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Traveling into Puerto Rico: From Paradise to paradox

Dear friends,

Greetings from the Latin America and Caribbean Office! My name is Rev. Angel L. Rivera-Agosto, and I serve at Global Ministries as the Area Executive for Latin America and the Caribbean. This pilgrimage was made possible by the joint effort of Week of Compassion, Disciples Volunteering, the People-to People Pilgrimage Programme and the Latin America and the Caribbean Office. After weeks of preparation, your opportunity to serve and engage in solidarity is finally here. Let me share some context of the overall experience of traveling to the island of Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico presents a context of extreme paradoxes where life is configured by a complicated history, an ambivalent and fragile present, and an uncertain and risky future. Yet, you will find that, for *Puertorricans*, life is colorful and tuneful, hospitality is offered in good will, and faith—many faiths—sustain their hopes. But, also, you will find the paradox of people drowning not only on heavy rain but in violence, injustice, social marginalization, and abandonment, specifically in the center part of the island or in towns far away from the main cities. There are still 50,000 people with no electric service and hundreds with no access to water. Deaths related to the passing of the hurricane are estimated in more than 4,500, according to recent studies. Federal and local authorities are blamed for the poor record on recovery and attention to the victims. That is to say, Hurricane Maria devastated the island in ways that, up until today, are about to be seen and known.

The packet of materials you have received will assist you in the discernment of the culture and the ways of the island. As you approach your view to the sun and the beach of the island, be alert into the signs of death and resurrection on Borikén (the indigenous name of the island) so you can acknowledge the challenging work of our Partners on their ministry of abundant life, justice and peace. Let us be the hands that join our friends in Puerto Rico like the fishermen get together in the sea to look for their livelihood and give yourself into the beauty of mountains, clouds and smiles, even in the toughest hour of their lives.

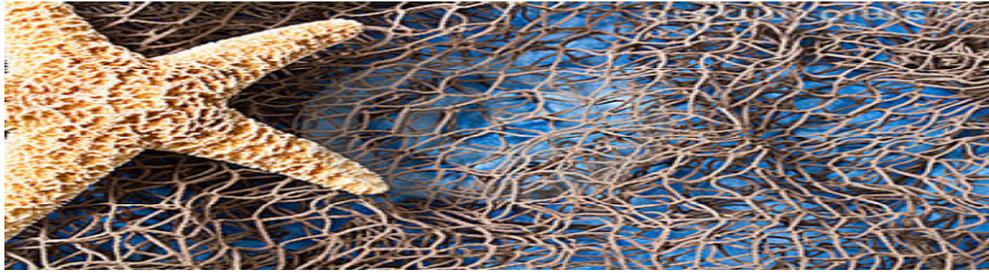
In Christ,

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Our Partners in the Caribbean: Puerto Rico

Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico *Iglesia Cristiana (Discipulos de Cristo) en Puerto Rico*



The Disciples have been in Puerto Rico since 1899 when the first missionary Disciples came. The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico is a Church constituted by 105 local churches. Their offices are located in Bayamón, in what is called the Christian Center. It has a Biblical Institute for the training of pastors and laymen of our churches, located in the Christian Center. They are dedicated to sharing a message of peace and hope, and have an identity that is defined by their values and history. They mark themselves by the role that Jesus plays in their lives.

The Disciples church in Puerto Rico has several community projects that are very diverse, from children's programs to elderly, counseling and community needs. Their mission is to proclaim the message of the gospel which is the possibility of change and transformation for society. The Church exists in society to accompany her and to model a lifestyle that encourages the towns to reach its aspirations and ideals. That is their social primary responsibility. However, the Church, like any other reality composed of human beings, is subject to the discomforts and ambivalences that they suffer from. This is the reason why we have seen Church not living up to its expectations. In spite of this, the Church lives constantly in a process of reflection using criteria such as the values of the Gospel that they profess.

United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico *Iglesia Evangelica Unida de Puerto Rico*



The United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico is a community of faith organized by believers in God the Creator, Jesus Christ the Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit the sustainer. They promote and live the unity of the church to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom. The United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico is a community of faith that encourages and lives through the unity of the Church. Their mission answers to a call from God that invites them to adore, proclaim the

gospel, educate, serve and reconcile the human being with God and do the same with their neighbors. Their vision is to be a name recognized by its drive and dynamism that reaches and transforms the lives of the people in the name of Christ and extends its service and action of justice to the society and the creation to establish the realm of God.

Puerto Rico Council of Churches / *Concilio de Iglesias de Puerto Rico*



The Council of Churches of Puerto Rico (CIPR) is the more ancient ecclesial ecumenical organization of America. It professes the unity of Christ's body and the service to God and Puerto Rico. The council was founded in 2002. Previous to the CIPR, the Federation of Evangelical Churches of Puerto Rico formed in 1905, which became the Union in 1916, the Association in 1934, and the Evangelical Council of Puerto Rico in 1954. The member churches of the Council of Churches in Puerto Rico are centered in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, motivated by the gospel to seek the unity of the church (John 17:21), and bound together by a fraternal bond, common history, and similar public witness.

Churches which currently make up the body of the CIPR are:

- Baptist Churches of Puerto Rico
- Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
- United Evangelical Church of Puerto Rico
- *Methodist Church of Puerto Rico*
- *Presbyterian Church (USA) in Puerto Rico*
- Church of the Brethren
- First Union Church
- Second Union Church

Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico/ *Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico*



The Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico is a mainline Protestant seminary in Río Piedras, Puerto Rico that offers graduate studies conducive to either a Master of Divinity or a Master of Arts in Religion. It was founded on September 11, 1919, by a group of theological schools and biblical institutes of the Protestant denominations that came to Puerto Rico after the Spanish-American War. The mission of the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico is to contribute to the integral formation of men and women to serve in Christian ministry and participate in the mission of the people of God in Puerto Rico and the Americas. Their reason for being is to accompany the student community in its development

and spiritual growth, personal, social, academic and professional, and identify and respond to the needs of continuing education for graduates and cooperating churches. The aim is to achieve the excellence and quality in our academic programs and administrative processes. Their vision is to continue the tradition of excellence of the Seminar, in order to adequately respond to the education and training needs of the pastoral and lay leadership of the Church, while affirming the importance of transformative theological education. The Council seeks to serve with efficiency and effectiveness in the accomplishment of their mission, which involves developing a teaching and administrative management that focuses on the quality, the contextuality, and globalization, of meeting the needs of students, faculty, and community churches.

