

VIEQUES insider

CONNECTING VISITORS TO VIEQUES

ESSENTIAL VIEQUES BEACH GUIDE

YOUR
GUIDE TO
SEA,
SAND
&
SUN

20
AMAZING
VQS
BEACHES



TABLE OF CONTENTS

PG. 6	GETTING HERE
PG.7	GETTING AROUND + INSIDER TIPS
PG. 8-9	WELCOME TO VIEQUES
PG. 10-11	MAP OF BEACHES
PG. 12-13	FLORA
PG. 14-15	LINKS FOR MORE INFORMATION
PG. 16-17	SUNBAY
PG. 18	MEDIA LUNA
PG. 19	NAVIO
PG. 20	PLAYA ESPERANZA • TRADEWINDS BEACH
PG. 21	CAYO DE AFUERA • CAYO DE TERRA
PG. 22-23	BIOULUMINESCENT BAY
PG. 24-25	ESPERANZA SUGAR PIER
PG. 26-27	PLAYA NEGRA
PG. 28	VIEQUES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
PG. 29	PLAYA GRANDE
PG. 30-31	PUNTA ARENAS
PG. 32	PLAYUELLA • TRES PALMITAS
PG.33	HIKING AND BIKING TRAIL SYSTEM
PG. 34-35	CARACAS
PG. 36	PATA PRIETA
PG. 37-40	PLAYA LA CHIVA
PG. 41	LA PLATA AND LA PLATITA
PG. 42	ESCONDIDA • CAYO BLANCO
PG. 43	ENSENADA HONDA
PG. 44	EL GALLITO
PG. 45	LA CHATA • SEA GLASS BEACH
PG. 46-47	MOSQUITO PIER
PG. 48	CRITTERS OF VIEQUES
PG. 49	JELLYFISH
PG. 50	PUERTO FERRO LIGHTHOUSE
PG. 51	MILITARY BUNKERS
PG. 52	PUERTO FERRO ARCHEEOLOGICAL SITE
PG. 53	ISLAND ETIQUETTE
PG. 54	ISLAND MAP
PG. 55	PHONE DIRECTORY



PLAY



RESPECT

WATCH THE SUNSET

GLOW

TAKE YOUR TIME



GO ON A **TOUR...** LEARN SOMETHING

COLLECT SEA GLASS



FORGET YOURSELF

SEE THE SUGAR MILL RUINS

PLAY

LOSE RECEPTION



JUMP OFF THE PIER IN ESPERANZA

DON'T SPEED

SMILE BIG

LISTEN TO LOCALS

UNPLUG

SWIM, SNORKEL, SCUBA



ASK

A TOUR GUIDE

CATCH

A WAVE

LISTEN FOR A COQUI



GET LOST

PICK YOUR SPOT

HIKE BIKE

CARE FOR OUR REEFS

build a sand castle



LEVEL IT

for the baby turtles!



FIND A HEART ROCK

PLAY

WITH LIFE

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[VIEQUES] insider

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

SANDBOX

A friend who recently moved to Vieques said, *“It’s like a huge sandbox with awesome toys, but not too many people play with all of them.”* It’s true; there are amazing toys to play with here. An abundance of sky, sand, water, wind, cliffs, trails, cays, bays, caves and waves can keep the most ardent adventurer busy. I’ve lived here 12 years and in researching the beaches for this guide I discovered new toys in my sandbox.

Had I ever snorkeled the many, brilliant coral “rooms” of Ensenada Honda (as Carlos of JAK lovingly refers to them)? No. I hadn’t. Had I ever licked the back of a black mangrove leaf to experience firsthand their process of salt filtration? Well no, as a matter of fact, I hadn’t done that either. Had I really noticed that areas of the island covered in non-native flora could easily be mistaken for the landscape of Africa, their place of origin? Not until botanist Scott D. Appell commented on an outing to Navio, *“I wouldn’t be surprised to see a giraffe walk across the road right now.”* His statement broke me out of my reverie of staring into the brush in search of a vanilla orchid. If I was in Africa, on safari, I would be discovering everything for the first time. But isn’t that exactly what was happening while in search of knowledge about Vieques beaches? Today I sit at my computer frantically typing away. Tomorrow I can be on safari, a pirate, a trailblazer, an underwater photographer, or just a kid in a sandbox with lots of toys. We hope that this guide helps you find the kid inside of you. Then jump in our sandbox and enjoy the toys!

Kelly Thompson

CONTRIBUTORS



Scott D. Appell, the Green Man, originally from NYC, is a garden writer, horticultural taxonomist and ethnobotanist. He writes, gardens, and teaches horticulture. He happens to be a professional baker as well.

José Carrasquillo has lived in Vieques for 11 years. Stateside he’s a theatre director and educator. Here in paradise José is the co-owner of a guesthouse, works as a volunteer for not-for-profit organizations, and logs hundreds of miles every year running all over Vieques.



