



Puerto Rico: A Vacation Paradise

photos Margarita Hutchison

BY MARGARITA HUTCHISON

If you live in beautiful Vermont or its neighboring states, you may not want to leave, but perhaps this article will inspire you to consider taking at least a brief respite from the ice and cold to visit sunny Puerto Rico. Our focus for this visit will be on some of the vacation highlights travelers will find in the northeastern coastal region from San Juan to Fajardo: El Yunque, the only rainforest in the US Forest System; the beaches; sailing; snorkeling; and a little about the culture and night-life that abound here.

Puerto Rico, with its mostly Spanish-speaking population of 4 million, is about the size of Rhode Island, and is located in the northeastern Caribbean, 1,000 miles southeast of Miami. Direct flights from Boston, New York, and Hartford whisk travelers to San Juan

ly feel the tropical breezes that bring temperatures remaining a steady 80 degrees year-round, except in the mountain areas, where it is cooler, especially at night.

Your eyes are immediately taken by the colors: lush greens, vividly colored buildings, glorious azure sky, and animated people. Within minutes, travelers can sunbathe on a white sandy beach or swim in the warm waters of the Caribbean sea.

World-famous Luquillo Beach is only a half hour drive from the airport. As you approach the beach, you will see one of Puerto Rico's cultural highlights: a row of approximately 70 kiosks, or little shack-style snack bars and casual restaurants which offer pina colodas, made fresh with local coconut and pineapple juices, as well as one of the numerous Puerto Rican rums. Foods available here include an assortment of empanadillas, arepas, and other Criollo (Puerto Rican) foods; you can even partake of a huge swordfish steak dinner for under \$15. Luquillo Beach, a former coconut plantation, stretches for miles of

uninterrupted walking, jogging, swimming, or just plain lying under a beach umbrella listening to gentle waves lapping on the shore.

Another beach, Seven Seas, just outside Fajardo, offers unspoiled beauty in a tropical paradise. Surfers love "La Pared," a beach area boasting waves



Villas Margarita

that draw surfers from around the world.

A short ride from the beach in the direction of El Yunque, the Caribbean National Forest, will take you to another time and place, eons ago. You will see philodendron leaves the size of houses, and Impatiens – the lovely little flower Vermonters use for borders and hanging planters – growing to the size of trees.

Driving or hiking in this rainforest preserve of nearly 30,000 acres is like going back to prehistoric times; ferns

and vines grow everywhere, and the deep scent of the lush forest will fill your lungs with pure oxygen, as your imagination anticipates the arrival of a dinosaur just beyond the next tree. There are easy, moderate, and strenuous walks and hikes, with or without guides, most of which pass several huge waterfalls. The views to the sea and from the mountaintop are spectacular, and the waterfalls are unforgettable. You can play in them, enjoy a natural waterfall's hydro massage, or just sit on

Web sites for more information

www.rainforestsafari.com

www.islandwalkers.com

escape.topuertorico.com

www.villasmaragarita.com

International Airport within 3.5 to 4 hours. Fares usually start at \$225; since it is a commonwealth of the United States, no passports are required, so travel to this enchanted island truly is a breeze.

Upon arrival at the modern, partially open-air airport, passengers immediate-

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