

# On the Road



## BRENDAN SAINSBURY

Cycling on the tropical island of Vieques can be hot work – especially when you’ve got a human cargo fast asleep in the back seat. This is me drinking freshly squeezed lemonade just outside the former Camp Garcia a few miles north of Esperanza. Garcia marked the entrance to the former US military training zone that was given over to the US Fish and Wildlife Refuge in May 2003. Five years ago it wasn’t uncommon to experience the loud whoosh of live arms fire going off near this site. Now all you can hear is the twitter of the odd Adelaide warbler – and my son snoring.



## NATE CAVALIERI

Certainly not my most flattering shot, but that half-dazed look is one of pure triumph: it was snapped at the peak of the hilly road that enters the Bosque Estatal de Guánica. With no lack of sweat (and probably a few tears) I had scaled it just moments earlier on a bike, surviving the climb to the likely disappointment of watchful vultures who circled overhead. The park’s thorn-lined trails and breezy Caribbean vantages offered a two-day adventure of hiking and biking, and sweet respite from the thumping clubs of Ponce.

*For full author biographies see p309.*

# Destination Puerto Rico

Puerto Rico is where the easygoing Caribbean collides with the slick efficiency of modern America over syncopated Latin rhythms and rose-tinted tropical sunsets. The result is a colorful, diverse and culturally unique island that is often as confusing as it is cosmopolitan. Hip funky restaurants nestle next to 15th-century Spanish forts; sprawling concrete shopping malls encroach upon fecund tropical rainforests; and glitzy casinos lie juxtaposed against some of the most stunning beaches, caves and offshore coral reefs in the Caribbean.

History is another inviting draw card. While the United States struggles to emulate the erstwhile glories of 'old world' Europe, Puerto Rico gets out its killer trump card: beguiling Viejo (Old) San Juan, one of the oldest and best preserved colonial cities in the Americas. Cocooned in the crucible of Spain's once illustrious colonial empire, five centuries of checkered history continue to slowly unravel. Neighborly pensioners recline languidly in creaking rocking chairs, *bomba* drums light up the somnolence of a diminutive baroque plaza, and the walls of two great military forts rise like wizened sentinels above the depths of the untamed Atlantic.

Racing headlong into the 21st century, contemporary Puerto Rico can sometimes present a bewildering picture to culture-seeking visitors. Decades of unchecked American-style development have meant that, despite significant economic advances, the modern world has stamped its ugly mark on the idyllically named *Isla del Encanto* (Island of Enchantment). Witness the ever expanding San Juan suburbs, the asphyxiating traffic gridlock, the insipid fast-food outlets, and the plethora of generic international resorts that pepper the northeast coast. But purists can take heart. In Puerto Rico what you see isn't always what you get. Scratch under the surface and the soul of the island will serendipitously reveal itself – though finding it can sometimes present a challenge or two. Hop on a local bus, disappear into the central mountains, or pedal your way around the beautiful island of Vieques; just be sure to tear up any cast-iron itineraries and let the open road lead you where it will.

A commonwealth of the United States of America, Puerto Rico is a semi-autonomous territory whose constitutional status has long been a political oxymoron. The island's cultural manifestations are similarly ridden with contradiction. Puerto Ricans love big American cars, but drive them more like they're in Mexico City; they have served in numerous foreign wars under the banner of stars and stripes, yet share a closer historical identity to communist Cuba; they have exported over half of their ebullient population to the east coast of the United States, but still exhibit a fierce loyalty to their beloved Borinquen, the island they will always call home.

Confused? Don't worry. Even native Puerto Ricans sometimes have difficulty in unraveling the baffling intricacies of their much-debated political system. When asked in a 1998 referendum if they would prefer to 1) adopt US statehood, 2) claim outright independence, or 3) remain as a commonwealth of the US, 50.3% of Puerto Ricans voted for an inconclusive 'none of the above.' Postponed for future discussion – the debate rages on.

## FAST FACTS

Population:	3.9 million
Population growth rate:	0.39%
GDP (per capita):	\$19,600
Life expectancy:	78.5 years
Literacy rate:	94.1%
Unemployment rate:	12%
Cell phones:	3.3 million
Internet users:	915,000
Miles of paved road:	15,220

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# Getting Started

Puerto Rico offers a plethora of plush, easy-to-negotiate resorts similar in quality to facilities in North America and Europe. Book a package through a New York travel agent, catch a charter to Aeropuerto Internacional de Luis Muñoz Rivera (LMM) in San Juan, and unpack your suitcase in the exclusive Palmas del Mar resort on the east coast, and your trip could be as smooth as a two-week sojourn to South Beach, Florida. But what about the real Puerto Rico that lies invitingly outside those well-guarded hotel gates? A whole island awaits serendipitous exploration, but where do you start?