Tom Kirkbright, a USCG Licensed Captain, and his wife Caroline first set foot on Vieques in 2004. They fell in love with its people, beaches and charm. They bought a house and moved from NJ to enjoy the island life and spend time *“On The Water”*.

Tom O’Grady Jr. is an author and freelance writer from Philadelphia with literature and writing degrees from Temple University (B.A.) and Rutgers University (M.A.). Tom has written in numerous commercial genres including business and training, marketing and advertising and newspaper and magazine features. He has focused on writing fiction for the last five years and has published three novels, all available on Amazon.com and select stores. He lives on Vieques with his wife, Liz, where he is currently writing a fourth novel.



Ben M. Gasirowski, M.D., FACEP

Board Certified in Emergency Medicine and Internal Medicine, he lives part time on Vieques.



L.A. Hernández Acevedo alternates between being a bird watcher, waffle fairy, “Serious Mommy” and digital librarian. By day she battles the enemies of information with her research skills, by night she laces her biobay tours with poems and songs. She is always up for an adventure, which began with her first trip of cultural discovery to PR and Vieques in 1999.

Mike Barandiaran works as a biologist and Wildlife Refuge Manager for the FWS and has been working on the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge for 13 years. He is a strong advocate for sustainability, eco-tourism and community involvement as part of the mission of the FWS. He works with others to protect the beautiful natural resources of Vieques. Extremely camera shy, we had a hard time getting him out of his shell.



Jorge E. Pasarell worked for 20 years as a computer consultant. Being an avid traveler and outdoorsman, he returned home and made the ocean his new workplace. Jorge is a USCG certified Captain and a US Sailing instructor. Proud dad of two and living off the grid, he owns and operates Vieques Paddleboarding and Little Boat Sailing. Jorge is a strong advocate of water sports safety and pure sustainable tourism.

Cristina von Essen and Gabe Espino have been diving for over 14 years, during which time they have developed a strong appreciation for the ocean and its life. They now work at Black Beards Sports as PADI Scuba Dive Instructors.



Daphne Vosberg, our newest contributing resident of Vieques, is discovering the island with fresh eyes, and recording her journey. With a passion for writing, particularly poetry, you might see her about with journal in hand. We are excited to see what she discovers next!

Mark Martin Bras plays an important role in protecting and preserving the ecological environment of Vieques as well as educating the youth through his daily work and Manta programs at the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust. He has helped redefine light pollution standards for Puerto Rico and is working tirelessly to preserve and study the BioBay.



Mark Delucia, owner and operator of SUP paddleboarding, has lived, worked, and played on Vieques for 16 years. He explores with his camera and paddleboard and can be found anywhere there is water and sand.



Sara Lee, photographer from Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii, visited Vieques on a side trip from shooting for www.alison-sadventures.com and teamed up with Vieques Insider for fantastic beach and water shots. Sara’s athleticism as a surfer and long distance swimmer allows her to capture underwater shots in a unique way.

Denise de Leon and Carlos Bermudez grew up with one foot on Vieques sand and one in the water. Owners and operators of JAK Water Sports they have been discovering the beauty of Vieques underwater for 40 years.



Robert Marino, curator for the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, is a storyteller and lecturer on the constellations and their starlore, an artist, and a researcher of many fields, one of which is the history of Vieques. He is involved in many community efforts.

Steve Simonsen is a photographer and underwater naturalist residing on St. John. Steve specializes in underwater, aerials, villa and resort photography and video.



COMPANY AND INDIVIDUAL CONTRIBUTORS:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| ABES BIOBAY TOURS | LITTLEBOAT SAILING |
| BLACK BEARD SPORTS | SEA VIEQUES |
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| JAK WATER SPORTS | |

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Thank you to everyone who submitted photos for publication.

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✈️ Fly from San Juan International (SJU) to VQS
 30 minute flight, starting at \$109 one way
www.capeair.com
www.viequesairlink.com
www.airsunshine.com
www.mnaviation.com (Charter flights-\$1,200 each way seats 9)

✈️ Fly from Isla Grande Airport (SIG) to VQS
 17 minute flight, 10 minute cab ride from SJU-aprox.
 \$20 trip (not per person)
 Airfare starting at \$72 one way
www.airflamenco.net
www.viequesairlink.com

✈️ Fly from Ceiba Airport (RVR) to VQS
 7 minute flight
 Aprox 1hr cab ride from San Juan to Ceiba \$100 trip (not per person)
 plus airfare starting at \$34 one way / 7 minute flight **Note: Publico Vans are located right outside baggage claim at SJU and can seat up to 10-12 people.**
www.airflamenco.net
www.viequesairlink.com

