

# Riskline / Destination Report

This document was generated on 22 December 2023



# PUERTO RICO

## Overall risk level

<b>Low</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Moderate</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Medium</b> Exercise caution	<b>High</b> Reconsider travel	<b>Extreme</b> Defer non-essential travel
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The Overall Risk Level will be determined by the higher of the Security Risk Level and Covid-19 Risk Level.

## Security risk level

<b>Low</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Moderate</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Medium</b> Exercise caution	<b>High</b> Reconsider travel	<b>Extreme</b> Defer non-essential travel
Safe, with few security risks	Generally safe, with some predictable security risks	Not completely safe, but typically presents predictable security risks	Can be dangerous and may present unexpected security risks	Extremely dangerous and presents unpredictable security risks
Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays	Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays	Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions	Travel is possible, but there is a potential for disruptions	Chaotic; travel impossible

## Covid-19 risk level

<b>Low</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Moderate</b> Take normal safety precautions	<b>Medium</b> Exercise caution	<b>High</b> Reconsider travel	<b>Extreme</b> Defer non-essential travel
Travellers should take normal precautions when travelling to <b>Low Risk</b> locations, which have limited or no restrictions on international travel and domestic activities.	Travellers should take normal precautions when travelling to <b>Moderate Risk</b> locations, which have few restrictions on international travel and limited or no restrictions on domestic activities.	Unvaccinated travellers should exercise caution when travelling to <b>Medium Risk</b> locations, and vaccinated travellers should take normal precautions. These locations may have some restrictions on international travel, but few restrictions on domestic activities.	Unvaccinated travellers should reconsider their need to travel to <b>High Risk</b> locations, and vaccinated travellers should exercise caution. These locations may have severely restricted international travel and partially restricted domestic activities.	Unvaccinated travellers should defer non-essential travel to <b>Extreme Risk</b> locations, and vaccinated travellers should reconsider their travel. These locations may have severely restricted international travel and domestic activities.

# Overview

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## Upcoming Events

There are no upcoming events scheduled

# Travel Advisories

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## ● Moderate risk: Outbreak of mosquito-borne viruses in the Americas

Mosquito-borne virus cases have seen a steep upward trend in the Americas in 2023, and are expected to rise further amid increasing temperatures. Take measures to prevent mosquito bites and ensure vaccine coverage and medication before departure.

Several mosquito-borne viruses (Chikungunya, dengue, malaria, yellow fever, Zika) are endemic to tropical and subtropical regions of **Central** and **South America**, the **Caribbean**, **Mexico** and the **United States**, and appear in both rural and urban areas, most often during the rainy season, which varies from country to country.

Climate change, deforestation and urbanisation are some of the factors behind the increasing number of outbreaks of mosquito-borne viruses. Mosquitoes thrive under increased precipitation and higher temperatures; outbreaks have increased even in areas of dry weather. Following a two to seven year cycle, El Niño weather phenomenon is developing since June, further increasing the risk of higher temperatures across the region and above-normal rainfall with an increased risk of flooding on the **West Coast** of the **United States**, **Peru** and **Ecuador**.

Dengue accounts for the largest number of cases in the Americas region, with epidemics occurring every three to five years. In **South America**, dengue is moving further south to countries such as **Bolivia**, **Peru** and **Paraguay**, with over 2.8 million cases reported in 2022 compared to 1.2 million a year earlier. Since January 2023, over 4.1 million cases have been reported of which over 1.8 million have been confirmed in the Americas, with higher-than-usual numbers of dengue cases reported including in **Argentina**, **Bolivia**, **Brazil**, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Cuba**, the **Dominican Republic**, **Guadeloupe**, **Guatemala**, **Martinique**, **Nicaragua**, **Panama**, **Paraguay** and **Peru**. Authorities in **Costa Rica**, **Bolivia** and **Jamaica** have issued emergency alerts due to the situation as of September.

Confirmed cases of chikungunya in the region have also increased from 50,000 in 2022 to over 230,000 in 2023, with an expansion observed beyond historical areas of transmission. **Paraguay** and **Brazil** reported the highest infection rates.

Reported cases of Zika virus have remained in a lower level than in 2022, with **Brazil, Bolivia** and **Belize** reporting the highest share of the over 3,200 confirmed cases. While malaria has been nearly or completely eradicated in many countries in the Americas, the region remains vulnerable to outbreaks. **Costa Rica** has reported an ongoing outbreaks of malaria in **Limón, Alajuela** and **Puntarenas provinces**, with over 515 cases reported since April. The impact of the increased transmission will depend on several factors, including country capacities for a coordinated public health response, high mosquito densities due to interrupted vector control activities during the COVID-19 pandemic and the susceptibility to infections, particularly in areas where these viruses are newly circulating.

In 2022, cases of both dengue and chikungunya peaked in May in the southern hemisphere. Transmission rates are expected continue high in the coming months, due to weather conditions favourable for the proliferation of mosquitoes. Such an increase may be followed by a high transmission season in the northern hemisphere, given the susceptible populations and increasing temperatures.

## Symptoms and Treatment

Each of these viruses when contracted present their own list of symptoms and require varied treatment plans, whether preventative or reactive.

Viral infections transmitted by the bite of the **Aedes** mosquito include chikungunya, dengue fever, yellow fever and Zika virus. The most common virus transmitted by the bite of the *Anopheles* mosquito is malaria. Both insects are most active during early morning and late afternoon hours, though some species are nocturnal making preventative measures like repellents and mosquitos nets an important strategy.

Cases of Zika virus are usually mild and include symptoms of fever, headaches, conjunctivitis, rash and joint and muscle pain; most cases are asymptomatic. Zika virus may also be transmitted through sexual contact with an infected person and has been linked to microcephaly in unborn children. There is no treatment for Zika virus, beyond rehydration and bed rest.

Initial symptoms of yellow fever include a high fever, chills, vomiting, nausea and backaches/muscle pain, with a risk of potentially fatal complications, including jaundice, severe haemorrhaging and kidney failure. There is no post-infection treatment for yellow fever, making vaccination against the disease imperative prior to travel.

Symptoms of dengue fever include a high fever, joint pain and headaches, although severe cases may cause significant falls in blood pressure and/or haemorrhaging, which can be fatal. There are no treatments for dengue fever though vaccine research is ongoing.

Symptoms of chikungunya fever include a high fever, joint pain and headaches; the disease is typically non-fatal. In most cases those infected recover after seven to ten days. There are no vaccines or treatments for chikungunya.

Symptoms of malaria include a high fever, joint pain, anaemia, chills and headaches; if left untreated, symptoms can become life-threatening. While pre-departure courses of anti-malarial prophylactics are available, these do not guarantee immunity to malaria. If contracted and caught early, malaria can be treated easily with a range of anti-malarial medications.

