

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

Overview

Introduction

Getting around Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is half the fun on a vacation: One of Fort Lauderdale's main drags is a river (the New River, to be specific), so visitors to Fort Lauderdale can hop on a water taxi and take in the sights.

This South Florida city's extensive system of waterways and reputation for gracious living have made Fort Lauderdale one of the country's largest yachting centers. Fort Lauderdale restaurants and bars overlook the canals and are accessible by water or from land by taxis and, believe it or not, from rickshaws. Several of Fort Lauderdale's special events—including a winter holiday boat parade that draws local, national and international celebrities—revolve around boating and the water.



Redevelopment in the 1990s left Fort Lauderdale awash in museums, art galleries, restaurants, hotels and chic sidewalk cafes, all appealing to visitors. The Broward Center for the Performing Arts houses two theaters, which provide separate venues for the Symphony of the Americas, Florida Grand Opera, Miami City Ballet, Broadway road shows and top-name performers. An elegant beachfront promenade attracts upscale vacationers from all over the world, including the spring-break college crowd. Fort Lauderdale was popularized by and is still often remembered for the 1960s beach movie *Where the Boys Are*.

More sedate than it used to be (but livelier than Palm Beach, its northern neighbor), Fort Lauderdale has more to offer visitors than most beach towns. The passage of a casino gambling law revitalized this resort town, and the former Hollywood Dog Racing Track, Isle Casino Pompano Park and Gulfstream Race Track have built multimillion-dollar casinos and entertainment venues attracting more tourists and businesses to the area.

Fort Lauderdale is also gay-friendly, with more than 150 gay-owned businesses in the city. Wilton Manors, a suburb of Fort Lauderdale, is the hub of activity for the gay community. There are several gay bars and restaurants in that area.

Highlights

Sights—Las Olas Boulevard, with its designer shops, cafes and beautiful people; Stranahan House and Bonnet House, historic, art-filled estates; Everglades National Park; a sunrise over palm-fringed beaches.

Museums—The major collection of CoBrA artwork at the NSU Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale; African-American Research Library and Cultural Center; the International Swimming Hall of Fame Museum; the International Game Fish Association Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum; the Museum of Discovery and Science; the Young at Art Children's Museum.

Memorable Meals—Waterfront dining at Kaluz and Blue Moon Fish Company; imaginative "Floribbean" cuisine at Cafe Maxx and 3030 Ocean; great steaks at Shula's on the Beach; gourmet vegetarian fare at Sublime.

Late Night—The lively beachfront Elbo Room; a colorful cocktail at Blue Martini; the popular Bahia Cabana Bar, with its nightly music and view of the yacht harbor; people-watching at Shooters; no-cover Saturday nights at Chase; the Seminole Paradise and Hard Rock complex of restaurants, nightlife and casino.

Walks—The Broadwalk at Hollywood Beach, filled with characters, cafes and shops; beautiful Fort Lauderdale Beach; quiet nature trails through Hugh Taylor Birch State Park, Anne Kolb Nature Center at West Lake Park or John U. Lloyd State Park; the Riverwalk, a promenade that meanders past some of the city's earliest buildings and along the New River; a sea turtle walk.

Especially for Kids—Free-flying aviaries at Butterfly World; Discovery Center at the Museum of Discovery and Science; Young at Art Children's Museum in Davie; the former pioneer homestead Tradewinds Park; airboat tours at Everglades Holiday Park; Splash Adventure at Quiet Waters Park; Boomers Amusement Park.

Geography

Fort Lauderdale sits in the middle of the burgeoning megalopolis known as South Florida, which hugs the Atlantic coast from Miami (a 40-minute drive south) to Palm Beach (a 45-minute drive north). It is the principal city in huge Broward County, two-thirds of which is Everglades swampland. What isn't swampy includes 23 mi/37 km of wide white-sand beaches and 30 other municipalities.

Several nearby coastal communities make up Greater Fort Lauderdale. To the north are Pompano Beach (where sportfishing is a favored pastime), Lauderdale-by-the-Sea (a small seaside oasis) and Deerfield Beach (one of South Florida's best-kept secrets).

To the south are Port Everglades (the country's third-busiest port, frequented by top cruise lines), Dania Beach (known for its antiques), Hallandale Beach (a seaside community popular with retirees, younger folks and Eastern European immigrants) and Hollywood (its bicycle-, skateboard- and pedestrian-friendly Broadwalk parallels the ocean). Western suburbs include Davie, Plantation, Lauderhill, Sunrise and Weston.

If this sounds like a patchwork of towns, it is—making a car a necessity for almost any traveler.

History

South Florida was the ancestral home of the Seminoles and more than a dozen other Native American tribes, but that began to change in the 1830s when U.S. Army soldiers started clearing trails into the area. The city's namesake, Maj. William Lauderdale, built an outpost at the mouth of the New River. Around the same time, runaway slaves sought refuge in the Everglades, where they banded together with the Seminoles to battle white settlers.

It wasn't until the arrival of a railroad in the 1890s that the area began to grow significantly. Frank Stranahan, one of the city's founding fathers, migrated from Ohio in the early 1900s and established a trading post, ferry system and post office. (He eventually married a native Floridian named Ivy Cromartie, and their home—two stories of Florida vernacular architecture—is now a museum in the historic district downtown.)

Meanwhile Charles Rodes, an ambitious land developer from West Virginia, followed the lead of Venice, Italy, and increased the amount of waterfront property by dredging waterways through dense mangrove swamps, forming peninsulas and a network of canals that still exist.

Like other resort areas in Florida, Fort Lauderdale boomed following World War II. By the 1960s it was a famed spring-break destination, whose population of raucous partygoers peaked at 400,000 in 1985. Eventually the city government cracked down and forced the annual spring bacchanalia to go elsewhere. The city invested millions of dollars to clean up its crime-ridden quarters in the early 1990s, transforming Fort Lauderdale into a more refined, family-friendly destination known for tourism and business, though it still thrives on the seasonal college crowd.

Along with the rest of South Florida, Fort Lauderdale then experienced a real-estate boom, especially for condominiums. A younger crowd started to fill the city, lowering the age demographic and making the nightlife scene less stodgy and suburban.

The area's Latin community has also mushroomed in the past 20 years, many moving north from Miami to join a mixture of Spanish-speaking people in Broward County.

Port Information

Location

Port Everglades is a 2,190-acre/887-hectare seaport located within the cities of Hollywood, Fort Lauderdale and Dania Beach. Each year more than 4 million cruise passengers board more than 40 ships from 10 cruise lines at its 12 terminals, putting it among the world's busiest cruise-ship facilities. The city predicts 7 million cruise passengers yearly by 2020.

A highlight of Port Everglades Cruise Terminal 18 is the massive work of art that artist Michele Oka Doner created for the center of the entrance hall. Terminal 18 has several built-in features for waiting cruise passengers such as acoustic panels to keep sound levels down, plasma-screen TVs where passengers can watch news and sports, Wi-Fi and a children's play area.

The port, which is about 3 mi/5 km southeast of downtown Fort Lauderdale and even closer to the beaches, is at the southern end of the 17th Street Causeway. Port Everglades is less than 2 mi/3 km from the Fort Lauderdale Hollywood International Airport, but allow about an hour to make the transfer from the airport to the port. I-595 goes directly into Port Everglades.

In December 2014, the port's Cruise Terminal Four will reopen following a US\$24-million renovation that includes a high-efficiency air-conditioning system, 50 check-in counters, and two new loading bridges to speed passenger check-in.

Secured parking lots are adjacent to the port terminals (parking is US\$15 per day). Parking is available at both the Northport and Midport Parking Garages (2,500 spaces in each garage) and the 410-space surface parking lot between Terminals 18 and 19. Complimentary shuttle-bus service is provided between the garages and Cruise Terminals 18 and 29. Wheelchair-accessible parking is available.

Free Internet access is available at all cruise terminals. There is a cell phone lot where people can wait for passengers to give them a call when the ship is ready for disembarkation. Digital signage provides ship names and cruise terminals on a rotating basis, making it easier for passengers to locate their ship's terminal.

All cruise passengers departing from Port Everglades enter the port through a security checkpoint and must show a government-issued photo ID for all people in the vehicle, as well as travel documents for departing passengers. Additional information can be found in the Cruise Passenger Information Section at <http://www.porteverglades.net>.

A taxi ride to and from Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport costs about US\$25-\$30. This rate depends on the traffic to and from the port and airport. Limousine and van services are also available for parties of five or more. Most car rental firms are licensed to do business at Port Everglades, and when ships are in port, they may provide courtesy-shuttle service between the cruise terminals and their off-site locations. Confirm shuttle availability with your car rental company.

Fort Lauderdale Shuttle offers service to and from the airport to Port Everglades from US\$26 per person, or for groups of four from US\$11 per person. Phone 954-773-2794.

The Quay shopping center, which has shops and restaurants (including the popular Bimini Boatyard restaurant), is a short cab ride away. Visitor information is available at kiosks around the terminals.

Because of the growth of the cruising industry and Port Everglades, shopping centers now surround the port on 17th Street. The Harbor Shops, less than 1 mi/1.6 km away, includes a bank, as well as such stores as Bluewater Books and Charts, a bookstore focused on nautical books and charts; the Prissy Hen, a consignment shop; Ace Hardware; and Total Wine and More.

If you have time for lunch, try Chef's Palette Restaurant at the Art Institute of Fort Lauderdale. Its culinary students prepare delicious meals and serve them to patrons for bargain prices. You can sneak a peek of these future chefs at work through a wall of windows. The Art Institute is a short cab ride from the port. 1650 S.E. 17th St. Phone 954-760-7957.

Potpourri

The city of Fort Lauderdale, the self-proclaimed "Venice of America," has 165 mi/266 km of navigable waterways and a reported 40,000 boats, earning its title as "Yachting Capital of the World."

Fort Lauderdale has more than 85 public parks and beaches, including nearby Haulover Beach, one of the nation's largest and most popular naturist beaches.

Besides *Where the Boys Are*, other movies shot in Fort Lauderdale include *Cape Fear* with Robert DeNiro; *Married to the Mob*, starring Michelle Pfeiffer, who also did *Up Close and Personal* there; and *Porky's*. *In Her Shoes*, with Cameron Diaz and Shirley MacLaine, filmed in Deerfield Beach; and scenes from *The Hours*, with Julianne Moore, took place in nearby Hollywood.

The Seminole Indians have a reservation in the heart of Hollywood, but if you didn't know better you'd think you were in a typical suburb. For a glimpse into the more traditional lives of Seminoles, visit Big Cypress Reservation, about 45 mi/72 km west of Fort Lauderdale. There you'll hear the people speaking their native language and see gator wrestling and authentic palm-thatched *chickee* houses.

In the neighboring city of Vero Beach, skeletal remains as old as 10,000 years have been discovered. More recent history dating from the late 1890s suggests that renowned "barefoot mailmen" walked along the beach from Hypoluxo to Miami to deliver mail before there were roads in the area.

What's so new about the New River? Legend says it came into being overnight. Maps from the 1630s called it Rio Nuevo; the name stuck.

Fort Lauderdale is considered the westernmost point of the Bermuda Triangle.

Greater Fort Lauderdale has 40 choices for golf, including courses designed by Greg Norman, Raymond Floyd, Robert Trent Jones, and Tom and George Fazio.

See & Do

Sightseeing

Start your tour at the Riverwalk, a 2-mi/3-km promenade on the north bank of the New River. It borders the Arts and Entertainment District, a historic area with restaurants, bars, galleries, marinas and street life.

Las Olas Boulevard, which follows the New River as it flows toward the Atlantic Ocean, is Fort Lauderdale's upscale shopping and dining district. If you're a history buff, the restored Victorian home of city founder Frank Stranahan, now a museum, can easily be included in a boulevard stroll.

Getting around Fort Lauderdale is part of the sightseeing experience: Water taxis ferry passengers among hotels, restaurants, theaters and nightclubs until midnight. At night, the twinkling lights along the canals make the rides quite romantic.

Historic Sites

Bonnet House

900 N. Birch Road
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304

Phone: 954-563-5393

<http://www.bonnethouse.org>

One of the few remaining estates on the ocean, the Bonnet mansion was built in 1920 by wealthy Chicago painter Frederick Clay Bartlett, who filled it with unusual contemporary artwork. Monkeys swing from the banyan trees, swans swim circles in a pond, parrots chatter from the aviary, and orchids bloom throughout the grounds. Guided tours available.

Open October-August daily except Monday 9 am-4 pm. US\$20 adults, US\$18 seniors, US\$16 children, free for children younger than 6, US\$10 for the gardens only.

Stranahan House

335 S.E. Sixth Ave.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Phone: 954-524-4736

<http://stranahanhouse.org>

The oldest building in Fort Lauderdale and the former home of pioneer businessman and city founder Frank Stranahan, this riverside home remained the residence of Stranahan's wife until her death in 1971. Local historians have restored the home to its original 1913 charm. One-hour tours are given every half hour.

Open daily 1-3 pm. River ghost tours Sunday at 7:30 pm. US\$12 adults, US\$7 children. River ghost tour US\$25 adults (includes house tour).

Museums

African-American Research Library and Cultural Center

2650 Sistrunk Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-357-6282

<http://www.broward.org/Library/LocationsHours/Branches/Pages/AA.aspx>

This place is equal parts museum and library, with a prominent African-American literary collection, a 5,000-sq-ft/465-sq-m art gallery, a business resource center and a 300-seat theater that hosts live performances, performance art exhibits, lectures and children's programs.

Monday and Wednesday noon-8 pm, Tuesday and Thursday-Sunday 10 am-6 pm. Admission to the museum and library is free; performance fees vary.

Young at Art Children's Museum

751 S.W. 121st Ave.
Davie, FL

Phone: 954-424-0085

<http://www.youngatartmuseum.org>

Children can visit an African village, go on an archaeological dig in Israel, learn the ancient art of origami in a Japanese house, explore a Mayan pyramid and more—all in the Global Village exhibit. Other permanent exhibits include *Earthworks*, a hands-on activity that teaches children about recycling, and the surrealistic *Kenny Scharf's Closet*. The state-of-the-art, modern museum features a 55,000-sq-ft/5,110-sq-m facility built on 11 acres/4.5 hectares that includes a children's reading center run by the county library system.

Open Monday-Thursday 10 am-5 pm, Friday and Saturday 10 am-6 pm, Sunday 11 am-6 pm. US\$13 adults, US\$12 children age 1 and older.

IGFA Fishing Hall of Fame and Museum

300 Gulf Stream Way (about 5 mi/8 km south of Fort Lauderdale)
Dania Beach, FL 33004

Phone: 954-922-4212

<http://www.igfa.org>

Run by the International Game Fish Association, this museum showcases the art and history of big-game fishing. Famous anglers, tackle and creatures of the deep are honored through exhibits and artifacts. Try the Catch Gallery for interactive, simulated fishing: You'll never mistake it for the real thing, but you're guaranteed to hook something. There is a seafood restaurant adjacent and a sports-oriented shop on-site, as well.

Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm, Sunday noon-6 pm. US\$10 adults, US\$5 children ages 3-16.

Museum of Discovery and Science

401 S.W. Second St.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33312

Phone: 954-467-6637

<http://www.mods.org>

This museum—one of the city's most striking attractions—appeals to adults and children alike. Among its outstanding exhibits are a simulated ride to the moon, a 52-ft-/16-m-tall gravity clock and a hands-on ecosystem exhibit with hundreds of plants and animals. There's also a five-story, 3-D IMAX theater and a children-only Discovery Center.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-5 pm, Sunday noon-6 pm. General admission US\$14 adults, US\$12 children ages 2-12.

NSU Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale

1 E. Las Olas Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301

Phone: 954-525-5500

<http://www.moafll.org>

Designed by noted museum architect Edward Larrabee Barnes, this museum houses one of the country's largest collections of postwar abstract artwork from the CoBrA (Copenhagen, Brussels, Amsterdam) movement. There also are notable works by impressionist William Glackens and Picasso ceramics, as well as a range of other 20th-century European and American art. It attracts major international exhibits.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-5 pm (till 7 pm Thursday), Sunday noon-5 pm. Exhibit admission fees are US\$14 adults, US\$7 children ages 5-17.

Parks & Gardens

Butterfly World

Tradewinds Park, 3600 W. Sample Road (about a 30-minute drive northwest of Fort Lauderdale)
Coconut Creek, FL 33073

Phone: 954-977-4400

<http://www.butterflyworld.com>

A world of natural pleasures, these screen-enclosed, walk-through aviaries contain 150 species of butterflies fluttering through a rain forest and the surrounding 3-acre/1.2-hectare Tradewinds Park. Aviaries for hummingbirds and lorikeets, too.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-5 pm, Sunday 11 am-5 pm. US\$26.95 adults, US\$21.95 children ages 3-11.

West Lake Park and Anne Kolb Nature Center and Marina

751 Sheridan St. (about a 20-minute drive south of Fort Lauderdale)
Hollywood, FL 33019

Phone: 954-357-5161

<http://www.broward.org/parks>

This tropical coastal ecosystem encompasses more than 1,500 acres/600 hectares of mangrove wetlands and forest habitat for ibis and heron. Named for a crusading environmentalist, the nature center is less than a mile/kilometer from the beach. You can climb a five-story observation tower and bicycle, hike, canoe or kayak through the wild. There's also a fishing pier on the Intracoastal Waterway.

Daily October-March 8 am-6 pm, April-September 8 am-7:30 pm. Exhibit hall open 9 am-5 pm. Admission to West Lake Park is US\$1.50; admission to Anne Kolb Nature Center is free, and the exhibit hall costs US\$2.

Quiet Waters Park

401 S. Powerline Road
Deerfield Beach, FL 33442

Phone: 954-357-5100

<http://www.broward.org/parks>

West of Deerfield Beach, this 430-acre/174-hectare park has a freshwater swimming beach, cable waterskiing, in-line skating, freshwater fishing and a variety of boats for rent. Also on-site is Splash Adventure, a water playground.

Open daily November-April 8 am-6 pm, May-October 8:30 am-7 pm. US\$1.50 park admission fee Saturday, Sunday and holidays. Admission to Splash Adventure is US\$5.

Flamingo Gardens

3750 S. Flamingo Road (about a 40-minute drive southeast of Fort Lauderdale)
Davie, FL 33330

Phone: 954-473-2955

<http://www.flamingogardens.org>

A vestige of Old Florida, this large citrus grove has lush botanical gardens; a wildlife sanctuary for such Everglades species as eagles, otters, flamingos and alligators; a free-flight aviary; and an arboretum containing some of the country's largest tropical trees, including a 200-year-old live oak. The highlight is a 30-minute tram ride through marshes and wetlands.

Daily 9:30 am-5 pm (closed Monday June-September). US\$18 adults, US\$10 children ages 4-11, free for children age 3 and younger. Tram tour is US\$4 adults, US\$3 children.

Everglades Holiday Park

21940 Griffin Road (take Interstate 595 West to I-75 and go south to Griffin Road West)
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-434-8111

<http://www.evergladesholidaypark.com>

If you want to see the Everglades but are short on time, take a one-hour tour aboard an airboat. The boats are loud (you wear ear protection) but thrilling—when you hit high speeds, the sensation is a lot like flying. Tour also includes an alligator show.

Open daily. Airboats leave every 20 minutes 9 am-5 pm (last boat leaves at 4:20 pm). US\$25 adults, US\$12.50 children.

Shopping

Broward County, which includes Fort Lauderdale, Hollywood, Dania Beach and a host of smaller cities, can satisfy any shopaholic. High-end and offbeat shops abound along Florida's Gold Coast, although you may have to drive a bit to reach them.

Fort Lauderdale has an eclectic mix: Las Olas Boulevard, best known for its relaxed alfresco shopping and Spanish colonial-style buildings, is lined with designer fashion stores and several notable art galleries. (The shopping district on Las Olas runs from Southeast Third Avenue to Southeast 15th Avenue.) You'll need a taxi or car to get to the rest. (The bus is slow, and the routes are circuitous.)

At the Galleria Mall on Sunrise Boulevard, just west of the Intracoastal Waterway, Neiman Marcus and Macy's set the retail tone.

There also are less traditional shopping areas frequented mostly by locals. Antiques buffs may want to head to Dania Beach's Antique Row, where dozens of shops occupy a few blocks along Highway 1. Bargain shoppers will enjoy visiting Pompano Beach's Festival Flea Market—more than 500 vendors, an arcade and a farmers market—and the Swap Shop, the state's largest indoor-outdoor flea market.

Shopping Hours: Most downtown shops and specialty stores are open Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm (some till 11 pm). Malls are usually open Monday-Saturday 10 am-9 pm and Sunday 11 am-6 pm. Shops along Las Olas Boulevard are open till at least 10 pm.

Factory Outlets

Sawgrass Mills

12801 W. Sunrise Blvd. (a 30-minute drive from the Fort Lauderdale/Hollywood International Airport)
Sunrise, FL

Phone: 954-846-2300. Toll-free 800-356-4557

<http://www.simon.com/mall/sawgrass-mills>

This sprawling outlet mall is about 30 mi/48 km north of Miami in Broward County. Its more than 350 name-brand stores and outlets include Last Call from Neiman Marcus, Off 5th Saks Fifth Avenue Outlet, the Calvin Klein Co. store and the J. Crew factory store. The Colonnade Outlets at Sawgrass Mills

features deep discounts at premium outlet stores such as Burberry, Hugo Boss, Ralph Lauren, Coach and more.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-9:30 pm, Sunday 11 am-8 pm.

Shopping Areas

Galleria Mall

2414 E. Sunrise Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33304

Phone: 954-564-1015

<http://www.galleriamall-fl.com>

Just blocks from the beach, this conveniently located mall has 150 mostly high-end stores, including Neiman Marcus, Macy's, Coach and Pottery Barn, as well as an upscale food court and restaurants, including two steak houses and Blue Martini Bar.

Monday-Saturday 10 am-9 pm, Sunday noon-6 pm.