AMANESER 2025



The Alliance for Sustainable Resources Management (AMANESER 2025) is an ecumenical network of grassroots organizations whose purpose is to promote sustainability in Puerto Rico so that the island can design its development as “prosperous, fair, democratic, sustainable and happy.” To this end, AMANESER 2025 is beginning to equip local communities with the organizational and material resources to improve their resiliency in the midst of natural disasters and to reduce the community’s dependency on outside assistance in responding to these disasters. Material resources provided to the community include:

- solar energy panels
- community refrigeration system
- rainwater harvesting system, which can hold 2,000-4,000 gallons
- individual water filters that can filter up to 30,000 gallons
- battery operated communication devices

Each community will develop their own strategic plan for becoming a more sustainable community in the face of climate change. In walking with the community, AMANASER 2025 will provide technical and organizational training. Through this process, each community will come together to write a vision statement, identify priority areas, and develop strategies and activities to work toward their vision for the future.

The connections between climate change and Christian spirituality is at the core of AMANESER's work. AMANASER 2025 will be facilitating conversations on how addressing climate change and creating resources for a more sustainable future are not only social issues but moral and religious ones as well.

AMANESER 2025 shares a history of community work and education with its predecessor, Industrial Mission of Puerto Rico. The Industrial Mission was founded in 1969 to give ecumenical support to workers, and to provide a forum of dialogue between workers and industrialists. Funded by the World Council of Churches and seven or eight Christian denominations in Puerto Rico, it provided support for the health and safety of workers. Such abuses as permitting sanitation workers to ride on the side of the truck and subjecting workers to dangerous pollution conditions demanded immediate attention. At that time, Industrial Mission acted also in the vanguard of all environmental problems, regardless of their magnitude. Amaneser 2025 inherited the Industrial Mission’s history, now focused on community education, organization, project design and advocacy, in the promotion of sustainable development in the context of climate change.

Hope Builders Home/*Hogar de Niños Forjadores de Esperanza*



The “Hogar Forjadores de Esperanza”, or Hope Builders Home, is located in Bayamón, Puerto Rico, and a home for approximately 20 boys coming from different backgrounds. Hope Builders Home first opened their doors in 1902, as a ministry of the newly established Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico. After 12 years of providing a home for orphaned boys, Hope Builders Home closed its doors. However, in 1994, as a ministry sponsored by the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico, the Hope Builders Home was reopened and provides a home and cares for young boys. Children arrive at the home from very different circumstances such as victims of abuse, orphans, or sometimes runaways. Each child at Hope Builders Home is placed in the home through the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico’s Department of Family Services. Whether the child was removed from their home due to a problematic family situation, or did not have a home and was placed in the care of the Department of Family Services, each child that arrives at Hope Builders Home is welcome to stay until they reach an age of independence.

The staff and volunteers at the home coordinate every area of care for each child living at Hope Builders Home including: clothing, education, medical care, dental care, psychological assistance, art, theater, and occupational and speech therapy. Since their reopening, many boys have grown to leave the home to become mechanical engineers, cooks, electricians, physical therapists, social workers, and construction workers.

As a residual result of the economic crisis in Puerto Rico, government funding for organizations providing services such as Hope Builders Home’s services has been cut dramatically. This has created challenges for Hope Builders Home in the past few years, and has required the home to become more creative in raising funds to continue to provide the level of care for each child living at the home. Hope Builders Home organized a concert fundraiser in 2015, with a performance by renowned Puerto Rican pianist, Adlan Cruz. This is one example of the new and creative ways Hope Builders Home is raising funds in order to continue to provide excellent care for each child at the home. Hope Builders Home says, “We are grateful to God that our needs have always been covered by generous people who support us and are concerned about the children.”



Recommended Reading

	<p><i>The Puerto Rico Handbook – Everything You Need to Know About Puerto Rico</i> (2016), by Todd Snider- “The Puerto Rico Handbook is the single and largest Puerto Rico reference book. This compendium of information is the authoritative source for all your entertainment, reference, and learning needs. It will be your go-to source for any Puerto Rico questions.”</p>
	<p><i>Puerto Rico: An Interpretive History from Pre-Columbian Times to 1900</i> (2014), by Olga Jimenez de Wagenheim- “A detailed analysis of Puerto Rican society during the Spanish colonial period, highlighting the roles and responsibilities of women and workers. Rather than celebrating the victors, the author has composed the book from the viewpoint of the colonized, suppressed and exploited.”</p>
	<p><i>The History of Puerto Rico</i> (2013), by R.A. Van Middeldyk- “The first major historical study of Puerto Rico in English. Van Middeldyk advanced Puerto Rican historiography by building on the works of Brau, Coll y Toste, and Acosta, and by consulting early Spanish chronicles. A librarian at the Free Public Library of San Juan, Van Middeldyk possessed knowledge of and access to considerable primary source material. His history is sympathetic to the Indians and highly critical of Spanish colonial administration.”</p>
	<p><i>The Tainos: Rise and Decline of the People Who Greeted Columbus</i> (1993), by Irving Rouse- “A noted archaeologist and anthropologist tells the story of the Tainos of the northern Caribbean islands, from their ancestry on the South American continent to their rapid decline after contact with the Spanish explorers.”</p>



	<p><i>Slave Revolts in Puerto Rico</i> (2014), by Guillermo A Baralt and Christine Ayorinde- “From the emergence of the first sugar plantations up until 1873, when slavery was abolished, the wealth amassed by many landowners in Puerto Rico derived mainly from the exploitation of slaves. But slavery generated its antithesis - disobedience, uprisings and flights. This book documents these expressions of collective resistance.”</p>
	<p><i>Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898</i> (2007), by César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe- “Highlighting both well-known and forgotten figures from Puerto Rican history, Ayala and Bernabe discuss a wide range of topics, including literary and cultural debates and social and labor struggles that previous histories have neglected. Although the island's political economy remains dependent on the United States, the authors also discuss Puerto Rico's situation in light of world economies. Ayala and Bernabe argue that the inability of Puerto Rico to shake its colonial legacy reveals the limits of free-market capitalism, a break from which would require a renewal of the long tradition of labor and social activism in Puerto Rico in connection with similar currents in the United States. “</p>
	<p><i>War Against All Puerto Ricans: Revolution and Terror in America's Colony</i> (2016), by Nelson A Denis- “n 1950, after over fifty years of military occupation and colonial rule, the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico staged an unsuccessful armed insurrection against the United States. Violence swept through the island: assassins were sent to kill President Harry Truman, gunfights roared in eight towns, police stations and post offices were burned down. In order to suppress this uprising, the US Army deployed thousands of troops and bombarded two towns, marking the first time in history that the US government bombed its own citizens. Nelson A. Denis tells this powerful story through the controversial life of Pedro Albizu Campos, who served as the president of the Nationalist Party.”</p>
	<p><i>America's Colony: The Political and Cultural Conflict Between the United States and Puerto Rico</i> (2004), by Pedro A Malavet- “Malavet offers a critique of Puerto Rico's current status as well as of its treatment by the U.S. legal and political systems. He analyzes the three alternatives to Puerto Rico's continued territorial status, examining the challenges manifest in each possibility, as well as illuminating what he believes to be the best course of action.”</p>



