, where it feeds on algae and lichens.

As an essential part of El Yunque's ecosystem, the **tree snail** contributes to nutrient recycling and the overall health of the forest.

However, it faces threats such as deforestation and climate change, which endanger its natural habitat. Thus, the conservation of this tropical park not only protects an extraordinary landscape but also the unique species that inhabit it, such as the tree snail.

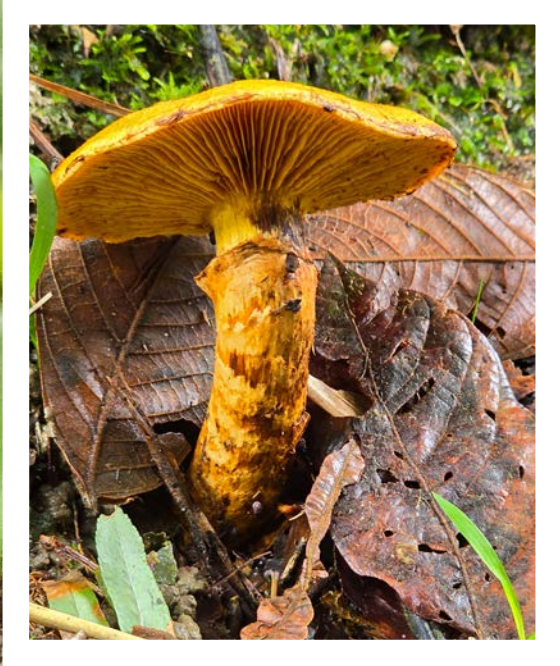




Puerto Rican parrot. Tree snail.