The key for discerning travelers is less about the intricacies of finding a room or booking an early morning fishing trip, and more about forging a path through the ubiquitous tourist brochure gloss and uncovering the authentic Puerto Rico that lies underneath.

To get a real take on the island's colorful personality, you'll need to be prepared for a lot of spontaneity and a large dose of DIY adventure. Plenty of travel literature would have you believe that Puerto Rico is impossible to traverse without a car and severely lacking in any form of budget accommodations. However, while the public bus system might be a little confusing and the campsites and cabins annoyingly difficult to find, anything is possible as long as you've got the interest and inclination to burrow beneath the surface.

So pack your salsa shoes, arm yourself with a good Spanish phrasebook and hit the road with an open mind and a gung-ho sense of adventure.

## WHEN TO GO

The best time to visit Puerto Rico is mid-December through late-April. The upside of visiting at this time is the weather, which is sunny (but not too hot) and free from the threat of hurricanes. The downside is that prices get hiked up and crowds are generally heavier. Skirt the edges of the high season (ie November and May) and you could get lucky with both the weather and cut-price rates.

The Caribbean hurricane season runs from June to November, with the highest storm risk in September and October. Every year is different, however, and booking your trip around the weather can be a bit of lottery. The island's last big whammy was Hurricane Georges in 1998.

Puerto Rico has plenty of colorful Latin festivals (p278) and you may want to arrange your trip to coincide with one of them. Other travelers, on the other hand, may prefer to dodge the crowds. Either way, be sure to plan ahead. Puerto Rico has a rather old-fashioned approach to national holidays (p280), with businesses shutting down completely and the whole country seemingly grinding to a halt. Easter and Christmas are good times to avoid if you can't bear the inconvenience of closed shops and ghostly town centers. Beware also the months of January and July which both have four official holidays.

## COSTS & MONEY

The good news is that Puerto Rico on a budget is possible. The bad news is that you'll need a lot of ingenuity to achieve it. Stay in the big resorts and eat in the better restaurants and prices on the island are comparable to any large US city. But step outside of the standard tourist sector and into a público (shared taxi) or *friquitines* (roadside kiosk), and you could be laughing all the way to the bank.

Transport is the first big issue. Puerto Rico has swallowed the US car culture hook, line and sinker, meaning that there is no decent countryside rail

### DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

Puerto Rico's status as a US commonwealth means travelers will find plenty of well-known stores selling familiar medicines, food and clothing – you could just buy what you need on the island to keep luggage to a minimum. But these essentials should come from home:

- A valid international driver's license if you're planning on renting a car (p291).
- A passport, if you're from outside Puerto Rico and the United States.
- Any prescription medicines you need (p295).
- Bug spray to ward off the night-time visitors (p299).
- A Spanish phrasebook to break down cultural barriers and integrate with the locals.
- Sunblock and a water bottle.
- A day-pack and a good pair of walking shoes.
- Energy bars to get you through the more difficult hikes.
- Something dressy for San Juan's late night casinos and clubs.
- A good, super-cool pair of sunglasses.

or bus system. Thus the only viable means of getting around for those without a car is by the hard-to-fathom público system that links the commonwealth's main towns via a fleet of 15-seater minibuses. Using públicos requires reams of patience and plenty of street savvy (see box p141), but if you master the basics you'll quickly end up saving buckets of money – for example, the San Juan–Fajardo run costs \$80 in a taxi but only \$5 by público. Fortunately for capital dwellers, San Juan has an excellent public transportation system enabling travelers to cross the city (and dodge the notorious traffic jams) for less than a dollar. Don't even think about renting a car here.

Food is cheaper if you stick to the shabbier, traditional places that, more often than not, serve up formidable home-style cooking. A small step up (but not extortionate) are the government-sponsored Mesónes Gastronómicos listed in the free tourist magazine *Qué Pasa*, available from tourist info centers and many hotels. Kiosks are another reliable option and most towns have their ever-ready cluster of mobile street vendors dispatching tasty – though not always healthy – snacks. For a sweet dessert, drop by one of the island's ubiquitous (and cheap) bakeries. A full blown *comida criolla* (traditional cuisine) meal in a family restaurant should cost no more than \$10. At a Mesón Gastronómico, bank on \$10 to \$15. If you're really strapped for cash, hit the fast food franchises that haunt almost every town in the country. Breakfast and lunch will rarely set you back more than \$5 if you eat like the locals – in small bakeries, tavernas and at the *friquitines*, which sell salty, deep-fried snacks. Restaurant dinners can range from \$8 to \$30 and up.