Travellers are advised to take measures to prevent mosquito bites such as wearing long sleeves and pants, applying insect repellent to exposed skin and clothing, using a bed net when sleeping in a room that is not screened or air-conditioned. Travellers should ensure they are up-to-date on vaccines before departure, consult medical professionals about use of prophylactics, take precaution with selection of sexual partners and ensure use of protection.

# Summary

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## Overall ● Moderate Risk

Puerto Rico is a **Moderate Risk** destination: take normal safety precautions.

## Security ● Moderate Risk

Moderate Risk locations are generally safe, with some predictable security risks. Travel is possible with an expectation of routine disruptions and delays.

## Covid ● Low Risk

An ongoing surge in infection levels followed the easing of preventative measures, with cases decreasing since early August 2022. International arrivals are no longer required to show proof of vaccination for entry.

## Political Instability ● Moderate Risk

The territory's massive debt has led the United States (US) Congress to impose a federal control board with wide powers to oversee the island's finances. Furthermore, despite over half of voters having repeatedly chosen the island to become a US state, the US Congress is unlikely to move on it. Pedro Pierluisi of the ruling NPP was elected as governor in the 2020 election. The economic crisis together with limited sovereign control over its policies will continue to undermine Puerto Rico's political stability.

## Conflict ● Low Risk

The island is not involved in any international conflicts and faces no external threats at this time. The national defence is the responsibility of the US. Internal security is delegated to the paramilitary National Guard and Police Force.

## Terrorism ● Moderate Risk

Domestic terror threats related to local pro-independence groups are present, with US military and government sites on the island targeted in the past. Although there is some evidence to suggest the island has been used as a safe haven by international terrorist organisations due to proximity to the US, the threat of terror attack remains low.

## Unrest ● Moderate Risk

Protests over sovereignty and economic issues are common. Most protests remain peaceful and localised.

## Crime ● Moderate Risk

Although crime is not a major concern, it is on the rise, particularly in **San Juan, Ponce** and other urban centres. Most violent crime is related to the drug trade and gang activity, but it is rare for such violence to affect foreigners. Travellers are most likely to be affected by petty crime, ATM scams and vehicle theft. The police face challenges regarding efficiency, training and equipment shortages as well as a lack of public support due to corruption.

## Natural and Environmental ● Medium Risk

Hurricanes which usually occur from June to November can pose serious risk to travellers in the country, with large rain storms also known to cut off road systems, trigger landslides in hilly areas and lead to major power outages. Situated in an active seismic zone, the territory is also occasionally prone to earthquakes and tsunamis. The country's infrastructure is not capable of withstanding major natural calamities and disasters.

## Local Travel ● Moderate Risk

Travel is generally safe throughout Puerto Rico. Urban roads are well-maintained, but roads outside populated areas can be rough and winding, especially through the mountain regions. Vehicle rental services are readily available but vehicle theft is a serious problem in urban hubs. Buses are considered a safe and inexpensive means of transport, while tourist or public taxis offer a flat rate and provide a safer driving experience than hailing an unlicensed taxi on the street. Police checkpoints may cause travel delays around urban centres during weekends.

## Health and Medical ● Low Risk

Puerto Rico has one of the best healthcare systems in the Caribbean, with high quality medical care available in the capital **San Juan** and across the island. Health standards are generally on par with the United States (US). However, medical costs can be expensive without appropriate private health insurance.

# Political Overview : ● Moderate Risk

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Puerto Rico is a Commonwealth of the United States with a constitution fashioned after the United States (US) model. The democratic system in Puerto Rico is based on a formal republican system with executive, legislative and judicial branches. The US President is considered the head of state but local affairs are administered by a popularly elected governor who serves a four-year term. Puerto Ricans elect a non-voting delegate to the US Congress; however, they cannot vote in US presidential elections.

Different stances to the country's sovereignty largely shape the political landscape. The Popular Democratic Party (PPD) favours the island's current commonwealth status, the New Progressive Party (NPP) supports the integration of Puerto Rico as the US's 51st state and the Puerto Rican Independence Party (PIP) supports full independence. The low likelihood of the US Congress actually acting on repeated referenda showing majority support for statehood undercuts any real impacts of the vote. After Puerto Rico's economic situation dramatically worsened in 2016, the US Congress approved the creation of a federal control board to supervise the restructuring of Puerto Rico's debt; the territorial government exited bankruptcy in 2022. The federal board held the authority to veto new laws and control the country's finances, triggering widespread protests during its operating period. Meanwhile, an estimated 500,000 residents have left the island in the last decade due to lack of job opportunities and the devastating impact of Hurricane Maria in 2017, which crippled the territory's energy infrastructure.

After former governor Rosselló was ousted by massive protests following corruption and text-message scandals in 2019, the NPP's Wanda Vázquez Garced completed his term through 2020. NPP's Pedro Pierluisi won the gubernatorial election in 2020 with a thin margin, 32.9 percent, compared to PDP's Carlos Delgado Altieri with 31.6 percent. In a major blow to the NPP and the PDP, Dignity Project (PD) and Citizen Victory Movement (MVC) – new political parties grown from the 2019 protest movement – broke into the legislature with several members. Pierluisi has vowed to fight corruption and expedite the distribution of billions of dollars assigned by the US Congress to help the island rebuild after Hurricane Maria. He has also maintained austerity measures called for by the federal control board. The fallout of the long-running debt crisis together with limited sovereign control over its policies will continue to dominate Puerto Rican politics for the foreseeable future.

There are no recent incidents

## Conflict : ● Low Risk

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**Border Conflicts:** The island is not involved in any international conflicts and faces no external threats at this time. Largely driven by economic reasons, illegal immigration from the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Haiti has been rising in recent years. Many immigrants from Caribbean countries who cross the **Mona Passage** to Puerto Rico every year have remained in the island permanently rather than continuing their transit onto the continental US. Both countries are aware of the issue but there seems to be little political will on either side to quickly resolve it. The problem does not appear to be a source of instability, despite frequent reports of prejudice and racism by immigrants.

**Strength of Military Forces:** There is no regular standing military in Puerto Rico. Internal security is delegated to the paramilitary National Guard and Police Force. As a Commonwealth of the US, defence is the responsibility of the US military. A significant number of Puerto Ricans sign up for US military service as a source of employment.

# Terrorism

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**Domestic Terrorism:** The pro-independence Boricua Popular Army has historically carried out numerous bombings and shootings targeting US military and government facilities but there have been no attacks claimed by the group since the death of its founder during a 2005 FBI raid.

**International Terrorism:** Puerto Rico's proximity to the US and its political status make the country a potential haven for international terrorists. Regardless, the threat of terror attack remains low.

## There are no recent incidents

## Unrest : ● Moderate Risk

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**Protests and Demonstrations:** Issue-specific protests occur from time to time in Puerto Rico, including around election times, where there tends to be some tension between groups supporting independence and the status quo. The debt crisis leading to cuts and layoffs in the public sector has been one of the most common protest triggers. Frustrations over inadequate disaster response, high unemployment and graft scandals all remain possible in the near-term. While most protests remain peaceful and localised, scattered clashes with security forces are not unheard of and may occur sporadically.