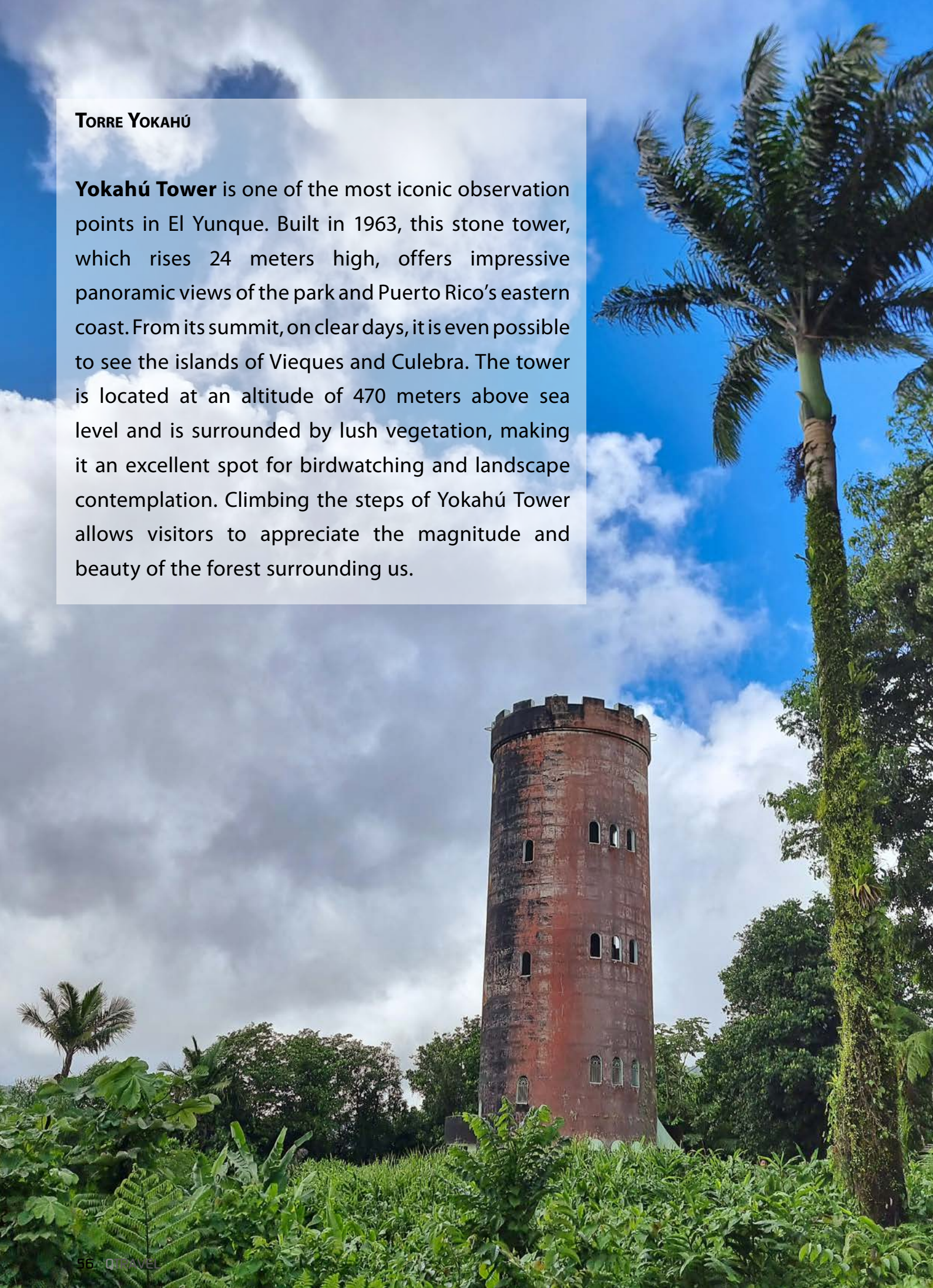
El Yunque is also a natural refuge for endemic birds, such as the **Puerto Rican parrot** (*Amazona vittata*), a critically endangered species that has been the focus of intense conservation efforts. El Yunque provides habitat for 97 bird species, of which 45 are migratory. Other animals found in the park include the Jamaican **fruit bat** (*Artibeus jamaicensis*), the **Puerto Rican boa** (*Chilabothrus inornatus*), and various species of butterflies and amphibians.