🚗🚢 San Juan International (SJU) to Fajardo Ferry to Vieques 1 hour cab ride + 1.5 hour ferry ride
 1 hour cab ride to Fajardo ferry port \$100 (approx) • Ferry ticket \$2
Vans can seat up to 10 people. Cost is per trip, not per person. [Be prepared to wait or possibly be bumped if ferry is full! Vieques residents are seated first. It is not uncommon for the ferry to be late]



SOME AIRLINES CHARGE \$1 PER POUND FOR LUGGAGE OVER 25 POUNDS

insider tips


🚢 FERRY SCHEDULE

Fajardo to Vieques
 4:00 am (only Mon-Fri)
 9:00 am
 1:00 pm
 4:45 pm
 8:15 pm

Vieques to Fajardo
 6:00 am
 6:30 am (only Fri, Sat & Sun)
 11:00 am
 3:00 pm
 6:30 pm

Schedule subject to change.
 Non-residents can be bumped if ferry is full.

MARINE TRAFFIC APP displays near real-time positions of ships and ferries worldwide. Check if the ferry has left Fajardo or Vieques and where it is en route!



GOOD TO KNOW

Publico = Collective Transportation

Buen Provecho = Enjoy your meal!

Malecón = Esplanade or boardwalk (oceanfront Esperanza)

No-see-ums = sandflies that come out at sunset-and they bite!

SAFETY TIPS

Many visitors think that Vieques is a sleepy, laid back island where you can lay in your hammock on the beach without a care in the world. For the most part, this is true. But petty theft is everywhere and your vacation can end badly without some precaution and common sense. Follow some safety tips and always be aware of your surroundings and belongings.

ALWAYS lock the doors where you are staying. Period. First floor, second floor, every door.

DON'T take valuables to the beach.

DON'T lock your car at the beach. Leave it open with nothing in it.

DON'T leave a cell phone or iPad charging next to an open window. Never leave house keys next to a window.

NEVER leave valuables unattended.

USE COMMON SENSE when walking around at night. Never walk on the beaches alone after dark.

getting around

WITH OR WITHOUT WHEELS

insider tips



HOOFIN' IT

Getting around Vieques by foot is very affordable and great exercise but you won't get to see the best parts of the island--meaning all of it!



SCOOTERS \$50-65/DAY

There are two companies that rent scooters, and rules are generally the same. 2 person max. Wear a helmet, shirt and long pants and at night, a safety vest. Don't park in the sand, watch out for horses and deep drop-offs on the sides of the roads.



PUBLICOS/PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

Publicos are marked with the letters TC for transportacion colectiva (Collective Transportation) meaning they are a hop on hop off type of rental. Keep this in mind if you are on a tight schedule and need to be somewhere at a set time. Publicos are available at the airport and ferry and you can flag them down all over the island. Look for a van with wording on the side or windshield.

Note that if you have a publico drop you off at a beach make sure you have cell reception or arrange your ride back before letting them drive away.



TAXIS / CHAUFFERS/ TOURS

Personal drivers and tours can be arranged through two companies who are certified for tourist transportation and have completed the course to be a Vieques tour guide.

This is a good way see a lot of the island in one day or just to get from here to there without stopping for other passengers.



BIKE RENTAL

Bikes can be rented by the hour or day. If you plan on using a bike as transportation make sure you research mileage on Google maps. Also, be aware that most beach roads are dirt, gravel or sand with some steep inclines.

Hot, dusty roads!



CAR RENTAL \$65-95/DAY

There are many rental car companies all within the same price range.

Most offer Jeeps or SUVs to get you to the most remote beaches, but just because it's 4wd doesn't mean you can't get stuck. Vieques has some world class potholes that are surprisingly deep. You must have a valid drivers license and be 21 years of age. When parking at the beach don't leave valuables in the car and leave the car unlocked. When returning cars you will be charged for wet seats so think twice about leaving the top off the jeep.



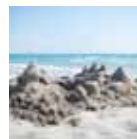
Fill Up or Top Off! During high season [Thanksgiving through Easter] and holidays

the two gas stations on the island routinely run out of gas. The gas trucks come on the ferry so it can be a long wait if you run out. So if the lines at the station are not long, stop in. When it is busy the lines form in one direction only and sometimes go around the block. If you see an empty spot at the pump, before pulling in, check to see if there is a line coming from the opposite direction. Go with cash, they don't take debit or credit cards.



Fix a Flat Pick one of these up at any convenience store or gas station on the island and save yourself a lot of trouble. Flats happen and usually not in the most convenient places. Just connect, inflate

and go! It will only seal temporarily so call your rental company for directions on where to go to get it fixed.



Leave No Trace Remember to leave the beach just as you found it. If you or your children dig holes or

make sand castles, level the sand before you go. Many beaches are turtle nesting beaches and baby sea turtles can get stuck in a hole or diverted by sand mounds on their way to the ocean.