The Gallery at Beach Place

17 S. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316

Phone: 954-760-9309

<http://www.galleryatbeachplace.com>

This three-story emporium across the road from the beach is home to several shops and restaurants. Some of the region's most popular watering holes are there, too, including Lulu's Bait Shack and Fat Tuesday.

Open Sunday-Thursday 11 am-10 pm, Friday and Saturday 11 am-midnight.

Dining

Dining Overview

Fort Lauderdale has more than 4,000 restaurants, ranging from waterfront dining spots that you can reach by boat or water taxi to ethnic eateries and top-notch steak houses. Locals claim that it would take about seven years to eat at all of Fort Lauderdale's restaurants, and even then you might miss some places because new dining spots spring up every year.

Fort Lauderdale's restaurants range from formal to funky. Many of the city's best choices are clustered along the principal shopping artery, Las Olas Boulevard, and in the Arts and Entertainment District. Other fine restaurants are located in the western part of the city, north in Pompano and Deerfield Beach, and south in Dania Beach and Hollywood.

Try stone-crab claws (in season mid-October to mid-May), key lime pie or a style of cooking dubbed "Floribbean," a blend of Florida and Caribbean fare, which typically mixes fresh lobster, shrimp, swordfish, pompano and other sea treats with locally grown citrus and tropical fruits.

General dining times are 7-10 am for breakfast, noon-2 pm for lunch and 7-9 pm for dinner. Early-bird specials, usually offered before 6 pm, are a good value.

Most restaurants don't enforce a dress code, but men often need a collared shirt and sometimes a jacket in upscale places. Ties are rarely required.

Expect to pay within these guidelines for a meal for one, not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than US\$15; \$\$ = US\$15-\$25; \$\$\$ = US\$26-\$50; and \$\$\$\$ = more than US\$50.

Local & Regional

Beauty and the Feast

601 N. Fort Lauderdale Beach Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-567-8070

<http://www.atlantichotel.com>

Located across from the ocean in the Atlantic Hotel, this newly created American menu of local and regional cuisine features pizza and paella, burgers, bone-in steaks, craft beers and cocktails. Enjoy the view and the food as you sit in comfy white booths.

Open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner, Sunday for brunch also. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Complimentary valet parking. Most major credit cards.

Fork and Balls

1301 E. Las Olas
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-771-2257

<http://www.forkandballs.com>

This casual, modern eatery is meatball-focused. You can build your own sandwiches or salads with your choice of balls, from lamb to veggies and fish. Try the tomato, onion, chickpea and olive balls with house vinaigrette, and add blue cheese. Beer and wine are on tap.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Market 17

1850 S.E. 17th St. (in the Portside Yachting Center)
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-835-5507

<http://www.market17.net>

Chef Lauren DeShields is a big proponent of the farm-to-table movement: She buys fish from local fisherfolk, and meat and produce from local farms. The result? Unbelievably fresh food, and a constantly changing menu. The duck confit salad with fried rice balls (arancini) is a standout.

Nightly for dinner (closed Monday during the summer). Reservations recommended. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Seasons 52

2428 E. Sunrise Blvd. (in the Galleria Mall)
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-537-1052

<http://www.seasons52.com>

Seasonally inspired dishes with fewer than 475 calories each have made this health-conscious restaurant a favorite among locals and a hit with visitors. The menu changes seasonally, and the atmosphere is upscale and casually sophisticated. The flatbreads, especially the ripe plum tomato and the classic Reuben, are favorite starters. Vegetarians are pleased with the crisp, fresh veggie dishes, which are served with a minimum of sauces, so the natural flavors can be savored.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Truluck's

2584-A E. Sunrise Blvd. (at The Galleria)
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-396-5656

<http://trulucks.com>

You're in for a treat if stone crabs are in season. The restaurant works with a fishery in Naples to ensure a fresh catch every day. Other sea fare includes grouper, sea bass, scallops, tuna and trout. Even the meat is served with a seaward bent: Try the Steak Ponchartrain, with crawfish, blue crab and shrimp in a tasty cream sauce. Servers suggest wines to pair with dinner—the wine flights pitting Spain versus Italy are fun.

Monday-Saturday for dinner. Reservations recommended. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Cuisines

American

Bimini Boatyard

1555 S.E. 17th St. Causeway
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-525-7400

<http://www.biminiboatyard.com>

This casual waterfront restaurant offers the requisite American menu—salads, seafood, chicken and steak—and also offers up-close views of huge boats docked next door. The Diane salad and roast chicken are spectacular, and the Bimini bread is outstanding.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Gilbert's 17th Street Grill

1821 Cordova Road
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-768-8990

<http://gilberts17thstgrill.com>

Possibly the best burger in South Florida: eight ounces of certified Angus beef with your choice of toppings—we liked the Brie burger with bacon and fried onions.

Monday-Saturday for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Tap 42

1411 S. Andrews Ave.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-463-4900

<http://tap42.com>

This lively gastropub serves up tasty burgers and vegetarian items, too. Great selection of craft beer and bourbon.

Open daily for lunch and dinner until late.

YOLO

333 E. Las Olas Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-523-1000

<http://yolorestaurant.com>

You only live once, and YOLO is a contemporary restaurant that helps folks live it up. This popular eatery is frequented by locals who gather there after work for dinner and drinks. Menu items vary from salads and sliders to coriander-crusting seaweed tuna and steaks.

Daily for lunch and dinner, Sunday for brunch also. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Fusion

Cafe Maxx

2601 E. Atlantic Blvd.
Pompano Beach, FL 33062

Phone: 954-782-0606

<http://www.cafemaxx.com>

The menu features sophisticated nouvelle cuisine with a "Floribbean" touch. Favorites include three-peppercorn filet mignon with au gratin potatoes, Manchego and sweet onion crusted rack of lamb, and Thai chili-crusting tuna.

Nightly for dinner. Reservations required. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Canyon Southwest Cafe

1818 E. Sunrise Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-765-1950

<http://www.canyonfl.com>

Prickly pear margarita? This Southwestern restaurant has been earning raves for its creative menu that blends Asian, Southwest and Native American flavors. Try the smoked salmon tostada with scotch bonnet tartar sauce, and the Florida grouper with chili peppers and Serrano ham.

Nightly for dinner. Reservations not accepted. Most major credit cards.

Italian

Anthony's Runway 84

330 State Road 84
Fort Lauderdale, FL

This local favorite has delicious, hearty servings of Italian entrees and has been around for nearly 30 years. The restaurant has an airport motif with cutouts of airplanes and flight decor. Make reservations ahead of time, or you will have a long wait.

Tuesday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday and Sunday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Sorrisi

5550 N.W. 40th St.
Coconut Creek, FL

Phone: 954-283-2812

<http://seminolecoconutcreekcasino.com>

Exceptional Italian cuisine is as pleasing to the eye as it is to the taste buds. Located in the Seminole Casino Coconut Creek, this restaurant is worth a try even if you are not a gambler. The warm Roman artichoke with oreganata crumbs and Parmigiano Reggiano appetizer is a standout. For entrees, try the *pollo Scarpariello* (chicken breast), with fennel sausage, peppers, mushrooms and shallots. The braised short ribs or porcini-encrusted lamb rack are savory sensations for meat lovers. Everything is made in-house, even the desserts. The chocolate semifreddo with creme Anglaise is a sweet finish.

Daily except Monday for dinner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Casa D'Angelo

1201 N. Federal Highway
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-564-1234

<http://www.casa-d-angelo.com>

This Italian gem is hidden in a strip mall, but don't let that deter you. Chef and owner Angelo Elia carefully selects each day's menu with mouth-watering results. We liked the spaghetti with house-made sausage and broccoli rabe. The veal scaloppine is another must-try. Extensive wine list and excellent service from an Italian-speaking waitstaff.

Nightly for dinner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Latin American

Cafe Seville

2768 E. Oakland Park Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-565-1148

<http://www.cafeseville.com>

For a touch of Spain in Florida, this is the perfect spot for tasty tapas and all sorts of meat and seafood dishes. Try the giant paella, big enough for two.

Tuesday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Monday and Saturday for dinner only. \$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Havana's Cuban Cuisine

8600 Griffin Road
Cooper City, FL

Phone: 954-530-1400

<https://www.facebook.com/HavanasCubanCuisine>

This casual Cuban dining spot mixes sangria at your table, stirring up delicious fruits and wine with a wooden stick. The portions are large and include two side dishes. In addition to the typical rice and beans try the *tostones* (green plantains) and *yucca con mojo* (yucca with a *mojo* sauce). The Cuban classic *ropa vieja* is a favorite as is the *bistec del palomilla* (Cuban-style thin sirloin steak). Moderately priced and family oriented.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$.

Padrinos

801 S. University Drive
Plantation, FL 33324

Phone: 954-476-5777

<http://www.padrinos.com>

The *bistec pollo* and *ropa vieja* are favorites, and the rice and black beans are *muy bueno*. Fried plantains are served with everything.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Seafood

Calypso

460 S. Cypress Road
Pompano Beach, FL

Phone: 954-942-1633

<http://www.calypsorestaurant.com>

As one of South Florida's best-kept secrets, this place may serve the most delicious Caribbean food you can get without hopping on a boat or plane. Jerk chicken and shrimp, fish cakes, scorched conch and spicy dolphinfish.

Open Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

15th Street Fisheries

1900 S.E. 15th St.
Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316

Phone: 954-763-2777

<http://www.15streetfisheries.com>

The daily selection of fresh fish and home-style bread make this place special. A downstairs lounge has a less-expensive menu; the upstairs restaurant is more formal.

Upstairs nightly for dinner, downstairs daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended for upstairs. Collared shirts required for men in the upstairs room. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

3030 Ocean

3030 Holiday Drive (in the Harbor Beach Marriott Resort)
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-765-3030

<http://www.3030ocean.com>

The menu is seasonal at this quintessential Florida seafood restaurant, where chef Dean Max's cooking style combines the light and flavorful sensibility of California cuisine with local produce in a relaxed, beachfront setting. Florida pompano and snapper are usually available, and a raw bar includes sevice, littleneck clams and stone crabs in season. The key lime and coconut cream tart is matched with summer strawberries.

Open nightly for dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Blue Moon Fish Company

4405 W. Tradewinds Ave.
Lauderdale-by-the-Sea, FL

Phone: 954-267-9888

<http://www.bluemoonfishco.com>

This picturesque Intracoastal Waterway restaurant has cuisine that matches the view. Try the lump crab and corn-roasted grouper with asparagus risotto and red-wine butter, or the sauteed yellowtail snapper and goat-cheese mashed potatoes. Fresh fish reigns supreme, but the New Zealand rack of lamb is also a favorite. The Sunday brunch is spectacular, with such favorites as applewood-bacon-wrapped stuffed breast of chicken, omelettes and salmon strudel.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations required. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Lobster Bar Sea Grille

450 E. Las Olas Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-772-2675

<http://buckheadrestaurants.com/lobster-bar-sea-grille>

Elegant and refined, this classy Las Olas restaurant serves seafood from around the world and is perfect for special occasions. Small plates and sharing menu items are encouraged. Greek and Mediterranean sauces predominate. Steaks are grilled to perfection in an open kitchen. The specialty is Mediterranean octopus, char-grilled with pickled red onion and capers. We recommend the Maryland crab cake with lemon-mustard emulsion or the cold-water lobster tail thinly crisped and flash-fried. The large bar is a gathering place for locals.

Monday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Saturday and Sunday for dinner only. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Sea Watch

6002 N. Ocean Blvd.
Fort Lauderdale, FL

Phone: 954-781-2200

<http://www.seawatchontheocean.com>

This beachhouse on the shoreline is known for its consistently good seafood dishes—bouillabaisse, oysters Rockefeller, gulf shrimp, Bahamian conch fritters, and the Sea Watch medley of crab, oysters, clams and shrimp. A special "Dinner at Dusk" menu is just US\$20.95 between 5 and 6 pm.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Security

Personal Safety

Exercise the same precautions you would during a visit to any major U.S. city: Don't carry large amounts of cash or wear conspicuous, pricey jewelry. Use a safe or hotel vault for valuables—extra cash, traveler's checks, credit cards, passports and plane tickets. Remember: Pickpockets enjoy the South Florida climate as much as travelers do.

Request advice and clear travel directions before venturing into unfamiliar areas. Stay in well-lit, well-populated areas at night. Keep car doors locked when stopping at red lights at intersections.

Don't use ATMs on deserted, dark or isolated locations, and try not to go alone. If people are loitering nearby or looking over your shoulder, don't use that ATM. Always shield the keypad when entering your PIN and don't write your PIN on anything you carry with your cards.

Ask your hotel's concierge or the front desk for advice about any area you may wish to visit.

Health

Dehydration and sunburn are two of the most common preventable ailments experienced by South Florida visitors. Make sure to stay hydrated and use at least an SPF-15 sunscreen several times a day. During the summer, mosquitoes are at their peak, so it's a good idea to use bug repellent, especially at night and near the water.

Several hospitals offer 24-hour emergency medical care. Holy Cross Hospital is at 4725 N. Federal Highway (phone 954-771-8000). Other facilities include Broward General Medical Center at 1600 S. Andrews Ave. (phone 954-355-4400) and Imperial Point Medical Center at 6401 N. Federal Highway (phone 954-776-8920).

In case of emergency, dial 911.

Disabled Advisory

Most attractions and transportation services—including water taxis—can accommodate those with special needs. The visitors bureau provides communication aids or services upon request for people with disabilities. For more information, contact the bureau at 954-765-4466.

Additional information for people with disabilities is available at <http://www.adrcbroward.org>.

Facts

Dos & Don'ts

Do rent a convertible if you need a vehicle: The costs are usually only a little higher, and a drive through Fort Lauderdale with the top down is the best way to take in the wide skies and palm trees.

Do try Cuban coffee—it's an ideal afternoon pick-me-up. Ask for *cafe con leche* (coffee with steamed milk) or a *cordadita* (espresso sweetened with sugar while brewing).

Do rise early and head to the beach to see shorebirds feeding on creatures left by the tide. Sunrise over the ocean is an awe-inspiring sight.

Don't get caught on the wrong side of the 17th Street Causeway drawbridge if you're in a hurry to get to the airport or Port Everglades to catch a cruise ship. The bridge rises every half-hour—and can stay up for more than five minutes while drivers sit and stew on the roadway. The traffic jam barely clears before the bridge goes up again. In fact, leave a little time for all bridge crossings in Fort Lauderdale, which has so many canals and waterways that it calls itself the "Venice of America."

Do take advantage of early-bird specials (some offered as early as 3 pm) at area restaurants. The food is typically the same as on the regular menu, and coffee and dessert are included.

Don't disturb turtle nesting areas. They are usually roped off and designated.

Do not drive in bicycle lanes. You will get a ticket. Florida has many cyclists on city streets and highways. There are separate, marked-off lanes for bicyclists.

Don't float where you can't swim. Nonswimmers often use flotation devices and can drown if they float out to deep waters and can't swim.

Do understand beach warning flags. They fly from lifeguard towers and represent hazards and surf conditions.

Don't swim alone. Always swim with a companion.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: All U.S. citizens must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S.

Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda. Reconfirm travel-document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

Population: 172,400.

Languages: English, some Spanish.

Predominant Religions: Christianity (Protestant, Roman Catholic) and Judaism.

Time Zone: 5 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-5 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is observed from the second Sunday in March until the first Sunday in November.

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts.

Telephone Codes: 954, area code;

Money

Currency Exchange

Banks are found throughout Fort Lauderdale and the surrounding communities, and most have 24-hour ATMs. Lobby hours are generally Monday-Friday 9 am-5 pm. Some banks have limited Saturday morning hours. Publix supermarkets and major gas stations also have ATMs. You can change money at Sawgrass Mills Mall, Aventura Mall and at most airports.

Taxes

The sales tax is 6% in Broward County, which includes Fort Lauderdale, Dania Beach, Davie, Hollywood, Plantation, Pompano Beach and Port Everglades. In general, products and services exempt from sales tax are unprepared food, professional services—medical, dental and legal—and labor-only services related to real estate. There is a hotel tax of 5% in Fort Lauderdale.

Tipping

Tip 15%-20% in restaurants, depending on service. Wine stewards and dining-room captains merit consideration—US\$5 should be a minimum, and double that when given a really good table. Be sure to check your bill, because many restaurants in tourist areas automatically add a 15% gratuity, especially for parties larger than five people.

US\$2 is appropriate for a parking valet. Luggage tips should be US\$1 per bag for airport baggage handlers and bellhops. Plan on US\$1.50 per day per guest for the hotel housekeeping staff (leave more if you ask for extra services).

Weather

Fort Lauderdale's winter temperatures, averaging 60-76 F/16-24 C, attract visitors from northern reaches (known locally as snowbirds) November-April. In winter, cold fronts do occasionally sweep down from chillier climes, which can cause temperatures to drop abruptly.

Summers are hot and humid (average temperatures are in the low 90s F/32-37 C, and humidity is often 98%), with frequent, brief afternoon thundershowers. A high-SPF sunscreen is a must. A hat will help, and an umbrella comes in handy to protect against rain and sun. Hurricane season is June-November.

What to Wear

You'll be most comfortable in cotton and linen casual clothing when visiting Fort Lauderdale. Locals wear shorts almost everywhere, especially places around the beach. Always pack a lightweight sweater for air-conditioning (just about every establishment is air-conditioned). A heavier sweater or jacket is a good idea in winter.

Evening attire can be dressy at some restaurants and nightclubs, but it's always adapted to the warm climate. Men rarely need a tie or jacket at any restaurant in Fort Lauderdale. If meetings are on your agenda, pack typical business wear, including a tie for men.

Transportation

If you will be spending more than a day in the Fort Lauderdale area, we recommend a rental car. A scenic way to get around while you're sightseeing, however, is by water taxi. Water Taxi of Fort Lauderdale operates a fleet of boats that travel the Intracoastal Waterway between Port Everglades and Commercial Boulevard and travel up the New River to downtown Fort Lauderdale. They stop within walking distance of many attractions and restaurants. An all-day pass is US\$16 adults. <http://www.broward.org/bct>.

Car

Rental cars are available at the airport and in many outlying areas of the city, as well as downtown. There are advantages to booking with a major rental car company such as Avis, Dollar, Enterprise or Hertz, as these agencies have the ability to repair and exchange vehicles quickly, often in less than an hour. The use of cell phones has expedited past problems. However, smaller companies such as Advantage and American lack the resources and abundant locations needed to quickly repair or exchange a vehicle in the event of an accident or serious mechanical malfunction.

Major credit cards are accepted at all key rental car companies, and debit cards have become popular, though large temporary withdrawals are common practice when using a debit card.

The legal age to drive in Florida is 16, but most rental car companies require all drivers to be 25 years of age or older to rent a vehicle. There is, of course, an industry-wide loop hole; by paying an additional US\$15-\$25 per day, the minimum age requirement drops to 20. Plan on paying US\$20-\$100 per day, depending on the vehicle (rates are typically higher November-May). Driving in Broward County is fairly easy. Signs on the main roads direct drivers to major attractions. Cell phone use while driving is still legal.

Interstates 95 and 595 are the main arteries through Fort Lauderdale. Along the ocean, the main road is State Road A1A. In the western suburbs the main drag is University Drive. Heed speed limits. Traffic is heavy during morning and evening rush hours, but off-peak hours aren't too bad. Parking is difficult in downtown Fort Lauderdale. A parking garage is your best bet.

Classic Car Rentals

For a fun day in Fort Lauderdale, this car rental agency has an inventory of classic cars from a 1972 Chevelle convertible to a 1961 Rolls Royce. Monday-Friday 10 am-6 pm, Saturday and Sunday by appointment. US\$250 per day. For longer periods, the per-day price goes down. 2848 Stirling Road, Suite G. Fort Lauderdale, FL. Toll-free 855-790-4903. <http://www.classicdreamrides.com>.

Public Transportation

The water taxi is a good way to get around, if your destination is close to the water routes. You can catch a free street trolley to travel between attractions in downtown Fort Lauderdale.

There's also the Sun Trolley service with routes along the beach, downtown, the Riverfront Complex and Las Olas, and to the Coral Ridge Mall: Just flag down the yellow-and-red trolleys. Fares range US\$0.25-\$0.50. Phone 954-761-3543. <http://www.suntrolley.com>.

County buses that run along the streets are slow and have little room for luggage. There are 40 routes. One-way bus fare is US\$1.75. All-day pass is US\$4. Phone 954-357-8400. See the website for bus schedules and route maps. <http://www.broward.org/BCT/VisitorInfo>.

Broward B-Cycle

This bike-sharing system allows people to check out a bicycle at a public bike station for a small fee and return it to another station when done. Fort Lauderdale, FL. Phone 754-200-5672.

<https://broward.bcycle.com>.

Water Taxi of Fort Lauderdale

Escape traffic, and take a boat instead. Canopied water buses crisscross miles/kilometers of the Intracoastal Waterway and canals in and around downtown Fort Lauderdale and between 17th Street to the south and Oakland Park Boulevard to the north. Eleven pickup points include waterfront restaurants, marinas, beaches, shopping malls and the Arts and Entertainment District. The service can be used in conjunction with county buses, though it's best just for sightseeing. Daily 10:30 am-midnight. US\$22 adults, US\$11 children (all-day pass). Family passes, evening rates and multiday passes also are available. 651 Seabreeze Blvd.. Fort Lauderdale, FL 33316. Phone 954-467-6677.

<http://www.watertaxi.com>.

Taxi

Friendly Checker Cab

Operates 24 hours daily. Phone 954-923-9999. Fort Lauderdale, FL.

Yellow Cab

Yellow Cab accepts major credits cards. Reservations are available. Phone 954-565-5400. Fort Lauderdale, FL.

San Juan, Puerto Rico

OVERVIEW

Introduction

San Juan, Puerto Rico, with stunning beaches, is one of the busiest leisure and business travel destinations in the Caribbean. It is especially convenient for U.S. citizens as they do not need a passport to go to Puerto Rico because of its association with the U.S., and the currency is the U.S. dollar.