**Strikes:** Strikes or walkouts are a common tactic used by disgruntled workers seeking higher wages and better working conditions, among other issues. General strikes are known to occur, but they are not common. These may cause severe disruptions to public services.

## Recent incidents

18 November 2023 - 19 November 2023

- **Moderate risk: World Wide Freedom rally planned in San Juan on 18 November**

Local media indicated that World Wide Freedom activists will rally at Plaza de la Democracia in San Juan from 13:00 local time (17:00 GMT) on 18 November for human rights and freedom.

17 October 2023 - 18 October 2023

- **Moderate risk: Pro-Palestine activists to rally in San Juan**

Activists plan to rally outside the United States Federal Court for the District of Puerto Rico (140 Avenida Carlos E. Chardón) in San Juan from 16:00 local time (20:00 GMT), in solidarity with Palestinians amid clashes and rocket fire between Israeli forces and Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

16 October 2023 - 17 October 2023

- **Moderate risk: Unionised healthcare workers to rally in San Juan on 16 October**

Triple-S Salud workers represented by the General Union of Workers plan to rally outside the company's office (1441 Avenida F.D. Roosevelt) in San Juan from 11:30 local time (15:30 GMT) on 16 October, to demand that the company comply with an agreement reached with the workers.

# Crime : ● Moderate Risk

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**Petty Crime:** Petty crime, such as pickpocketing and purse snatching, is widespread, particularly in **San Juan, Ponce** and other urban centres. Although the rate of vehicle break-ins, theft and carjacking has decreased in recent years, it still remains a problem, particularly in **San Juan**. Credit card and ATM scams are also common.

Beware of your surroundings, do not leave your belongings unattended and exercise general personal safety for travel. Only carry what is needed, do not flash expensive valuables or large sums of money, and keep cash, identification and mobile phones in front pockets, or in a zipped or concealed pocket or pouch rather than in a bag. Secure belongings when using public transport or when frequenting markets and other crowded public areas; secure bags diagonally across the body against the chest, keep bags within sight and away from the street. Refrain from using mobile phones or laptops in congested public places; avoid putting bags containing valuables on the ground. Avoid walking in poorly lit and isolated areas. Stay in groups. Reject rides or drinks from strangers and never leave drinks unattended. Exercise extreme caution when purchasing and consuming alcohol in public venues. Do not accept pamphlets in the street or shopping centres; these could be impregnated with potent and disorienting drugs, which permeate the skin. If you start to feel unwell, tell staff or close friends and do not leave the venue alone or with strangers. Shout to attract attention, if needed.

**Violent Crime:** Cases of violent crime, including murder, rape, robbery and aggravated assault, occur but have been decreasing in recent years. The majority of violent crime is committed by youths involved in gang activity and drug-trafficking, and occurs in **Caguas, Carolina, Bayamón, Gurabo, Ponce** and **San Juan**. **Ñeta** is the largest and most violent gang in the country. Prison gangs are commonly involved in drug trafficking, money laundering, extortion, murder and public corruption. Incidents of mugging have been reported on beaches after sunset, including in the capital.. It is rare for gang activity and violent crime to affect foreigners.

Commonsense measures are best kept to ensure against becoming the victim of a violent crime. Travellers are advised to remain vigilant at all times and exercise general personal safety for travel: avoid walking alone at night, do not venture down roads with poor lighting and few access points. Be careful when using taxis and public transport and plot route bypasses around rowdy crowds. Seek local advice for areas to avoid. If you are held-up by an armed robber do not become confrontational as any

resistive behaviour may cause more violence by the attackers.

**Vehicle Crime:** Rates of vehicle theft and break-ins are higher in urban centres than rural locales.

**Break-ins:** Expensive-looking vehicles, especially 4x4s, or vehicles with visible valuables are commonly targeted. Visitors should park cars in well-lit areas, preferably in private parking lots with security and ensure that all valuables, including vehicle's papers/insurance, are removed from the vehicle. Lock car doors at all times and make sure windows are rolled up. If renting a vehicle, ensure that it is fitted with a secure car alarm.

**Theft:** A common tactic for confrontational theft is for thieves to smash a car window or pull open passenger doors when cars are stopped at traffic lights, before stealing items such as bags, GPS, radios, phones or wallets. Motorists may also be signalled to stop by the occupants of another car pointing at their tyre and indicating a problem. Alternatively thieves may force victims out of their vehicle at knife or gunpoint in order to steal the vehicle. Avoid driving at night and exercise caution when stopped at traffic lights or in tunnels. Never stop at the indication of another driver. If you are being followed, drive to the nearest police station or public area. Stop at the nearest town or service station if you think you may have a genuine problem with your vehicle.

**Carjacking:** Avoid leaving or returning to your place of work or residence at the same time every day. Vehicles equipped with a coded key or a key fob tend to be increasingly targeted as they make it easier to hijack with jamming devices. Hijackers also tend to stage breakdowns, flagging victims for assistance. Two cars are often used to box the victim in and force them to stop. Leave a safe distance between yourself and the car in front of you at traffic stops, limiting speed as much as possible to avoid stopping in order to keep the vehicle moving and gain time before the light turns green. Hijackers are often armed and extremely willing to use deadly force so resistance is discouraged. Stay calm and move slowly and exit your vehicle avoiding eye contact with the assailants. Keep your hands in clear sight at all times.

**Kidnapping:** Although isolated cases have occurred, there is no serious risk of kidnapping targeting foreigners in Puerto Rico. Between 2014 and 2021, only 19 abductions were reported in the territory. Response of law enforcement officials, in the event of a kidnapping, is likely to be poor, as security forces face challenges regarding efficiency, lack of training and equipment shortages.

Travellers should remain aware of their surroundings and follow the latest advisories

for their destination. Maintain communications and your itinerary with local contacts, authorities or embassy staff, especially in locations with a higher risk of kidnapping. Consider a local guide or security escort for the highest risk locations.

## Recent incidents

06 February 2023 - 07 February 2023

- **Medium risk: Stabbing attack targets foreign travellers in Old San Juan**

Local media reported that at least three United States (US) nationals were injured in a stabbing attack near the intersection of San Sebastián and Mercado streets and on Norzagaray street in Old San Juan, at around 04:11 local time (08:11 GMT), when an unidentified assailant attacked the travellers after telling them to stop filming and leave the La Perla neighbourhood. There were no reports of arrests.

15 January 2023 - 16 January 2023

- **Medium risk: Deadly shootout erupts between maritime border agents and smugglers off northeast coast**

At least two suspected smugglers were killed in a shootout with United States (US) Customs and Border Protection Maritime Operations agents at an undisclosed location off the northeast coast of the island, early on 15 January. Four other suspected smugglers were arrested with large quantities of drugs following the shootout; no agents were wounded.