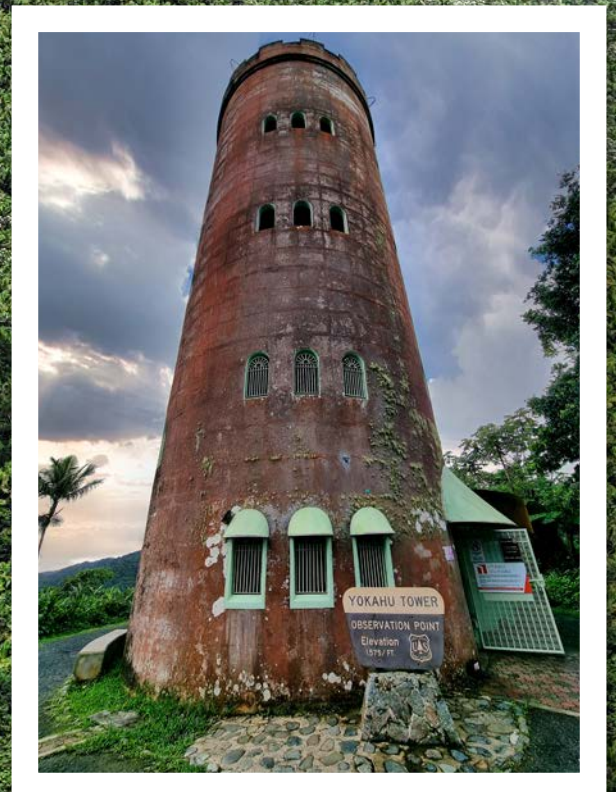
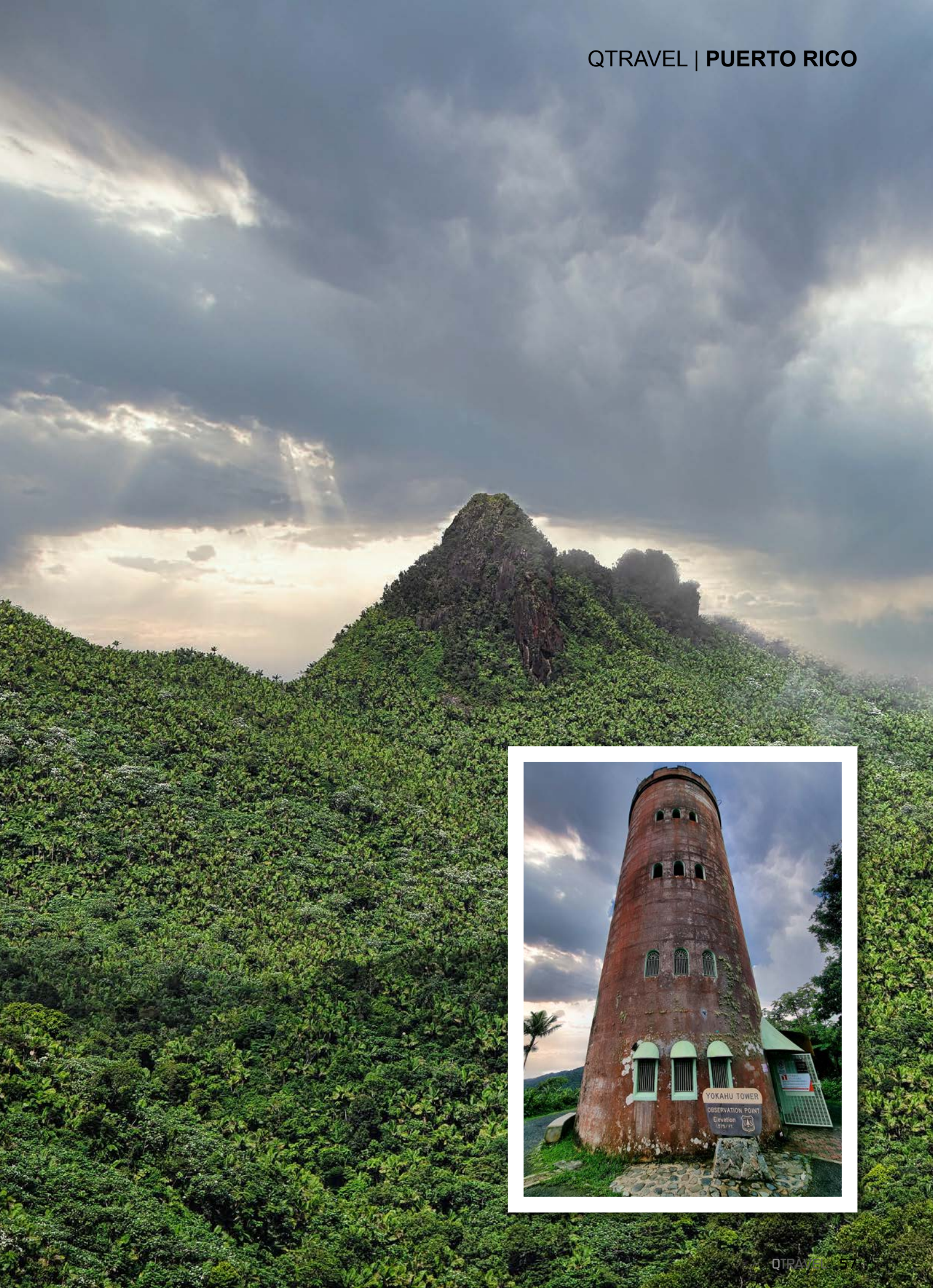