Old San Juan's walled enclave delights visitors with a treasure trove of Spanish colonial architecture. The venerable San Juan Cathedral, gray cobblestoned streets and pastel-colored buildings give the Puerto Rican city the glamorous look of a movie set. Visitors will find a deep respect for the past combined with passion for the trends of the present.

San Juan houses cultural attractions such as the stunning Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico, the state-of-the-art Coliseo de Puerto Rico that has welcomed major superstars and athletes, and a multimillion-dollar convention-center facility—the largest in the Caribbean. Historic neighborhoods offer sophisticated restaurants that combine Latin, Caribbean and Asian flavors. Cosmopolitan lounges, restaurants and nightclubs all around town fuel the city's reputation as a late-night haven for beautiful people.

Highlights

Sights—Castillo de San Felipe del Morro and Castillo de San Cristobal, which were built in the 1500s; Catedral de San Juan for its beautiful stained-glass windows; the Bacardi Rum Distillery; the pristine beaches of Isla Verde, Condado and Ocean Park; the lush vegetation of El Yunque National Forest in nearby Rio Grande.

Museums—The regional art and sculpture garden at Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico; the Museo de las Americas, located inside the 19th-century Spanish-built Cuartel de Ballaja; the collection of the cellist's personal effects and manuscripts at Museo de Pablo Casals; contemporary works by Puerto Rican and Latin American artists at the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo.

Memorable Meals—Arroz con pollo (chicken and rice), *mofongo* (mashed plantains and garlic) or other classic Puerto Rican dishes at La Casita Blanca; anything off the nouvelle Latino menu at the Parrot Club; Latin-Asian cuisine creations by *Iron Chef America* contender and restaurateur Robert Trevino at Budatai; typical South American seviche at Pa'l Cielo; excellent French food at Trois Cent Onze (311); fluffy pancakes and fresh orange juice for breakfast or pizza and stromboli for lunch at Danny's Pizza; mahimahi and other sea delights at Soleil.

Nightlife—Dance the night away at the hip and hot Brava; roll the dice at any of the swanky hotel casinos; mingle with the local elite at La Concha Lobby Bar & Lounge; enjoy the traditional Monday hip-hop jam at La Respuesta; soak up the authentic Puerto Rican ambience at the Nuyorican Cafe.

Walks—Explore Old San Juan on foot; catch a breath of air while passing by the oceanfront at La Ventana al Mar in Condado; take in the fresh ocean breeze on a stroll through the Luis Munoz Rivera park at the entrance of Old San Juan (opposite side of Escambron beach area); a walk along the Paseo Pinones Recreational Trail in nearby Loiza; the pleasant surroundings of the Rio Piedras Botanical Garden.

Especially for Kids—Interactive exhibits and puppet shows at El Museo del Nino; a petting zoo at Villa Campestre; a bike ride at the Luis Munoz Rivera park in Hato Rey; the planetarium at Luis A. Ferre Science Park; miniature golf, ice skating and other attractions at the Museo Historico de la Biblia; in-line skating and skateboarding at Moisty Skate and Family Park.

Geography

San Juan is located on the northern coast of Puerto Rico. The city is made up of five urban centers: Old San Juan, Santurce, Hato Rey, Rio Piedras and Condado. Most tourist attractions are located in the Old San Juan, Condado and Isla Verde areas.

Old San Juan occupies a peninsula that juts into the Atlantic Ocean, with the ancient Spanish fortress of El Morro (at the tip of the peninsula) marking the city's northernmost point. Moving eastward from Old San Juan, the modern hotels of the Condado and Isla Verde areas rise along the sands of the beach, and farther south, the gleaming glass towers of the Hato Rey banking district reflect the sun.

Miramar, an upscale area between Santurce and Isla Grande, is bordered on one side with a path that provides spectacular views of the Condado lagoon. SoFo, the district south of Calle Fortaleza in Old San Juan, is one of the city's trendiest entertainment hubs. South of the city are the cool green mountains that crisscross the center of the island.

History

After Columbus discovered the sparsely inhabited island of Puerto Rico in 1493, Spain sent Juan Ponce de Leon to establish a stronghold in a protected harbor on the northern coast. Spain used the city for the next four centuries as its gateway to the New World, as well as the base from which it defended its possessions in the Americas. Although the Dutch and eventually the British held the town for brief periods, the Spanish managed time and again to recapture San Juan. In 1898, however, the U.S. Army landed on the island during the Spanish-American War, and Puerto Rico was later ceded to the U.S. as part of the Treaty of Paris, which ended the conflict.

In 1917, the U.S. Congress granted Puerto Ricans U.S. citizenship. Two decades later, President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched Operation Bootstrap, which provided agricultural development, public works and electricity to the island. Puerto Rico has been a U.S. commonwealth since 1952. There have been three nonbinding plebiscites on statehood—the most recent in 1998—but the majority of the voters apparently prefer their current status to becoming the 51st U.S. state.

Proponents of statehood have not given up, however, and are continuing efforts in Washington, D.C., for a congressionally mandated referendum on the island's political status. Islanders enjoy U.S. citizenship and pay no federal income taxes, but they cannot vote in presidential elections.

San Juan continues to thrive as the business center of the island and the region. It's a manufacturing powerhouse that set the foundation for the island's growing presence of biotechnology developments, and it is a processing hub, with petroleum refineries and the famed Bacardi Rum distillery. Its port is one of the most active in the Caribbean—both for cruise and cargo ships—and Luis Munoz Marin International Airport is the region's busiest airport.

Tourism is an important economic driver for the island, as evidenced in the metro area's ongoing industry developments, including the 503-room Sheraton Hotel & Casino adjacent to the Puerto Rico Convention Center, the largest and most technically advanced meeting facility in the Caribbean.

Port Information

Location

The Port of San Juan is the center of cruise-ship traffic in the Caribbean—in addition to being a popular port of call, it is home base for dozens of luxury liners. More than 1 million cruise passengers sail in or out of San Juan annually, and those figures continue to grow as increasing numbers of megaships visit the island.

Several piers sit right on bustling Calle Marina. When you get off your ship, you can walk straight into Old San Juan. There's tourist information at La Casita, which is west of Pier 1 on Calle Marina. The newer cruise-ship piers are Pier 3 and Pier 4, which are directly south of Pier 1 and lead up toward the Pan American Pier, at the far south end of Old San Juan on Calle Lindbergh in the Isla Grande area—it's a little farther from the main tourist attractions. For the Puerto Rico Ports Authority, phone 787-723-2260; or contact Terminal de San Juan at 787-729-8714.

Although you won't find restaurants on piers 1, 3 or 4 or the Pan American premises, they are plentiful in Old San Juan. Options range from chain eateries to local-cuisine restaurants and cafes. Pier 4 has a duty-free store. And the ferry terminal, marked Pier 2 Acuaexpreso, offers a variety of eateries such as the terminal cafeteria, Subway, an ice-cream shop and a coffeehouse.

Most hotels provide Internet access; Cafe Berlin at 407 Calle San Francisco in front of Plaza Colon also has Wi-Fi for patrons. The nearest Internet cafe is CyberNet Cafe at 1128 Ashford in Condado. Phone 787-724-4033. <http://www.cybernetcafepr.com>.

Taxis are readily available at the port, and a free trolley stops across from Pier 4 with hop-on, hop-off service through Old San Juan. Pier Car Rental in front of Pier 3 rents cars, electric cars, scooters and bikes (phone 787-962-6555). Charlie Car Rental has an office in the nearby Condado area (phone 787-721-6525). Hertz has a location at the Sheraton Old San Juan on Calle Brumbaugh (phone 787-721-5100).

If you're flying into San Juan to catch a ship, know that most cruise lines provide transportation from the airport to the pier; otherwise, a taxi ride to the port costs about US\$20.

Potpourri

Founded by Ponce de Leon in 1521, San Juan is the oldest city in U.S. territory—older than St. Augustine, Florida, which was founded in 1565.

The *coqui* (a type of frog) can be found all over Puerto Rico. Its name comes from the lovely melody it sings in the evening: *ko-kee, ko-kee*. It is considered the island's unofficial animal.

Puerto Rico is a featured destination for a limited edition of the Parker Brothers Monopoly brand board game. The El Morro fort in San Juan is the board's main picture.

With more than 120 years of history in horse racing, the island has produced famous jockeys and Thoroughbreds including Angel Cordero Jr., who rode the Puerto Rican-trained horse Bold Forbes to wins in the 1976 Kentucky Derby and the Belmont Stakes.

San Juan native Jose Miguel Agrelot—a beloved Puerto Rican comedian, radio and TV host—was the first Hispanic inducted into the National Radio Hall of Fame in Chicago.

The Puerto Rican band Calle 13 has won 21 Grammy Awards, more than any other Latin artist, including 19 Latin Grammy Awards and two American Grammy Awards. Other well-known recording artists from Puerto Rico include pop megastars Ricky Martin, Marc Anthony, Robi Draco Rosa and Luis Fonsi; Latin reggae leaders Cultura Profetica; Latin hardcore rock icons Puya; *reggaeton* stars and actors Tego Calderon, Daddy Yankee and Don Omar; jazz megastar Miguel Zenon; guitarist Mars Volta; and singer Omar Rodriguez-Lopez.

Movies filmed in Puerto Rico include: *Assassins, Contact, Bad Boys II, Amistad, The Men Who Stare at Goats, Che, Fast & Furious: Fast Five, Havanna Nights, Golden Eye, Captain Ron, Hector Lavoe, The Losers, Rum Diaries* and *Christmas in Paradise*.

Puerto Rico is considered the rum capital of the world. Besides its 450-year history of rum production, Puerto Rico is the only rum-producing nation that regulates production with laws to ensure great quality and taste. It's also the birthplace of the refreshing pina colada cocktail.

See & Do

Sightseeing

With its narrow cobblestoned streets, lovely Old San Juan is best explored on foot. Begin your tour in the southwest corner of the walled city at Paseo de la Princesa, a promenade with a spectacular view of San Juan Bay. Midway down the promenade is La Princesa, a former prison that currently houses the Puerto Rico Tourism Co. and displays rotating art exhibits that are open to the public.

Walk northwest along Paseo de la Princesa toward San Juan Gate, one of the old city's original seaside entrances. You can head into the city through the gate or continue walking the promenade all around the outer border of the colonial walls that surround Old San Juan, which leads to El Morro, the fortress at the tip of the peninsula.

If you pass through San Juan Gate, take an immediate right to visit La Fortaleza, the governor's mansion built in 1533, or continue walking eastward toward the Catedral de San Juan, El Museo del Nino and Casa Blanca, which lie a few blocks beyond the gate.

Be sure to linger among the charming streets of the old city, especially in Plaza del Quinto Centenario, Plaza San Jose or Plaza de Armas. Beautiful Spanish colonial buildings border each square.

Nature lovers will want to make time for the dramatic rain forest at El Yunque, a U.S. National Park located about an hour outside the city. For those wishing to stay closer to San Juan, the Botanical Garden (Jardin Botanico de Rio Piedras) is located on Route 1 about 15 minutes by car from the city center. This nature reserve serves as a research center for the University of Puerto Rico and offers the public 200 acres/80 hectares of strikingly beautiful tropical flora and fauna.

Historic Sites

Castillo de San Cristobal

Calle Norzagaray (at the eastern end of the street)
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-729-6960

<http://www.nps.gov/saju>

Venture into the tunnels and dungeon of the largest fort Spain ever built in the Americas. Located close to the eastern entrance to Old San Juan, it was built to guard against land attacks. The views of the Atlantic are breathtaking, and the tour guides are extremely knowledgeable and friendly. The Le Lo Lai folkloric group performs every Tuesday.

Daily 9 am-6 pm. US\$3 adults, free for children younger than 16. US\$5 adults for combined entrance to the Castillo de San Cristobal and Castillo de San Felipe del Morro.

Castillo de San Felipe del Morro

Calle Norzagaray (at the end of the street)
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-729-6960

<http://www.nps.gov/saju>

El Morro fortress, built in 1539 at the tip of Old San Juan's peninsula to defend San Juan Bay, dominates the landscape. Its massive gold-colored walls glisten in the Caribbean sun, and its sprawling stone design, impressive seaside location and rich historical legacy make it one of the city's most popular attractions. There's also a gift shop, lookout telescopes and the best views of the Atlantic Ocean and the bay.

Open daily 9 am-6 pm. US\$3 adults, free for children younger than 16. US\$5 adults for combined entrance to the Castillo de San Cristobal and Castillo de San Felipe del Morro.

Catedral de San Juan

151 Calle Cristo
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-722-1881

<http://www.catedralsanjuan.com>

The current cathedral was rebuilt in 1852 (on the site of the original structure, which was originally finished in 1521). Now a popular location for society weddings and funeral Masses for prominent Puerto Ricans, the cathedral houses the dramatic white-marble tomb of Ponce de Leon, as well as many stunning stained-glass windows.

Open daily 8 am-5 pm. Monday-Friday Mass (in Spanish) at noon, Saturday at 7 pm, Sunday at 9 and 11 am. Free.

La Fortaleza

52 Calle Fortaleza
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-721-7000, ext. 2211

<http://www.fortaleza.gobierno.pr>

This palatial structure, built in 1533, is the oldest executive mansion in the Western Hemisphere. La Fortaleza is surrounded by luxuriant gardens and overlooks San Juan Bay.

Guided tours of the gardens are available Monday-Friday 9 am-3 pm. Reservations recommended. Clothing restrictions are in place, with no tank tops permitted and no shorts unless knee-length Bermuda-style. US\$3 adults.

La Princesa and Paseo de la Princesa

Paseo de la Princesa
San Juan, Puerto Rico

The gray colonial building known as La Princesa was once a prison, but now it houses the main office of the government-run Puerto Rico Tourism Co. Occasional special exhibits of regional art and handicrafts are held there. La Princesa is on Paseo de la Princesa, a 19th-century esplanade lined with benches and plazas with outdoor sculptures. It's a great street for strolling, especially on the weekends as local musical groups play occasionally on Sunday.

The building is open Monday-Friday 8 am-4:30 pm.

Plaza de Armas

Calle San Francisco (between Calle San Jose and Calle Cruz)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

In the 16th century, Spanish soldiers practiced their drills on this square. Today, the plaza is a popular spot to people-watch, relax on a bench or sip coffee at the nearby cafe. The plaza includes San Juan's City Hall, which was completed in 1799 and last restored in 1975. Its ground floor (formerly a jail) houses an information desk and has walking-tour maps of Old San Juan.

City Hall is open Monday-Friday 8 am-4 pm.

Plaza de Colon

Calle O'Donnel (to the east, between Calle Fortaleza and Calle San Francisco)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

A statue of Cristobal Colon (Christopher Columbus) dominates this historic plaza on the eastern edge of Old San Juan. Tablets at the base of the statue, erected in 1893 to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the explorer's arrival in Puerto Rico, chronicle Columbus' life.

Plaza del Quinto Centenario

Calle Norzagaray (to the south)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Visitors walking from El Morro to San Cristobal will pass by Quincentennial Square, a large plaza constructed in 1992 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Columbus' arrival in the New World. A 40-ft/12-m totem-pole-style sculpture is the plaza's modern centerpiece, which some have criticized for being at odds with the old city's historic setting. The plaza frequently hosts outdoor music and dancing extravaganzas and is a favorite spot for skateboarders, government workers on lunch breaks and mothers out strolling with their toddlers.

San Juan Gate

Paseo de la Princesa (at the end, between Calle Fortaleza and Calle San Francisco)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

One of the original seaside entrances to San Juan, the gate was completed in 1639. Known in Spanish as "La Muralla," the gate opened each morning to welcome vendors and visitors on official business and then closed at sunset to keep out pirates.

Museums

Museo de Arte Contemporaneo

Avenida Juan Ponce de Leon (at the corner of Ave. Roberto H. Todd Parada 18)
Santurce, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-977-4030

<http://www.museocontemporaneopr.org>

Established in 1984 by a group of artists, this museum exhibits art produced in Puerto Rico, the Caribbean and Latin America from 1940 to the present. It is housed in Rafael M. de Labra historical building, an architectural jewel of the Georgian style.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-4 pm, Sunday noon-4 pm. Free.

Caparra Ruins Historical Park and Museum

Highway 2, Km 6.4, Guaynabo
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-781-4795

<http://www.prfrogui.com/home/ruinas.htm>

This small museum and park where Juan Ponce de Leon was declared the island's first governor in 1508 is a U.S. National Historic Landmark. Caparra is the name given to the spot by Taino natives, which means *place of sweet waters*. The museum features exhibits of objects related to the colonization of Puerto Rico.

Open Monday-Friday 8:30 am-4:30 pm.

El Museo del Nino

150 Calle Cristo
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-722-3791 or 787-725-7214

<http://www.museodelninopr.org>

Young visitors can stage their own puppet show, walk through a pulsating heart and enjoy much more at this interactive children's museum. The museum also features a replica of Camuy Caves, a natural attraction in the northwestern part of the island.

Open Tuesday-Thursday 9 am-3:30 pm, Friday 9 am-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday 12:30-5 pm. Summer hours Tuesday-Friday 10 am-5 pm, Saturday and Sunday 11:30 am-5:30 pm. Last admission 90 minutes before closing. US\$7 children younger than 15, US\$5 adults.

La Casa del Libro

199 Callejon de la Capilla
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-723-0354

<http://www.lacasadellibro.org>

A striking 18th-century town house contains this museum devoted to rare books and the art of printing and book binding. Its permanent book collection, thought to be the best in Latin America, has 5,000 volumes, some of which date from the 1500s.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 11 am-4:30 pm. Free.

Museo de Arte de Puerto Rico

299 Ave. de Diego
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-977-6277

<http://www.mapr.org>

This museum is housed in a remodeled 1920s neoclassical structure. It showcases Puerto Rico's most-treasured works of art—including works by Puerto Rican artists Jose Campeche and Rafael Tufino. The collection enables visitors to learn about the development of Puerto Rican society and culture from the 18th century to the present day. The museum grounds also contain a 5-acre/2-hectare sculpture garden. Visitors can dine at the Pikayo restaurant on the third floor of the east wing; the menu features Latin fusion cuisine by Puerto Rican chef Wilo Benet.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-5 pm (Wednesday till 8 pm), Sunday 11 am-6 pm. US\$6 adults; US\$3 students, seniors and children ages 5-12; free for children younger than 5 and seniors older than 75. No photos or videos in the gallery area.

Museo del Deporte de Puerto Rico

3 Bulevar del Deporte (Sector Bellomonte)
Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-731-4923 or 787-731-4924

<http://www.musdepur.com>

This museum pays homage to the great athletes of Puerto Rico. Various exhibition halls tell the tales of the island's numerous sports legends such as Roberto Clemente, Gigi Fernandez and Tito Trinidad.

Open Tuesday-Friday 9:30 am-4 pm, Saturday and Sunday 11 am-4 pm. US\$6 general admission, US\$3 students and seniors.

Museo del Tabaco Herminio Torres

87 Calle Betances (at the corner of Calle Padial)
Caguas, Puerto Rico

Just outside of San Juan in the Caguas area, this museum offers a firsthand look at the process and art of hand-rolled cigars. There are also exhibits about the history of tobacco growing in Caguas. Cigar packages start at US\$10, and shipping is available to the U.S.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 9 am-5 pm (closed for lunch noon-1 pm).

Museo de Pablo Casals

101 Calle San Sebastian (Plaza de San Jose)
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-723-9185

<http://www.festcasalspr.gobierno.pr>

The Spanish cellist, whose mother was Puerto Rican, spent the last decade of his life on the island. The 18th-century house contains the manuscripts, photographs and videotapes of Pablo Casals, in addition to some of his personal artifacts.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 9:30 am-4:30 pm. US\$1 adults, US\$0.50 children and seniors.

Museo Felisa Rincon de Gautier

51 Caleta de San Juan
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-723-1897

<http://www.museofelisarincon.com>

Before this architecturally distinctive structure became a museum, it was home to Felisa Rincon de Gautier, San Juan's former mayor (1948-64). Exhibits include memorabilia related to her impressive life and career.

Open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm. Free.

Museo Historico de la Biblia

24 Calle B Urb. Industrial (off Baldorioty Expressway)
Carolina, Puerto Rico

This 13-level museum features an aquarium, reptile exhibit, interactive and educational exhibits of biblical eras, an indoor miniature-golf course and amusement rides. Featured exhibits include the *Journey to Jurassic* and the *Hall of the Apostles*, and amusement rides include a carousel, merry-go-round and caterpillar roller coaster.

Open Tuesday-Saturday 10 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-6 pm. Ticket package at US\$20 includes all attractions, minigolf, amusement rides, aquarium and ice-skating rink.

San Juan Museum of Art and History

Calle Norzagaray 150
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Built in 1855 as a market (or *mercado*), it was restored in 1979 as a cultural center to showcase Puerto Rican art and music, including concerts and festivals. Located in Old San Juan, it's a quick stop done by almost everyone visiting the walkable five-century-old port town.

Open daily except Monday 10 am-4 pm.

Parks & Gardens

Rio Piedras Botanical Garden

Highway 1 and Highway 847 (next to the University of Puerto Rico)
Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-758-9957; for tours phone 787-250-000, ext. 6578

<http://www.upr.edu>

At this pleasant garden, paths wind through 200 acres/80 hectares of peaceful grounds that include indigenous trees, shrubs and flowering plants. Leave time for a visit to Jardín de Esculturas, where some Latin-American sculptors have created magnificent artworks on the grounds. Following the student strikes of 2010 and 2011, stricter measures of security were adopted by the University of Puerto Rico's administration, caretaker of the garden, which could limit tourist access.

Daily 6 am-6 pm. Guided tours for groups of 10-30 Monday-Friday at 9:30 am and 1 pm by appointment. Admission is free. Guided group tours cost US\$25. English tours available.

Central Park of San Juan

Parada 15, Calle Cerra Finan
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This park and recreational complex features tennis and racquetball courts, an aerobics center, track and field, and a swimming pool.