# Law

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## Overview

The Puerto Rican commercial and civil codes are based upon the Spanish system. Penal, procedural, public and constitutional laws are all based on US models. Puerto Rico has its own Supreme Court which has jurisdiction within the Puerto Rican constitution. There is also a US Federal District Court with jurisdiction in Puerto Rico. Due to its close association with the US court system, tendencies for corruption within the Puerto Rican court system are very low.

# Corruption

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**Corruption:** Although corruption in Puerto Rico's government sector is not common, the island's leaders are not immune from corruption scandals. Foreign travellers to Puerto Rico are unlikely to be affected by any form of corruption. Residents and businesses are not likely to be affected by most forms of corruption.

# Security Services

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**Security Services:** The Puerto Rico Police Department (Policía de Puerto Rico) is the territorial police force for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, which has jurisdiction anywhere in the territory. Today, the police force, some 11,500 officers strong, suffers from a lack of public support and recent cases of corruption have further deteriorated perceptions. The police continue to face long-standing challenges regarding efficiency, lack of training and equipment shortages. Clearance rates for crimes are low and the hierarchical command structure impedes effectiveness. Police cars are easy to spot, as by local regulation, they must keep their blue light bar continuously illuminated any time they are in motion.

# Natural Risks : ● Medium Risk

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Hurricanes which usually occur from June to November can pose serious risk to travellers in the country, with large rain storms also known to cut off road systems, trigger landslides in hilly areas and lead to major power outages. Situated in an active seismic zone, the territory is also occasionally prone to earthquakes and tsunamis. The country's infrastructure is not capable of withstanding major natural calamities and disasters.

## Hurricanes/Typhoons/Tropical Cyclones

A cyclone/typhoon/hurricane is essentially a large mass of air that spirals around a low-pressure centre. It is an organised collection of thunderstorms embedded in a swirling mass of air. This mass of air is called a cyclone if it forms in the Indian or South Pacific oceans, a typhoon if formed in the West Pacific Ocean and a hurricane if formed in the East Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Cyclones/typhoons/hurricanes normally bring gale-force winds, heavy rainfall and high tides, with the potential of causing significant or destructive damage and widespread travel disruptions.

Hurricanes and tropical cyclones can be fatal and cause widespread damage in the country. In September 2017, Category 5 Hurricane Maria caused catastrophic damage to the island and claimed the lives of some 2,975 people, despite efficient advanced warning systems. The territory was declared a federal disaster zone shortly after the passing of the storm, which also destroyed the island's power grid and cut off roads for prolonged periods. More recently, Hurricane Fiona triggered an islandwide power outage and widespread flooding across the territory in September 2022.

Follow local radio or television broadcasts for information and evacuation instructions. If not under an area with mandatory evacuation orders, remain indoors. Locate and secure important documentation, including passports, photo identification, travel permits and any indispensable personal effects. Be advised that the calm 'eye' is deceptive and should by no means be interpreted as a sign that the storm has passed. The second winds are likely to be worse and may destroy trees and buildings damaged in the first pass. If caught in a region hit by a cyclone/typhoon/hurricane, remain indoors until the storm passes. If there is a need to move to an evacuation centre, evacuate in a calm manner and ensure you carry important personal identification.

Avoid all low-lying coastal areas due to storm surges. Confirm the viability of overland travel routes due to the risk of flooding. Air and sea travel are also likely to be impacted. Anticipate disruptions to power, communications and other essential services.

## **Landslides/Mudslides**

Sometimes referred to as debris flows, mudflows, lahars or debris avalanches, landslides/mudslides are a form of mass soil movement that tends to flow in channels in a surge of water-saturated rock, earth and debris, typically following heavy rainfall.

Landslides and mudflows can occur following periods of heavy rainfall in hilly areas with loose soil. Areas prone to landslides and mudflows include **Lares, San Sebastian, Las Marias, Anasco, Maricao, Mayaguez, Rincon** and **Yauco municipalities**. The country has a good landslide warning system, but landslides and mudflows can occasionally block main roads for several days and hinder rescue operations, especially remote hilly terrains.

Follow local news updates in landslide prone areas for warnings about intense storms and rainfall. If landslide or debris flow danger is imminent, quickly move away from the path of the slide. Seek shelter on the nearest high ground in a direction away from the path. If rocks and debris are approaching, run for the nearest shelter and take cover (if possible, under a desk, table or other piece of sturdy furniture that can provide you with air space if the building collapses). Anticipate disruptions to overland travel in areas affected by landslides. Confirm the viability of intended overland travel routes before departure and remain alert for landslide warning signs including cracks in the soil or the faint rumbling sound of an approaching landslide or debris flow.

## **Earthquakes**

An earthquake is the sudden, rapid shaking of the earth, caused by the breaking and shifting of subterranean rock as it releases strain that has accumulated over a long period. Initial mild shaking may worsen and become extremely violent within a matter of seconds. Additional earthquakes, called aftershocks, may follow the initial earthquake.

Puerto Rico is located on the line between the North American and Caribbean tectonic plates, which generated a series of faults around and across the island. Hence, strong tremors can occur in all areas of the island, with the southwestern region being the most vulnerable. Shallow earthquakes have the potential to cause widespread damage and fatalities in the country as most areas including the capital **San Juan** have weak infrastructure. In 2020, strong 6.5- and 5.8-magnitude earthquakes near **Talabo** prompted an island-wide state of emergency and triggered a nationwide blackout, disruptions to water and telecommunication services and damaged infrastructure, including in **Guánica, Yauco** and **Ponce**.

When shaking begins, drop to the ground and take cover under, and hold on to, a sturdy piece of furniture, such as a heavy desk or table that can provide you with air space if the building collapses. If you're not near a strong piece of furniture, crouch down and protect your head and face in an inner corner of a building; only stand in a doorway if you know it is strongly supported. Stay away from windows or glass panels. Most deaths and injuries in an earthquake are caused by collapsing building materials and heavy falling objects. Stay indoors until the tremors stop and you are sure it is safe to exit. Avoid all areas in the vicinity of outer walls and doorways, as these are most prone to falling debris. In a high-rise building, the electricity may go out and the sprinkler systems may come on. Do not use the elevators. If the lights go out, avoid using candles, matches or lighters during or after the earthquake; if there is a gas leak, an explosion could result. If outdoors, move to an open space away from buildings, electric poles and street lights which are prone to collapse. Do not travel on roads and bridges which may have been damaged by the earthquake. Be prepared for secondary earth movements that follow the initial earthquake; some of these may be large enough to cause additional damage or bring down weakened structures.

## **Tsunami**

Tsunamis are commonly generated by an earthquake-induced movement of the ocean floor. A strong earthquake lasting 20 seconds or more near the coast is likely to generate a tsunami and imminent coastal impact, possibly before warnings can be issued. However, all offshore or coastal earthquakes carry the potential of generating tsunamis. Warning signs of a tsunami include a sudden rise and fall in coastal sea levels.