Cell Service at the Beach

If you hire a publico to take you to the beaches remember to arrange a pick up time before they drive off because cell service may not be available.



A Twist or a Tap

If your car won't start when leaving the beach, before panicking, first check your battery cable connections. On rough roads they tend to bounce and loosen. Tighten them up or give them a tap and try again!

NO ESTACIONAR = NO PARKING
YELLOW CURB = NO PARKING

You've arrived.

The amazing island of Vieques packs a lot of beauty into a little space. Only twenty miles from east to west and four miles from north to south, Vieques offers spectacular beaches at every turn, each one providing a unique experience. We've put together this beach guide to help you decide how best to enjoy all of them. Sit, sip, sun and savor or swim, snorkel, surf and stroll; it's your call because when you're here, it's your island.

"We're here because we are not all there."



Navio Cave

MARCE DELUCIA/SUP



Bienvenidos!
(welcome)

Esperanza Cayos



APRIL RONAE



Flamboyant Tree

This guide is filled with information gained by hours and hours of tireless investigation. Much walking, laying, snorkeling, paddleboarding, fishing, floating and sipping has taken place for your benefit. (Somebody's gotta do it.) The hardest part for you will be deciding which beach is your favorite, which picture will hang in the gallery of your mind when you leave. Here's a suggestion; start with a canvas of sand - white to tan to gold to black. Add your colors - Caribbean blue, emerald green, sea grape jade, seabird white. Now, put yourself in the painting, doing whatever you want. Ah, magnifique! What a masterpiece. What an island!

Vieques Insider has provided information to help you find the right beach for your activities. Please note that most beaches and beach areas are nature in the raw and unsupervised. We encourage you to choose your activities and locations carefully with safety always in mind. We highly recommend using licensed tour and activity guides familiar with the island and particular activities, i.e. paddleboarding, snorkeling, biobay trips, scuba, sailing, horseback riding, etc. Vieques Insider is not responsible for any personal harm experienced in the visiting of areas or as a result of participation in activities identified in this guide. Please use good judgment, be safe and enjoy your time on Vieques.

VIEQUES BEACHES

DECISIONS, DECISIONS



ILLUSTRATION: JADE ROBERTSON
 ORIGINALS AND PRINTS AVAILABLE AT EL BLOK AND FUNKY BEEHIVE

This Beach Guide is meant to give you a place to start. There are more beaches, more places to snorkel, more fishing spots and more nature walks on Vieques than we could pack into one magazine. Please visit our website www.viequesinsider.com for more information. We encourage you to contact us with some of your own beach wisdom. We look forward to hearing from you!

NAMES, IDENTITY, AND HISTORICAL IMPORTANCE

During the time U.S. Navy and Marine forces were stationed on Vieques colored flags were placed on a number of beaches for training exercises. Over time the color became the common name used to identify the beach, i.e. Red, Blue, Green, etc. After the departure of military personnel an effort was set in motion by Viequense elders and community leaders to reclaim the actual beach names and restore their cultural significance.

In 2005 the Fish and Wildlife Service at the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge conducted a research project, polling community members to find the correct, original names of the beaches and establish a precedent for their use. The project discovered there were multiple names used for some of the beaches pre-Navy, complicating the process. An anthropologist recording oral histories of Viequenses over the age of 70 took the list of beach names and during her interviews polled the community elders again. Minor changes to the names were made based on their recommendations and the original names of the beaches were established.

Normal force of habit allows the color names to continue, appearing on internet sites, in publications and in the everyday conversation of islanders. To avoid confusion, Vieques Insider has listed both names on the map above as reference. While you are here we encourage you to participate in the restoration effort by honoring and using the original Spanish names of the beautiful beaches of Vieques.

ACTUAL NAMES

Former U.S. Navy Names

CARACAS

Red Beach

PLAYUELA

Garcia Beach

LA CHIVA

Blue Beach

LA PLATA

Silver (Or Orchid) Beach

PUNTA ARENAS

Green Beach

SPANISH NAMES

English Names

PLAYA GALLITO

Gringo Beach

BLAYDIN

Starfish or Rompeolas Beach

ROMPEOLAS

Mosquito Pier

PATA PRIETA

Secret Beach



PREVAILING WINDS:

WINTER EAST TO NORTHEAST

SUMMER SOUTHEAST



79° F
AVERAGE TEMP.



If it's raining on one side of the island... just move to the other.