Some of the best deals on the island come in a glass during happy hour, when mixed drinks can go as low as \$2. Even during normal hours drinks rarely jump above \$4 (outside of the pricier places in San Juan, of course).

Accommodations are likely to be your biggest investment in Puerto Rico. The best midrange options are in the government-sponsored paradors that lie scattered across the island. Prices range from \$75 to \$150 per night depending on the season, and facilities, while not luxurious, are invariably quirky and family-friendly. Real budget accommodations are woefully lacking and generally confined to camping, cabins and a few inferior hotels. If you're sticking around for a week or more you may want to look into renting an apartment. With the right number of people and flexibility with your dates you could cut a deal worth about \$60 per person per night.

## TRAVELING RESPONSIBLY

Since our inception in 1973, Lonely Planet has encouraged our readers to tread lightly, travel responsibly and enjoy the magic independent travel affords. International travel is growing at a jaw-dropping rate, and we still firmly believe in the benefits it can bring – but, as always, we encourage you to consider the impact your visit will have on both the global environment and the local economies, cultures and ecosystems.

Puerto Rico is one of the most densely populated islands in the world and its diverse ecosystems struggle constantly against a rising tide of burgeoning resorts and mass tourism. Fortunately there are now enough environmentally sensitive operators to make a low-impact trip possible, as long as you're prepared to be selective. Stay at small hotels and ecolodges rather than large resorts, use public transport whenever possible (or, better still, cycle), and support the 'green' local businesses listed in this book's GreenDex.

Puerto Rican públicos are a safe and perfectly viable way of traveling between the island's larger towns if you're willing to decipher the sometimes complicated bus system and muck in with the locals. The rewards are free Spanish lessons, higher ecocredentials and a far more vivid cross-cultural experience.

The following are some helpful websites covering sustainable travel options in Puerto Rico.

**Golden Heron** ([www.golden-heron.com](http://www.golden-heron.com)) Golden Heron runs ecotours, and their website provides travel planning information.

**El Yunque** ([www.elyunque.com](http://www.elyunque.com)) Information, sleeping and activities listings for the El Yunque rainforest and how to travel responsibly there.

**Elenas Vieques** ([www.elenas-vieques.com](http://www.elenas-vieques.com)) Ecotourism information about Vieques.

**AdventTours** ([www.adventourspr.com](http://www.adventourspr.com)) The website for AdventTours, which runs tours for the ecosensitive traveler.

## TRAVEL LITERATURE

Probably the best and most evocative fictional account of Puerto Rico at an important turning point in its history is *The Rum Diary* by the late Hunter S Thompson. Although written in the early '60s, it wasn't published until the late '90s, and follows the capers of an expatriate journalist caught in a culture of corruption, jealousy and excessive alcohol consumption. See p97 for further discussion of Thompson's San Juan sojourn.

*Stories from Puerto Rico* by Robert L Muckley and Adela Martinez-Santiago will fill you in on how the natives discovered the Spaniards weren't Gods, and other local legends.

*Boricuas: Influential Puerto Rican Writings – An Anthology* by Roberto Santiago showcases the very best Puerto Rican writers from modern to colonial times.

*Divided Borders: Essays on Puerto Rican Identity* by Juan Flores dissects in greater detail the Puerto Rican struggle to define and maintain indigenous identities as the island becomes more homogeneous. Flores also wrote *From Bomba to Hip-Hop*, a wide-ranging series of essays.

The following titles are rather difficult to get hold of, but are well worth a read if you do manage to find a copy. *Puerto Rico Mio: Four Decades of Change* is a sizable picture book by Jack Delano, who has been photographing Puerto Rico since 1941; Stan Steiner's *The Islands: The Worlds of the Puerto Ricans* stands out for its vivid evocation of islanders and their anecdotal histories; and *The Other Puerto Rico*, by Kathryn Robinson, depicts the island through the eyes of a keen naturalist.