Shallow and strong earthquakes in the Caribbean Sea and North Atlantic Ocean can potentially cause tsunami waves in coastal areas of Puerto Rico. However, the territory has not been affected by hazardous tsunamis in recent years. Tsunami warnings are issued by the US Tsunami Warning Centre and the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre.

In areas at risk of tsunamis, know the height of your street above sea level and the distance of your street from the coast or other at-risk waters. Areas which are less than 7.5 metres (25 feet) above sea level and/or within 1.5 kilometres (one mile) of the coastline are perceived to be the most at risk. Evacuation orders may be based on these numbers. Immediately move inland or to higher ground in the event of a tsunami alert/warning; stay away from the beach. In the absence of an official warning, if you are on the coast and feel an earthquake, or if there is a noticeable recession in water away from the shoreline this is a natural warning of a possible tsunami and should be heeded; move away immediately. Remain out of the tsunami hazard zone until local officials advise otherwise.

## Recent incidents

09 November 2023 - 10 November 2023

- **Moderate risk: Weather officials issue flash flood warning in parts of San Juan metropolitan area**

National Weather Service officials issued a flash flood warning in Bayamón, Cataño, Guaynabo and Toa Baja, San Juan metropolitan area, until at least 05:30 local time (09:30 GMT), due to strong thunderstorms.

27 October 2023 - 28 October 2023

- **Moderate risk: Flash flooding warning issued in San Juan metropolitan area**

Meteorological authorities issued a flash flood warning for Carolina, Loiza, San Juan and Trujillo Alto through 15:30 local time (19:30 GMT), due to heavy rainfall.

# Health and Medical: ● Low Risk

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## Overview

Puerto Rico has one of the best healthcare systems in the Caribbean, with high quality medical care available in the capital **San Juan** and across the island. Health standards are generally on par with the United States (US). However, medical costs can be expensive without appropriate private health insurance.

## Before you travel

Consult your doctor or a healthcare provider who specialises in travel medicine at least six weeks before your departure. If you have a medical condition, you should also share your travel plans with your doctor.

## Outbreaks and Other Diseases

### Malaria

There is no risk of malaria transmission.

### Yellow Fever

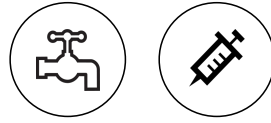
There is no risk of Yellow Fever infection.

## Vaccinations, Medicines and Documentation

**Note:** Requirements and recommendations for vaccines and other medicines as well

as Yellow Fever vaccine are based on guidelines from the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Yellow Book 2024. All other entry requirements are based on Riskline research.

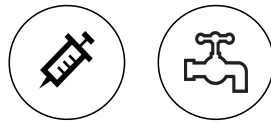
## Routine vaccines



Make sure you are up-to-date on all routine vaccines before every trip. Some of these vaccines include

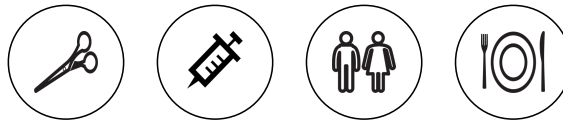
- Chickenpox (Varicella)
- Diphtheria-Tetanus-Pertussis
- Flu (influenza)
- Measles-Mumps-Rubella (MMR)
- Polio
- Shingles

## COVID-19



All eligible travellers should be up to date with their COVID-19 vaccines.

## Hepatitis A



Recommended for unvaccinated travellers one year old or older going to Puerto Rico.

Infants 6 to 11 months old should also be vaccinated against Hepatitis A. The dose does not count toward the routine 2-dose series.

Travellers allergic to a vaccine component or who are younger than 6 months should receive a single dose of immune globulin, which provides effective protection for up to 2 months depending on dosage given.

Unvaccinated travellers who are over 40 years old, immunocompromised, or have chronic medical conditions planning to depart to a risk area in less than 2 weeks should get the initial dose of vaccine and at the same appointment receive immune globulin.

## Hepatitis B



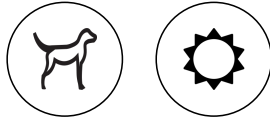
Recommended for unvaccinated travellers of all ages traveling to Puerto Rico.

## Measles



Infants 6 to 11 months old traveling internationally should get 1 dose of measles-mumps-rubella (MMR) vaccine before travel. This dose does not count as part of the routine childhood vaccination series.

## Rabies



Puerto Rico is free of dog rabies. However, rabies may still be present in wildlife species, particularly bats. CDC recommends rabies vaccination before travel only for people working directly with wildlife. These people may include veterinarians, animal handlers, field biologists, or laboratory workers working with specimens from mammalian species.

## Typhoid



Recommended for most travellers, especially those staying with friends or relatives or visiting smaller cities or rural areas.

## Required documentation

### Yellow Fever entry requirement (Source: USA CDC):

None

### Other entry requirements:

None

**Note:** Documentation requirements are subject to change. Consult your destination embassy or consulate prior to departure for confirmation.

## While you are there

### Emergency services

The country has an extensive and free public ambulance service with adequately trained and equipped staff. However, response times can be erratic. Several private hospitals in the capital also have their own ambulance service, and these are generally more efficient.

## Evacuation

It is very unlikely medical evacuation would be required for injury or illness.

## Routine care

Health practices and standards are similar to the US and most doctors have had some sort of training or experience in the US. Physicians are likely to be approachable and willing to answer questions. English proficiency among healthcare professionals is high, especially in **San Juan**. While medical facilities in more rural areas can be more limited, quality of care is still good.

## Medicine

High quality prescription drugs are widely available, and over-the-counter medicines are readily available in stand-alone pharmacies as well as at supermarkets and corner shops. While travellers are unlikely to experience any difficulties in entering the country with their own prescription medicine, it is advisable that all prescription drugs are kept in their original container noting the patient's name.

## Payment

Up-front or cash payments may be required prior to treatment, even for individuals with medical insurance. Whenever possible, check with medical providers for payment requirements prior to treatment.

## Ailments

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### Chikungunya Fever



Though there have been no major outbreaks since 2014, the mosquito-borne disease is now consistently present in the country.

*Chikungunya fever is a viral infection, transmitted via mosquito bite. Generally non-fatal, the symptoms of Chikungunya fever include a high fever, joint pain and headaches. In most cases those infected recover after seven to ten days. There are no vaccines or treatments for chikungunya.*

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## Ciguatera



Considered endemic to Puerto Rico, it is estimated that seven percent of the population has experience ciguatera poisoning in their lifetime. Ciguatera is the most frequently reported foodborne illness associated with a natural poison.

*Ciguatera is a marine toxin transmitted by the consumption of infected fish, particularly those that live or feed near reefs. Symptoms include vomiting, nausea and a reversal of the infected person's perception of hot and cold. While not fatal, symptoms may last for a number of years; there is no treatment for ciguatera.*

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## Dengue Fever



The mosquito-born viral disease is considered endemic to the country, with periodic outbreaks. In non-outbreak years, between 500-1,000 cases are reported annually on average. Dengue fever is present throughout most areas in the country below 1,200 metres (3,937 feet) elevation.