Open Monday-Thursday 6 am-10 pm, Friday-Sunday 6 am-7 pm.

El Yunque National Forest

Highway 191 (off Highway 3, about an hour's drive east of San Juan)
Rio Grande, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-888-1880

<http://www.fs.usda.gov/elyunque>

To get a feel for the rain forest's mystery and lush beauty, stop first at El Portal Tropical Rain Forest Center, located just inside the entrance to El Yunque. Exhibits range from high-tech multimedia displays to a giant light-up map that shows how the rain forest supplies water to much of the island. At El Portal, you can also obtain maps of picnic areas, drive-up waterfalls and hiking paths. If you follow one of the

marked trails, you may see rare plants and animals, such as the melodious *coquis* (tiny tree frogs) or the multicolored Puerto Rican parrot. Comfortable clothing and closed shoes recommended.

The park is open daily 7:30 am-6 pm. El Portal Tropical Rain Forest Center open daily 9 am-5 pm. There is no fee to enter the national forest. Rain Forest Center is US\$4 adults, US\$2 seniors, free for children younger than 16. Groups of 15 or more pay half price. No cost for self-guided tours, but one-hour ranger-guided tours cost US\$5 adults, US\$3 children.

La Ventana al Mar

Ashford Avenue
San Juan, Puerto Rico

A park and open-air plaza in the heart of Condado, the Ventana al Mar (Window to the Sea) features a fountain, a walkway along the Atlantic Ocean coastline, restaurants and more than 2 acres/1 hectare of green area that is perfect for a picnic. The Le Lo Lai folkloric dance-and-music troupe performs in this area on Saturday evening at 8 pm. In addition, other musical groups perform occasionally throughout the year, including jazz and local tropical-music groups. Across the street there is a strip of high-end specialty stores such as Louis Vuitton, Salvatore Ferragamo, Cartier and Christian Dior.

Luis Munoz Marin Park

Jesus Pineiro Avenida (at Luis Ferre Expressway)
Hato Rey, Puerto Rico

Families can go bike-riding and pedal-boating on the lake at this park. A funicular ride lets you see the entire park from 55 ft/17 m up in the air. This park is also home to the Tito Puente Amphitheater.

Open Wednesday-Sunday 8:30 am-6 pm (in high season, also open on Tuesday). Funicular US\$2 adults, US\$1 children younger than 11. Parking fee US\$3.

Luis Munoz Rivera

Luis Munoz Rivera Avenida (Puerta de Tierra)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This park, just inside Old San Juan from the hotel strip, honors Luis Munoz Rivera, a Puerto Rican statesman, journalist and poet. When it was opened in 1929, the event marked the first urban park built on the island, and renovations have maintained its historic standing. The park's 22 acres/9 hectares offer a central gazebo, fountains, benches, vine-covered trellises and playground.

Daily 24 hours. Free.

Plaza Antonia Quinones/Stella Maris Park

1300 Calle Magdalena (across from the San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

A small, pleasant park in the heart of Condado lined with trees, benches and fountains. It's a great place to sit and rest, walk or jog, let the kids play in the playground or just people-watch. If you're traveling with Fido, the Condado Pet Park is nearby on Calle Luchetti.

Third Millenium Park Jose Celso Barbosa

Munoz Rivera Avenida (Puerta de Tierra)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This sports complex and park with views to the ocean is adjacent to the Escambron Beach area and opposite Luis Munoz Rivera Park. The park provides a nice setting for running, walking, biking and skating, or just relaxing on the green areas.

Amusement Parks

Luis A. Ferre Science Park

Carretera 167 (near the Plaza del Sol)
Bayamon, Puerto Rico

Children will enjoy this place—nine themed museums, a zoo, Torito City and Space Rockets Plaza.

Open Wednesday-Friday 9 am-4 pm, Saturday and Sunday 10 am-6 pm. Ticket counter closes two hours before closing time. US\$5 adults, US\$3 children, US\$2.50 seniors.

Time Out Family Amusement Center

525 F.D. Roosevelt Ave. (inside the Plaza de las Americas shopping mall, in the Hato Rey area off Las Americas Expressway)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

There are no rides at this indoor game center, but children and adults enjoy playing the electronic games, especially on hot or rainy afternoons.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-7 pm. Entrance is free, but games are US\$1-\$8.

Wineries, Breweries & Distilleries

Bacardi Rum Distillery

165 Carretera, Km 2.5 (in the Catano Industrial area)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-788-1500

<http://www.casabacardi.org>

The largest rum distillery in the world offers free guided tours that include sample drinks. You'll learn about traditional and modern rum-production techniques, as well as the history of the Bacardi family. A convenient way to get to the distillery is to take a ferry from Pier 2 across San Juan Bay to Catano and then a *publico* (open-air car) or taxi to the plant. Most local tour companies also offer excursions to the distillery.

Open Monday-Saturday 8:30 am-5:30 pm (last tour at 4:30 pm), Sunday 10 am-5 pm (last tour at 3:30 pm). The one-hour tour begins every half-hour. Free.

Recreation

In San Juan, the ocean calls to locals and tourists alike. The white-sand beaches provide a destination for sun worshippers, and more active vacationers will want to take advantage of the excellent diving and snorkeling sites near the city. Boating is a major sport in Puerto Rico—regattas and racing events are held throughout the year—and it's possible to take boating and sailing outings (with or without a hired skipper). Various catamarans offer day-sailing trips out of the marinas in Fajardo, about one hour east of San Juan. The fishing—both coastal and deep-sea—is outstanding.

Another great diversion is the Paseo Pinones Recreational Trail. Located in the Pinones sector (at Loiza), just minutes from the Isla Verde tourist zone, it's a 6-mi/10-km pathway that attracts cyclists, skaters and joggers. Families traveling with children may also consider hitting the Moisty Skate and Family Park in Bayamon.

Beaches

San Juan's top attractions include its beaches. Whether it's for sun worshipping or watersports, San Juan has just the right beach for you. All Puerto Rican beaches are public, but those designated as *balnearios* are run by the government and have restrooms, lifeguards and other facilities. Most charge US\$4 for parking in the fenced lots.

Some other favorite beaches are found west of town near the resort community of Dorado, about a 30-minute drive from the city.

Puerto Rico's west coast also has beautiful beaches, such as those in Rincon, Cabo Rojo and Isabela. Also, the west coast presents a great scenario for watersports, including surfing, and events such as the Rip Curl International have been held on its sandy beaches.

Note: It is not considered safe to walk at night on any of the beaches near San Juan, except those in front of the large hotels. (Even then, consult the hotel's concierge or front-desk staff about the safety of the area.) Although the beaches are generally safe during the day, take commonsense precautions: Don't leave valuables in a parked car or unattended on the beach.

El Balneario La Monserrate

El Balneario La Monserrate
Luquillo, Puerto Rico

El Balneario La Monserrate in Luquillo, just a 30-minute drive east on Highway 3 from San Juan, is one of Puerto Rico's best beaches. It offers picturesque white sand, and an offshore reef means tranquil waters and good snorkeling. The view of El Yunque National Forest is captivating. This Blue Flag beach features the Mar Accesible (Accessible Beach) program, which provides assistance for the physically challenged. Expect large crowds on weekends.

Balneario El Escambron

Avenida Munoz Rivera, Parada 8
San Juan, Puerto Rico

At the entrance of Old San Juan across from the Luis Munoz River Park is the Balneario El Escambron. This public beach has lifeguards on duty 8:30 am-5 pm and is handicap accessible. El Escambron boasts the Blue Flag distinction—an exclusive ecolabel that is awarded annually to beaches that meet water quality guidelines and other environmental standards.

Open daily in summer, but closed Monday and Tuesday in winter months.

Condado Beach

A natural rock barrier keeps the waters calm along Condado's shady beach, which is the only spot in the neighborhood not given over to the beachfront hotels and condos. For the adventurous, the lagoon beyond the bridge is great for kayaking and windsurfing. Other popular San Juan beaches are Ocean Park, a favorite hangout of young adults and gays; Punta las Marias, a great spot for windsurfing and other watersports; and Boca Cangrejos.

Isla Verde Beach

This is a popular beach just east of Old San Juan. Partially lined by condominiums, luxury hotels and tropical flora, Isla Verde's white-sand beach is a favorite of locals and tourists alike. The Carolina Public Beach (at the far end of the Isla Verde Beach after the Marriott Courtyard Hotel, but before Luquillo Beach) is a long stretch of white sand designated as a Blue Flag beach. It has gazebo picnic areas, parking and an up-to-date bathroom facility and security office.

Fishing

More than two dozen world records have been broken by big-game anglers in the waters off Puerto Rico, where huge marlin, sailfish and tuna swim. The best fishing is near the north coast, also known as Blue Marlin Alley. San Juan's mangroves and lagoons are ideal for light-tackle fishing because of the plentitude of tarpon fish.

Note that a 7% tax is added to all listed fishing charter rates.

Caribbean Outfitters

Cangrejos Yacht Club, Carretera 187, Km 3.3
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-396-8346

<http://www.fishinginpuertorico.com>

Offers deep-sea fishing and light-tackle fishing tours.

Deep-sea fishing for up to six people is US\$575 for a half-day (four hours), US\$775 for three-quarters of a day (six hours) or US\$1,000 for full day (eight hours). Trip includes tackle, soda, water, captain and mate. A combination deep-sea fishing and light tackle full-day (nine hours) tour is US\$1,075. Light-tackle

fishing US\$350 for a half-day for one or two people, US\$400 for a half-day for three people, or US\$450 for six hours for four people. Most major credit cards.

Castillo Tours & Water Sports

Ave. Fernandez Juncos Parada 10 (Miramar)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-791-6195 or 787-726-5752

<http://www.castillotours.com>

Offers deep-sea fishing and light-tackle fishing tours. Deep-sea fishing departs from San Juan Bay Marina. Light-tackle tours depart from Cangrejos Yacht Club (Carretera 187, Km 3.3).

Deep-sea fishing US\$700 for a half-day, US\$1,100 for a full day with up to six people. Split charter US\$195 per person for a half-day, minimum three people. Light-tackle fishing US\$330 for a half-day.

Magic Tarpon

Carretera 187, Km 3.3 (Cangrejos Yacht Club)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-644-1444 or 787-449-3036

<http://www.puertoricomagictarpon.com>

Light-tackle fishing tours for half-day and three-quarter day range US\$330-\$600, depending on the number of people in the group. The company also offers a 2-mi/3-km sightseeing nature tour for two to five passengers to spot iguanas, pelicans, birds and mangroves; US\$75 per person, two-person minimum. Combination fishing and sightseeing tours can be arranged by request.

Manolga Fishing Charters/Kimi Deep Sea Fishing Charters

Carretera 187, Km 3.3 (Cangrejos Yacht Club)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This family-owned fishing charter offers deep-sea fishing tours from Dock D-92.

US\$600 for a half-day (four hours), US\$750 for three-quarter day (six hours), and US\$950 for a full day (eight hours) with up to six people. All trips include fishing equipment, bait, soft drinks, water and dry snacks; it is recommended to take a lunch for the three-quarter and full-day trips. Cash, traveler's checks or money orders accepted.

Puerto Rico Angling

Carretera 187, Km 3.3 (Cangrejos Yacht Club)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-724-2079 (office), 787-209-6926 or 787-234-8849

<http://www.puertoricofishing.com>

Offers deep-sea fishing and light-tackle fishing tours using charter boats equipped for both offshore and inshore fishing.

Deep-sea fishing US\$700 for a half-day (four hours), US\$800 for three-quarter day (six hours), and US\$900 for a full day (eight hours) for up to four people, US\$25 for each additional person up to six people. Rates include bait, tackle, water, soda and license. Light-tackle fishing for tarpon US\$350 for a half-day tour.

Golf

Puerto Rico is sometimes called Sunny Scotland, because the island is loaded with championship 18-hole courses. Almost all of Puerto Rico's courses are open to the public—as a result, they are crowded year-round. We recommend that you make reservations in advance.

Dorado Beach East, West, Pineapple and Sugarcane Courses

Road 693 (about a 30- to 40-minute drive northwest of San Juan)
Dorado, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-626-1030

<http://www.doradobeachclubs.com>

Quadruple your golfing pleasure with four different 18-hole courses at the Dorado Beach Resort and Hacienda del Mar Resort, all designed by golf legend Robert Trent Jones.

Greens fees US\$115-\$194; fees vary depending on season. Club rentals are US\$59, shoes are US\$11.

Caguas Real Golf & Country Club

500 Alhambra en Granada Boulevard (behind the hotel)
Caguas, Puerto Rico

An 18-hole golf course about 25 mi/40 km south of San Juan that offers a beautiful mountain backdrop. Although this golf course doesn't offer any ocean views, there are six lakes and majestic mountain scenery. The course adjoins the Four Points Sheraton Caguas Real hotel.

Greens fees US\$65-\$120 depending on day and season (Monday rates are the better deal). Rental clubs US\$45.

Dorado del Mar Golf Course

Road 693 (about a 30- to 40-minute drive northwest of San Juan)
Dorado, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-796-3070

<http://www.embassysuitesdorado.com>

Designed by Chi Chi Rodriguez, this 18-hole course is scenic as well as challenging, with 14 lakes and a spectacular view of the Atlantic Ocean.

Open daily 6 am-9 pm (till 6 pm Sunday and Monday). Greens fees US\$55-\$120 depending on time of day. Club rentals US\$45, shoes US\$11.

Rio Bayamon Golf Course and Driving Range

Carretera 177 and Laurel Avenue
Bayamon, Puerto Rico

This nine-hole golf course is the only golf course located in the center of the metropolitan area. There is also a driving range and a golf shop, as well as a cafeteria with outdoor table seating.

Open Monday-Saturday 6 am-10 pm, Sunday 6 am-8 pm. Driving range US\$5 per bucket of 50 balls, US\$30 for nine-hole play, US\$45 for a double round.

Trump International Golf Club

Off Route 3 (a 45-minute drive east of San Juan)
Rio Grande, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-657-2000

<http://www.trumpgolfclubpuertorico.com>

Designed by PGA professional Tom Kite, the two 18-hole championship courses—the Championship (with ocean and lakes views) and the International (with views of the mountains and palms)—are a golfer's delight in Rio Grande. The 36-hole golf course showcases a Trump-style 46,000-sq-ft/4,274-sq-m club house with meeting facilities, swimming pools, gourmet restaurant, and indoor and outdoor bars, as well as a spa and fitness center (locker facilities, sauna and whirlpool). The courses are adjacent to the luxury resort Gran Melia Puerto Rico, and the Championship course has hosted the PGA Tour.

Greens fees US\$160 (US\$125 after 1 pm) per 18 holes at the International course, and US\$190 (US\$160 after 1 pm) at the Championship course. Fees include the cart and tees. Club rentals US\$60, shoes US\$20.

Wyndham Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa

6000 Rio Mar Blvd. (19 mi/30 km east of San Juan, off Route 3)
Rio Grande, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-888-6000 or 787-888-7060

<http://www.wyndhamriomar.com>

The Wyndham Rio Mar Beach Resort & Spa features two magnificent courses. The 18-hole River Course, designed by Greg Norman, is 21,054 ft/6,419 m long and follows the Mameyes River. The 18-hole Ocean Course, designed by Tom and George Fazio, is 20,762 ft/6,330 m long.

Greens fees US\$75-\$175 (depending on the time of day and season) and include shared carts, unlimited range balls and club storage, as well as towels, tees, ball markers, divot repair tool and shoeshine. Club rental is an additional US\$55.

Horseback Riding

Catch A Dream Ranch

Route 3 (a 45-minute drive east of San Juan, toward the Wyndham Rio Mar)
Rio Grande, Puerto Rico

Whether a first-time rider or a professional polo player, Catch A Dream Ranch will fulfill your fantasy with Western-style riding on multiterrain (8 mi/13 km) 90-minute trails through water, sand and mountains. Bilingual guides give detailed riding instructions to beginners and do not take more than 10 riders at a time. Long pants and closed-toe shoes recommended, pregnant women are not allowed, and there is a weight limit of 265 lb/104 kg per rider.

Daily from 10 am (pickup from San Juan metro-area hotels varies from 9 am). Reservations required. Prices are US\$85 for ages 5 and older (fee includes round-trip transportation and complimentary beverage after trails). Private 13-mi/21-km rides for more experienced riders cost US\$150 per person. Payment by cash or traveler's check.

Hacienda Carabali

Route 992, Km 3 (a 45-minute drive east of San Juan, toward the Wyndham Rio Mar)
Luquillo, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-889-5820 or 787-889-4954

http://www.carabalirainforestpark.com/horseback_riding.php

Experience horseback riding on *paso fino* horses through the foothills of the El Yunque rain-forest mountains. Riders can choose either a one- or two-hour guided trail ride. Weight limit per rider of 250 lb/104 kg.

Tours offered daily at 10 am, and 12:30 and 2:30 pm. Reservations are recommended at least one day in advance. One-hour rides US\$35 adults, US\$25 children younger than 13; two-hour rides US\$70 adults and US\$50 children.

Scuba & Snorkeling

Tropical fish, coral and reefs lie below Puerto Rico's waters, providing excellent scuba diving and snorkeling. The runoff from the hills and cities makes many parts of the coast around San Juan a bit too murky, but the warm shallow waters are great for beginners.

Large ocean swells stirred up from North Atlantic storms can pound the north coast during winter, but the waters are calmer in the summer, making the trip out to the dive sites, and the dive itself, safer and more enjoyable. If you want to try snorkeling off the beach, most hotel shops rent equipment. To go diving, you must be certified, although some shops offer a supervised introductory course for beginners.

Along the metropolitan hotel strip, the waters surrounding the Caribe Hilton and Condado Plaza have great reefs for snorkeling. There are several good dive sites off the east coast of the main island, near the islands of Culebra and Vieques. The watersports centers at most of the larger hotels in San Juan offer boat trips to both islands. In addition, you'll find good diving off the west coast near Rincon (except in winter) and La Parguera. There are dive shops in these towns, as well as in the bigger hotels.

We also recommend, if time permits, a drive to the east coast city of Fajardo where you can board a charter boat for a great snorkel-and-lunch. There are many operators, but we think Traveler Catamaran (phone 787-863-2821 or 787-412-9555; <http://www.travelerpr.com>), East Island Excursions (phone 787-863-2821 or 787-409-2485; <http://www.eastwindcats.com>) and Salty Dog (phone 787-717-6378; <http://www.saltydreams.com>) are among the best.

Caribe Aquatic Adventures

Normandie Hotel
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-281-8858

<http://www.caribe-aquatic-adventures.com>

This PADI and NAUI affiliate offers shore dives at local dive sites in San Juan, where divers can see reefs, feed fish and swim through tunnels. Boat dive trips out of Fajardo usually go to the offshore island of Palominos. The island picnic package includes lunch and equipment. Transportation from San Juan provided. Advance reservations of at least one day are required for all diving trips. Equipment rental available.

Prices US\$60-\$285 depending on type of excursion and location.

La Casa del Buzo

293 Ave. Jesus T. Pinedo
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-758-2710

<http://www.lacasadelfuzo.com>

This five-star training PADI diving shop offers excursions and classes, and sells equipment. The diving trips are offered to sites around the island and Culebra on Saturday and Sunday; weekday trips can be arranged for groups of at least six people.

The dive shop is open Monday-Saturday 9 am-6 pm. Prices US\$75-\$90 per person per day trip depending on type of excursion and location. Price includes tank; equipment rentals are an additional US\$25-\$45.

Scubadogs

Calle Buen Samaritano, D-13, Gardenville
Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-783-6377

<http://www.scubadogs.net>

Underwater adventure awaits everyone from beginners to experienced divers. Boat dives, shore dives, night diving and underwater photography are among the many trips offered. PADI-certified, this dive center offers excursions at Escambron Beach in San Juan, where the tropical fish are very friendly. Dive trips are also offered outside of San Juan to Fajardo, Culebra, Isabela and La Parguera.

Surfing

Puntas Surf School

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 939-697-8040 or 787-366-1689

<http://www.puntassurfschool.com>

Some of the best surfing spots of the world reside on the west and northwest coast of Puerto Rico. Puntas Surf School began giving surf lessons in the beach town of Rincon in 2003, under the direction of local legend Melissa Taylor. It now counts 15 instructors and offers different types of services, including one-on-one attention to younger students and group rates.

Wow Surfing School & Water Sports

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-955-6059

<http://www.wowsurfschool.com>

Learn how to surf from Puerto Rican pro-surfer William "Chino" Sue-A-Quan. Lessons for basic, intermediate and advanced levels take place at different hotel locations in San Juan, including beach-side stands at the Pine Grove beach in Isla Verde behind the Ritz-Carlton Hotel. Lessons for intermediate and advanced surfers only are offered at Escambron Beach near the Caribe Hilton Hotel. Lessons include surf board and wax.

Call to inquire about rates, which are customized depending on surfer level, day and number of people. Surfboard and boogie board rentals vary US\$25-\$60, depending on board style. .

Shopping

In Old San Juan, shop for local crafts such as straw hats, musical instruments, hammocks, carnival masks, hand-crafted jewelry, lace and santos (figurines of saints made from wood). Name-brand outlet stores such as Coach, Ralph Lauren, Speedo and Guess also abound in Old San Juan, especially along Calle Cristo.

Be sure to check out the local art at one of the many galleries in the area. The works of art available in Puerto Rico may be the most underrated commodity in the Caribbean. Prices vary from less than US\$50 for the work of local artists to thousands of dollars for the works of a few internationally recognized artists, such as Angel Botello, Rafael Tufino and Carlos Irizarry.

In the tourist areas of Condado and Isla Verde, venture into boutiques that sell beachwear, fashion accessories and home furnishings.

The attractiveness of the Puerto Rican market is obvious from the number of U.S. businesses seen around the island. Retail giants such as Macy's, Sears, Walmart and JCPenney anchor shopping centers and malls alongside island chain stores and locally owned shops. The largest mall in the Caribbean is Plaza las Americas in Hato Rey.