	<p><i>Governing Spirits: Religion, Miracles, and Spectacles in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1898-1956</i> (2007), by Reinaldo L. Roman- “Spiritism, Santería, and other African-derived traditions were typically characterized in sensational fashion by the popular press as “a plague of superstition.” Examining seven episodes between 1898 and the Cuban Revolution when the public demanded official actions against “misbelief,” Roman finds that when outbreaks of superstition were debated, matters of citizenship were usually at stake.”</p>
	<p><i>Witchcraft and Welfare: Spiritual Capital and the Business of Magic in Modern Puerto Rico</i> (2003), by Raquel Romberg- “Presents a masterful history and ethnography of Puerto Rican brujería (witch-healing). Romberg explores how brujería emerged from a blending of popular Catholicism, Afro-Latin religions, French Spiritism, and folk Protestantism and also looks at how it has adapted to changes in state policies and responded to global flows of ideas and commodities. She demonstrates that, far from being an exotic or marginal practice in the modern world, brujería has become an invisible yet active partner of consumerism and welfare capitalism.”</p>
	<p><i>Puerto Rico True Flavors</i> (2010), by Wilo Benet- “Authentic Puerto Rican food recipes, updated for the 21st century home cook by San Juan's award-winning chef, restaurateur, television personality and author Wilo Benet. Chef Benet provides traditional recipes for everything from Alcapurrias (Stuffed Yautia Fritters) and Arañitas (Plantain Spiders) to Piñon (Ripe Plantain and Beef Lasagna) and Pernil (Roast Port Buttl.) The 'bible' of Puerto Rican cooking, with a pictorial 'how-to' section, ingredient glossary and more. Spanish edition also available (Puerto Rico Sabor Criollo).”</p>
	<p><i>Macho Camacho's Beat</i> (2000), by Luis Rafael Sanchez- “Over the course of a single afternoon, Macho Camacho's hit song 'Life Is A Phenomenal Thing' blares out of every radio in San Juan and connects the lives of Senator Vicente Reinoso, his poor mistress, his neurotic, aristocratic wife and his fascist son. Full of puns, fantastic wordplay, advertising slogans, and pop-culture references, Macho Camacho's Beat is a grimly funny satire on the Americanization of Puerto Rico.”</p>

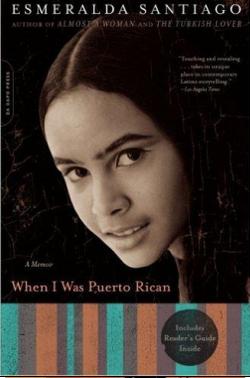
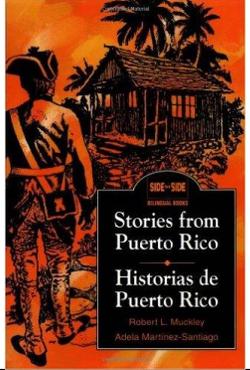
Global Ministries- UCC & Disciples



Caribbean Basin Initiative

Puerto Rico

Recommended Reading

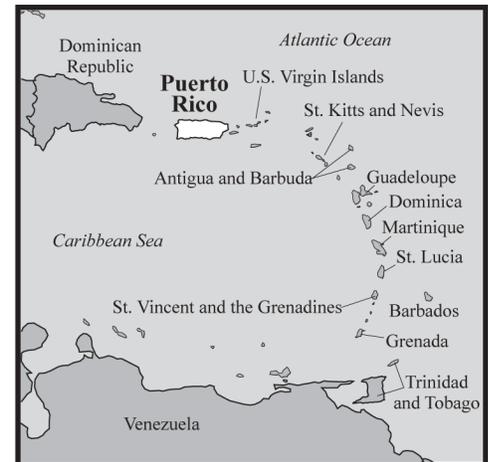
	<p><i>When I was Puerto Rican: A Memoir</i> (2006), by Esmeralda Santiago- “Santiago's artful memoir recounts her childhood in rural Puerto Rico and her teenage years in New York City; also available in a Spanish-language edition.”</p>
	<p><i>Stories from Puerto Rico/Historias de Puerto Rico</i> (1999), by Robert L. Muckley and Adela Martinez-Santiago- “Allows you to explore the island's rich history. It includes 18 well-known Puerto Rican legends that stretch from the dawn of creation to the twentieth century. These tales will introduce you to an array of characters as dynamic and colorful as the country that gave birth to them.”</p>

SPANISH PHRASES

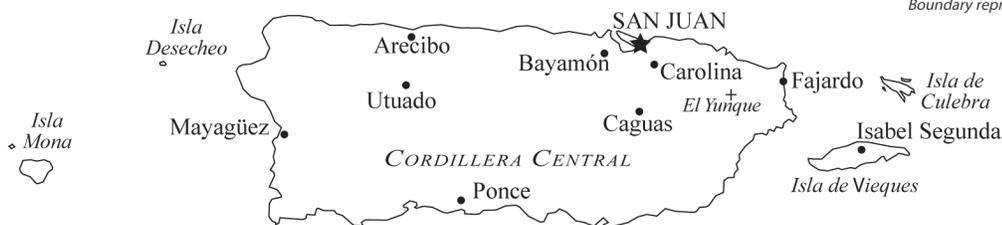
Thank you.	Gracias.
Thank you very much.	Muchas gracias.
You're welcome.	De nada.
Please.	Por favor.
Yes.	Sí.
No.	No.
Excuse me.	Con permiso.
Pardon me.	Perdone.
I'm sorry.	Lo siento.
I don't understand.	No entiendo.
I don't speak Spanish.	No hablo español.
I don't speak Spanish very well.	No hablo español muy bien.
Do you speak English?	¿Habla inglés?
Speak slowly, please.	Hable despacio, por favor.
Repeat, please.	Repita, por favor.
What's your name?	¿Cómo se llama?
How are you?	¿Cómo está?
Do you speak English?	¿Habla inglés?
Where is the subway?	¿Dónde está el metro?
Is the tip included?	¿Incluye la propina?
How much does that cost?	¿Cuánto cuesta?
Is there a public phone here?	¿Hay algún teléfono público aquí?
Can I get on the internet?	¿Puedo conectarme con el internet?
Can you help me?	¿Me podría ayudar?
Where is the bathroom?	¿Dónde está el baño?