*Dengue fever is a viral infection, transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and is commonly found in urban areas. Symptoms include a high fever, joint pain and headaches, although severe cases may cause significant falls in blood pressure and/or haemorrhaging, which can be fatal. There are no vaccines or treatments for dengue fever.*

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## Hepatitis (A, B, C, D and E)



*Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. The three main variations (A, B and C) are caused by infections from parasites, bacteria or viruses, but are transmitted by different means.*

## HIV/AIDS



*Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a retrovirus that induces Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) and is transmitted through contact with the blood, sexual and rectal fluids of an infected person, usually via sexual intercourse. AIDS weakens the body's immune system, making the body susceptible to numerous other diseases and ailments. There is no cure for AIDS or HIV.*

## Schistosomiasis



*Schistosomiasis (also known as bilharzia or katayama fever) is a parasitic infection, transmitted through contact with infected water sources, usually freshwater lakes or rivers. Saltwater and chlorinated pools are not affected by schistosomiasis. Symptoms include a rash, fever, muscle pain, abdominal pain and the enlargement of the spleen and/or liver. The disease can be treated via the administration of praziquantel. If left untreated, schistosomiasis can cause serious chronic gastrointestinal or central nervous system diseases.*

## Traveller's diarrhoea (TD)



*Traveller's diarrhoea (TD) is a catch-all term for a number of minor or moderate bacterial, viral and parasitic infections, generally transmitted through infected food or water. In the majority of cases antibiotics or anti-diarrhoeal medication is unnecessary; travellers experiencing TD should ensure that they remain hydrated and well rested until their symptoms dissipate. Most cases of TD last less than three days; if diarrhoea continues for longer periods, travellers should consider consulting a medical professional.*

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## Zika Virus



The government declared an end to the Zika epidemic in 2017, after a consistent drop in the number of new cases to minimal levels. However, there remains an ongoing risk of contracting the disease in the country.

Zika virus is a viral infection transmitted by the bite of the Aedes mosquito, which is most active during early morning and late afternoon hours and commonly found in urban areas, as well as through sexual contact with an infected person. Most cases of Zika virus are asymptomatic; where symptoms occur they are usually mild and include fever, headaches, conjunctivitis, rash and joint and muscle pain. Zika has been linked to microcephaly in unborn children. There is no treatment for Zika virus, beyond rehydration and bed rest.

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## Leptospirosis



In 2022, a total of 944 cases of leptospirosis, including 14 fatalities, were reported across the territory. Cases tend to increase in the aftermath hurricanes and tropical storms.

*Leptospirosis is a bacterial infection transmitted through contact with (or consumption of) soil, water or food contaminated by infected animal urine. Symptoms can occur in two phases: first stage symptoms include fever, diarrhoea,*

*vomiting, jaundice, headaches and muscle and stomach aches; second stage – also known as Weil's disease – symptoms are more severe and may include meningitis and kidney or liver failure. Leptospirosis can be treated with a course of antibiotics.*

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## Recent incidents

12 May 2023 - 13 May 2023

### ● **Moderate risk: Officials lift COVID-19 vaccine requirement for inbound air travellers - Update**

Updated reports indicated that non-citizen and non-resident inbound air travellers will no longer be required to provide vaccination proof for COVID-19 for entry into Puerto Rico, in line with the expiration of the COVID-19-related public health emergency in the United States (US) and the end of relative COVID-19 entry rules on 11 May.

# Covid-19: ● Low Risk

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## Summary

An ongoing surge in infection levels followed the easing of preventative measures, with cases decreasing since early August 2022. International arrivals are no longer required to show proof of vaccination for entry.

**What is the current nationwide Policy?:** Open

**Policy starts:** 10 March 2022

**Policy ends:** indef

**Policy explanation:**

**Policy source:** -

**Last update:** 10 November 2023

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## Infection

**Infection Level:** Low

**Infection rate:** 0.0 cases per 100k in the last 14 days

**As of date:** 09 November 2023

**Hotspots:** -

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## International Travel

### International Flights

**Is there a ban on international commercial flights?** No

**Through what date?** indef

### **Flight Ban Explanation:**

Inbound flights to Puerto Rico will land at **San Juan Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (SJU/ TJSJ)**. **Rafael Hernández International Airport (BQN/JBQ)** in **Aguadilla** and **Mercedita International Airport (PSE/TJPS)** in **Ponce** have also reopened.

**Last Update:** 07 December 2023

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## **Entry and Borders**

**Is there a ban on entry for any travellers?** No

**Through what date?** indef

### **Travellers from where are banned?**

**Land border:**

**Maritime border:** Open

### **Entry Rules Explanation:**

Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States. On 12 May, the United States immigration rules and COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Air travellers arriving to Puerto Rico no longer need to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19.

Ferry and cruise services have resumed. Additional health protocols and inspections by Centres for Disease Control personnel remain in place.

**Entry Rules:** <https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/puerto-rico>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>

**Last Update:**

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## Testing

**Do travellers need to take a COVID-19 test** No

**When?**

**Is it mandatory or optional?**

**Test Type:**

**Minimum age requirement:**

**Pre-travel test validity, in hours:**

**After arrival test days:**

**Testing Explanation:**

**Testing Rules:** -

**Last Update:** 07 December 2023

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## Health and Travel Documentations

**Do arriving travellers need any health and/or travel documentation?** No

**Documentation Explanation:**

**Last Update:** 10 November 2023

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## Tracing App

**Do travellers need to use a contact tracing app after arriving?** No

### Tracing App Explanation:

There is no mandatory national contact tracing app at this time.

**Last Update:** 10 November 2023

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## Quarantine on Arrival

**Who needs to quarantine on arrival** Some travellers

**Travellers from where need to quarantine?**

**How many days is quarantine?** 2

**Is it self-quarantine or operated by the government?** Self

### Quarantine Explanation:

Travellers are not generally required to quarantine upon arrival. Those who test positive on the island may be subject to quarantine requirements depending on severity of symptoms and vaccination status.

**Quarantine Rules:** <https://travelsafe.pr.gov/>

**Last Update:** 2023-12-07

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## Exit

**Is there a ban on exit for any travellers?** No

**Are there special requirements to exit?** No

## Exit Requirements Explanation:

There are no special requirements to exit the country.

### Exit Requirements

(URL): -

Last Update: 07 December 2023

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## Vaccination

**Percent vaccinated with at least one dose:** 101.56 as of 02 Jun 2023

**Percent fully vaccinated:** -

**Is vaccination mandatory for entry?** No

**Fully vaccinated are exempt from:** -

**Minimum age for vaccine requirements for travel:**

**Exemptions for vaccine requirements for travel:**

**"Fully vaccinated" is defined by the destination as:**

**Accepted vaccines, validity and special age restrictions:**

**Is mixing of vaccine doses authorised?** N/A

**Are specific combinations of mixed doses required?**

**"Boosted" is defined by the destination as:**

**Accepted boosters:**

**"Recently recovered" is defined by the destination as:**

Recovery status is valid from days until after .