### HOW MUCH?

- Airport taxi to Old San Juan \$20
- Average price for day of diving \$65
- Rental car cost per day \$45
- One night in a midrange San Juan hotel \$125
- Round-trip ferry to Vieques \$4.50

# TOP 10

## PUERTO RICO

### FESTIVALS

Puerto Rico celebrates all of the US national holidays in addition to nine of its own. Each town also has a patron saint festival that can last up to 10 days. Mostly Catholic in nature, these festivals often incorporate African and indigenous elements left over from the days when Taíno and Yoruba slaves wove their native rituals into colonial culture.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Festival San Sebastián, January 20, San Juan (p108)</li> <li>2 Coffee Harvest Festival, February, Maricao (p279)</li> <li>3 Carnival, February, Ponce (p190)</li> <li>4 José de Diego Day, April 16, nationwide (p279)</li> <li>5 Fiesta Nacional de la Danza, May, Ponce (p190)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 Fiesta de San Juan Bautista Day, June 24, San Juan (p108)</li> <li>7 Festival de Flores, June, Aibonito (p279)</li> <li>8 Fiesta de Santiago, July, Loíza Aldea (p279)</li> <li>9 Culinary Festival, early November, San Juan (p108)</li> <li>10 Festival Casals, dates vary, San Juan (p108)</li> </ol> |
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### IT ISN'T EASY BEING GREEN

Palm trees and jungle-covered mountains aside, Puerto Rico isn't the world's most ostensibly 'green' country. But with a bit of advanced planning and a dip into this book's brand-new GreenDex there's nothing to stop you treading lightly around one of the Caribbean's most heavily populated islands.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Staying at the Casa Cubuy Ecolodge (p136)</li> <li>2 Hiking in the Bosque Estatal de Guanica (p203)</li> <li>3 Tackling the Tradewinds Trail in El Yunque (p137)</li> <li>4 Catching a público (p141)</li> <li>5 Bird-watching on the Corozo Salt Flats (p211)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6 Strolling the streets of Old San Juan (p88)</li> <li>7 Surfing on Playa Jobos (p251)</li> <li>8 Drinking local coffee in the Hacienda San Pedro (p269)</li> <li>9 Using an electric boat in the bioluminescent Laguna Grande (p142)</li> <li>10 Kayaking in La Paguera (p205)</li> </ol> |
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### TOP READS

The following offer great insight into Puerto Rican culture and history.

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <i>When I Was Puerto Rican</i> by Esmeralda Santiago (p46)</li> <li>2 <i>Sataníada</i> by Alejandro Tapia y Rivera (p45)</li> <li>3 <i>The Rum Diary</i> by Hunter S Thompson (p97)</li> <li>4 <i>La llamarada</i> by Dr Enrique Laguerre (p46)</li> <li>5 <i>Song of the Simple Truth: The Complete Poems of Julia De Burgos</i> (p45)</li> <li>6 <i>Spiks</i> by Pedro Juan Soto (p46)</li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7 <i>Puerto Rican Obituary</i> by Pedro Pietri (p46)</li> <li>8 <i>The Benevolent Masters</i> by Enrique A Laguerre (p46)</li> <li>9 <i>El Gíbaro</i> by Manuel Alonso (p45)</li> <li>10 <i>The History of Puerto Rico: From the Spanish Discovery to the American Occupation</i> by RA Van Middeldyk (p32)</li> </ol> |
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## INTERNET RESOURCES

**Escape to Puerto Rico** (<http://escape.topuertorico.com>) A detailed overview of island life, plus links to other informative sources.

**LonelyPlanet.com** ([www.lonelyplanet.com](http://www.lonelyplanet.com)) There's no better place to start your web explorations.

**Puerto Rico Tourism Company** ([www.gotopuertorico.com](http://www.gotopuertorico.com)) Run by the island's tourism company, this site contains loads of useful information and 'travel planner' features to help you sketch out itineraries.

**Puerto Rico Wow** ([www.puertoricowow.com](http://www.puertoricowow.com)) This for-profit site has good information in between the ads for cars, restaurants and other island products.

**Welcome to Puerto Rico** (<http://welcome.topuertorico.org/index.shtml>) A travel guide plus information on the people of Puerto Rico and some great criollo recipes.

**World Factbook** ([www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook](http://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook)) All the latest information from the CIA about safe travel in Puerto Rico and some background material too.