SPANISH FOR TRAVELERS

English	Spanish	English	Spanish
the airport	<u>el aeropuerto</u>	the landing	el aterrizaje
the baggage	el equipaje	the line	la fila / la cola
the boat	la lancha	the metal detector	el detector de metales
the bus station	la terminal de autobuses	the platform	la plataforma
the cable	cable	room	cuarto
the carry on	el bolso de mano	the runway	la pista de aterrizaje
the check-in	registrarse	the security guard	el guardia
the check-out	registrarse a la salida	the ship	el barco
the departure	la salida	the subway	el metro
the flight	el vuelo	the suitcase	la maleta
the gate	puerta	the takeoff	el despegue
the hotel	el hotel	the terminal	la terminal
the kiosk	el quiosco	the ticket	el boleto



Boundary representations are not necessarily authoritative.



BACKGROUND

Land and Climate

Puerto Rico is about the same size as Montenegro or as the U.S. states of Delaware and Rhode Island combined. Its territory includes the islands of Puerto Rico, Culebra, Vieques, Desecheo, and Mona. The waters between Isla Mona (Mona Island) and the capital, San Juan, form a key shipping lane for vessels heading to the Panama Canal. San Juan has one of the Caribbean's best natural ports. The island of Puerto Rico is characterized by the Cordillera Central (a high central mountain range), a dry southern coast, fertile northern coastal plains, low eastern mountains, and El Yunque rain forest. Relatively little land, roughly 7 percent, is available for cultivation. The coastal plains are densely populated.

Widespread deforestation of the island in the early 1900s combined with the current level of industrialization and population density have left few animal species remaining in the wild. The government has set aside land to protect the nation's flora and fauna.

Puerto Rico's climate is mildly tropical, with warm and sunny weather. Temperatures average 70 to 80°F (21–27°C) year-round. Rain falls mainly between April and November; it is moderate in coastal regions and heavier in the mountains. The island is often affected by excessive rains that accompany regional storms. Several destructive hurricanes have hit the island.

History

Indigenous People and Colonization

The indigenous Taíno people were living in Puerto Rico when Columbus arrived in 1493. He named the island San Juan Bautista and claimed the island for Spain at that time, but colonization did not begin in earnest until 1508. The Spanish introduced slavery and diseases that decimated the indigenous population. In 1511, thousands of Taíno were killed and thousands more fled the island after a failed revolt. European settlers began to import African slaves in 1513. Slavery was not abolished until 1873.

The Spanish-appointed governor strictly controlled Puerto Rico. Despite protests, few promised reforms were ever implemented. An increasing sense of frustration led Puerto Ricans to rebel. The 1868 revolt, El Grito de Lares, ended swiftly and brutally, leaving hundreds of protesters dead. However, Spain began to slowly open the political process until in 1897 it granted Puerto Rico self-rule under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Rivera.

Association with the United States

Self-governance was short-lived, because in 1898, as part of the Spanish-American War, the United States invaded the island and conquered its Spanish defenders. Spain ceded the island to the United States that same year. In 1917, Puerto Rico officially became a U.S. territory, and its people were granted citizenship.

In 1946, U.S. president Harry S. Truman appointed Jesús Toribio Piñero as the first island-born governor. Two years later, Puerto Ricans directly elected a governor, Luis Muñoz Marín. Puerto Rico became a commonwealth of the United States with its own constitution in July 1952.

Opposition to commonwealth status has at times erupted

into violence. In 1954, militants from Puerto Rico shot several congressional representatives in Washington, D.C., during a session of the House of Representatives. Since then, political groups have occasionally debated the island's status and its relationship with the United States. Puerto Ricans today remain divided by the issue of whether to request U.S. statehood or remain a commonwealth. A small group advocates full independence. Plebiscites in 1967 and 1993 approved the commonwealth status, but the margin of victory in 1993 was slim. A non-binding vote in 1998 also favored staying a commonwealth, although 47 percent of voters favored statehood. In 2012, the majority of voters supported the idea of statehood in a non-binding referendum, though many found fault with the design of the referendum and the interpretation of its results.

Political Issues

In May 2003, the U.S. Navy pulled out of the island of Vieques, which it had been using as a bombing range for more than 50 years. The land formerly owned by the Navy is now a wildlife refuge. Although the base had been an economic boon to the island, residents opposed the Navy's presence.

In 2006, street protests were sparked by the implementation of Puerto Rico's first sales tax, aimed to alleviate budget deficits like the one that led to temporary closure of the island's public schools and most public agencies. In 2009, following the announcement of major public spending cuts, tens of thousands of public workers marched in the capital city of San Juan to protest job layoffs. Puerto Rico defaulted on its public debt for the first time in 2015. Puerto Rico's severely struggling economy and debate over its status as a U.S. commonwealth continue to dominate the political landscape.

Recent Events and Trends

- **Economic crisis:** In May 2017, Puerto Rico declared a form of bankruptcy in a U.S. federal court, the first ever for a U.S. state or territory. The move will allow a federal judge to oversee a restructuring of Puerto Rico's public debt, which stands at an unsustainable \$74 billion. Puerto Rico, which is implementing major spending cuts in areas such as health care and education, has been in a deep economic recession for over a decade. Since 2007, Puerto Rico has lost some 20 percent of its jobs and 10 percent of its people, who have been fleeing in large numbers to the United States in search of better economic opportunities.

- **Statehood referendum:** In June 2017, Puerto Rican voters overwhelmingly supported the idea of Puerto Rico becoming the 51st U.S. state in a nonbinding referendum. However, even though 97 percent of voters supported statehood, only 23 percent of eligible voters participated in the election. Most opponents of statehood boycotted the vote, which raised questions about the vote's legitimacy. Regardless of the vote's results, the Republican-led U.S. Congress, which has the power to approve statehood, is unlikely to discuss or change Puerto Rico's status as a U.S. territory anytime soon.

- **Hurricane:** In December 2017, more than two months after Hurricane Maria struck Puerto Rico as a powerful Category 4 storm, a study estimated that as many as 1,052 deaths may have resulted from the storm's aftereffects, far exceeding the

much-criticized official death toll of 64 people. The study illustrated the magnitude of the destruction caused by Hurricane Maria, which destroyed roads and bridges and left most of Puerto Rico without electricity and cellular phone service. Government officials have warned that it will take years for Puerto Rico to fully recover from the storm. Puerto Rico is vulnerable to destructive hurricanes, especially during hurricane season, which lasts from June through November.