TIDES OF VIEQUES

The tidal pattern of Vieques is known as semi diurnal. There is one high tide and one low tide which rarely exceeds one and a half feet. As a result the change does not influence water activities around the island except for fishing. 2015 Tide Table for Vieques Puerto Rico is a good source to check on-line for best fishing times. www.tides4fishing.com

HELPFUL APPS/WEBSITES



SWELL INFO
SKY GUIDE
MOON CALENDAR
AUDOBON BIRDS
OUTCAST

TIDES4FISHING.COM
MAGICSEAWEED.COM
VIEQUESTRAVEL.COM
VIEQUESINSIDER.COM

FWS REFUGE
18,000 ACRES



Approximately 54% of the island is managed by the USFWS – Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. It is the second largest natural protection and conservation area in all of Puerto Rico and the US Virgin Islands following El Yunque (the Rainforest). This is very important in terms of conservation, since only 8% of land in the entire Archipelago of Puerto Rico is legally set aside as protected lands for conservation purposes.

DNER AND COMPANIA DE PARQUES NACIONALES

NOTE: When you add the approx. 1,200 acres of the DNER Reserve and the 800 acres of the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust Cerro el Buey Reserve to the to the FWS area, there are approx. 20,000 acres of conservation lands in Vieques

FWS REFUGE HOURS:

April 1 - September 30
6 AM - 7:30 PM

October 1 - March 31
6 AM - 6:30 PM

Gate closes automatically at designated time.

BEACHSIDE

FLORA

Vieques beaches not only provide a variety of sand and terrain but also some interesting and beautiful growth. Here's a quick survey of some of our most frequently encountered seaside flora.

SEASIDE MORNING GLORY

(Ipomoea pres-caprae)

In Puerto Rico this morning glory is called bejuco de playa or beach vine. The foliage contains natural antihistamines and the Carib Indians crushed and applied them to the stings of jellyfish, stingrays or insects to provide quick relief.



Sea Almond

SEA ALMOND

(Terminalia catappa)

Known as almendro in Spanish, this large, salt-resistant, drought tolerant almond inhabits most of the beaches of Vieques. The sweet, almond-like kernels within the pits are a real taste treat. Although incredibly difficult to crack open, the kernels are used by clever Viequenses to make brittles, cookies and other confections.

The coconut palm is an alien species originally native to the South Pacific. Its buoyant, salt-resistant seeds have made it a global colonizer of shorelines and a welcome sight to visiting northerners.



ond

SEASIDE MAHO

(*Thespesia populnea*)

Another prolific grower, the Maho appears on most every beach here. Incredibly salt-resistant, this hibiscus cousin may grow as tall as 60 feet. Throughout the year it produces bell-shaped yellow flowers bearing a wine-red center that last for a single day.



SEA GRAPE

(*Coccoloba uvifera*)

Called *uva de playa* in Spanish, you'll find this highly salt-resistant and wind tolerant bush-like tree on most any Vieques beach. The long, pendant clusters of reddish-purple "grapes" are delicious, mellow and sweet, and prove to be highly popular with Viequenses of all ages.

NONI

(*Morinda citrifolia*)

Because of its high salt tolerance, this tropical Asian and Australian species can be found growing along most of Vieques' shores. The most notable characteristic is its milky-white interior fruit that vaguely resembles a well-scrubbed new potato emitting a strange cheese-like odor. The fruit possesses medicinal properties used in Polynesian cultures to treat a variety of ailments. Noni has become of great interest in the field of homeopathy.



SANDBUR

(*Cenchrus incertus*)

Called *abrojo de playa* in Spanish, this sandbur is a 10-inch high, mat-forming grass that spreads making thick, dense clumps often concealed by taller flora. The burs will stick to your feet and cause pain till you physically pull them off. Some form of footwear is recommended when crossing through these areas to the ocean. On the upside, their presence does help prevent beach erosion.



MANCHINEEL

(*Hippomane mancinella*)

This Caribbean native is also called beach apple, manzanillo in Spanish, and is the most poisonous tree on Vieques. All plant parts exude a caustic milky sap which may effect some individuals more than others, especially if in contact with the eyes and mouth. If the fruit is mistakenly eaten prompt treatment includes vomiting and a trip to the emergency room. Vieques Fish and Wildlife Service has marked the trees in public areas but there may be others so beware.



FOR MORE INFORMATION
ABOUT VIEQUES:

PUERTO RICO TOURISM
AIRPORT KIOSK
ISABEL II OFFICE: 8AM-4:30, 7 DAYS
WWW.SEEPUERTORICO.COM
787-741-0800



7:30AM - 4PM MON-FRI
WWW.DRNA.GOBIERNO.PR
787-741-8683



8:30AM - 5PM, 7 DAYS
WWW.PARQUESNACIONALES.PR
787-741-8198



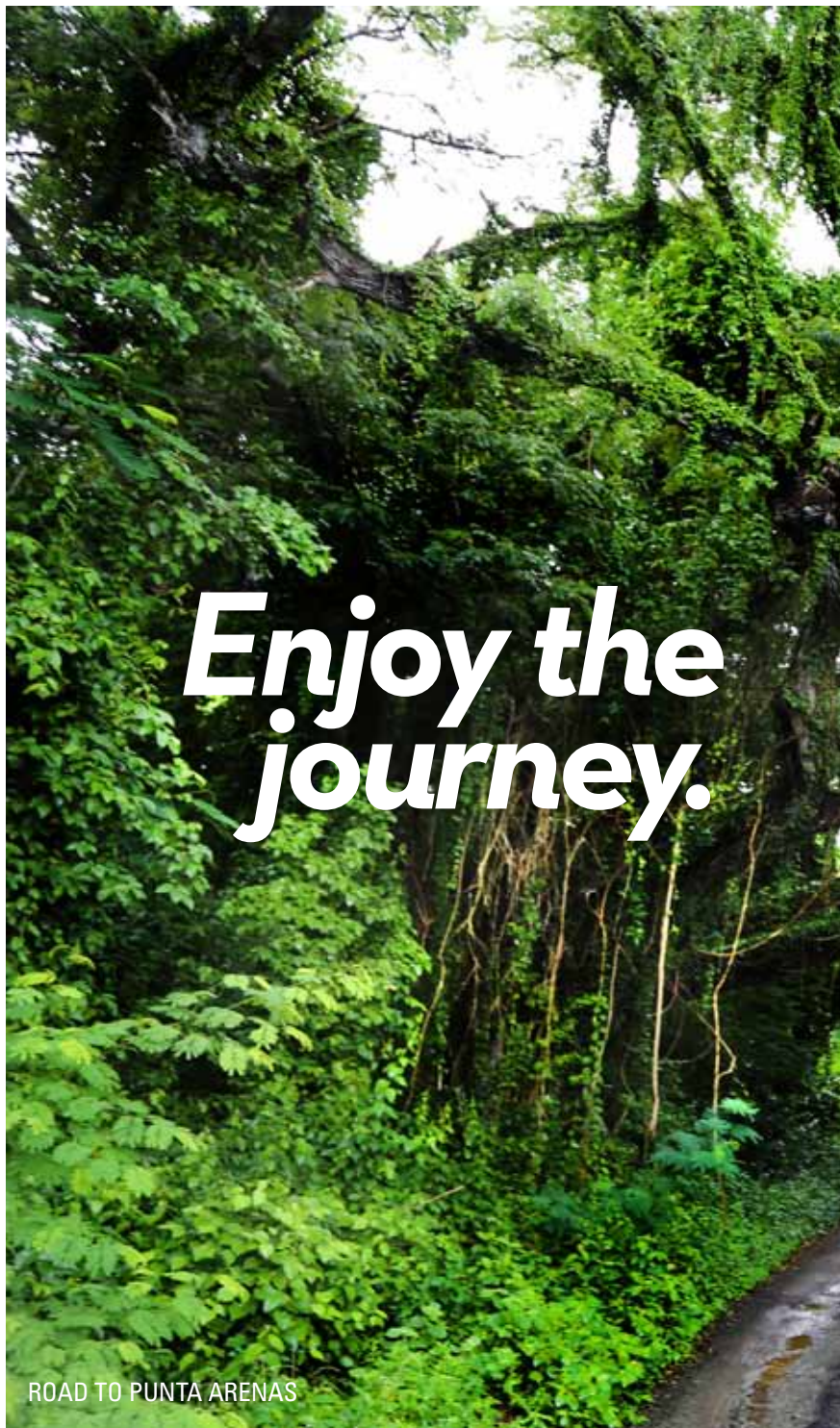
8AM - 3PM, MON-FRI
(EXCLUDING FED. HOLIDAYS)
WWW.FWS.GOV/CARIBBEAN/REFUGES/
VIEQUES
787-741-2138



9AM - 5PM, TUE - SUN
WWW.VCHT.ORG
787 741 8850



WWW.RADIOVIEQUES.NET
787 375 0525



Enjoy the journey.

ROAD TO PUNTA ARENAS



SARA LEE/ALISON'S ADVENTURES



Pata Prieta



*"This is a special place...
and special people are
drawn here."*

Linda Quinn-pilates instructor



SAPA LEE/AISON'S ADVENTURES



Bioluminescent Bay



DONNA SNERFOS

“Oh...
just
Sunbayer.”



SUNBAY



If you ask a local what beach they went to that day they might say, "Oh, *just* Sunbay. That means they didn't want to make the effort to drive to a more remote beach. But don't be fooled. Not only is it easily accessible but Sunbay is one of the most beautiful beaches on Vieques. A mile stretch of beautiful white sand, turquoise water and shady palm trees make this slice of paradise the ideal place to put up your hammock and spend the entire day. It's the only public beach on the island with a shower, campground, café and lifeguards. If you like to walk for exercise, Sunbay is the perfect mile to stretch your legs. Horses roam the fields adjacent to the beach so bring your camera.