**Vaccination certificates accepted:**

**Vaccination certificates accepted in the following languages:**

**Recent recovery document required:**

**Recent recovery document accepted in the following languages:**

### Explanation:

On 12 May, US authorities lifted vaccination requirements for international air travellers.

**Sources:** <https://travel.gc.ca/destinations/puerto-rico>  
<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/travelers/international-travel-during-covid19.html>

**Last change to vaccination policy:** 11 May 2023

**Last Update:** 10 November 2023

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## Other International Travel Restrictions

**Exit Requirements Explanation:**

**Last Update:**

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## Domestic Situation

### Areas on Lockdown

**Last Update:**

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### Areas under Curfew

**Last Update:**

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## Domestic Travel

### **Domestic Travel Explanation:**

Public transport in the San Juan metro area has resumed.

Travellers on domestic flights are no longer required to present proof of vaccination or a negative COVID-19 test prior to arrival, regardless of vaccination status.

**Last Update:** 10 November 2023

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## Other Domestic Restrictions

**Last Update:** 10 November 2023

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## Resources

**Government COVID Site:** <https://www.salud.gov.pr/CMS/142>

**Health Dept COVID Site:** <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/puerto-rico>

**There are no recent incidents**



# Local Travel : ● Moderate Risk

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## Travel Safety

**Air Travel: San Juan Luís Muñoz Marín International Airport (SJU/ TJSJ)** is Puerto Rico's main arrival and departure center. It can be expected to be equivalent to any medium sized US airport with an added crush during peak tourist season.

There are smaller airlines with local service and companies that offer charter services. Both the main international airport as well as the **Fernando L Rivas Dominicci Airport (SIG/TJIG)**, located on **Isla Grande** near **Miramar** and **San Juan**, offer domestic flights. **Aguadilla, Fajardo, Mayaguez**, and **Ponce** are all served by **Luís Muñoz Marín International Airport**, while flights to **Vieques** and **Culebra** depart from **Dominicci Airport**. A departure tax which may or may not be included in the price of your ticket.

**Airspace:** Inbound flights to Puerto Rico will land at **San Juan Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport (SJU/ TJSJ)**. **Rafael Hernández International Airport (BQN/ JBQ)** in **Aguadilla** and **Mercedita International Airport (PSE/ TJPS)** in **Ponce** have also reopened.

**Borders and Entry:** Puerto Rico is a territory of the United States. On 12 May, the United States immigration rules and COVID-19 restrictions were lifted. Air travellers arriving to Puerto Rico no longer need to show proof of vaccination against COVID-19.

Ferry and cruise services have resumed. Additional health protocols and inspections by Centres for Disease Control personnel remain in place.

**Exit:** There are no special requirements to exit the country.

**Road Travel:** Driving rules are the same as they are in the United States; traffic moves on the right. Roads in urban areas are kept in good condition but roads outside of populated areas can be rough and winding, especially through the mountain regions. However, rarely will you find roads hazardous or impassable.

Driving procedures and road signs are similar to those in the US, with the exception is the stop sign. Rather than stop, the red, six-sided figure contains the Spanish word 'pare'. Although speed limits are still in miles per hour, road markers are posted in kilometres. Speeding ticket incurs in fines that start at USD50 plus USD5 for each mile above the speed limit. Speed limits are usually 105kph (65 mph) on highways, 40kph

(25 mph) in urban areas, and 72kph (45 mph) in rural areas. Those caught speeding in specially demarcated school zones will pay a fine of USD250. Seatbelts are mandatory, and those who violate this law can be fined USD50. Speeding ticket incurs in fines that start at USD50 plus USD5 for each mile above the speed limit.

In and around **San Juan** and other large cities, traffic is extremely crowded and hectic. Car theft is a serious problem in heavily populated areas. The use of any security devices provided by your rental car company is strongly recommended. Police regularly set up checkpoints and close off several roads during weekends to carry out vehicle or document inspections and monitor for driving under influence. The measure usually affects areas around urban centres

**Rail Travel:** A light rail line (Tren Urbano) connects three municipalities (**San Juan**, **Guaynabo** and **Bayamón**). There is a free trolley that loops around **Old San Juan**.

## Public Transport

**Ferries and Boats:** On the eastern end of Puerto Rico, the town of **Fajardo** runs ferries to both **Culebra** and **Vieques**. Outbound ferries leave several times a day. Arrival time should be one hour prior to departure. Both trips taking about an hour and a half. Car ferries are also available from **Fajardo-Vieques** and **Fajardo-Culebra**.

There is also a seasonal high-speed ferry which runs from **Old San Juan** to **Vieques** to **Culebra** between December and the end of April.

**Buses:** Buses, although not comparable to American or European standards, are considered safe and an inexpensive means of transport. Public cars, a cross between taxis and buses locally known as 'publicos', are a unique choice for getting around the island. Publicos are less expensive than taxis. They are also a great way to intermingle with locals. Publicos tend to make frequent stops, so they are not the most time-efficient mode of transport.

A network including regular buses and metrobuses operates throughout the **San Juan metro area**, including **Toa Baja**, **Cataño**, **Bayamón**, **Guaynabo**, **San Juan** and **Carolina**.

**Taxis:** Black and white taxis are tourist taxis and will take visitors at a flat rate from the airport to many of **San Juan's** tourist destinations, including hotels. Taxis, called publicos, have a P or a PD on their license plates and are share-taxis. Drivers will take passengers to specific destinations for a flat rate. Negotiate a price with the driver before boarding. Also, the 'linea' service will take passengers between specific points

in **San Juan** and between **San Juan** and other urban centres for a flat rate. Taxi drivers will expect a 10-15 percent tip.

**Vehicle Hire:** Rental companies are located in **San Juan Airport** as well as offices around **San Juan**. A valid driver's license from a country with similar driving laws (US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the UK) is accepted in Puerto Rico for up to 90 days, or three months. Visitors from other parts of the world should contact their national embassy in Puerto Rico for the most accurate and up-to-date information.

## There are no recent incidents

# Destination Hotspots

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**Cities, Towns, Villages:** Public housing complexes known as caseríos and shantytowns like **La Perla** in **San Juan** are prevalent. These are frequently the location of illegal activity and violent crime. If it is necessary to enter into these areas, do not take pictures or film the locals without permission. Avoid drawing attention to yourself.

Outside the **Old San Juan city walls** and **Santurce** are places to be cautious. Brawls and violent confrontations are common in **Santurce** and **Old San Juan** nightclubs. Muggings are frequently reported on **Isla Verde** and **Condado beaches** in **San Juan**.