Shopping is a favorite Puerto Rican pastime, so be ready to deal with the crowds no matter the season, day of the week or time of day. As always and everywhere, buyer beware. Check the prices at home so you'll know if you're getting a deal. For the best buys, stick to local arts, crafts and—of course—rum.

Shopping Hours: Generally, Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm and Sunday 11 am-5 pm.

Factory Outlets

The Outlet 66 Mall

Off Route 3 (about a 30-minute drive east of San Juan)
Canovanas, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-256-7040

<http://www.theoutlet66mall.com>

Past the San Juan airport, shopaholics will find an outlet mall that houses more than 80 major brands such as Gap, Guess, Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Nike, Nautica and Ralph Lauren. You'll get the feeling that you're in Old San Juan because the storefronts are replicas of Spanish colonial architecture—the advantage is that there's air-conditioning. A magnificent carousel greets shoppers at one entrance.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-6 pm.

Galleries

Galeria Botello

208 Calle Del Cristo
San Juan, Puerto Rico 918

Phone: 787-723-9987

<http://www.botello.com>

One of Puerto Rico's most prestigious galleries, this place exhibits art by both Puerto Rican and Latin American artists, as well as works by the gallery's founder, Angel Botello.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm.

Galeria San Juan

204 Calle Norzagaray
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-977-3909

<http://www.thegalleryinn.com>

Conveniently located in the historic part of town, this place is located in The Gallery Inn. It features various works by Puerto Rican artists, including sculptor Jan D'Esopo.

Daily till 6 pm. Walk-ins welcome, but appointments are recommended.

Markets

Paseo de Diego Plaza del Mercado de Rio Piedras

Calle de Diego
San Juan, Puerto Rico

A pedestrian mall with dozens of stores where you can find food, clothing and even furniture at discounted prices. There is also a farmers market that sells fresh meat and produce, and other curiosities. An Urban Train station is within walking distance.

Stores Monday-Saturday 9 am-5:30 pm. Farmers market daily 6 am-6 pm, Sunday until noon.

Plaza del Mercado de Santurce

Avenida Ponce de Leon (a few blocks past Bellas Artes)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This public market houses nearly 30 different kiosks around a square of renovated buildings that showcase beautiful architecture. The market has a variety of fresh fruits such as mangoes, papayas and oranges—these taste great blended and served as a fruit milk shake. There is also a variety of exotic vegetables, meats and flowers.

Monday-Saturday 6 am-6 pm, Sunday 6 am-noon. After 6 pm the marketplace turns into a hangout for young professionals who meet at the pubs for finger foods, drinks, music and dancing.

Shopping Areas

Montehiedra Town Center

9410 Ave. Los Romeros
San Juan, Puerto Rico 926

Phone: 787-720-6165

<http://www.montehiedratowncenter.com>

This airy mall has more than 100 local and chain stores, including Marshall's, Novus (a fashionable footwear boutique) and PacSun for all your beachwear needs. A 14-screen movie theater and a spacious food court offer visitors a respite from shopping.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-5 pm.

Plaza Carolina

Baldorioty de Castro Expressway and 65th Infantry Avenue (exit Fragoso Avenue, approximately 7 mi/11 km or 15 minutes east of Isla Verde and San Juan International Airport)

San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-768-0514

<http://www.simon.com/mall/plaza-carolina>

Plaza Carolina is Puerto Rico's second-largest shopping center with anchor stores Sears and JCPenney, as well as 250 other stores including Victoria's Secret, Tous, Express, Best Buy, Forever 21 and TJ Maxx. It offers many dining options including a food court and casual sit-down restaurants such as Chili's and Pizza Hut

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-5 pm.

Plaza del Sol

725 W. Main Ave. (near the Luis A. Ferre Science Park)
Bayamon, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-778-8724

<http://plazadelsol.com>

With some 150 stores such as Ann Taylor, Banana Republic and Gap, this mall attracts lots of shoppers. On the second level of the mall, there's a great carousel for children, too. It's a shopping alternative for people who want to enjoy the surroundings as they browse.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-5 pm.

Plaza las Americas

525 Ave. Roosevelt
San Juan, Puerto Rico 917

Phone: 787-767-5202

<http://www.plazalasamericas.com>

With more than 300 shops (including the only Macy's in the Caribbean), 13 movie theaters, more than 40 eateries and restaurants, a drugstore, seven banks and a post office, Plaza las Americas easily wins the distinction as the largest mall in the Caribbean. It houses department stores and chain stores such as Banana Republic, Hugo Boss, Coach, Lacoste, Ann Taylor and Pottery Barn, as well as kiosks featuring arts and crafts by Puerto Rico artisans. Valet parking service and taxi stand at front entrance. Visitors staying in any hotel on the island can show room keys and ID to the Customer Service Center to receive a discount coupon booklet and a small welcome gift.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-7 pm.

San Patricio Plaza

Avenidas Roosevelt and San Patricio
Guaynabo, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-792-5328

<http://www.sanpatricio.com>

This place is small but very pleasant—and the favorite of high-end shoppers. Set in downtown San Juan, it has more than 145 stores, including local businesses such as Metro Comics. It offers a food court, movie theater and even an amusement park in the parking lot.

Open Monday-Saturday 9 am-9 pm, Sunday 11 am-6 pm (food court open until 10 pm daily).

Specialty Stores

Butterfly People

257 Calle Cruz
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-723-2432

<http://www.butterflypeople.com>

The displays of iridescent colors of butterfly wings in glass shadow boxes will enchant you. The Purington Revan family has more than 40 years of experience in creating this artwork, and their gallery is a must-see. The gallery-plus-gift shop displays butterfly-theme gifts and souvenirs, T-shirts, butterfly kites, butterfly and beetle jewelry, decorative plates and more.

Casa Don Q

500 Ochoa Building (near Pier 1)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-977-1720 or 787-707-1000

<http://www.donq.com>

Although the distillery for this Puerto Rican rum is in the southern city of Ponce, visitors to San Juan can get a free taste and buy the Don Q Premium Puerto Rican rum at the Casa Don Q store right in front of the San Juan pier. Our favorite and most refreshing as a spritzer is the Don Q Limon.

Open Monday-Friday 9 am-6 pm.

Don Collins Cigars

59 Calle Cristo
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-977-2983

<http://www.don-collins.com>

One of Puerto Rico's oldest and leading tobacconists, this shop sells hand-rolled cigars following the Taino Indian tradition, which involves moistening the tobacco, then separating and stacking the leaves so that the veins crisscross. The Old San Juan locale is a small retail store with friendly personnel who are eager to share stories about the cigar factory in Bayamon (southwest of Old San Juan). It sells a wide range of Puerto Rican cigars from the top-of-the-line Piramides to the most popular Lonsdales and Coronas.

Daily 9 am-6 pm.

E'Leonor

1310 Ashford Ave.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-725-3201

<http://www.eleonorboutique.com>

This is where well-heeled and VIP women—including former Gov. Sila Maria Calderon—shop for clothes. The exclusive two-story boutique houses formalwear and sportswear, bridal attire, accessories and gifts.

Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm, also open Sunday 11 am-5 pm in December.

Galeria Ole

Calle Fortaleza and Calle San Jose
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This locale has a potpourri of items, including a wide variety of hats for men and women, as well as antiques (no furniture, however). It is among the many spots in Old San Juan where you'll find Puerto Rican handcrafts and carved patron saint figures.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-6:30 pm, Sunday noon-5 pm.

Mi Pequeno San Juan

107 Calle Cristo (near El Convento Hotel)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-977-1636

<http://www.mipequenosanjuan.com>

This specialty shop, in combination with its sister store The Poet's Passage (203 Calle Cruz, phone 787-721-0564) showcases the artistic reflections of a local couple, Puerto Rican poet Lady Lee Andrews and French painter Nicolas Thomassin. The stores are full of ceramic hand-painted doors and buildings of Old San Juan that can be personalized, *giclee* paintings, poets' words and messages on tiles and mats, as well as other local arts and crafts.

Both stores are open daily 10 am-6 pm (The Poet's Passage open until 9 pm on Tuesday).

Puerto Rican Art & Crafts

204 Calle Fortaleza
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-725-5596

<http://www.puertoricanart-crafts.com>

Typical arts and crafts from Puerto Rico are just a few of the things you'll find inside this store. This shopping stop is also ideal for finding everything under one roof from carved santos (saint figures) to masks, rum, sweets and gourmet coffee selections. In the rear of the store is a gallery that sells lovely silk screens and original paintings by Puerto Rican artists.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm, Sunday noon-5 pm.

Spicy Caribbee

154 Calle Cristo
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-725-4690. Toll-free 888-725-7259

<http://www.spicycaribbee.com>

This quaint spice shop in Old San Juan actually offers more than Caribbean seasonings. Rich Puerto Rican coffee, sauces and condiments, tropical jams and even fragrant soaps, perfumes and lotions are available.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-6 pm, Sunday 11 am-5 pm.

Dining

Dining Overview

San Juan's restaurant explosion has breathed new life into the local dining scene. The assortment of eateries is multicultural, reflecting both international trends and the increased interest in ethnic cuisine.

Some of the most popular places—many of which are in the restaurant hub of SoFo, the trendy Old San Juan dining and nightlife area south of Calle Fortaleza—specialize in creative cuisine that reinvents traditional dishes using Latin, Caribbean and Asian flavors.

Condado, beyond Old San Juan, also has experienced an infusion of diverse dining options.

Be sure to sample typical Puerto Rican *cocina criolla*—a Creole cuisine that's a blend of Spanish, African and Taino Indian food and includes roast pork and chicken, seafood, rice, beans, tubers and plantains. It's spiced with peppers, garlic, cilantro, oregano and ginger. There are plenty of small, out-of-the-way restaurants, called *mesones*, where locals eat. When you find one, try the wonderful Puerto Rican barbecued chicken, *mofongo* (mashed plantains with garlic) or *sancocho* (beef stew with vegetable roots).

A great variety of delicious fried dishes can be found at kiosks near the beach or on the street, such as *alcapurrias*, *arepa*-like dumplings made of a mixture of yucca or plantain and filled with crab, chicken, fish or ground beef. Other good kiosk food includes *bacalaitos* (a deep-fried mixture of wheat flour, spices and pieces of codfish), *piononos* (ground beef, corn and spices wrapped in a mixture of ripe plantain and wheat and deep fried); and *empanadillas*, which are larger than South American-style empanadas, filled with ground beef, cheese, pizza mix, fish, shrimp, lobster or chicken.

General dining times are 7-11 am for breakfast, noon-3 pm for lunch and 6-11 pm for dinner (although some restaurants serve dinner as late as midnight). Please also note that Puerto Rico enforces its law against smoking inside establishments, including restaurants, hotels and casinos.

Expect to pay within these guidelines for a single meal, not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than US\$15; \$\$ = US\$15-\$25; \$\$\$ = US\$26-\$50; and \$\$\$\$ = more than US\$50.

Local & Regional

Amadeus Bistro Bar

350 Chardon Ave.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-641-7450

<http://www.amadeuspr.com>

Located in the heart of the Hato Rey financial district, this bistro bar and restaurant (dining area, full bar, lounge and a wine cellar) is a favorite for lunch specials and after-work get-togethers. Choose from a variety of traditional local favorites with a twist, such as fried plantains and caviar, or coconut shrimp with tamarind ginger sauce, or try the signature Amadeus fried dumplings with guava sauce. Live music from 7 pm on Wednesday and Thursday with Bohemian tunes and a variety on Friday. Happy hours are Wednesday-Friday 5-9 pm.

Open for lunch and dinner Tuesday-Friday, lunch only on Monday, private activities only on Saturday.

Barrachina

104 Fortaleza St.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-725-7912 or 787-721-5852

<http://www.barrachina.com>

This restaurant claims to be the birthplace of the pina colada and specializes in *mofongo* (mashed plantains with garlic). There you can enjoy Puerto Rican and international cuisine in a typical old-city ambience whether you choose to dine inside or in the courtyard. This casual, elegant eatery also features a flamenco show Friday and Saturday 8-9 pm. Visitors may store luggage at the restaurant daily 9 am-5 pm, and guests have free access to Wi-Fi.

Daily for lunch and dinner. Reservations recommended for the show. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Casa Lola

1006 Ashford Ave.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-998-1978

<http://www.casalolarestaurant.com>

Located on one of the trendiest corners of Condado, in the building that used to be the legendary Ajili-Mojili restaurant, Casa Lola is an elegant way to experience Puerto Rican cuisine with a sprinkle of international flavor. It is one of the many restaurants owned and managed by stellar Chef Robert Trevino, of Iron Chef fame, and it serves several recipes from local legend Lola Garcia's cookbook of Puerto Rican cuisine. Appetizers from the sea range from wild shark *chicharrones* with local hot sauce to shrimp *piononos*. Main dishes include Puerto Rican classics such as fried pork meat with an orange twist, served with traditional *pasteles* (boiled rice tamales filled with meat); or the *boricua*-style skirt steak served with tons of sides, including garlic yucca, ripe plantains and local chimichurri sauce. It also offers a daily four-

course lunch priced at US\$25 that includes soup, salad, one of four traditional dishes and cheese caramel custard for dessert, along with a bottle of local beer.

Open Monday-Saturday for lunch, daily for dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Coladas

8020 Tartak St. (in the lobby of the Verdanza Hotel)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-444-7778

<http://www.coladaspr.com>

This is the first Puerto Rican eatery to become a signature restaurant for a major local hotel, and it is co-owned by Puerto Rico's own salsa singer Michael Stuart. The casual-elegant restaurant features a menu of fine Puerto Rican cuisine and a frozen drink bar with the signature pina coladas. Popular restaurant dishes include the yucca croquettes in a Creole sauce, chicken breast stuffed with sweet plantains, and the chocolate temptation dessert. There's even a kids' menu.

Open daily for dinner; bar open from 4 pm and the kitchen opens at 5 pm. \$-\$\$. Most major credit cards.

El Jibarito Restaurant

280 Calle Sol
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-725-8375

<http://www.eljibaritopr.com>

Enjoy tasty *comida criolla* (Creole cooking) in this Puerto Rican restaurant. Other great menu items include traditional beefsteak and seafood items such as red snapper.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Jaquita Baya

Calle Estado (corner of Avenue Fernandez Juncos)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This Criollo-style restaurant in the middle of upscale Miramar is surprisingly inexpensive. The colorfully decorated eatery is popular with hip, young professionals. Appetizers such as the small seviche tacos or the Vieques *arepas* take creative local cuisine to another level. Main dishes vary depending on the day, but the *tostones* (fried flat plantains) and *mamposteao* rice dish can always be found alongside the highly rated pork ribs or smoked pork tenderloins with guava sauce.

Open Tuesday-Friday for lunch and dinner, Monday and Saturday for dinner only. \$\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Jose Enrique

176 Duffant St.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This restaurant is a true favorite among locals and travelers alike. The eatery displays chalk art pieces by local painter Nico Flores, and the waitstaff usually consists of hip young artists. Hosted by owner Jose Enrique, one of Puerto Rico's young thriving chefs, the restaurant's specialties include the Humble Mamposteao, a rice and beans dish, which is usually topped with truffles, and a unique seafood dish in which the segments of a lobster are deep fried in its own shells after being seasoned with a kicky hot sauce. This a low-key restaurant that doesn't even have a sign outside and feeds itself from the rich cultural atmosphere of the Santurce Placita, a venue highly visited on weekends by locals.

Open Tuesday-Saturday for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

La Casita Blanca

351 Tapia St.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

This place is a true classic serving good, hearty Puerto Rican home cooking in the heart of the Santurce *placita*. A favorite among artists, musicians, politicians and general public alike, this colorful, *fonda*-like venue offers very reasonably priced lunch plates. The menu is scrawled daily on a chalkboard and is limited to no more than a dozen dishes. Good old arroz con pollo is featured, as well as the Puerto Rican spin on Italian lasagna, called *pastelon*, in which the flat pasta segments are substituted by ripe plantain, and the increment in spices is very notable. This is Puerto Rican food at its best.

Open daily for lunch, Friday-Sunday for dinner. \$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Mofongo y Algo Mas...

388 Ave. San Claudio, Urb. Sagrado Corazon
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Can't get enough *mofongo*? If you venture outside the tourist areas of San Juan, Condado and Isla Verde, you'll find this inexpensive eatery along the suburbs of Rio Piedras. Although it has various options, from classic Puerto Rican chicken soup to grilled steaks, this place is best known for its filled *mofongos*. It's simple: Mofongo y Algo Mas... specializes in stuffed *mofongo*, with fillings ranging from shrimp cooked in an onion- and garlic-based red sauce to simple corned beef, cooked Puerto Rican style, with tons of onion, garlic and other spices. This a great place to experience local cuisine in an even more local atmosphere, where there is nothing fancier than an air-conditioned room, and the orders are taken from a window next to the kitchen, diner-style. The best way to get there is to grab a cab, unless you have plenty of time to wait for the public metropolitan bus system.

Parrot Club

363 Calle Fortaleza
San Juan, Puerto Rico 901

Phone: 787-725-7370

<http://www.oofrestaurants.com>

Nouvelle Latino cuisine, hip decor and fine service have turned this into a major dining spot in Old San Juan. The eatery is packed most nights and has won rave reviews. The vegetarian tower—almost a work of art—merges island yams and plantains with portobello mushrooms and other fresh vegetables. Meat dishes feature mango sauces and other island touches. Live Latin music Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday.

Daily for lunch and dinner, Saturday and Sunday for brunch. Reservations recommended. \$\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Raices Restaurant

315 Calle Recinto Sur (across from the Dona Fela parking garage)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-289-2121

<http://www.restauranteraices.com>

Traditional Puerto Rican dishes are served in a vibrantly colorful dining area that creates a warm welcome for any visitor. Be sure to try the magnificent *mofongo* (mashed plantain with garlic) filled with meat, chicken or seafood, as well as a variety of other hearty specialties and homemade desserts—including scrumptious Puerto Rican cheese with tropical fruits and syrup coverings. The restaurant also provides Wi-Fi for patrons.

Open daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Seafood

Aguaviva

364 Fortaleza St.
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-722-0665

<http://www.oofrestaurants.com>

Specializing in seafood with a Latin-Caribbean fusion, Aguaviva is the catch of the day for fine dining or to pull up a stool at the oyster-and-seviche bar.

Open daily for dinner, Friday-Sunday for lunch. \$\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Marisqueria Atlantica

7 Calle Lugo Vinas
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-722-0890

<http://www.marisqueriaatlantica.com>

Known for its Spanish paella, this eatery offers fresh seafood—including Maine lobster—in a casually elegant setting. The seafood *asopao* is also a favorite. There is a second location in Isla Verde.

Open daily except Monday for lunch and dinner. \$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Perla

1077 Ashford Ave. (inside the La Concha Renaissance Hotel)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-721-7500

<http://www.perlarestaurant.com>

Set in a conch-shell dome, this seafood restaurant is undoubtedly a treasured pearl for fine dining and breathtaking ocean views (especially at sunset). Wine connoisseurs will be satisfied with the restaurant's wine cellar, which houses more than 4,000 bottles and 1,000 brands.

Open daily for dinner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Soleil

Carretera 187, Km 4.8 (in Pinones, a 15-minute drive from Old San Juan)
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Phone: 787-253-1033

<http://www.soleilbeachclub.com>

A seaside spot in the Pinones area of Loiza, this restaurant and beach club specializes in Puerto Rican seafood. Order the *chillo* (red snapper) with yucca *mofongo* or the green-plantain-covered mahimahi. Enjoy your meal as you're serenaded by the sea breeze and Latin jazz music on Friday from 9 pm. Free Wi-Fi. Free transportation available for hotel guests in Isla Verde (Monday-Saturday, by reservation; service primarily for dinner).

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Security

Etiquette

As a territory of the U.S., Puerto Rico has relatively few legal and trade barriers for businesses based in North America. On the other hand, its culture is different from that of the mainland U.S., and the territory's relationship with the U.S. (the colonial ruler, to some Puerto Ricans) also requires business travelers to tread carefully.

Appointments—Be on time for appointments, but your Puerto Rican counterpart may be less punctual. It's not absolutely necessary to have your business card translated, but a two-sided card, one side in Spanish, one in English, will be appreciated.

Personal Introductions—A handshake, often accompanied by a brief nod, is the common form of greeting. After you've met a person for the first time and share a mutual friendship or business relationship, it is acceptable to give and receive one quick kiss on the cheek as a more personal greeting; this is expected among close friends and family members. Maintain direct eye contact, but don't do so too intently. If you speak Spanish, do so. If you do not, you should learn a few phrases well and use them.

Last names with the appropriate Spanish title are used. If your acquaintance has a professional title, you will learn it when introduced; if not, *senor* (male), *senora* (married female) and *senorita* (unmarried female) are appropriate. The title and the person's last name should be used until you are instructed otherwise. Note that it is typical for Puerto Ricans to have two surnames, one from their father and one from their mother. The father's surname will be given first during the introduction, and that's the name that is used to address or speak of the person. Thus, "Senor Ricardo Ortiz Franco" would be addressed as "Senor Ortiz."

Negotiating—Relationships are important in business matters. Expect to spend some time getting to know your hosts and letting them become acquainted with you through extended social conversation. Remain warm and friendly, but with a formal, businesslike demeanor. High-pressure tactics are to be avoided at all costs. Decisions will be made based not only on the merits of the transaction but also on an intuition regarding your integrity as a representative of your company.

Body Language—Puerto Ricans tend to stand close to one another during conversation and smile easily, and they are often eager conversationalists. Expect a lot of gesturing during discussions.

Gift Giving—Gift giving is not expected in business situations. Gifts are usually opened upon receipt.

Conversation—Remember that although Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the U.S., the people tend to identify themselves as Puerto Ricans first and U.S. citizens second. They are very proud of their distinctive culture and history. On the other hand, Puerto Ricans *are* U.S. citizens, and you can offend them by indicating otherwise. In general, there are varying attitudes toward the island's relationship with the U.S. It's wise to avoid the topic until your host makes his or her views clear. Sports are a good topic (baseball and boxing especially), as are Puerto Rican culture, music, food and history.