SUNBAY

*Beautiful mile-long beach
Blue flag beach
Lots of shade
Perfect for swimming, paddleboarding and snorkeling*



DIRECTIONS: Caribbean side off Rt. 997. The gated entrance is 5 miles from Isabel II and 0.7 miles from Esperanza.

ENTRY FEE: \$2 at the gate. (If the right gate is closed, go in the left. No charge.)

BEACH LENGTH: 1 mile

AMMENITIES: Campground, bathrooms, outdoor showers, café, DRNA and Parques Nacionales offices

HEADS UP: When entering the water be aware of a quick drop-off to a solid sandy bottom. Elders, kids and people with knee problems could need assistance exiting.

DRNA / PARQUES NACIONALES OFFICES: 8:30-5pm Mon-Fri

ARENAMAR CAFÉ: 11-5pm everyday

WAVES: Mostly calm but can be windy and choppy.

ORIENTATION/VIEWS: The lights of St. Croix can be spotted on a clear night.

SNORKELING: Beginner to Moderate. Snorkel the east end out to the point. Locals call this area of Sunbay "El Horno" which means the oven. It is usually calm and clear. Watch not to get too shallow because there are a lot of sea urchins.

PADDLEBOARDING / KAYAKING: Enter the water at the far east end of the beach or "El Horno". Paddleboards and kayaks are not allowed inside the buoyed area. A general rule is to stay deep enough that if you fall from the equipment you will not touch the bottom. This will protect the coral from you and you from the coral! It is always advised to take a tour with a licensed guide rather than strike out on your own.

FLORA: Tropical American rain trees. Abundance of Noni, Sea Grapes, Coconut Palms and Sea Almonds.

FAUNA: Horses make the pasture of Sunbay their home. You will see them rolling in the mud and standing under the rain trees.

PARKING: Do not park on beach side of the road.

INSIDER TIP: Bring beach chairs, hammock, cooler, books; you won't want to leave!

DOGS: Not permitted.

 The six "Blue Flag" beaches of Puerto Rico earned their title by passing a series of very strict standards for water quality, safety, services, environmental education and sustainability. Sunbay is one of them.

psssst... don't touch the ropes or buoys. At certain times of the year jellyfish tentacles are floating in the water having torn free from the jellyfish. They get wrapped around the ropes and stick to the buoys.

-  SHADE
-  LOUNGING
-  GAZEBO
-  CAMPING
-  LIFEGUARDS
-  CAFÉ
-  SNORKELING
-  SHOWERS
-  RESTROOMS
-  10 SPEED LIMIT
-  SEA TURTLE NESTING SITE
-  DOGS



Sunbay boasts grand specimens of the celebrated rain tree, *Samanea saman*, which in 1960 provided the frame for the treehouse in the film *Swiss Family Robinson*. If you're fortunate enough to see one in bloom the tree is covered with fluffy pink and white pompoms. The wild horses feast upon the resulting sweet-tasting seedpods.



Sunbay Balnearia (Beach Park), is managed by the Compañía de Parques Nacionales (National Park Company)



DNER manages the Puerto Mosquito Bioluminescent Bay Reserve which extends 9 miles out to sea, as well as Cayo Tierra and Cayo de Afuera, Media Luna, and Navio.



STEVE SIMONIAN PHOTOGRAPHY



MEDIA LUNA

translation: "half moon"

MEDIA LUNA

*Shallow
Ultimate
kiddie pool
Fine, white
sand*

Media Luna can best be described as the ultimate kiddie pool. Powdery-white sand slopes so gradually that 50 yards out into the water you will only be waist deep. The long narrow cove collects the silt-like sand creating a lovely place for kids to play and learn to swim. The temperature of the water at Media Luna can be a few degrees higher than other beaches because of the expanse of shallow water. A few gazebos and shade trees make this the perfect family or large group beach. Bring a grill!

-  LOUNGING
-  SWIMMING
-  SHADE
-  SNORKELING
-  GAZEBO
-  CAMPING
-  SEA TURTLE NESTING SITE
-  10 SPEED LIMIT
-  DOGS

DIRECTIONS: Caribbean side off 997. Enter the gated entrance to Sunbay and follow the beach road to the east. Continue on this road and look for signs to Media Luna.

CAMPING: Rustic. No facilities. To camp at Media Luna request a permit from the DRNA (DNER-Department of Natural and Environmental Resources) at their office across from the Café at Sunbay.

DRNA OFFICE HOURS: Mon-Fri 7:30-4pm

WAVES: Very calm.

SHADE: Gazebos, palms and sea grapes provide shade.

SNORKELING: There is some snorkeling along the east side out to the big rock but until you get halfway out all you will see is sea grass. It can also get windy and choppy farther out. Depth goes from very shallow to 30 feet in places. It is recommended that only advanced snorkelers go all the way out to the point.