THE PEOPLE

Population

About 76 percent of Puerto Rico's population is of Hispanic origin, another 12 percent is black, and others have a mixed Spanish, African, and Taíno heritage. The effects of the different cultures can be seen in the island's music, arts, food, and traditions. The capital city of San Juan proper is home to some 2.5 million people, with many more living in the surrounding areas of Bayamón and Carolina.

Roughly 1.5 million island-born Puerto Ricans live in the United States, many in New York City and Florida, common destinations for Puerto Rican emigrants. This brings the total U.S. mainland population of Puerto Ricans to over 5 million, which exceeds the total population of Puerto Rico itself. In recent years, Puerto Rico's struggling economy has spurred increasing numbers of people to move to the mainland United States for better work opportunities. The combination of Puerto Ricans leaving the island and declining birthrates has led to population loss.

Language

Spanish and English share official status in Puerto Rico. For a short time in the early 1990s, Spanish was declared the only official language, but English has since regained equal status. Spanish is the language of school instruction and daily life. English is required as a second language in school and is used in business. Most people can speak English to some extent. The official status of either language often depends on the political climate surrounding Puerto Rico's relationship with the United States. The close relationship Puerto Rico shares with both the United States and English has led people to mix many English words with spoken Spanish. Locally, people call this mixed speech *Spanglish*, and it is a comfortable, informal method of communication.

Religion

Roman Catholicism is the major Christian religion in Puerto Rico and claims about 85 percent of the population as members. Most of the remainder belongs to various Protestant and other Christian churches, and their numbers are growing. Although there is a separation of church and state, Catholic traditions and customs prevail among the people. Puerto Ricans consider themselves religious and often attribute good fortune to Deity.

General Attitudes

Puerto Ricans tend to be sensitive people, quick to express sympathy and equally quick to resent a slight. Many are

gregarious and fond of *fiestas* (celebrations). The Puerto Rican concept of time is somewhat relaxed. If a friend, relative, or business associate drops in unexpectedly, Puerto Ricans will stop everything they are doing to visit, even if they have other commitments. People who are intelligent, hardworking, dedicated, and humble tend to be the most admired. Puerto Ricans generally consider open criticism, aggressiveness, and greed offensive. Many believe a person's destiny is God's will, although individuals must also watch for opportunities.

Overall, Puerto Ricans value a good education, and a large number of students not only finish high school but also attend college or another institution of higher learning. Gaining a good education is considered a key to a better future. Being able to buy a home is a near universal goal.

National and regional pride are strong. Political influence is desirable; individuals who have such power are admired. Though attitudes toward the U.S.–Puerto Rico relationship vary, many people are satisfied with the island's current status, fearing that independence might bring poverty and that statehood could mean a loss of cultural identity.

Personal Appearance

Puerto Ricans generally take great pride in what they wear in public. Young people favor popular North American fashions and sporty styles. Sloppy, overly casual, or revealing dress is considered inappropriate. Because of the warm climate, people tend to prefer lightweight fabrics. Jeans are popular at all age levels for informal activities and outdoor work. Tennis shoes and sandals are the most commonly worn footwear. People living in interior towns may wear sweaters and jackets during winter months, as nighttime temperatures can be cool. Shorts are acceptable casual wear. However, for most parties and social gatherings, more formal clothing is expected.

CUSTOMS AND COURTESIES

Greetings

People usually shake hands when greeting. Close friends often greet by grasping shoulders and kissing each other on the cheek. Women normally kiss women or men in this manner, but men do not greet other men this way. However, men may embrace a good friend or relative after a long absence. People stand very close when talking, and females often touch each other with their hands. Moving away, even slightly, may be considered an insult.

Although Spanish is most common, both Spanish and English greetings are used. One might hear *Good morning* or *Buenos días*, *Good afternoon* or *Buenas tardes*, *Good evening* or *Buenas noches*, and *Hi* or *Hola*. When one meets a person for the first time, it is polite to say *How are you?* or *¿Cómo está?* Young friends often begin a conversation with *¿Qué tal?*, a casual way to ask "How are you?" The language speakers use depends on the situation (e.g., on the street or in a business meeting) and the relationship between the people talking.

When addressing others in formal situations, one may use titles of respect or profession alone or in combination with a

person's surname. These might include *Señor* (Mr.), *Señora* ("Mrs." or "Ms."), *Señorita* (Miss), *Doctor/a* (Dr.), and so on. One respectfully addresses an older person by combining the title *Don* (for men) or *Doña* (for women) with the person's first name. Friends address each other by given name or nickname.

Most Puerto Ricans have two surnames in addition to one or two given names. The family name is the father's surname; this appears as the second-to-last name, while the mother's surname appears last. Therefore, a man named Victor Arocho Ramos would be called *Señor Arocho*. Women do not change their surnames when they marry.

Gestures

One beckons by waving all fingers with the palm down; beckoning people with the palm facing up is improper. Wiggling the nose is a way of asking "What's going on?" To point, people often purse or pucker their lips in the direction they are indicating. During conversation, Puerto Ricans might interrupt each other; this generally is not considered rude. Nonverbal forms of communication, such as hand movements and facial expressions, are very important.

A person can get another's attention by saying "psst." This is common and not rude, but if a man does it to a woman on the street, she will usually ignore him. Men often smile and stare at women, but it is considered improper for a woman to smile indiscriminately at strangers. It is appropriate for a man to offer his seat to a woman on public transportation.

Visiting

Visiting friends and relatives is considered a social obligation. While inviting guests to the home is not uncommon, most casual visits occur in the early evening without prior arrangement. Visits are relaxed, and the entire family participates. Guests are treated to refreshments such as juice, soda, crackers, and cookies. If visitors arrive at mealtime, the hosts generally invite them to join the meal. In most cases, guests politely decline the offer a few times before finally accepting. Unannounced visits are usually short (one or two hours), but planned activities can last longer. Friends and relatives invited for dinner are expected to stay after the meal to relax and enjoy conversation with the hosts. Invited guests are not expected to bring gifts, except on special occasions. However, hosts may appreciate a gift of flowers, candy, or fruit. If offered, gifts are opened in the presence of the giver.

Eating

Puerto Ricans eat three meals each day, and dinner is the main family meal. Breakfast might include oatmeal and eggs. Rice and beans with meat is common for lunch and dinner, though people increasingly have fast food for lunch instead.

