

# Puerto Rico Trip Planning Checklist

*Printable Guide for First-Time Visitors*

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## PRE-TRIP TIMELINE

### 8 Weeks Before Departure

- Book flights to SJU airport — Target Tuesday/Wednesday departures for 15-25% lower fares
- Reserve accommodation — Paradores for authentic stays (\$90-200/night) or San Juan hotels for convenience
- Purchase travel insurance — Must cover weather disruptions, medical evacuation, and activity coverage
- Check passport/ID validity — U.S. citizens: government-issued photo ID sufficient; international: passport required

### 4-6 Weeks Before Departure

- Book El Yunque timed entry (if required) — Check [fs.usda.gov/elyunque](https://fs.usda.gov/elyunque) for current reservation policy
- Reserve ferry tickets — Ceiba ↔ Vieques/Culebra via [puertoricoferry.com](https://puertoricoferry.com) OR book Cuatro Tours for priority access
- Book inter-island flights (alternative to ferry) — Vieques/Culebra via Vieques Air Link or Cape Air (\$100-150 round-trip)
- Schedule key tours — Bioluminescent bay (electric kayak), rum distillery, cooking class — book direct with operators

### 2 Weeks Before Departure

- Download offline maps — Google Maps: download Puerto Rico, Vieques, Culebra regions
- Install translation app — Google Translate (download Spanish offline pack)
- Order eSIM or confirm roaming — Claro PR, Airalo, or Holafly (\$12-18/week); test before departure
- Notify bank of travel dates — Prevent card freezes; confirm no foreign transaction fees

### 48 Hours Before Arrival

- Check weather forecast — Monitor [NOAA NHC](#) during hurricane season (Jun-Nov)
  - Confirm ferry/tour reservations — Screenshot confirmations; save operator phone numbers
  - Pack reef-safe sunscreen — Required by law; fines up to \$500 for non-compliant products
  - Print emergency contacts — See bottom of checklist
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## **PACKING LIST: PUERTO RICO SPECIFIC**

### **Clothing (Tropical Climate)**

- Lightweight, breathable fabrics (linen, cotton, moisture-wicking)
- Light rain jacket or poncho — afternoon showers common, especially north coast
- Water shoes — essential for waterfall hikes, rocky beaches, bioluminescent bay kayaking
- Modest attire for churches — shoulders/knees covered for Cathedral of San Juan Bautista
- One "nice casual" outfit — for fine dining in Condado or sunset rooftop bars

### **Gear & Electronics**

- Reef-safe sunscreen (mineral-based, oxybenzone-free) — legally required on all beaches
- Insect repellent with DEET or picaridin — for rainforest and evening outdoor activities
- Portable power bank (10,000+ mAh) — cell service drops in mountains/offshore islands
- Waterproof phone case or dry bag — for boat tours, waterfall visits, beach days
- Universal travel adapter — Puerto Rico uses U.S. outlets (Type A/B), 120V

### **Documents & Money**

- Government-issued ID (U.S. citizens) or passport (international)
- Printed/digital copies of: ferry tickets, tour confirmations, hotel reservations
- Credit card with no foreign transaction fees + \$20-50 cash small bills for vendors
- Health insurance card + policy number; note: U.S. Medicare/Medicaid not accepted in PR

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## FERRY VS. FLIGHT DECISION TREE: VIEQUES/CULEBRA

Rule of thumb: Ferry for budget travelers with flexible schedules; flight for time-sensitive itineraries or rough-sea seasons.

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## FIRST-WEEK ITINERARY TEMPLATE

### Days 1-2: San Juan Historic Core

- Morning: Castillo San Felipe del Morro (\$10 entry, allow 90 mins)
- Afternoon: Calle del Cristo shopping + Cathedral of San Juan Bautista (free)
- Evening: Sunset at La Vergüenza rooftop; dinner at El Jibarito for mofongo
- Optional: Bomba/plena performance at La Factoría or Nuyorican Café

### Days 3-4: El Yunque + Bioluminescent Bay

- Morning: Arrive at El Yunque before 10 AM; hike La Mina Falls (2.4 miles round-trip)
- Afternoon: Lunch in Fajardo; rest before evening tour
- Evening: Bioluminescent bay kayaking (book electric kayak operator; avoid full moon dates)

### Days 5-7: Offshore Island (Vieques OR Culebra)

- Morning: Ferry/flight to island; check into guesthouse or Parador
- Afternoon: Beach time (Flamenco Beach on Culebra; Sun Bay on Vieques)
- Evening: Local dinner at family comedor; stargazing (minimal light pollution)
- Buffer day: Use for weather delays, spontaneous exploration, or rest

*Customize:* Swap days based on ferry schedules, energy levels, and weather.

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## BUDGET TRACKER: LOCAL PRICE BENCHMARKS

Category	Budget	Mid-Range	Luxury	Notes
Accommodation/night	\$75-120	\$150-250	\$300+	Paradores offer best

				value for authenticity
Meals/day	\$25-40	\$50-85	\$120+	Lunch menú del día (\$8-12) = best value
Local transport/day	\$5-15	\$20-40	\$60+	Uber/Lyft in San Juan; rental car only for island exploration
Tours & activities	\$0-30	\$45-90	\$120+	Free: hiking, beaches; Paid: bioluminescent tours, rum distillery
Ferry/inter-island	\$4.50	\$150	\$200+	Ferry = budget; flight = time-saving premium

Daily total estimates: Budget \$110 | Mid-range \$243 | Luxury \$506+ per person  
*Track your spending:* Write actual amounts next to benchmarks; adjust remaining days accordingly.

## **SOS** EMERGENCY CONTACTS & SPANISH CHEAT SHEET

### Critical Numbers




- Emergency (police/ambulance/fire): 911 (English-speaking operators available)
- Poison Control: 1-800-222-1222 (U.S. system; works in Puerto Rico)
- U.S. Embassy/Consular Services: +1-787-729-6000 (San Juan)
- Tourist Assistance: 1-866-777-2026 (Discover Puerto Rico visitor support)

### Spanish Phrases That Earn Smiles

English	Spanish	Pronunciation

Good morning	Buenos días	BWEH-nos DEE-ahs
Thank you	Gracias	GRAH-see-ahs
Please	Por favor	por fah-VOR
How much?	¿Cuánto cuesta?	KWAHN-toh KWEH-stah
I need help	Necesito ayuda	neh-seh-SEE-toh ah-YOO-dah
Where is...?	¿Dónde está...?	DON-deh es-TAH
Bathroom	Baño	BAH-nyo
Delicious	¡Delicioso!	deh-lee-see-OH-soh

## Health & Safety Notes

- Tap water is generally safe in San Juan; use bottled water in rural areas/offshore islands
- Mosquito-borne illnesses (dengue, Zika) are rare but possible — use repellent dawn/dusk
- Beach warning flags:  = safe,  = caution,  = dangerous currents — always heed local signage

## FINAL PRE-DEPARTURE CHECK

- All reservations confirmed and saved offline
- Packing list complete; reef-safe sunscreen included
- Emergency contacts printed + saved in phone
- Bank notified; cash small bills prepared
- Weather checked; flexible buffer day scheduled
- Mental note: Slow down, say "buenos días", eat where locals eat

*You're ready. Now go experience Puerto Rico — not just see it.*