TORRE YOKAHÚ

Yokahú Tower is one of the most iconic observation points in El Yunque. Built in 1963, this stone tower, which rises 24 meters high, offers impressive panoramic views of the park and Puerto Rico's eastern coast. From its summit, on clear days, it is even possible to see the islands of Vieques and Culebra. The tower is located at an altitude of 470 meters above sea level and is surrounded by lush vegetation, making it an excellent spot for birdwatching and landscape contemplation. Climbing the steps of Yokahú Tower allows visitors to appreciate the magnitude and beauty of the forest surrounding us.







Entrance to the main building of El Portal, the visitor center of El Yunque.

EL YUNQUE VISITOR CENTER

El Yunque visitor center is the first stop recommended for those who want to learn more about this unique ecosystem before exploring its trails. Inaugurated in 1996, El Portal was designed to integrate with the natural environment, using materials and construction techniques that are environmentally friendly.

This center offers a series of interactive

exhibits that explain the history, ecology, and cultural significance of El Yunque.

Additionally, information is provided on the various hiking trails, the flora and fauna that visitors may encounter, and the conservation measures being implemented to protect this valuable natural resource. It also features an auditorium where educational documentaries are shown and a gift shop offering local and sustainable products.



Baño Grande Dam.

BAÑO GRANDE DAM

Baño Grande Dam is a magical spot hidden in the heart of El Yunque National Park. This artificial pond, built in the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps, was originally a recreation area for park visitors. Today, its tranquil waters and rustic architecture make it an ideal place to enjoy the serenity of the rainforest.

Surrounded by lush vegetation and

tall palm trees, Baño Grande offers a charming view of nature in its purest form. A stone bridge crosses over the pond, inviting visitors to stop and admire the clarity of the water, which reflects the deep green of the surrounding trees. The sound of birds and the gentle murmur of the water create a peaceful atmosphere that envelops those who visit, making it a perfect place to rest during a park hike.

Although swimming is no longer allowed



A small stream originates from the Baño Grande Dam.

in its waters, Baño Grande remains perfect for a leisurely walk or for taking spectacular photographs. Additionally, it's an ideal spot to observe the tree snail in its natural habitat, as it camouflages perfectly within the surroundings.

We mustn't forget that, beyond its natural beauty, Baño Grande holds great historical significance within the park, as its construction was part of a conservation effort carried out during the Great



Depression in the 1930s. Over the years, it has been a silent witness to the passage of time and the interaction between humanity and nature in an environment that has remained practically untouched. Today, it remains one of the most special places in El Yunque, as it commemorates the beginning of the park's arduous conservation process.



JUAN DIEGO WATERFALL

Juan Diego Waterfall is a hidden gem within the park, known for its intimate and serene setting. Unlike other, more popular waterfalls in El Yunque, such as

La Mina, **Juan Diego Waterfall** offers a quieter and less-visited retreat, making it an ideal destination for those seeking a more personal connection with nature. The waterfall is located at the end of a short but steep trail that winds through



the forest. Upon arrival, visitors are greeted by a beautiful cascade of water that flows into a small natural pool, perfect for a refreshing swim. The surrounding vegetation is dense and vibrant, with ferns and mosses covering the rocks, creating a

dreamlike landscape. This place is perfect for relaxing, taking photographs, and enjoying the sound of the water amidst the silence of the forest.

From its fascinating flora and fauna to its



historical and natural points of interest, this place has it all. Although it seems to be frequently visited, those who come to this waterfall are very respectful of the environment, feeling a special connection with nature.

El Yunque National Park encapsulates Puerto Rico's natural richness, offering visitors the rare opportunity to explore a unique and diverse ecosystem, learn about its biodiversity, and enjoy its spectacular landscapes.



PIÑONES AREA

The Piñones Area, located east of San Juan, is one of Puerto Rico's most authentic and tranquil destinations. This picturesque coastal enclave, part of the Loíza municipality, is famous for

its spectacular beaches, its rich Afro-Caribbean cultural heritage, and its exquisite culinary offerings.

With a blend of lush nature and deep-rooted traditions, Piñones offers visitors a unique experience that combines the



natural beauty of the seaside with the warmth of local culture.

PIÑONES SEASIDE

The seaside of Piñones is one of the area's main attractions. This stretch

of coast, which extends over several kilometers, is lined with golden beaches and crystal-clear waters, perfect for swimming, relaxing, and enjoying the natural tranquility of the Caribbean Sea. The area is particularly popular among both locals and visitors looking



for a more relaxed and less touristy atmosphere compared to the busy beaches of San Juan.