The eating atmosphere is relaxed and cordial. Diners always keep both hands above the table. Spoons and forks are commonly used; knives are used when appropriate. Some foods are eaten with the hands. Food left on the plate may be interpreted as a sign that the guest did not enjoy the dish. Hosts might offer second helpings when guests finish their food, but guests may politely decline.

On the street, people normally eat food near the stand where they purchase it, but it is not uncommon for people to eat while walking in public. At a restaurant, leaving a 15 percent tip is customary when service is not included in the bill.

LIFESTYLE

Family

Structure

Families generally have between one and three children. The nuclear family unit is standard, with single-mother households being fairly common. If families emigrate to New York or elsewhere, one parent may move first and establish a home before the rest of the family joins him or her.

Families are close-knit. Traditionally, members offered substantial practical support to each other: older siblings cared for younger siblings and cousins, children cared for their elders, and grandparents cared for their grandchildren. Today, families remain supportive, but a growing number of people have shifted from relying on familial relationships to paid services, such as day care and nursing homes. A number of factors have contributed to this shift, including the need to move away from extended family for work, the integration of women into the workforce, and delayed retirement.

Parents and Children

Parents consider themselves responsible for their children throughout life and expect to give adult children financial or emotional support if needed. Young children are expected to keep their bedrooms clean and are in charge of their personal things. As they get older, they increasingly help out with general household chores. Children often remain at home until they marry. If they are able, grandparents provide child care when both parents work.

Gender Roles

Traditionally, fathers held the role of providing economically for their families. They would also tend to be responsible for chores like car maintenance, yard work, and home repairs. The home was once considered the realm of the Puerto Rican woman, and her role was to raise children and perform all household chores. However, today, more members of the family share domestic tasks since many women are formally employed.

Common positions for women include that of nurse and teacher, but they can be found in a variety of professions. Employed women do not always make the same amount as men doing similar work. Though women hold the same legal rights as men, crimes involving sexual assault and domestic violence often go unprosecuted.

Housing

Exteriors

The majority of Puerto Ricans live in single-family homes. Most homes, single-level structures built of cinderblocks covered with stucco, are made to withstand hurricanes. However, in rural areas wooden houses with aluminum ceilings may still be found. Security gates and bars are common on houses of all economic levels.

Terraces or other shady structures are often built in the backyards of houses. Those living in apartment buildings generally have access to nearby playgrounds for children.

Interiors

Most houses have three bedrooms. Siblings often have their own rooms; if not, they share with those of the same sex. Other rooms include a kitchen, dining room, and living room.

Floors tend to be made of ceramic tile, which stays cool in the heat. Ceiling and portable fans are essential since air conditioners are expensive to maintain, though many homes have a small unit in one bedroom. Family pictures and paintings of typical island scenes are displayed in the main rooms of the house, while religious objects like a bust of the Virgin Mary, the cross, and a rosary may be found in bedrooms.

Home Life and Ownership

Young families often begin living in a small apartment with the goal of later moving to a house with a small lawn, citrus trees, and an herb garden. The amount of land a house sits on is considered very important. However, because of a decreasing supply of land available for construction, newer housing tends to be more vertical in structure, often three or four storeys high. The majority of Puerto Ricans own their own homes.

Puerto Rico has a fairly high population density, and nearly all residents live in urban areas, many in the suburbs of major cities. Life in these areas tends to be confined to individual households, whereas rural life used to be more communal.

Dating and Marriage

Dating and Courtship

In recent decades, traditional attitudes toward dating have given way to more permissive ones, due in part to the influence of mainland U.S. culture. In the past, women were expected to marry the first man they dated, and their courtships tended to be closely supervised. By contrast, Puerto Rican popular culture embraced men who were womanizers, influencing generations of boys.

With advances in women's rights and declining religiosity came more freedom for women to date who and how they pleased. Today, most women expect fair treatment from their partners. Teens generally begin dating in groups but eventually pair off into boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. Dates may include dancing, going to the movies or on a picnic, or spending time at the beach. In rural areas, the relationship usually does not become serious until the young man has met the young woman's parents. Engagements typically last two to three years.

Marriage in Society

Early dating leads some Puerto Ricans to marry, either formally or in a common-law partnership, at an early age (16–17). The majority of young women prefer marriage at a young age to single motherhood. However, an increasing emphasis on formal education and financial stability has resulted in more Puerto Ricans marrying in their late twenties, early thirties, or not at all.

Marriage rates have declined sharply since the turn of the century. Cohabitation is increasingly common and socially

acceptable, and couples who do marry have often lived together first. Divorce is common and socially acceptable, though it may be harder for women with children to remarry than it is for divorced men.

In June 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled that same-sex couples have the constitutional right to marry in all 50 states and U.S. territories, including Puerto Rico. Though a majority of Puerto Ricans oppose same-sex marriage, attitudes toward LGBT individuals have improved in recent years.

Weddings

Whether a marriage is performed by a judge or in a church, a wedding is a time of great celebration and family gatherings. Families, traditionally the bride's parents, spend large amounts of money on decorations, food, and music, both traditional and modern. Couples who marry in their thirties usually pay for their own weddings. Wedding music often begins with a formal waltz, followed by a toast and then dance music like salsa and merengue. In addition to a meal, guests enjoy champagne and cake. Devoutly religious families celebrate with religious music and abstain from dancing and alcohol.

Life Cycle

Birth

Catholic rituals still govern most people's life cycle events, though Protestantism and secularism are growing. Baptism in the Catholic Church happens within the first two months of life and is followed by a big family celebration. Children are given godparents (*compadre* and *comadre*), with whom they typically have a close relationship.

Today, when naming a child, it is popular to create new names by combining traditional names. For example, *Iremar* is a combination of Irene and Maragarita.

Family and friends usually throw expectant parents a baby shower. Games are played, and a light dinner or refreshments and cake are served. Guests bring gifts for parents and baby. After a woman gives birth, the family's closest friends and relatives come to visit her in the hospital. Most employed women receive one to two months off work after giving birth. After a mother goes back to work, a grandmother or aunt may care for her baby.

Milestones

The first birthday is considered important, as it signals a transition from babyhood and fewer risks to a child's health.

The *quinceañera* (15th birthday) marks a girl's transition into womanhood. Family and friends are invited to a large party to celebrate this event. The birthday girl wears an elaborate dress and traditionally dances a waltz with her father, who then fits a high heeled shoe on her foot as a symbol of her coming of age. Dinner and cake are served, and guests enjoy music and dancing. Some families celebrate a girl's 15th birthday with a trip.