Personal Safety

As with most cities, San Juan has its share of crime, but law-enforcement officials work hard—and with measurable success—to chip away at violent-crime rates. In areas that travelers are likely to visit, including Old San Juan, there's a visible police presence. An area to especially steer clear of at night (and even during the day) is the small neighborhood between the northern city wall and the coast, known as La Perla. It will be easily identifiable when you see old cemetery site markers and disheveled houses; it is a closed private community.

Even though tourist areas are considered mostly safe, you should always be wary at night as there have been many innocent victims of crimes related to the drug war in Puerto Rico. The murder and unemployment rates have skyrocketed recently, and 2011 became the year with most murders registered in its history. Don't walk the streets of Santurce or Rio Piedras alone after dark. Those two sectors of San Juan are bustling with cafes, discount stores and boutiques during the day, but be wary at night.

Though tourists are not a target, take caution when in Old San Juan at night, especially during the San Sebastian Street Festival or the SOFO Food Festival; there has been an increase in random assaults and street shootings by passing motorcyclists, as well as a number of hit and runs where the burglars target smart phones, bags and laptops. Heightened police presence is visible in Old San Juan and the San Juan areas during the day and at night.

Use common sense and take the usual precautions: Do not walk alone at night, especially on beaches or in other deserted areas, and if something looks suspicious, steer clear. Don't carry large amounts of cash or wear expensive or expensive-looking jewelry. If you are unsure about parking your car in a certain neighborhood, it's best to pay to park in a marked lot supervised by a guard. Never leave your vehicle running or unlocked.

For more information, contact your country's travel-advisory agency.

Health

It is important for all travelers—especially those not accustomed to the strong rays of the Caribbean sun—to always wear sunscreen; even when it's overcast, the rays are still potent and can leave a mean sunburn. Remember to reapply frequently. A wide-brim hat is also strongly suggested.

Although the drinking water is considered safe, hotels provide bottled or purified water to their guests, and many residents do not drink water from the tap.

Dengue fever is a viral disease transmitted by one type of mosquito that lives primarily in urban areas, most often in cool, dark places, such as closets. It is unlikely that visitors will be bitten at the beach or in the forest reserves, since dengue-carrying mosquitoes rarely breed in these places. The majority of the dengue cases have been outside popular tourist areas, but visitors should use insect repellent when outside and sleep in air-conditioned hotel rooms. Spraying flying-insect repellent in rooms provides further protection.

Most hotels (primarily the larger chains) and cruise ships take precautionary measures to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, including influenza. These include placing hand sanitizers at the front counter and in lobby areas, bathrooms and restaurants. Tourists should take the advised precautions of washing their hands and covering their mouths when they cough or sneeze.

If you need medical assistance, the majority of the island's hospitals and clinics are just as competent as those in the U.S., and virtually all doctors and medical professionals speak English. Ashford Presbyterian Community Hospital is located at 1451 Ave. Ashford, in the hub of the Condado tourist sector. This hospital offers various general and specialized medical services, a 24-hour emergency room and a separate pediatric emergency room (phone 787-721-2160; <http://www.presbypr.com>). Pavia Hospital is located at 1462 Prof. Augusto Rodriguez Ave., close to the Luis A. Ferre Performing Arts Center in Santurce (phone 787-727-6060; <http://www.paviahospitalsanturce.com>). San Jorge Children's Hospital, located at 258 Calle San Jorge in Santurce, has a 24-hour emergency room (phone 787-727-1000).

An alternative to a visit to the hospital for a doctor consultation is the local pharmacy El Amal Health Clinic, located at 282 Ave. Pinero in Hato Rey. It has doctors that see patients daily 7 am-10 pm. Phone 787-763-2125.

In a medical emergency, dial 911.

For the latest information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

Disabled Advisory

San Juan is not considered an accessible city for disabled visitors, especially in Old San Juan. Someone in a wheelchair will find it difficult to navigate many businesses, sidewalks and tourist areas. Improvements have been made—especially at hotels, restaurants and malls—but in the city, expect narrow sidewalks, nonexistent ramps, cars parked on sidewalks and uneven cobblestoned streets. New facilities are required by law to install wheelchair ramps.

Sea Without Barriers (Mar Sin Barreras) provides services for people with special needs at some beaches, including the Balneario Escambron near the Caribe Hilton Hotel and Monserrate Beach in Luquillo. Assistance is provided from the parking lot to the beach gazebos and from the gazebos to the water, where floating devices are offered. The service is free and is offered daily. Phone 787-889-4329 (Sea Without Barriers), 787-449-5672 (Escambron) or 787-889-5871 (Luquillo).

The Office of the Ombudsman for Persons with Disabilities (OPPI) publishes *Turismo Accesible* (Accessible Tourism), which lists various hotels, recreation sites, restaurants and car rental companies that meet the needs of people with disabilities. Phone 787-725-2333. <http://www.oppi.gobierno.pr>.

The Metropolitan Bus Authority, known as the AMA (its Spanish acronym), does provide special transportation services for the disabled under its Programa Llame y Viaje (call and travel program), known as paratransit in the U.S. Fees US\$1.50-\$2.50 for one way, and the service is provided in the San Juan metro area daily 5 am-10 pm. You must be enrolled in the paratransit program of your home state and present evidence to receive a 20-day pass to use the Llame y Viaje service. Call in advance to submit evidence by fax and make arrangements. (*Note:* Calls for the service must be made Monday-Saturday 7:30 am-4 pm.) Phone 787-294-0500, ext. 599. Toll-free 800-981-0097. <http://www.dtop.gov.pr/ama/llameyviaje.htm>.

Care Vacations of Caribbean provides rental equipment for people with special needs and delivers to locations in the San Juan metro area. Toll-free 877-478-7827. <http://www.carevacations.com>.

Facts

Dos & Don'ts

Do know that the ATM is referred to as ATH (*a toda hora*, meaning at all hours).

Don't pull back when someone tries to give you a kiss upon meeting. It is the customary greeting among Puerto Ricans.

Do fly a kite on the greens leading up to Castillo San Felipe El Morro if time and weather conditions permit.

Don't forget that Puerto Rico is a territory of the U.S. and not a foreign country; Puerto Ricans are offended by U.S. visitors' ignorance of the island's commonwealth relationship.

Do know that many Puerto Ricans are bilingual and tend to switch frequently between Spanish and English.

Don't take the public bus transportation schedule too seriously as punctuality is not common in Puerto Rico. Though signs state a waiting time of 15-20 minutes, more likely the wait will average 30-45 minutes for the popular ride between Condado and Old San Juan.

Don't try to leave Puerto Rico with any local fruits such as mangoes, papayas or plantains stuffed in your suitcase. Your luggage will not pass through USDA inspection at the airport.

Don't be surprised that Puerto Ricans measure distance in kilometers but speed limits in miles per hour. Also, gas is priced by the liter instead of the gallon.

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: U.S. citizens do not need a passport when traveling directly between the mainland and the commonwealth island of Puerto Rico. However, all travelers must have some form of official government-issued picture ID, such as a driver's license.

Citizens of all other countries must show a valid passport. A visa may be required for citizens of some countries.

All U.S. citizens, which includes Puerto Ricans, must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S.

Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda.

Reconfirm travel-document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

Population: 402,141.

Languages: Spanish, English.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant).

Time Zone: 4 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-4 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts.

Telephone Codes: 787 and 939, area codes;

Money

Currency Exchange

Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the U.S. and uses the dollar. Banks are generally open Monday-Friday 9 am-4 pm and Saturday 9 am-noon. ATMs can also be found throughout San Juan and elsewhere on the island.

Taxes

There is an island-wide tax of 5.5% on goods and services. Most municipalities have an additional tax that varies by city. San Juan's tax is 1%. The total tax in San Juan is 6.5%.

Lodging taxes are also imposed in Puerto Rico. Hotels with a casino have an 11% room tax, hotels without casinos charge 9%, and there is a 7% room tax at small inns. Some properties also charge an additional use fee of 14%, which is often billed as a resort tax. Inquire about additional taxes and fees when making reservations.

Tipping

Generally 15%-20% is adequate, but tip more if service warrants. In tourist areas, some restaurants charge a 15% service fee, so check your bill before tipping.

Weather

Puerto Rico's climate is very pleasant, with an average temperature of 83 F/23 C in the winter, 85 F/29 C in the summer and year-round sea breezes. Temperatures are slightly cooler in the mountains during both summer and winter. Average humidity (which you will feel while walking around, and travelers will notice as their hair volume changes) is 55% during the day and 80% at night. The rainy season hits its peak in August, and hurricane season is June-November.

What to Wear

Attire should be suited to the warm, tropical weather, such as cottons and linens for both men and women. Dress comfortably during the day and wear plenty of sunscreen, especially if you are out in the sun a lot. Be aware that locals are offended by shirtless men and women dressed in revealing clothes. Beachwear is inappropriate anywhere except on the beach or at a pool, and never sit in a taxi or restaurant in a wet swimsuit, even if it's covered up.

Puerto Ricans, especially the women, often carry an umbrella as protection from both sun and rain. Temperatures drop after dark, and some buildings use excessive air-conditioning to combat heat and humidity, so it's wise to take along a light jacket, sweater or shawl.

Business attire is conservative, with men wearing suits and ties and women in suits, dresses or slacks. Evening wear is usually dressy. Local women generally wear tighter clothes, brighter colors and more jewelry than their U.S. mainland counterparts, and the local men almost never wear jeans (unless it is a sports bar or casual hangout) or shorts out at night.

Many nicer restaurants and clubs enforce a dress code that is best described as stylish, but only a few require men to wear a tie and jacket.

Basseterre, St. Kitts

OVERVIEW

Introduction

The British picked Basseterre as the colonial capital in 1727, and, despite hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and fires, the city has prospered. Today, the island's largest and only true city is a pleasant mishmash of things past and present. Although you'll see some fine examples of West Indian architecture—arched doors and balconies detailed in lattice—you'll encounter crumbling concrete-block structures, too. An eclectic assortment of upscale shops aimed at tourists abuts dusty stores selling home appliances to islanders. At lunchtime, the narrow sidewalks fill up with islanders in business attire and visitors dressed in shorts and T-shirts. The result is an unpretentious charm that's often missing in Caribbean towns that have been sanitized solely for benefit of tourists.



About 7 mi/11 km north of Basseterre, on the main road that circles St. Kitts, you'll come to Old Road Town, where the first colonists landed in 1623, led by Sir Thomas Warner, who later became the first British governor in the West Indies. (Warner is buried in the graveyard of St. Thomas' Church, in the village of Middle Island. His epitaph, in his own words, boasts of his position in the colonies: General of My Caribbee.) A historical marker notes the landing, but there is little else to see in Old Road Town. Just a bit farther on down the main road, there's a turnoff that leads to an area where you can view Carib rock drawings.

Farther along the coastal road, near the village of Bell Vue, Black Rocks is a gnarled outcropping of rocks that juts out of the Atlantic along the island's northeast coast. A volcanic eruption that sent lava spewing into the sea created the unusual rock formations, which are definitely worth a look and a few snapshots.

See & Do

Sightseeing

There are so many wonderful things to see and do in beautiful St. Kitts. Activities include beach and nature adventures, or taking in the history of the island. Many driving tours are available with knowledgeable guides; otherwise bike or hike through the island at your own pace. As you would expect from a tropical Caribbean island, there are plenty of beautiful beaches to lounge on, or a trek through the jungles and sugar cane fields can take you worlds away.

St. Kitts abounds with historical treasures. Be sure to check out the National Museum or Romney Manor for an introduction to the island's sugarcane history, and see the many petroglyphs carved into rocks centuries ago.

Historic Sites

Berkeley Memorial

The Circus
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

<http://historicbasseterre.com/Article1.asp?AID=7>

The Berkeley Memorial is a drinking fountain and clock that marks the center of Basseterre. It was erected in 1883 in honor of a local planter. It sits in the center of a roundabout named The Circus, erected by Lord Combermere in honor of Thomas B.H. Berkeley, a legislator of St. Kitts. The landmark is surrounded by shops, restaurants and banks.

Museums

International House Museum and Edgar Challenger Library

Church Street (at Central Street West)
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-664-9016

<http://sankofaskn.wordpress.com/2011/10/10/international-house-museum-basseterre-st-kitts>

Zach Nisbett, the Doctor of Culture, as he is affectionately known, is the curator of a unique museum that operates from the home of Edgar Challenger, the first president of the Labour Trade Union in 1939. If you have time to explore, International House Museum will occupy you for hours. The museum has a large archive of documents, books, artifacts and photos of historic events that affected the Federation of St. Kitts and Nevis. There is also a mini-animal sanctuary on the premises that provides a home for vervet monkeys, iguanas, mongoose, turtles and ginny birds, to name a few.

Open daily 9 am-9 pm. EC\$5 adults, EC\$2 children.

National Museum

Bay Road (at Fort Street)
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-465-5584

http://stkittsheritage.com/national_museum.asp

St. Kitts National Museum is located in the Old Treasury Building, a historic site in its own right. Not only was it the main entrance to Basseterre upon arrival by water, but it was once used as a lighthouse to guide incoming vessels safely to shore. The National Museum shares with the visitor a pictorial view of Kittian and Nevisian history, society, music, landscape, crafts, customs and traditions. Also make sure to visit the St. Christopher Heritage Society, which is housed in the same building and is the guardian of a huge collection of documents, books, photos and artifacts that tell about the history, heritage, culture and environment of St. Kitts and Nevis.

Religious Sites

The main religious denominations on St. Kitts are Anglican, Catholic and Methodist. The island was first settled by the British Sir Thomas Warner in 1623. Later that same year it was settled by the French. The French and British were in constant battle for supremacy, and the influence of both cultures is visible in the architectural designs of the numerous chapels throughout the island.

Catholic Church of Immaculate Conception

East Independence Square Street
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-465-2451

<http://co-cathedral.blogspot.com>

The Catholic Church of Immaculate Conception was built in 1856. It was demolished in 1927, and a modern structure with two steeples was designed and built on the same site a year later by architect Father Claeys.

St. George's Anglican Church

Cayon Street
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-465-6691

<http://www.stkittsanglicanchurch.org>

The first Anglican church was constructed in 1630 by Capuchin Friars. St. George's Anglican has a long history of being demolished and rebuilt many times during the late 17th century and most of the 18th century as it fell victim to the "Great Fire" of Basseterre in 1763 and the "Great Earthquake" of 1843 and other structural changes. A visit to this well-attended chapel will be a real treat if you appreciate Gothic architecture.

Wineries, Breweries & Distilleries

Carib Breweries

10A Cayon St. East
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-465-2309

<http://www.caribbrewery.com>

Carib Breweries makes the local brew, Carib, and several other beers. Tours are available.

Recreation

There are lots of activities to keep you occupied during your visit. If you love being around water, take a catamaran cruise around the island, hire a boat to take you fishing, jump on a Jet Ski and bounce on the waves, snorkel or scuba dive.

Great on-land activities include hiking into the rain forest either on foot or horseback, a cycling tour of the island or driving a Jeep into the hills. There are a few gyms on the island if you want to avoid the afternoon heat, and golf and tennis facilities abound. For a good walk or jog, Frigate Bay has beautifully landscaped green spaces.

Boating & Sailing

Skippered trips are the safest options, but if you prefer to have an adventure of your own, Mr. X Watersports in South Frigate Bay (next to the Monkey Bar) rents Sunfish for US\$20 an hour. Banana Boat Tours on Bay Road in Basseterre is also recommended; its crew is U.S. Coast Guard approved. Phone 869-466-0645.

You also can kayak along the rugged southeast peninsula—watch for hawksbills and greenback sea turtles. Turtle Tours at Turtle Beach provides transportation from Basseterre, boats and experienced guides for about US\$40 for four hours. Phone 869-469-9094. <http://www.beach-works.com>.

Steady trade winds make St. Kitts a good place to windsurf. Mr. X Watersports also rents Windsurfers for US\$20 an hour. Both South Frigate Bay and Banana Bay have good conditions for windsurfing (consistent wind and protection—so you won't be blown out to sea). You will need to take a board to Banana Bay—equipment cannot be rented there.

Blue Water Safaris

Located on Princess Street
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-466-4933

<http://www.bluewatersafaris.com>

Blue Water Safaris offers fishing, sunset and moonlight cruises, party cruises, Nevis day tours and snorkeling.

US\$45-\$85.

Leeward Island Charters

Fort Street
Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

The operation offers catamaran cruises on three boats, including the 70-ft/21-m *Spirit of St. Kitts*. The *Spirit's* 9:30 am-4:30 pm cruise features unlimited refreshments, a beach barbecue and open bar, and a snorkel stop. Shorter sails are also available, depending on the season.

US\$80 adults.

Scuba & Snorkeling

Shallow patches of coral reef make for good snorkeling around the island. The best snorkeling from the beach is off Turtle Bay Beach, where beginners and intermediates relish the fish life of Shitten Bay in particular. Swim out past the sea grass to reach the coral. There's good snorkeling at Major's Bay and

Banana Bay, at the end of the peninsula, and also at Pump Bay on Sandy Point. Hurricane winds have uncovered an old sailing ship and several cannons in White House Bay. Other snorkeling sites can be reached by boat—most dive shops offer boat trips for US\$35 a person. Snorkelers can rent masks and fins for US\$15 a day from shops at Turtle Beach and South Frigate Bay.

In addition to shallow coral reefs, the waters surrounding St. Kitts are home to almost 400 ships that sank between 1492 and 1825. (Most still haven't been located, with only overgrown piles of ballast stones to mark their resting places.) Off the calmer Caribbean side of St. Kitts, scuba divers will find the *M. V. Talata*, which sank in 1985 and now lies in 70 ft/21 m of water. The boat's hull shelters many tropical fish. *The River Taw*, a freighter resting in 50 ft/15 m of water, sank in 1978 and is in good condition.

You must be a certified diver and present your C card to rent equipment and go diving.

Kenneth's Dive Centre

Bay Road

Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

Phone: 869-465-7043 for the dive shop or 869-465-2670 for the dive center

<http://www.kennethdivecenter.com>

This outfit offers instruction and equipment, and also offers services for handicapped people.

Shopping

Shopping on St. Kitts is duty-free. The best shopping on the island is around Basseterre's Circus-Fort Street area, the Pelican Mall on the Bay Road at Independence Square Street West, Amina Craft Market and Port Zante Shopping Area near the cruise-terminal pier.

Bargaining is not common on St. Kitts, except at the public market and with beach vendors.

Shopping Hours: Monday-Saturday 8 am-4 pm. Some of the smaller shops close for lunch, generally noon-1 pm. A few shops also close on Thursday afternoons.

Specialty Stores

Philatelic Bureau

Bay Road (east of Fort Street; next to the post office)

Basseterre, St Kitts, St Kitts & Nevis

You can purchase St. Kitts and Nevis stamps there, said to be among the most beautiful in the world.

St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten
OVERVIEW

Introduction

St. Maarten, the Dutch side of the island, is still somewhat more developed for tourism than the French side, with large hotels, villas, condos, resorts, time-share developments, casinos and an amazing variety of nightlife. Its capital, Philipsburg, is a favorite destination of cruise ships and plays host to thousands of tourists when ships are in port.



The French and Dutch sides of the island, although culturally distinct, have a shared history dating back to the early 17th century. Early settlers banded together to ward off the Spanish, then divided the 37-sq-mi/96-sq-km island between themselves. The hilly, southern Dutch side is the smaller half, covering 16 sq mi/41 sq km. The French side is often called "the north" by locals.

The Arawak Indians named the island Soualiga, or Land of Salt, and the Great Salt Pond, near Philipsburg, remains a prominent geological feature protected by local environmentalists. The capital's sheltering Great Bay has attracted international traders for centuries, and St. Maarten is still known as a duty-free shopper's paradise. With its sheltered harbors, trade winds and proximity to other islands, St. Maarten is also a yachting hub.

The Dutch side changed its status in October 2010 from an island territory of the Netherlands Antilles to an autonomous country within the Kingdom of the Netherlands. Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands remains head of state, while The Hague continues to be in charge of overseeing foreign affairs and defense. The people of St. Maarten remain Dutch nationals and carry Dutch passports.

Highlights

Sights—Sunrise at Dawn Beach; sunset and maybe even the "green flash" at Cupecoy or Mullet Bay beach; Wathey Square; the views from Fort Willem and Fort Amsterdam; the thrill of big planes landing right over your head at Sunset Bar & Grill on Maho Beach.

Museums—Island history at the St. Maarten Museum.

Memorable Meals—A romantic dinner by candlelight at Sheer on Front Street; grilled lobster at one of the popular waterside restaurants on the Simpson Bay strip.

Late Night—Guavaberry Colada at Sky Beach; playing roulette at Casino Royale or Princess Casino; bar hopping along the Simpson Bay strip, including Red Piano Bar; dancing at Bliss nightclub or Tantra in Maho.

Walks—A hike with the St. Maarten National Heritage Foundation; a leisurely stroll along Front Street or Maho Plaza for shopping and a cappuccino overlooking the sea.

Especially for Kids—The monkeys at St. Maarten Zoological Park; watersports off Great Bay Beach; Carousel Gelateria for super sundaes and a ride on a beautiful custom-made Venetian merry-go-round.

Port Information

Location

Philipsburg has a large port facility—the Dr. A.C. Wathey Cruise Pier in the Pointe Blanche area of town—just a short walk or taxi ride from downtown. At the pier, there's also a Welcome Terminal with information booths, ATMs, and—built in old St. Maarten style—Harbour Point Village, housing 12 branches of the best Front Street jewelry shops and several market stalls. As many as six cruise ships may be in town in a day, either tying up at the facility or anchoring in Great Bay and tendering passengers to Bobby's Marina or the Captain Hodge Wharf.

There are also information booths stocked with brochures and maps near the pier at Wathey Square and along Front Street. Wi-Fi hot spots and Internet cafes are widespread.