# Safety

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## Emergency Numbers

Emergencies	911	
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**Corruption:** Although corruption in Puerto Rico's government sector is not common, the island's leaders are not immune from corruption scandals. Foreign travellers to Puerto Rico are unlikely to be affected by any form of corruption. Residents and businesses are not likely to be affected by most forms of corruption.

**Customs:** Black markets have proliferated in the island in recent years. Hundreds of people have been arrested for intellectual-property violations and several criminal organisations that distributed counterfeit merchandise dismantled.

**Drugs and Alcohol:** Puerto Rico's drinking age is 18. It is considered illegal to drive with a blood alcohol level over 0.08 percent. Some cities do have specific rules about drinking in public. Except during major festivals, it is illegal to drink in the streets of **Old San Juan**, although it is legal in most other cities. It is also illegal to drink out of a bottle on the street in many cities but bars will pour beer into a plastic cup. Narcotics such as marijuana, heroin and cocaine are illegal in Puerto Rico; this prohibition is strictly enforced. If carrying prescription drugs while travelling, visitors should carry a copy of the prescription.

Drug offenses are heavily penalised. Any substance which is illegal under US law will also likely be illegal in Puerto Rico. Drunken driving can also be expected to be handled in a similar fashion to US standards.

**Food and Drink:** Tap water is considered safe to drink, but bottled water is best to avoid an upset stomach. Milk is pasteurised and dairy products are safe for consumption. Local meat, poultry, seafood, fruit, and vegetables are considered generally safe to eat.

**Import and Export:** Since Puerto Rico is a commonwealth of the US, travelling to the island is not any different than inter-state travel in the US. An agricultural inspection to look for plants and products that are prohibited entry into the US is regular practice. Local customs also regulate the entrance of alcohol and cigarettes into the island; duty-free products up to what is considered reasonable, or for personal use;

prescription drugs, as well as firearms, which can enter the country only with a special permit.

**Security Services:** The Puerto Rico Police Department (Policía de Puerto Rico) is the territorial police force for the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, which has jurisdiction anywhere in the territory. Today, the police force, some 11,500 officers strong, suffers from a lack of public support and recent cases of corruption have further deteriorated perceptions. The police continue to face long-standing challenges regarding efficiency, lack of training and equipment shortages. Clearance rates for crimes are low and the hierarchical command structure impedes effectiveness. Police cars are easy to spot, as by local regulation, they must keep their blue light bar continuously illuminated any time they are in motion.

**Weapons:** It is illegal for all but a few thousand people licensed by Puerto Rico police to possess weapons. Smuggling of firearms from Florida is a particular problem and those caught with weapons on the island can face heavy fines and jail time.

# Culture

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**Cultural Sensitivities:** Government-sanctioned forms of gambling such as lotteries, horseracing and cock-fighting are legal in Puerto Rico. Cock-fighting has a long tradition and strong cultural significance to islanders. There are some issues with Taíno indigenous rights in Puerto Rico but tensions have not led to violence. The independence question is often the subject of heated debate but violence in connection with the issue is rare.

**Religious Sensitivities:** A majority of Puerto Ricans are Catholic and tend to be conservative outside major urban areas.

# Specific Traveller Advice

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## Female Travellers

**Local Customs and Laws:** There are no local customs or laws that a female traveller should take into consideration in Puerto Rico. Familiarise yourself with your destination prior to travel, and be respectful and mindful of any possible cultural sensitivities, which may include dress, behaviour and topics of discussions.

**Safety:** There are some safety concerns female travellers should take into consideration in Puerto Rico. Sexual assault and rape do occur; however, visitors to Puerto Rico are not likely to face an additional risk as most perpetrators of assault are known to their victim. Female travellers may, however, receive unwanted attention from men, ranging from open displays of catcalling and staring to physical groping, including at day time. It is best to ignore these advances or confrontations and walk away. In the event that harassment escalates, draw attention to what is happening and locals will likely come to your aid. Exercise personal safety awareness if walking alone at night, especially in beach areas. Stick to main, well-lit streets and avoid walking through desolate areas or unfamiliar neighbourhoods, including crime hotspots **La Perla** and **Puerta de Tierra neighbourhoods** in **Old San Juan**. Use only official and registered taxis or reputed radio cabs due to the persisting risk of assault by taxi drivers on women. Some cities may have women-only taxis, operated by a female driver; consider using these companies, especially if travelling at night. Female travellers should exercise caution when reporting crimes to local police as there have been reports of law enforcement undermining incidents of harassment and assault. Consider consulting your home consulate/embassy for legal advice and ensure you receive a copy of the police report.

**Health and Wellness:** Women have access to a full range of specialised gynaecological and reproductive health services, medicines and products in Puerto Rico, especially in urban areas. These include specialised clinics and abortion services, emergency contraceptives without prescription, prescription contraceptives and a full range of feminine hygiene products that are available in **San Juan, Bayamón** and **Carolina** and to some extent in rural areas. Consider bringing an adequate supply of female-specific OTC drugs, feminine hygiene products and oral contraceptive pills, which may not be available locally. Consult a health professional prior to travel, especially if pregnant or planning to become pregnant, due to a potential risk of Zika virus.

## LGBT+

Homosexuality is legal in Puerto Rico. There are many legal protections for LGBT+ persons in the country, including anti-discrimination laws, laws concerning gender identity or expression and adoption by same-sex couples. Same-sex marriage is legal. LGBT+ activity and persons are somewhat socially accepted. Puerto Rico is considered to be one of the most gay-friendly island of all the islands in the Caribbean. Large LGBT communities and active social scenes can be found in **San Juan** and **Ponce**. While most LGBT+ travellers are unlikely to face any difficulties or legal issues for travel, social conservatism is more prevalent across the country as evidenced by a double homicide of transgendered women in **Humacao** in 2020. Travellers may prefer to be discreet about sexual orientation and avoid excessive public displays of affection in areas where attitudes towards the LGBT+ community are unknown or generally not accepted. Transgender travellers may wish to consider having their passport and identification changed to reflect new gender before travelling. Exercise general safety precautions.

## Technology & Communication Risk

Travellers are unlikely to face risks related to information and communication technology (ICT) in Puerto Rico.

Internet access and social media have no restrictions. There are some concerns related to device searches or sensitive technology. Device searches and inspections at the border are possible; United States (US) Customs and Border Protection (CBP) are authorised to access travellers' electronic devices at ports of entry at agents' discretion without a warrant. There are no restrictions in relation to bringing or operating sensitive equipment, which may include photo cameras, satellite phones, drones, and other GPS systems, in the country. State or criminal penetration of private data is unlikely. Authorities implement minimal state surveillance of ICT networks in the country.

Travellers should exercise basic ICT safety precautions. However, travellers should note that ICT laws and practices are subject to change on short notice, and travellers are recommended to confirm the legality/appropriateness of their specific ICT needs prior to departure.

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