At the age of 16, teenagers can legally drive and hold a paying job. At 18, young people are able to vote and drink alcohol.

Death

Upon a death, a family typically holds a wake for two to three days. Shorter wakes may be held at funeral homes, while

longer ones take place at the deceased's home or that of a relative. Mourners stay awake all night, cooking, playing dominoes, and sharing stories about the deceased.

When the dead are buried, their tombstones often include an image of the Virgin Mary or Jesus Christ and a short message or scripture. Following the burial, Catholics hold a *novenario*, which is a daily reciting of rosary prayers. This is followed by an annual Mass commemorating the day of death. Widows generally wear black or neutral colors for a brief period after the death of a husband. Cremation is becoming increasingly common.

Diet

Foods in Puerto Rico come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, reflective of the people's mixed ancestry and colonial associations. The most commonly eaten main meal is *arroz con habichuelas* (beans and rice). Other popular dishes include *arroz con pollo* (rice and chicken), *bacalao con viandas* (boiled cod made with cassava and potatoes), *arroz con gandules y pernil* (rice with peas and roasted pork), and foods made with plantains. Plantains are a starchy banana-like fruit that must be cooked to be eaten. Chicken, pork, and beef are favorite meats. Seafood (shrimp, octopus, clams, and fish) and fruits (pineapples, mangoes, bananas, papaya, grapefruit, and oranges) are also common in the diet. Pasta and fast foods tend to be popular among younger generations.

Packaged snack foods are as common as they are in the mainland United States, but people also enjoy locally prepared snacks, such as *frituras* (foods fried in oil). Popular varieties of *frituras* include *alcapurrias* (plantains with meat) and *sorulllos* (corn flour). The local flat bread typically eaten with meals, *pan sobao*, is made with flour, water, and shortening.

Recreation

Sports

As a whole, Puerto Ricans are proud of their island's long tradition of baseball. The island boasts several legendary players, and the sport has an enthusiastic fan base. Basketball is also very popular, especially among young people, and basketball courts are common throughout the island, as are NBA-inspired fashions. Women can be found playing a variety of sports but participate in the largest numbers in volleyball, gymnastics, and track and field.

Leisure

Many Puerto Ricans enjoy getting out into nature, which includes the island's tropical forests, rivers, and beaches. Beaches and parks are favorite spots for family picnics. Fishing, bird watching, and horse riding are also popular.

In their leisure time, people may visit one another or watch films or television (sitcoms and telenovelas, or soap operas, are favorites). People also relax by spending time on social media. Card and board games are also popular. A favorite strategy game is dominoes, in which two to four people play individually or on teams. The individual who places all of his or her tiles wins the game.

Puerto Ricans often enjoy attending the many regional and themed festivals held on the island each year. The period leading up to and following Christmas is especially festive.

Vacation

Families tend to plan vacations according to school breaks. The Christmas break is generally spent visiting members of the extended family and attending parties with neighbors and friends. Summer break is considered a time to travel around the island. Families attend festivals, participate in sporting activities, or spend time at the beach or in the country.

Those who can afford it may travel to the Dominican Republic or the U.S. mainland, with Florida being an especially popular destination. Caribbean cruises are also popular among the more affluent.

The Arts

The arts enjoy a wide following and reflect both African and Spanish influences. Long before the United States took possession of Puerto Rico, a strong tradition of literature and music, as well as scholarship, had been established. Indeed, art and music are fostered in the home; most Puerto Ricans can play a musical instrument, and a display of musical talent is usually expected at parties. The most popular forms of music for dancing and singing include salsa, *bomba* (dance music influenced by West African rhythms and traditions), *plena* (folk music that deals with life's hardships), and *danza puertorriqueña* (Puerto Rican dance music). The prestigious Pablo Casals Festival features special concerts.

Puerto Rican films and other cultural arts are known throughout the world. Among the most common folk arts are the carved religious figurines, called *santos*, which are found in almost every home. They represent the local patron saint or other Christian personages.

Holidays

Puerto Rico celebrates both local and U.S. national holidays. Holidays include New Year's Day (1 January), Day of the Three Kings (6 January), the Birth of Eugenio María de Hostos (11 January), Martin Luther King Jr.'s Birthday (second Monday in January), Presidents' Day (third Monday in February), the Abolition of Slavery (22 March), Easter (including Good Friday), José de Diego's Birthday (third Monday in April), Memorial Day (last Monday in May), U.S. Independence Day (4 July), Luis Muñoz Rivera's Day (17 July), Constitution Day (25 July), José Celso Barbosa's Birthday (28 July), Labor Day (first Monday in September), All Souls' Day (2 November), Discovery of Puerto Rico Day (19 November), Thanksgiving (fourth Thursday in November), and Christmas (25 December).

Carnaval and the Easter Season

Carnaval celebrations (during February or March), held before Lent, are most visible in Ponce. Lively festivities there, as well as in Arecibo and other towns, feature "monsters," or *vejigantes*, who wear bells and elaborate papier-mâché masks with multiple horns. The *vejigantes* roam the streets, threatening to hit people on the head with a dried pig's bladder while children try to gather bells from their costumes.

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of Lent (the 40 days before Easter). According to tradition, Lent is a time period during which many people give up various foods or habits. *Semana Santa* (Holy Week), the week before Easter, is a holiday week for many institutions. Most Puerto Ricans,

especially younger generations, use this time off of school and work to go to the beach or go camping.

Among the devout, Good Friday is a solemn day, and the weekend culminates with a celebration of Christ's resurrection on Sunday.

Christmas Season

Christmas is Puerto Rico's biggest holiday, and the season, which begins the day after Thanksgiving, lasts a full six weeks. Celebrations include traditional feasts, festivals, and *aguinaldos* (Puerto Rican Christmas music). Streets and houses are adorned with lights and other decorations. An important part of the Christmas season is the *parrandas*, when groups of friends sing Christmas songs door to door. After they sing, the groups are usually given food and drinks in return for this entertainment, and the person caroled to may join the group at the next house or return the favor later in the season.

Christmas Eve is the peak of the holiday. On this night, families gather for a traditional meal that usually includes *lechón asado* (roast pork), *arroz con gandules* (rice with peas), *plátanos* (plantains), and *pasteles* (a dough made in part with green bananas and plantains, then steamed in banana leaves). Festivities last well into the night. Catholics may attend a special midnight Mass. On Christmas Day, families rest from the night before, and children (and sometimes other family members) often open the gifts left by Santa Claus.