Potpourri

With 37 beaches on a 37-sq-mi/96-sq-km island, St. Maarten boasts one beach for every 1 sq mi/2.6 sq km.

The panoramic view from The Lookout on Cole Bay Hill is St. Maarten's most photographed spot.

Sand dredged from the harbor for construction of the cruise ship piers was used to replenish Great Bay Beach, now one of the island's widest and longest stretches of beach.

The island of St. Martin/St. Maarten is the world's smallest land mass shared by two sovereign nations.

Simpson Bay Lagoon is the largest lagoon in the Caribbean.

The Pasangrahan Royal Guest House hotel was once the summer home of the Dutch Queen Wilhelmina.

The French side of the island is part of the European Union; the Dutch side is not.

No border formalities exist between the two sides of the island, just two quite easy-to-miss signs: *Bienvenue dans la partie Francaise* (Welcome to the French side) and Welcome to Sint Maarten.

The numbers 10-10-10 are considered lucky, as this is the date when the Netherlands Antilles was dissolved and St. Maarten achieved full country status within the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

See & Do

Sightseeing

Historic Sites

Fort Amsterdam

Little Bay Road
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

The first Dutch fort built in the Caribbean sits atop the peninsula that separates Great Bay from Little Bay. Only a cannon or two and a few walls remain, but historically this was Philipsburg's most important bastion. It was built in 1631 but captured by the Spaniards two years later. Although the fort's military importance has definitely waned, the views over Great Bay remain spectacular.

Fort Willem

Camel Road, Philipsburg (look for the television transmission tower)
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Even though little of this fort at the western end of town still exists, the view of Philipsburg and beyond to the neighboring islands makes it worth the half-hour trek up the dirt road opposite the entrance to the Great Bay Hotel. Be aware that the drive to the top is treacherous—it's better to walk if you have the time, energy and a good pair of sneakers.

Old Courthouse

Front Street, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Across from Wathey Square is the green-and-white wooden courthouse. Built in 1793, it was originally the home of Cmdr. John Philips, the founder of Philipsburg. The structure has since housed the fire station, the jail, the town hall and the post office (but never a church, which it resembles).

Pasangrahan Royal Guest House

19 Front St., Philipsburg (at the eastern end)
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-3588

<http://www.pasanhotel.net>

Recently renovated with new and upgraded rooms, St. Maarten's oldest inn was frequented by Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands, and it is still the lodging of choice for visiting dignitaries. The lobby bar is a spirited happy-hour locale when the sun sets, and the hotel's restaurant is recommended for breakfast, lunch or a fine dinner.

Museums

St. Maarten Museum

Speetjens Arcade, 7 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-4917

<http://www.museumsintmaarten.org>

The house where this museum is located was built in the 1890s. Tucked away in a shady alley on the east end of Front Street, the small second-floor museum relates the history of the island from its earliest days to the present through changing exhibits. Permanent exhibits include a model of the HMS *Proselyte*, a three-masted warship that went down in Great Bay in 1801, and various artifacts salvaged from it. The museum shop sells local art, jewelry, books and an excellent collection of maps of the island and the Eastern Caribbean. Check the *Daily Herald* for special events held at the museum.

Monday-Friday 10 am-4 pm, Saturday 10 am-noon. No entry fee, but donations are appreciated.

Parks & Gardens

Emilio Wilson Historical and Cultural Park

Dutch Cul de Sac
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

<http://ewef.sxmconservationfoundations.org>

This small, shady park is part of a large estate and the legacy of the late Emilio Wilson, whose grandfather was a freed slave and who himself worked as the property's watchman since 1929. After purchasing the 106-acre/43-hectare estate, Wilson resisted offers to sell the land, keeping it entirely original as a living museum. Last vestiges of local history include surrounding stone walls built without cement and many structures dating back to its days as Golden Rock sugar plantation. The park hosts various charitable functions, agricultural projects, sports events, picnics, weddings and the annual Art in the Park festival.

Man of War Shoal Marine Park

Nature Foundation, Cole Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 544-4267

<http://www.naturefoundationsxm.org>

St. Maarten's first marine park was established in 2010. It includes the popular Proselyte Reef dive site named after a 32-gun frigate that sank there in 1801. Sightings of migratory whales and dolphins are a big hit with tourists.

Recreation

St. Maarten's beaches provide a wide range of experiences, from calm to windy, social to serene. As you'd expect on a tropical island, watersports predominate. With numerous harbors and several other islands in sight, day trips are also popular ways to amplify the getaway feeling.

Boating and sailing opportunities await at Simpson Bay, Captain Oliver's Marina (Oyster Pond) and Philipsburg. Deep-sea fishing is another option. Surfers, with or without kites or sails, will also find plenty of options.

Beaches and watersports are so abundant and well promoted in St. Maarten that it's easy to overlook land-based recreation and the more authentic experience of the island that it affords. Vary your options with hiking and horseback riding, or explore by renting vehicles with wheels: bikes, motorcycles, Segways and ATVs.

Beaches

No one goes to St. Maarten without a swimsuit in hand—much of the island's appeal is found along its waterfront. Visitors have a variety of exquisite white-sand beaches to choose from; most have scored high in water-quality tests.

Popular for the unruffled waters and funky boardwalk that stretches from Sonesta Great Bay Beach Resort (<http://www.sonesta.com/greatbay>) on the southern tip to the cruise ship pier on the other end, long, wide Great Bay Beach is great for families. Seaside bistros, cafes and bars dot the boardwalk; vendors hawk colorful pareos and Heineken caps; and the giant ships anchored in the Bay are awesome. When the sun darts behind the clouds, duty-free shopping galore awaits on Front Street parallel to the boardwalk.

Right next door but separated by the Divi Peninsula, Little Bay Beach may be crowded, but it's usually less so than Great Bay Beach. There's a good selection of watersports activities, and unless a southeast wind is blowing, calm water makes it a good place to snorkel around the rocks right beneath Fort Amsterdam.

On the southeastern coast, Pointe Blanche is one of those beaches that locals like to keep secret. From the top of the hill, views of the cruise ships pulling into Great Bay look better than the photos in the tourist brochures, and it's the perfect place for collecting seashells on the beach and surfing in the gentle waves.

Dawn Beach is known for its incredible sunrises and good snorkeling on the close-by reef as long as the Atlantic is calm. There's usually plenty of activity going on, from sandcastle contests to live music that emanates from Mr. Busby's, a beachfront bar and restaurant with shaded tables and great food (<http://www.dawnbeachsxm.com/busby-index.shtml>). You can get to the waterfront through Mr. Busby's or by walking from the road. Farther down the road, you will find quiet areas along Oyster Pond on the Atlantic side.

Close to the eastern end of Princess Juliana International airport, Simpson Bay Beach, one of the island's longest, snuggles a crescent-shaped harbor that hosts some of the most extravagant yachts in the world. When the bridge is up, photographers gather for a glimpse of the megaships as they glide through the waters.

On the western end of Simpson Bay, Burgeaux Bay by the Caravanserai Hotel is a neighborhood beach reachable on the paved road from the southern end of the airport or on the paths between the villas and cottages. Walking distance to several clubs, shops, restaurants and casinos, the beach is the choice du jour of sun worshippers coveting a lazy afternoon.

Maho Beach, at the western edge of Juliana Airport, is the one you've seen photos of with low-flying jets, high flying sand and even people blown over by the blasts despite a sign warning, "Low-flying and departing aircraft blast can cause physical injury." Spectacular sunsets there are secondary to the midafternoon aviation buffs and just plain thrill-seekers facing off with big jets landing almost low enough to touch. You'll also see fence-grippers trying to stay upright from the planes' acceleration blasts as they roll down the runway at takeoff.

Foundations sprinkled around palm-fringed Mullet Bay Beach are all that's left of the former Mullet Bay Resort, destroyed by Hurricane Luis in 1995. On the sheltered side of the island, this surfer's paradise is also one of the best for a more quiet enjoyment of spectacular sunset views.

Just north, close to the Dutch/French border, you can go *au naturel* on Cupecoy Beach—actually three connected beaches—and the only clothing-optional stretch of sand on the Dutch side. Regal sandstone cliffs, cozy coves, caves and sultry sunsets where the legendary, lucky "green flash" can often be viewed, are the star attractions. This beach tends to come and go depending on the time of year, and there are often big, rolling waves. Take a camera for snaps of nearby Saba, St. Eustatius and Anguilla.

Boating & Sailing

There is no shortage of boating activities on St. Maarten. You can rent Sunfish, Sailfish or Hobie Cats (around US\$45 an hour) from most of the hotels and on the beaches around Philipsburg. Day sails are available out of Philipsburg's Dock Maarten (phone 542-5705; <http://dockmaarten.com>) and the adjoining Bobby's Marina.

Boats also do full- and half-day sails to both Islet Pinel and Tintamarre, a completely uninhabited island (no beach bars, nothing) from Philipsburg, Simpson Bay and Captain Oliver's Marina in Oyster Pond.

If you enjoy exciting yacht races and a party atmosphere with live musical entertainment, be on the island in March for the annual St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. It's four days of "serious fun" at various venues around both sides of the island.

Big boat buffs, either sail or motor, can admire the megayachts docked at Port de Plaisance in Cole Bay, Palapa Marina on the Simpson Bay Lagoon and the Porto Cupecoy Marina.

Bobby's Marina

Head of Town, Great Bay, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-2366

<http://www.bobbysmarina.com>

Day sails are available out of Philipsburg and the adjoining Great Bay Marina (phone 542-5705). Several boats docked at the marinas sail to Tintamarre, including the *Golden Eagle* catamaran (phone 542-3323; <http://www.sailingsxm.com>).

Captain Oliver's Marina

Captain Oliver's Marina, Oyster Pond
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 581-0790

<http://www.captainolivers.com>

Arrange boat trips to Islet Pinel and Tintamarre or hook up with SunSail or The Moorings for longer charters. You can also take a water taxi to Dawn Beach or a ferry to St Barths.

Celine

Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 526-1170

<http://www.sailstmaarten.com>

Captain Neil Roebert organizes some of the best sunset cruises (US\$35) and snorkeling day trips (US\$115-\$130) as well as private charters on his 40-ft/12-m catamaran. Most unusual is a Tuesday evening Lagoon Pub Crawl (US\$85), a nautical twist on the traditional progressive dinner. The boat leaves from the dock at Skipjacks in Simpson Bay, where your meal starts off with a crab back and fish kebab appetizer; then it's a 20-minute trip over to Porto Cupecoy's Quatre Vents for the main course (a choice of chicken, beef or fish), which is ready and waiting upon your arrival. Then it's back to Simpson Bay for a delicious house-made apple pie or baklava dessert at Barnacles. Includes open bar onboard and a welcome drink at each stop.

Lagoon Sailboat Rentals (LSR)

Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 588-2474

<http://sailboatrental.org>

Nine little Jeanneau Sunset 20-ft/6-m centerboard boats (with or without skipper) can comfortably accommodate up to five sailors for sails in the calm waters of Simpson Bay Lagoon. Saturday races are often organized, lessons available too.

Sails run US\$110 for a half-day, US\$150 for a full day.

Lord Sheffield Tall Ship Adventures

Dock Maarten Marina, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Get back to the original meaning of "three sheets to the wind" with a three-hour Pirate Day sail (departs at 9 am or 1 pm) or Sunset Soiree (Tuesday-Friday) aboard a 72-ft/22-m square-rigged windjammer of yesteryear. It occasionally offers an additional four-hour cruise at 11 am, as well as a Sunday afternoon cruise that guarantees a gorgeous sunset.

Pirate Day sail US\$79 adults, US\$55 children ages 2-12. Sunset Soiree US\$55 adults, US\$38 children ages 2-12.

Random Wind

Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 587-5742

<http://www.randomwind.com>

Sailing and snorkeling trips on a traditional 54-ft/16-m cutter-rigged ketch depart at 10 am from Skipjacks' dock in Simpson Bay. A maximum of 22 people can enjoy the Paradise Day Sail with snorkel and swim stops at Baie Longue and Mullet Bay, and the exciting Tarzan Swing, a unique trapeze rigged from its spinnaker to dive or jump from. Private charters and overnight cruises to neighboring islands are also available.

Paradise Day Sail US\$99 adults, US\$65 children ages 5-12.

St. Maarten 12-Metre Challenge

Bobby's Marina, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-0045

<http://www.12metre.com>

The St. Maarten 12-Metre Challenge takes a bunch of landlubbers and trains them to compete in a shortened version of the America's Cup Yacht Race. For about US\$105, you could be part of a crew racing *Canada II*, *Stars and Stripes* or *True North*, whether you grind a winch, trim a sail or sip a beer. Not only is it a fun day, but the skippers who handle the boats are delightful, each with a great sense of humor. The gift shop is worth a stop, particularly for the photos taken on the yachts as well as high-quality T-shirts, which make good souvenirs.

Tour SXM

Bobby's Marina, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 543-0068

<http://www.toursxm.com>

With more than 20 years of experience running excursions, sailing and day sails, this reliable outfit now offers three fun trips. The snorkel sail is on the 65-ft/20-m catamaran *Golden Eagle*. A fast track full- or half-day trek to Creole Rock, Pinel and Tintamarre for a swim and snorkel is on the latest of water toys, a rigid inflatable boat called a Power Raft. On the Island-Lagoon Tour, up to 25 guests start out on a bus to visit Philipsburg and Marigot sights, do some shopping, then transfer to the double-decker Explorer Party Boat, which motors back with an open bar to Simpson Bay.

Snorkel sail US\$65 adults, US\$45 children younger than 12; fast track US\$49 adults, US\$35 children; Island-Lagoon tour US\$49 adults, US\$35 children.

Fishing

Deep-sea fishing charters provide a chance to catch the big fish that are known to put up an impressive fight, such as marlin, billfish, sailfish, wahoo, tuna, mahimahi and barracuda. Expect to pay US\$550-\$1,000, depending on the number of passengers and the length of the trip.

Captain Rudy Sierens runs his trips from just over the Simpson Bay Bridge across from McDonald's. 14 Airport Road, Simpson Bay. Phone 545-2177. <http://www.rudysdeepseafishing.com>.

Alternatives include the three boats of seafood-restaurant owner, Lee Halley (phone 544-4233 or 544-4234; <http://www.leesfish.com>) or Roy Lake (phone 581-6248; <http://roydeepseafishing.com>). All operate out of the Simpson Bay Lagoon.

Golf

Mullet Bay Golf Course

Airport Road, Mullet Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 545-2850

<http://www.stmaartengolf.com>

The island's only golf course, not far from the airport. Mullet Bay Resort itself has been closed since it incurred extensive damage from Hurricane Luis in 1995, but the course has remained open. The St. Maarten Golf Association (SMGA) does its best to maintain the sometimes-scruffy greens and holds frequent tournaments, including the annual St. Maarten Open every April. There are water views from 14 of its 18 holes.

Greens fees run US\$106 for 18 holes with motorized cart (US\$70 with pull cart), but prices may vary by season. The Pro Shop (phone 545-2801) rents clubs for US\$21-\$26, but not golf shoes.

Horseback Riding

Lucky Stables

Seaside Nature Park, Traybay2, Cay Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 544-5255

<http://www.luckystables.shoreadventures.net>

Even for the untutored, trail riding provides a great way to get out and enjoy the countryside during the day. Lucky Stables also takes riders out at sunset, full moon and for an experience you won't find everywhere, going into the sea on horseback. Ponies are available for kids.

Prices are about US\$50-\$120. Call ahead to reserve.

Scuba & Snorkeling

A dozen or more boats depart regularly from Philipsburg's harbor and Simpson Bay on snorkeling and diving excursions. If you want to stay on land and close to Philipsburg, snorkel in Little Bay—the hotels along the beach rent equipment.

Among the certified dive centers on the Dutch side are Aqua Mania at Pelican Marina in Simpson Bay (phone 544-2640) and Trade Winds at Great Bay Marina in Philipsburg (phone 547-5176).

Note that dive shops aren't the only ones to offer classes for beginners: Some ships do, too, so check with your activity director.

The island's reef structures aren't dramatic, but there are enough shallow coral formations and fish to keep diving novices happy. You can also dive to the remains—mainly the anchor and cannon—of a British 32-gun frigate, the *Proselyte*, which sank in 1801 about 1 mi/1.6 km off Great Bay. This is part of the Man of the War Shoal Marine Park.

Reef, wreck and night dives as well as introductory three-hour lessons and equipment rental are offered. Single-tank dives average US\$60; double tanks US\$104 and night dives US\$75. You must be a certified diver and present your C card to rent equipment and go diving.

Aqua Mania Adventures

Pelican Marina, Simpson Bay Resort
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 544-2640 or 544-2631

<http://www.stmaarten-activities.com>

Called the "One-Stop Vacation Shop" with an outstanding variety of water-oriented activities. Banana boats, windsurfs, paddleboards, rafts, kayaks, wave runners, Hobie Cats and snorkel equipment are all available to rent. Dive Adventures is the PADI scuba facility. Day trips go to St. Barths, Saba and Anguilla, and romantic sunset sail and dinner cruises are all part of the offering. For the kids, there's a special Lagoon excursion (US\$25), which ends at Carousel Gelateria Bar for ice cream and a merry-go-round ride. Play Station is a platform for fun anchored just off Simpson Bay Beach, where kids are

encouraged to swing, slide and splash (US\$20; children younger than 12 must be accompanied by an adult). There is a second location in Philipsburg.

Dive Safaris

Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 545-3213

<http://www.divestmaarten.com>

Operated out of the Scuba Shop at La Palapa Marina, this is among the best PADI-certified dive centers on the Dutch side.

Ocean Explorers

Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 544-5252

<http://stmaartendiving.com>

Located in Simpson Bay, this is the island's first dive shop and one of a few offering weekly shark dives (US\$85).

PADI Caribbean Dive College

Bobby's Marina, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

This dive center is PADI-certified, and is one of the better dive operators in St. Maarten.

Shopping

Front Street has been a bit eclipsed by newer shopping centers, but it's still hot, hectic and great fun when the big cruise ships are in port. If you prefer a quieter shopping experience, check the *Daily Herald* for the ship schedule and pick a day when the port is less busy.

On Front Street, the emphasis is on imports. It's lined with shops offering fashions from France and Italy, diamonds, gold, emeralds, pearls and other jewelry, perfumes and cosmetics, Swiss watches, Japanese cameras, Dutch chocolates and liquor. More than 70 shops sell jewelry in Philipsburg alone.

Loose diamonds in amazing colors (including chocolate) and other unset gemstones are a good buy on the island, if you know what you're looking for. Retailers with fine collections include Boolchand's, Caribbean Gems, Diamonds International, D.K. Gems International, Little Europe and Zhaveri.

Although the French side offers a wider selection of European designer fashions, Front Street has Ralph Lauren, Liz Claiborne, Hugo Boss, Tommy Hilfiger, Benetton and a branch of Lipstick (the main store is on the French side of the island), which carries the island's best selection of fragrances, cosmetics and skin-care products (phone 542-6051).

Vendors on Wathey Square sell local souvenirs such as carvings, jewelry, paintings, and colorful beachwear and pareos. Vendors can be aggressive but are generally pleasant. Remember not to bargain too much as these folks depend on tourism for their livelihood.

Good buys on liquor are available on Front Street at Ram's and Cannegie, and at the many smaller variety stores that dot the island. The former Jimmy Buffet-inspired Last Mango in Paradise catering to Parrotheads has moved from Front Street to Simpson Bay but maintains its branch at Juliana Airport.

Cameras and electronics are two items sold in large quantities, and reliable stores include Ram's, Boolchands, Klass and Chulani's. Be prepared to bargain: Prices will drop, especially if you're contemplating an immediate purchase. Ask about the guarantees as some are only good on-island and not in the U.S.

On Back Street, shops sell ready-to-wear goods at low prices. The merchants at these stores expect you to bargain, too. If you need toiletries and other smaller items, Back Street is the place to find them.

Near the airport, there's a strip of interesting shops in Simpson Bay's Plaza del Lago and in Maho Plaza, and a few souvenir stores with an impressive inventory of items including bags made from recycled juice containers. There are also several worthwhile stores inside the airport, past security, including duty-free shops and a divine shop selling homemade chocolates.

Everything sold in Philipsburg and elsewhere on the island is 100% duty-free. Be aware that this means importers on the island didn't pay duty and can offer low prices. It does not mean your purchases will be exempt from duties and taxes imposed by your home country's customs officials. Savings on U.S. prices by as much as 40% are common, as is bargaining, especially for jewelry, electronics and photographic equipment; the competition is fierce.

U.S. dollars and most major credit cards are widely accepted—Visa and MasterCard are the most reliable. Some shops offer discounts for cash purchases (but not for traveler's checks). Other currencies are not as readily accepted and should be exchanged.

Be aware that the local shops recommended by tour operators, taxi drivers and your ship's port lecturer generally pay for the privilege. Prices at the shops recommended by the ship may be somewhat higher than others, but passengers usually get a money-back guarantee, valid for 30 days. As always and everywhere, buyer beware.

Shopping Hours: Generally, Monday-Saturday 9 am-6 pm, until 10 pm at Maho Plaza. Only a handful of shops are open on Sunday and only when cruise ships are in port.

Galleries

Art Box

Bobby's Marina, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 543-0855 or 588-5999

<http://www.zdenkakiric.com>

Jewelry designer Zdenka Kiric uses pearls, precious and semiprecious stones for her intricate, delicate designs. Her boutique also stocks originals from regional and local artists such as Sir Roland Richardson, as well as a few pieces of sculpture and collectible crafts.

Le Saint-Geran Gallery

117 Front St.
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

This eclectic gallery encourages curious browsers and serious shoppers to peruse the work of more than 50 artists, including the late Patrick Poivre De La Freta, who studied with Salvador Dali.

Ras Mosera Gallery

7 Front St., Phillipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Inside his Axum cafe, this St. Lucian-born artist showcases his large oil and watercolor paintings.