# Itineraries

## CLASSIC ROUTES

### PUERTO RICO IN A FLASH

One Week / San Juan to San Juan

Since time is limited, fly to **San Juan** (p83) and make it your home base. With only seven days to spend in Puerto Rico, get right on the beach: **Isla Verde** (p103), **Condado** (p103) or **Ocean Park** (p103). Spend the next day weaving your way through **Old San Juan** (p88), being sure to stop by **El Morro** (p88), **Fuerte San Cristóbal** (p89) and **Calle Fortaleza** (p116). If you're up for some nightlife, stay right there.

The next few days require a rental car. With an early start, you can be the first in line to go inside the caves at **Parque de las Cavernas del Río Camuy** (p245). You'll have plenty of time in the afternoon for a drive up the winding mountain road to the **Observatorio de Arecibo** (p245) and the world's largest radio telescope.

Don't linger too long, though, because you want to get through the mountains to **Parque Ceremonial Indígena Caguana** (p245). Continue on to **Hacienda Gripiñas** (p269) for a restful night on this restored plantation. The next day, follow part of the **Ruta Panorámica** to **Yabucoa**, and then up to famed **Playa Luquillo** (p138), settling into the famed white, sandy crescent to care for your tan; sleep at a nearby **ecoresort** (p137).

For a dramatically different next day, explore the cool, green interior of **El Yunque** (p132) and spend the night in **Fajardo** (p146). Sign up for a kayak ride through **Laguna Grande** (p142), the bioluminescent bay. Then it's back to San Juan via **Loíza Aldea** (p126), where you can pick up a *vejigante* mask and get in a little snorkeling or surfing off the wild and lovely beaches. Test your luck at the gaming tables that night at any of the **Isla Verde** and **Condado** hot spots (p121) in San Juan.

This trip covers about 45 miles, hits all the major highlights and still fits in plenty of beach time.



## THE BEST OF THE ISLAND

Two Weeks / San Juan to North Coast

Spend five days in **San Juan** (p83) and surrounding areas, making sure to see **Old San Juan** (p88), the terrific **beaches** (p247), and the **Observatorio de Arecibo** (p245), a worthwhile day trip a couple of hours' drive to the west. Rent a car and drive east to **El Yunque** (p132) for a day of hiking. That night you can take the bioluminescent bay tour in **Fajardo** (p142) or wait until the next day when you go to **Vieques** (p166) on the ferry.

If you arrive early enough, you can zip right over to **Esperanza** (p170) – just make sure to rent a scooter or car in advance. Once there, hit the beautiful **beaches** (p171). Spend that night and the next day in Esperanza, then return to **Isabel Segunda** (p169); check out **Fortín Conde de Mirasol** (p170) and assess the nightlife at **Al's Mar Azul** (p179). Don't stay out until too late, though, because at 6am the next morning you'll be on a ferry to **Culebra** (p154). More fabulous beaches await, and great snorkeling, diving and glass-bottomed boat trips, too.

Now that you're nice and relaxed it's time to return to Fajardo, but only long enough to pick up your car and hit the road for **Ponce** (p183). Spend a few days exploring the colonial city's sights, such as **La Guancha Paseo Tablado** (p189), **Museo Castillo Serailles** (p189) and the **Centro Ceremonial Indígena de Tibes** (p194).

Definitely allow one day (preferably with an early morning start so you can be done by mid-afternoon when the sun's at its hottest) for **Bosque Estatal de Guánica** (p201). After hiking, drive scenic Rte 333 along the south coast and stop to swim wherever you wish.

The next morning, the San Juan–Ponce Autopista will get you back to the north coast in less than two hours.

This trip gives you plenty of time to explore the major island attractions, as well as the Spanish Virgin Islands. Including ferry rides, the whole jaunt covers about 100 miles.



## ROADS LESS TRAVELED

### RUTA PANORÁMICA

Three Days / San Juan to Observatorio de Arecibo

Head south from **San Juan** (p83) to **Bosque Estatal de Carite** (p258) on Hwy 184 for a morning of beautiful hiking and swimming in cold-water pools (in nonholiday weeks Carite is almost empty). On your way out in early afternoon grab lunch from one of the *lechonerías* (suckling pig restaurants) that line the highway near **Guavate** (p261). Head to **Aibonito** (p261) next and check out the views from **Cañón de San Cristóbal** (p262) and **Mirador La Piedra Degetau** (p262). Take a stroll around Aibonito's little plaza if you need to stretch your legs before bedding down at the **El Coqui Posada Familiar** (p263).

The next day begins in **Barranquitas** (p264) and the numerous museums dedicated to la Familia Muñoz, the closest thing Puerto Rico had to a political dynasty. Track west along the island's windiest road toward the **Reserva Forestal Toro Negro** (p265) where you can rouse a park ranger (if you're lucky) and set off on a couple of short hikes.