New Year's is celebrated as part of the Christmas season. On New Year's Eve, people clean their houses and dress in new clothes before gathering with friends. It is traditional to eat 12 grapes at midnight, one grape for each chime of the clock. People welcome the new year with hugs, car horns, and firecrackers.

On the Day of the Three Kings (6 January), children wake up to find presents left for them by the kings. The eight days following this holiday, called *Octavas*, were once mainly religious in nature but today tend to be a time for people to return *parrandas* they received or visit friends generally. On 14 January, most families take down their Christmas decorations and the season ends.

Festivals

Every town honors its patron saint annually; people participate in several days of activities, which include going to amusement parks, gambling, singing, dancing, and participating in religious ceremonies. A beauty queen is selected for almost every activity. Other festivals center on a theme, such as salsa music, cinema, books, surfing, flowers, masks, and more. People may travel to other towns for their festivals, meeting up with friends and family members to enjoy weekend trips (*chinchorros*).

SOCIETY

Government

Structure

The Commonwealth of Puerto Rico has 78 municipalities. The head of state is the U.S. president, but the head of government is a governor who is elected locally to a four-year term.

A locally elected resident high commissioner represents Puerto Rico in the U.S. House of Representatives. The high commissioner cannot vote but can introduce legislation, express opinions, and engage in dialogue on issues that relate to Puerto Rico.

Puerto Rico's Legislative Assembly is composed of a 27-seat Senate and a 51-seat House of Representatives. Legislators are elected to four-year terms.

Political Landscape

In addition to the Democratic and Republican parties, political parties include the pro-statehood New Progressive Party (PNP), the pro-commonwealth Popular Democratic Party (PPD), and the Independence Party. The PPD and PNP alternate holding power; the PNP currently has the legislative majority.

Major political issues include Puerto Rico's faltering economy, its large amount of public debt, crime, and illegal immigration from the neighboring Dominican Republic.

Puerto Ricans are fairly evenly divided in their support of commonwealth status or statehood, with only a minority advocating independence. Supporters of commonwealth status are typically concerned with maintaining Puerto Rico's unique culture, while supporters of statehood point to the potential for an improved standard of living. November 2012 elections saw a majority of voters support the idea of statehood in a non-binding referendum for the first time in history. The validity of the referendum was, however, questioned by some, who raised concerns about both the referendum's design and the interpretation of results. In any case, the U.S. Congress would have to approve Puerto Rican statehood, a move that is unlikely to happen without a Democratic majority in both houses since Puerto Rico is largely Democrat.

Government and the People

As commonwealth citizens, Puerto Ricans do not pay federal income tax and do not vote in U.S. national elections, but they do elect their own officials. They are subject to the draft and receive partial welfare benefits. Puerto Ricans have no voting representation in the U.S. Congress and are restricted by federal controls in managing their territory.

Freedoms of religion, assembly, and speech are protected by law. However, police have been accused of often violating the rights of nonviolent protestors and journalists, in addition to unfairly targeting immigrants and black Puerto Ricans. Corruption is a widespread problem in Puerto Rican politics. All citizens age 18 and older may vote. Puerto Rico generally has a very high voter turnout rate. Elections are held on the same schedule as in the United States.

Economy

Since World War II, industrialization and duty-free trade with the United States have produced a dynamic economy in what used to be a poor, agrarian-dominated island. Only some 2 percent of the population is now engaged in agriculture; 19 percent works in the industrial sector. The government, services, and tourism sectors provide the remainder of the nation's jobs. Puerto Rico exports chemicals, electronics, textiles, canned tuna, and rum.

Drawbacks to industrialization include the fact that most

foods must be imported, which makes them more expensive. U.S. investment and labor laws have improved the standard of living for most people. However, recent years have seen a shrinking economy, a rising public deficit, and soaring unemployment rates, which are usually higher than in the United States. In September 2017, Puerto Rico was hit by Hurricane Maria, which caused widespread destruction; the economic impact of the hurricane could influence the island's economy for years to come. The U.S. dollar (USD) is the official currency.

Transportation and Communications

Roads generally are in good condition, and most families have at least one car. Buses and taxis are available in large urban areas. *Públicos* serve most of the island. These large cars, fitting as many as six passengers, travel to fixed destinations (with no stops in between). Air service operates domestically and internationally.

Puerto Rico has numerous radio and television stations and newspapers. Cellular phones are more common than landlines. High-speed internet access at home is common.

Education

Structure

Education is highly valued, and the school system is continually improving. Primary and secondary schooling are structured in the same way as they are in the United States, and instruction at those levels is free and compulsory. A large number of private schools, both religious and secular, operate as well. Children begin kindergarten at age five or six. A high school diploma, earned upon completion of the 12th grade, is necessary to get a good job or go to college.

Access

Public schools generally offer good-quality educations. However, many families make great sacrifices to enroll their children in private schools, which are more rigorous. Private schools also generally offer more secure campuses, whereas technology resources in public schools tend to be subject to burglaries.

School Life

Common subjects include languages (Spanish and English), social studies, science, technology, engineering, and math. Lecture-based lessons tend to dominate teaching styles. Classroom resources mainly include textbooks and handouts. Public school students generally complete most of their work during the school day, while private school students often have one to two hours of homework a night. Cheating is not allowed but common nonetheless and carries few penalties.

Teachers and students rarely socialize outside of the classroom. Several social events are held during the senior year of high school, including prom. Sometimes students (usually led by the class president) will arrange a senior trip for the whole class; these often involve going to the beach. The literacy rate is slightly higher among the youth than adults.

Higher Education

Higher education is provided by vocational schools and several universities and colleges, including the University of Puerto Rico, with its 11 campuses. Other institutions include

the Inter-American University, Catholic University, Turabo University, Sacred Heart University, and Puerto Rico Junior College. These institutions take into account a student's high school GPA and entrance exam score during the admission process.

Health

A network of urban and rural healthcare centers and four medical schools (one public and three private) serve Puerto Rico's medical needs. The system of health care is similar to that in the United States, although people are not always eligible for the same federal funds. Lifestyle-related health problems such as heart disease are growing concerns.

AT A GLANCE

Contact Information

Puerto Rico Tourism Company, 666 Fifth Avenue, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10103; phone (800) 866-7827; web site www.seepuertorico.com.

Country and Development Data

Capital	San Juan
Population	3,351,827
Area (sq. mi.)	5,324
Area (sq. km.)	13,790
Human Development Index	NA
Gender Inequality Index	NA
GDP (PPP) per capita	\$37,700
Adult Literacy	93% (male); 94% (female)
Infant Mortality	7 per 1,000 births
Life Expectancy	76 (male); 84 (female)
Currency	U.S. dollar