Along the seaside, visitors can walk, exercise, or bike along the Piñones Boardwalk, a wooden trail that

winds through mangroves and offers spectacular views of the coast and surrounding vegetation. This walk allows for the enjoyment of natural landscapes while breathing in the sea breeze and listening to the gentle sound of the waves.



THE WATERFRONT PIÑONES RESTAURANT

The **Waterfront Piñones Restaurant** is one of the standout places to enjoy local cuisine in Piñones. Located by the sea, this restaurant offers a culinary experience that combines the freshness of seafood

with the traditional flavors of Puerto Rico. Its menu includes a variety of typical dishes, such as alcapurrias, bacalaítos, and mofongo, all prepared with fresh, local ingredients.

The restaurant's atmosphere is casual



and welcoming, with decor reflecting Caribbean culture and lifestyle. The charm of the place, in addition to the excellent cuisine, lies in being able to enjoy the dishes outdoors, seated on wooden benches with ocean views, while often live music is performed on-site. The

Waterfront Piñones is the perfect place to spend a beach day with an unmatched view of the Caribbean Sea.



CULTURAL TOUR IN LOÍZA

The Loíza Area is known as the Afro-Caribbean cultural capital of Puerto Rico. A tour through this municipality offers an immersion into the rich African heritage that has shaped its traditions, music, and

art. This is a Puerto Rico entirely different from what can be found in the rest of the island. Among the most notable places to visit are the **Bomba N'Zambia Workshop** and the **Ayala Brothers' Batey**, two spaces that celebrate and preserve Loíza's cultural identity.



BOMBA N'ZAMBIA WORKSHOP

The **Bomba N'Zambia Workshop**, located near the mouth of the Río Grande de Loíza, is an open-air space on the beach dedicated to the teaching and practice of *bomba*, a traditional genre of

music and dance that is one of the most important cultural expressions of the Afro-descendant community in Puerto Rico. This space is open to the general public who want to learn.

Bomba has its roots in the history of African



slaves who were brought to the island, and it is characterized by a dialogue between the drums and the dancers, where the rhythm of the drum sets the dancers' movements. At the **N'Zambia Workshop**, visitors can learn about the history of bomba from **Sheila Osorio**, participate

in interactive workshops, and enjoy live performances that demonstrate the energy and passion that this music embodies. The natural setting of the workshop, near the Río Grande, adds an element of serenity and connection with nature, making the experience even more enriching.



At the Ayala Brothers' house, you can see how traditional vejigante masks are made.

AYALA BROTHERS' BATEY

The **Ayala Brothers' Batey** is another must-see in the cultural tour of Loíza. This family is famous for creating the colorful **vejigante masks**, which are an iconic symbol of Puerto Rico's traditional festivals, especially during the Fiestas de Santiago Apóstol in Loíza. The masks, made from natural materials like coconut and papier-mâché, are decorated with vibrant colors and horns that give

them an intimidating appearance. Their craftsmanship not only reflects the ingenuity of the local community but also a process of cultural resistance against colonial impositions.

These masks represent mythological figures and are used in parades and celebrations, where the vejigantes, festive characters combining African, Spanish, and Taíno elements, dance to the rhythm of bomba and plena.



One of the traditional vejigante masks displayed at the Ayala Brothers' house.

Historically, the vejigantes symbolize the struggle between good and evil, representing the Moors confronted by Christians during Spain's reconquest.

This concept arrived in Puerto Rico through Spanish colonization and was reinterpreted by African slaves and their descendants. In Loíza, this tradition acquired a unique fusion, integrating Catholic religious beliefs with elements of African culture and Taíno symbolism.

The **vejigante masks** of Loíza are a living example of the rich intersection between history and anthropology in Puerto Rico, reflecting the island's cultural mestizaje.

At the **Ayala Brothers' Batey**, visitors can learn about the artisanal process of making these masks, from shaping to hand painting, and understand their cultural significance. Additionally, masks and other crafts can be purchased as excellent souvenirs.



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