Divert off the Ruta Panorámica briefly on Rte 144 to the mountain town of **Jayuya** (p268) where you can visit the surreal **Museo del Cemí** (p269) and stock up on coffee at the **Hacienda San Pedro** (p269). Spend the night in the tranquil confines of **Hacienda Casa Taina** (p269), a refreshingly unique mountain escape.

Day three can begin with a drive/hike to the top of **Cerro de Punta** (p266), Puerto Rico's highest peak followed by the long decent into **Adjuntas** (p270) where you can visit the environmental protectionists at the **Casa Pueblo** (p270).

Continue via the fecund **Bosque Estatal de Guilarte** (p270) to romantic **Maricao** (p271). From this point you can easily jump off to **Bosque Estatal de Guánica** (p201), or the **Parque de las Cavernas del Río Camuy** (p245). If you've come this far, seriously consider a side trip to the **Observatorio de Arecibo** (p245) before heading back toward the capital.

Ideally this route takes three days, but it's easy to do smaller chunks if you prefer. The entire east–west trip, which includes some mountainous roads, covers 165 miles.





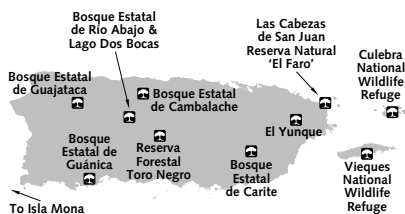
## TAILORED TRIPS

### FOR NATURE LOVERS

Start with what many believe to be the crown jewel of Puerto Rico's nature reserves, **El Yunque** (p132). Soak up the cool jungle interiors of this unique tropical ecosystem before heading for **Las Cabezas de San Juan Reserva Natural 'El Faro'** (p142), near Fajardo. From there you can ferry to Culebra and the **National Wildlife Refuge** (p156), which includes the coastline as well as more than 20 offshore cays. **Vieques National Wildlife Refuge** (p169) is also a fabulous place to cycle, hike, snorkel and swim on newly opened beaches and pristine land – you can visit one or both, as you wish.

Back on the mainland, head for **Bosque Estatal de Carite** (p258) at the mouth of the Ruta Panorámica. That road leads to the **Reserva Forestal Toro Negro** (p265), a remarkable forest with lush, flowery vegetation very unlike what you'll find at nearby **Bosque Estatal de Guánica** (p201), which is short on greenery but long on bird-watching and stunning ocean views. For the truly adventurous, a trip to **Isla Mona** (p234) is imperative – you'll really feel like an out-of-place guest in this animal kingdom.

**Bosque Estatal de Guajataca** (p249) is next, followed by **Lago dos Bocas** (p246), **Bosque Estatal de Río Abajo** (p246) and **Bosque Estatal de Cambalache** (p243).



### FOR CYCLISTS

Test your brakes in central San Juan before heading east through the traffic-calmed streets of Condado to the bike paths of **Piñones** (p125). Here among gorgeously undone beaches you can cycle to your heart's content with nary a car or truck to bother you.

Hop on a ferry next for the island of **Culebra** (p154) and strike out for the golden crescent of **Playa Flamenco** (p159) and some seriously steep and rutted roads. The switch to **Vieques** (p166) is welcome and seamless – it's one of the best places in Puerto Rico to make a spontaneous bike trip with a local guide.

Back on the mainland, avoid the car chaos of Yabucoa on the southeast coast and veer off on the panoramic **Hwy 901** (p149) that traces the coast until **Maunabo**. Following the south coast beyond Ponce you'll encounter the dry forest of **Guánica** (p201), where a network of trails provide plenty of options.

The **Cabo Rojo** (p211) area is, arguably, the island's best cycling haven. From **La Parguera** (p205) head west toward the famous Las Salinas salt flats and Los Morrillos lighthouse. Spin north after lunch for a seafood dinner in **Boquerón** (p213).

Another little heralded cyclist's paradise is hidden in the roads around Isabela. Spin out of the Ramey Base near Aguadilla before hooking up with spectacular **Hwy 466** (p251) and a full-on surfing show at Playa Jobsos.

On the way back to San Juan a couple of protected areas offer plentiful off-road adventures. Try the eight miles of single track in the **Bosque Estatal de Cambalache** (p243) or make a sedate circumnavigation of **Laguna Tortuguero** (p243).



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