Shopping Areas

Back Street

Parallel to Front Street, this is where the locals shop for clothing, electronics, sandals, luggage, toiletries and gift items. It's a great place for tourists to shop because the prices are lower than on Front Street.

Blue Mall

162 Rhine Road, Dutch Lowlands
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 545-2418

<http://www.bluemallsxm.com>

This multistory complex is residential on its upper floors with luxe dining and shopping on the lower. You'll find a Bacchus wine bar and terrace cafe featuring similar gourmet treats to the original on the French side, Yogen Fruz, Paul & Shark, Diamonds International, Swarovski, Guess, Crocs and Swatch, as well as many more high-end brands.

Open Monday-Saturday 10 am-8 pm, Sunday noon-8 pm.

Harbour Point Village

Pointe Blanche
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-8504

<http://www.portofstmaarten.com/harbour.htm>

Integrated into the Dr. A.C. Wathey Pier in Pointe Blanche, this gated replica of old-time St. Maarten buildings houses major jewelers, and island-style souvenirs and clothing. It's designed as an exclusive

convenience for cruise passengers, those staying aboard and those with too little time to shop because of scheduled day-long tours and activities. Nonpassengers will be turned away.

Maho Village

Maho Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten
<http://www.mahovillage.com>

One advantage of shopping in this restaurant and nightlife epicenter is that browsing for fashions, gifts and jewelry can extend late into the evening. One place even serves free drinks.

Marina Village of Porto Cupecoy

66 Rhine Road, Dutch Lowlands (at the French border)
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten
Phone: 546-4900
<http://www.portocupecoy.com>

This ritzy condo development just before the French border bills itself as "Mediterranean style with Caribbean spirit." Its waterside plaza has plenty of open space for frequent musical events plus four restaurants and six boutiques, not only convenient for residents, but also providing a unique ambience. Visit Blooming Baskets for unusual flower- and feather-decorated bags; Metro Opera for European fashions; a branch of Shipwreck Shop for souvenirs; a salon and spa; marine supply store; and its own Gourmet Marche.

Old Street

Between Front and Back streets, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

This attractive pedestrian street's small shops include Colombian Emeralds, Beach Stuff, Tommy Hilfiger and Dalila (stylish batik clothing from Bali).

Puerta Del Sol Plaza

Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

This small, Spanish-style red-tile-roofed commercial center features quality rather than quantity. There's a Scotiabank, the healthy and very popular Top Carrot, a beauty salon and Marie Bella's Italian designer swimwear, clothing, shoes and accessories.

St. Rose Shopping Mall

Front Street (on the boardwalk)
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

This attractive seaside grouping of shops is home to an art gallery, restaurants and bars, as well as high-end boutiques including Cartier, Diamonds International and Goldfinger.

Specialty Stores

Artistic Jewelers

61 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-3456

<http://www.artisticjewelers.com>

This store is known for its unique jewelry designs including extensive David Yurman and John Hardy collections and pricey Mikimoto pearls. Its sister store, Art of Time (26 Front St.; phone 542-2180), has similar merchandise but concentrates on collector's timepieces from luxury marques such as Baume & Mercier, Panerai and Omega. Both stock the prestigious writing instruments and leather goods from Mont Blanc.

Ballerina Jewelers

53A and 56 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-4399

<http://www.ballerina-jewelers.com>

Watches, diamonds of all hues and designer jewelry, including the popular Hidalgo enamel rings, are sold at this family-owned and operated store that has been in business since 1987. There's a second location at Harbour Point Village.

Belgian Chocolate Box

109 Old Street, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-8863

<http://www.thebelgianchocolatebox.com>

This shop offers a chocolate fix in 75 different forms and flavors, including orange peel dipped in chocolate, macaroons and chili-milk-chocolate bars. Visitors also have the chance to see the sweets being made. There is a second location at Harbour Point Village.

Monday-Friday 8:20 am-6 pm.

Blanc du Nil

15 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-9435

<http://www.blancdunil.com>

White (and only white) cool, 100% Egyptian cotton classic clothing in sizes small to 4X for men, women and children. There is a second location at Maho Village (phone 545-3112).

Boolchand's

14 and 50 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-2245

<http://www.boolchand.com>

One of the most popular (and certainly the island's largest) choice of computers, electronics and photographic equipment from name brands such as Apple, Bose, Canon, Olympus, Samsung, Sony and Zeiss. Jewelry, including a full range of Pandora charms at the branch across from the Passangrahan Hotel, and watches too, especially Movado. There is a second location at Harbour Point Village.

Caribbean Gems

22 and 40 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-8313 or 542-2176. Toll-free 800-848-7925

<http://www.caribbeangems.com>

Established on-island since 1983, these shops are best known for their variety of loose diamonds and gemstones in all shapes, sizes and colors, as well as exclusive 14- and 18-karat gold designer jewelry. Competitive prices, personalized service, on-site workshop and three convenient U.S. service centers.

Diamonds International

Wathey Square
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-7992

<http://www.diamondsinternational.com>

Specializes in diamonds and designer jewelry, including John Hardy. There is an impressive VIP lounge for big buyers. The exclusive Crown of Light 90 faceted special cut is much admired for its unparalleled brilliance. Other locations at St. Rose Arcade (phone 542-1972) and Juliana Airport (phone 546-7726).

D.K. Gems International

69A Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-1978. Toll-free 866-978-5352

<http://www.dkgemsint.com>

This family-owned business has one of the most extensive collections of loose diamonds. Four certified gemologists help you make the right choice.

Dutch Delft Blue Gallery

37 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Inside an adorable restored building, this shop offers beautiful handcrafted blue-and-white Delftware pieces, ranging from museum-type pieces (with accordingly high price tags) to tiles and Christmas ornaments for US\$10-\$15. The staff is very informed about the history of each piece.

Effy Jewelers

28A-49 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-3951. Toll-free 877-275-3339

<http://www.effyjewelers.com>

Designer and owner Effy Hematian has been creating exquisite jewelry with diamonds, colorful gemstones and metals since 1979. There's a second location at Harbour Pointe Village.

Endless Summer

27 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-1510

<http://endlesssummerswimwear.com>

An endless choice of international designer swimwear in every imaginable color, shape and style. With sizes from 2A to 24F and the opportunity to mix and match tops and bottoms, a perfect fit is assured. A discount is often given when buying more than one suit (as you likely will). There is a second location at 3 Airport Road, Simpson Bay (phone 545-2618).

Fifth Avenue

92 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-3401

<http://www.fifthavenuesxm.com>

The place for fine Italian leather goods, accessories, shoes and sunglasses from such sought-after names as Fendi, Ferragamo, Gucci and Prada.

Flip Flop

14 Boardwalk Blvd., Philipsburg (next to Passagrahan Hotel)
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 543-0577

<http://www.flipflopshops.com>

"Free your toes" is the slogan at this shop entirely dedicated to flip-flops and sandals. The trendiest styles and hottest colors are stacked floor to ceiling.

Goldfinger

Harbour Point Village, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-4661

<http://www.jewelrygoldfinger.com>

The island's only authorized Rolex dealer has two stores with elegant and elegantly displayed exclusive jewelry, more than a dozen brands of prestigious watches, perfumes and a few high-quality crystal pieces from Baccarat, as well and S.I. Dupont smokers accessories. There is a second location at St. Rose Arcade (phone 542-6200).

Guavaberry Emporium

8-10 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-2965

<http://www.guavaberry.com>

Located at the eastern end of Front Street in a wonderful old gingerbread building. Tasting the natural "Island Folk Liqueur," locally made from rum, cane sugar and wild guavaberries from the hills, is encouraged. The shop also carries a great line of hot sauces, jams, vinegars, barbecue sauces, and logo souvenirs and clothing. For history buffs, this is also the site of the island's first synagogue.

Le Grand Marche

79 Bush Road
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 544-4144

<http://www.legrandmarche.net>

This gourmet's bonanza stocks an amazing variety from fresh seafood and spices to fine wine, meat, cheeses, produce, kosher products, duty-free liquors and liqueurs, and house-made pastries. There is an additional, slightly smaller location at 53 Union Road in Cole Bay (phone 544-3118), and two much smaller locations at 46 Airport Road in Simpson Bay (phone 545-3055) and Porto Cupecoy (phone 546-4888).

Little Europe

80 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-4371

<http://www.littleeurope.com>

A stellar reputation since 1976 for loose diamonds, beautiful designs and hard-to-find brands such as Fendi sunglasses, Aaron Basha charms, Judith Ripka and Stefan Hafner bling, and Hublot and Piaget watches. Their unique VIP Guest Executive Host Service provides a wine bar, chauffeur pick-up or valet parking for a private showing appointment, as well as a special gift. There is a second location at 2 Front St., Philipsburg (phone 542-3153).

Little Switzerland

52 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-3530. Toll-free 800-524-2010

<http://www.littleswitzerland.com>

The Caribbean's leading retailer for more than 50 years. This shop has a wide selection of 14- and 18-karat gold, precious and semiprecious stones, and diamond jewelry. It also sells china, crystal, collectibles, accessories and fine Swiss watches, including the expensive Breitling brand that is worn by many airline pilots. There are other locations at Harbour Point Village (phone 543-7785) and Westin Hotel (phone 543-6451).

New Amsterdam

66 Front St., Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

This large shop near the Old Courthouse sells almost everything, from designer shoes to fine china and linens on three spacious floors.

Rima Beach World

44 Pondfill Road, Philipsburg
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-1424

<http://www.rimabeachworld.com>

All those caps, wraps, bags, shirts, dresses, handicrafts and jewelry you've seen vendors hawking, plus many more, are cheaper in this bright yellow, air-conditioned emporium.

Monday-Saturday 9:30 am- 6 pm.

Dining

Dining Overview

The island's French side—Grand Case, in particular—garners more accolades from visiting epicures, but the Dutch side has come up fast with its share of restaurants that shouldn't be overlooked. Restaurant fare on the Dutch side tends to be somewhat more eclectic and decidedly more gentle on the pocketbook than what you'll find on the French side. If you're looking to eat cheap, the usual fast-food joints are represented on the island.

Do sample some of the local specialties and some of the best barbecue ribs and chicken legs anywhere. Seafood, with an emphasis on snapper and lobster, is usually fresh and can be served spicy. You might find a Dutch dish or two on menus, and the large East Indian population assures plenty of curries.

St. Maarten does not have an official national dish, but calaloo, conch, dumplings and Johnny cakes could easily qualify. Guavaberry liqueur (a blend of rum and a native berry that grows in the hills) has been made on the island for nearly 200 years. Most bars and restaurants serve an assortment of drinks concocted with it. A favorite is the guavaberry colada—a blend of cream of coconut, pineapple juice and guavaberry liqueur. Ask for it on ice.

Expect to pay within these guidelines for a meal for one person, not including drinks, tax or tip: \$ = less than US\$15; \$\$ = US\$16-\$25; \$\$\$ = US\$26-\$50; and \$\$\$\$ = more than US\$50.

Local & Regional

Beau Beau's

Oyster Bay Beach Resort, Dawn Beach
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 543-6040

<http://www.oysterbaybeachresort.com/the-resort/beau-beaus>

Multi-time winner of St. Maarten's Calypso crown, King Beau Beau and his wife offer laid-back dining by the sea with a view of St. Barths, island music, authentic recipes and real Caribbean-style cabaret.

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Turtle Pier

114 Airport Road
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 545-2562

<http://www.turtlepier.com>

Across the street from the airport, this lively hangout suspended over Simpson Bay lagoon is a good spot for a last-minute bite before checking in for the flight home. Shrimp flambeed with rum is one good choice from the regular menu. We recommend one of the special evenings: There's a Bacardi dinner show on

Tuesday; Wednesday's Lobster Feast features live music and lobsters fresh from the tank; and Sunday boasts all-you-can-eat chicken and ribs.

Daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner. \$\$-\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Seafood

Captain Oliver's

Oyster Pond Marina
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 520-7889

<http://www.captainolivers.com>

Built over the water and straddling the French-Dutch border, seafood is king there, but you'll also find some interesting French and Creole accents. The seafood buffet (it includes lobster on Saturday) and Sunday brunch are always worth the trip, even if you're not staying in the area.

\$\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Chesterfield's

Dock Maarten, Pointe Blanche
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 542-3484

<http://www.chesterfields-restaurant.com>

A perennial lunchtime favorite with the best view of boat and dock activity from the front tables. The fresh calamari, conch, lobster, scallops, shrimp and fish cooked in myriad ways are always popular, but so are the duck with a pineapple-banana sauce and—of course—burgers, salads, wraps and sandwiches. Yachties, visitors and locals alike gather for big breakfasts, and the Marine Bar has a very happy happy hour.

Daily for lunch and dinner. \$-\$\$. Most major credit cards.

Skip Jacks

Welfare Road, Simpson Bay
St Maarten, St Martin/St Maarten

Phone: 544-2313

<http://www.skipjacks-sxm.com>

A restaurant with its own on-site fish market must be counted on for the freshest of seafood, and that's what awaits you at this nautically decorated, casual lagoonside eatery. All kinds of fish for sure, but there's also plenty to please carnivores and vegetarians.

Daily for lunch and dinner until 8 pm. Happy hour specials 4-6 pm. \$\$. Most major credit cards.

Security

Personal Safety

Crime has seen somewhat of an upturn in the past few years. By taking similar precautions to those you would at home, the Friendly Island should present no problems. Don't take unauthorized cabs, hitchhike or pick up hitchhikers. Be aware that the drive through the Lowlands on the island's west coast can make tourists a target; the road is poorly lit in some stretches and not frequently patrolled by police. Be sure to stay on the well-traveled roads through Cole and Simpson Bays, and don't walk alone at night through these areas or on beaches. In Philipsburg, purse snatchers have been known to cut bag straps as they speed by pedestrians on motor scooters.

Car break-ins are on the rise. Don't leave valuables in your car, even if locked, especially at beaches. Some rental companies advise that you take everything out, leave the doors unlocked and windows slightly ajar to prevent damage to the vehicle by would-be thieves. If possible, avoid rental cars with an "R" license plate—they're a dead giveaway that you're a tourist. If you must leave something in the car, lock it in the trunk and make sure you're not spotted as you do it.

Health

The biggest health risk in St. Maarten is the sun. Wear a lightweight hat and remember to use sunscreen. It is safe to eat the food and drink the purified tap water. You may prefer to drink bottled water for the taste—it's widely available.

You may have a rainy day June-November. The mosquitoes that then emerge are your next risk. It's wise to protect yourself from bites; some mosquitoes carry the dengue fever virus. Often mistaken for flu by nontropical doctors, dengue can be debilitating for weeks. Mosquito Milk, available in most markets, souvenir shops and pharmacies is an excellent protection product. Cover up on the beach at sunset when no-see-ums come out in full force.

If hiking, avoid encounters with paper-wasp nests.

The manchineel tree, found primarily on beaches, may tempt you to shelter from a rain shower or to sample the little green fruits, which resemble apples. Don't do it. The tree is so poisonous that even raindrops falling from the leaves have been known to cause bad blistering.

The St. Maarten Medical Centre at 6R Welegen Road in Cay Hill has 24-hour emergency service, though complicated or severe cases will most likely require subsequent airlift. Phone 543-1111. <http://sintmaartenmedicalcenter.com>.

For an ambulance, dial 542-2111 or 912. The police emergency number is 911, or you can dial 542-2222 in Philipsburg; 545-5500 in Simpson Bay. The doctor-on-call service can also be reached at 543-1111.

Pharmacies are bountiful in major towns, less so in outlying districts. The pharmacies in Maho and Simpson Bay have exceptionally helpful pharmacists on duty who will sometimes refill prescriptions if you have your U.S. prescription or pill bottle with prescription information.

In the event of a diving emergency, the Diver's Alert Network (DAN) will provide treatment advice and, if necessary, arrange for evacuation (phone 919-684-9111, which connects to DAN's headquarters in the U.S. and accepts collect calls). DAN also answers health-related questions about diving. For more

information, contact DAN at 919-684-2948 or toll-free 800-446-2671 in the U.S. and Canada.
<http://www.diversalernetnetwork.org>.

For the latest information, contact your country's health-advisory agency.

Disabled Advisory

Access for the disabled is spotty. Many restaurants and hotels are not handicapped-accessible, though there are exceptions. Shops in Philipsburg are generally at ground level, but some have a step or two to climb in order to enter. The Carousel Gelateria in Simpson Bay has wheelchair access to its fantastical merry-go-round.

Facts

Geostats

Passport/Visa Requirements: All U.S. citizens must have a passport when traveling by air to or from Bermuda, Canada, the Caribbean, Central and South America and Mexico. Citizens of Canada, Mexico and the British Overseas Territory of Bermuda also must have a passport or other designated secure document to enter the U.S.

Passports are required for land crossings at the Canadian and Mexican borders with the U.S. and for cruise passengers returning to the U.S. from Mexico, the Caribbean, Canada or Bermuda. Reconfirm travel-document requirements with your carrier prior to departure.

Population: 51,830.

Languages: Dutch.

Predominant Religions: Christian (Roman Catholic, Protestant).

Time Zone: 4 hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (-4 GMT). Daylight Saving Time is not observed.

Voltage Requirements: 110 volts.

Telephone Codes: 721, country code;

Money

Currency Exchange

Following the dissolution of the Netherlands Antilles, St. Maarten's official currency was to change to something called the Caribbean guilder. It hasn't happened yet, but there is still talk that it might. The Netherlands Antilles guilder, also called Florin, is still the official currency. The U.S. dollar is also widely accepted.

Scotia Bank has branches in Philipsburg and Simpson Bay with ATMs, and also offers currency exchange services. Banks are generally open Monday-Friday 8 or 8:30 am-3:30 pm, Saturday 9 am-noon. Some hotels offer currency exchange but check the rates, as they could be higher than at the bank.

Change points (easier to find on the French side) offer good rates. Avoid using euros on the Dutch side; merchants often want to swap them one for one to the U.S. dollar, which is not a good deal. Be aware that American Express and Discover cards are not accepted everywhere. MasterCard and Visa are more widely accepted.

ATMs dispensing U.S. dollars are common on the Dutch side. Windward Islands Bank (WIB) has the most ATMs on the island. The American Express office is at S.E.L. Maduro & Sons at the end of Front Street at 1 Emmaplein.

Taxes

There is no sales tax in St. Maarten. Hotels add a 10%-15% service charge and a 5% government tax to the bill.

A US\$30 departure tax is charged at the airport when leaving the region for international destinations (US\$10 for Saba and Statia), although this is generally included in the ticket price. For departures via ferry, you'll pay US\$2.50.

Tipping

In restaurants, check your bill to see whether a 15% service charge is included. If not, it's a good amount to tip. If it's included in your total, you may still choose to leave a little something extra for good service. (Your server doesn't receive the whole service charge; it is split amongst the staff.)

For taxi drivers, a 10% tip should suffice for a short run; more is expected for long drives, including tours. For hotel staff, consult the hotel's in-room information packet, which may spell out what they consider proper to leave the housekeepers. Otherwise, leave US\$1-\$2 per day, preferably not all at once at the end of your stay, because different people may have cleaned your room, especially in larger hotels. Tip 15%-20% at spas. Airport porters should receive US\$1-\$2 per bag, depending on size and weight.

Communication

Telephone

Pay phones are available, but they may drive you crazy with complicated rules for area codes and supposed special deals on international calls. Depending on which kind you find, they may accept coins, phone cards or credit cards.

You can make international calls from a Telem office or any phone with a long-distance direct-service number. Prepaid phone cards are available at various shops around the island and at Telem offices. Toll-free numbers do not work from there; you will be charged the normal international rate.

Cell phone coverage is widespread and accommodates many providers. Roaming rates depend on your provider; check with yours before leaving. Local providers are TelEm, and United Telecommunications Services (UTS-Chippie). Get a local SIM card if you plan to make lots of local calls. Voice-over-Internet phone service (VOIP) is also available.

To place a call from the Dutch side of the island to the French side, dial 00-590, then 590 a second time or 690 if it is a cell number, plus the six-digit number. When calling from the French side of the island to the Dutch side, dial 00-721, plus the five-digit number. Calling from one side of the island to the other side is expensive.

For directory assistance, dial 9299. For weather information, dial 123.

Internet Access

Philipsburg has free Wi-Fi in the downtown business district, including the Boardwalk and the Front Street shopping area. Anyone with a Wi-Fi-enabled device can use it.

There are also many Internet cafes on both sides of the island—there's one in almost every strip of shops. Connections in most districts are ADSL, although Wi-Fi predominates in the north of the island and the Terre Basse area. Prices can be as low as US\$1 for 15 minutes but are often higher. Some hotels have Wi-Fi or free Internet-accessible computers available to patrons.

Mail & Package Services

Mail service is reputed to be reliable and speedy. The main post office is on Walter Nisbeth Road. Monday-Thursday 7:30 am-5 pm, Friday 7:30 am-4:30 pm. Phone 542-2289.

The Mailbox is a one-stop shop for faxing documents or mailing letters and packages to the U.S., which they fly to their U.S. office, then put on U.S. postage to continue to their destination. La Palapa Marina, Simpson Bay, St. Maarten. Phone 545-3890.

FedEx, UPS and DHL are available for those who take no chances.

Newspapers & Magazines

Published in Philipsburg, the English-language *Daily Herald* is the main daily newspaper in St. Maarten. <http://www.thedailyherald.com>.

Tourist-oriented magazines—with event, restaurant, and attraction guides and listings—include the weekly *K-Pasa* (<http://www.k-pasa.com>), *Experience St. Maarten* (<http://www.experiencestmaarten.com>), *St. Maarten Events* and *Nights* magazine (<http://www.nightspublications.com>), which covers both sides of the island.

The arts are covered in the monthly *Soualig'Art*. Savvy visitors in search of more cultural authenticity should also check with the French side's Art and Cultural Service at Town Hall. Phone 511-905.

Local radio station Island 92 (91.9 FM) is great for music and local news, including events happening around the island. You can also listen to this station online at home before arrival. <http://www.island92.com>.