FLORA: Abundance of Noni, Sea Grapes, Sea Almonds, and Coconut Palms

DOGS: Not permitted.

INSIDER TIP: Use the fine silt-like sand to have a spa-like exfoliation!



PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE SIMONIAN



NAVIO
 Waves, caves
 & 4 wheel drive
 Bodsurfing
 beach



- SHADE
- SNORKELING
- BODY SURFING
- WAVES
- SEA TURTLE NESTING SITE
- DOGS


NAVIO *translation: "big ship"*

Navio is not for the faint of heart, or low-riding vehicles. The beach is not in a cove like others on the south side so it is exposed to the winds and currents of the Caribbean Sea. This makes it perfect for body surfing and boogie boarding. Jagged rock formations frame the east and west side of the beach. Visit the cave on the east end of the beach with a waterproof camera.

DIRECTIONS: Caribbean side off 997. Enter the gated entrance to Sunbay, follow the beach road to the east end then follow signs to Navio.

ACCESSIBILITY: The road to Navio is rough and peppered with potholes. After heavy rains it is sometimes impassable. Go very slow through dips and to the side of water holes to avoid a flat tire. Cell reception is minimal.

WAVES: Consistently rolling. Great for body surfing or boogie boarding.

 **CAVE:** On the east side of Navio there is a cave that is the perfect photo spot. Make sure your camera is waterproof!

HIKE: To climb up the rocks on either side wear good shoes. Flip flops are not recommended. The rocks are eroded limestone and jagged.

SNORKELING: If you happen to find a calm day at Navio (extremely rare), definitely snorkel. Swim the leeward (east) side out to the point. Advanced snorkelers can swim around the point to another little beach called Novillo. Don't try this if the water isn't calm because the waves and currents are very strong.

FLORA: Large clumps of white-flowering ink berry, prickly mampoo, Puerto Rican thatch palm and organ pipe cactus.

DOGS: Not permitted.

INSIDER TIP: Keep your arms inside the windows on the road. You don't want to get scratched by thorns.

HEADS UP: Please don't build palm huts or make campfires on the beach as this is a turtle nesting beach.



MARC DELUCIA / SUP



psssst... If you like your sunglasses, don't wear them in the water! Navio waves will claim them!



PLAYA ESPERANZA

Family gatherings
Walking
Swimming



SWIMMING



KAYAKING



SHADE



BOAT RAMP



SNORKELING



WALKING

PLAYA ESPERANZA

The beach that starts in front of the Malecón and ends at the land bridge that crosses over to Sunbay is known as Playa Esperanza. It's a favorite place for taking a camera and enjoying people. This the beach for family outings, acrobatics off the pier, and fishermen coming and going. Kids exercise their horses in the surf and you might come across a "floating" domino game. Look for the white sand drift bottom for swimming, otherwise it is mostly beds of sea grass. Walk out onto the short pier known as the fishermen's pier and look down into your own personal aquarium. On a calm day you can see rays, pufferfish, ballyhoo, and turtles swimming around down below. On a weekend walk out onto the long pier (the Sugar Pier or El Muelle Grande) for a unique view of the life below or snorkel under the pier to immerse yourself in it. This is a beach for ending the day and beginning the evening. Bring a cover-up and pick a restaurant for lunch, dinner or after beach beverages.

3
miles

PLAYA ESPERANZA TO END OF SUNBAY
A fantastic way to start your day is to walk Playa Esperanza starting from the small pier and continuing to the far end of Sunbay, 3 miles round trip!



TRADEWINDS BEACH

Nature walk Tidepools Sunsets



SNORKELING



EXPLORING

TRADEWINDS BEACH



SEA URCHIN



OCTOPUS



JAWFISH



This beach at the far west end of the Malecón, across the street from Tradewinds Restaurant, is a wonderful nature trek for kids. Start by going down the steps across from Belly Buttons and looking for baby hermit crabs among the roots and rocks. Look through the shallow pools for sea urchins, octopus, jawfish hiding in their holes, and brightly colored small fish in the seagrass beds. See herons and oyster catchers fishing on the rocks which are, by the way, a great backdrop for family photos. The rocks can be slippery. Wear water shoes, and watch out for sea urchins!

CAYO DE AFUERA

translation: "outside cay"

Rent a kayak or paddleboard to get to the cayo in front of the Malecón in Esperanza. It is not recommended to swim to the cayo because of boat traffic. Look for dolphins while you paddle across. There are buoys in the water a few feet out from the sandy beach. Hook your kayak or paddleboard up to them and jump in the water to begin your snorkel. If you pull your kayak onto the little sandy beach be sure to wear shoes because the rocks in front of the beach are FULL of sea urchins. You also run the risk of damaging the equipment you rented by scraping it along the rocks.



CAYO DE AFUERA

Little island in front of the Malecón in Esperanza



KAYAKING



SNORKELING

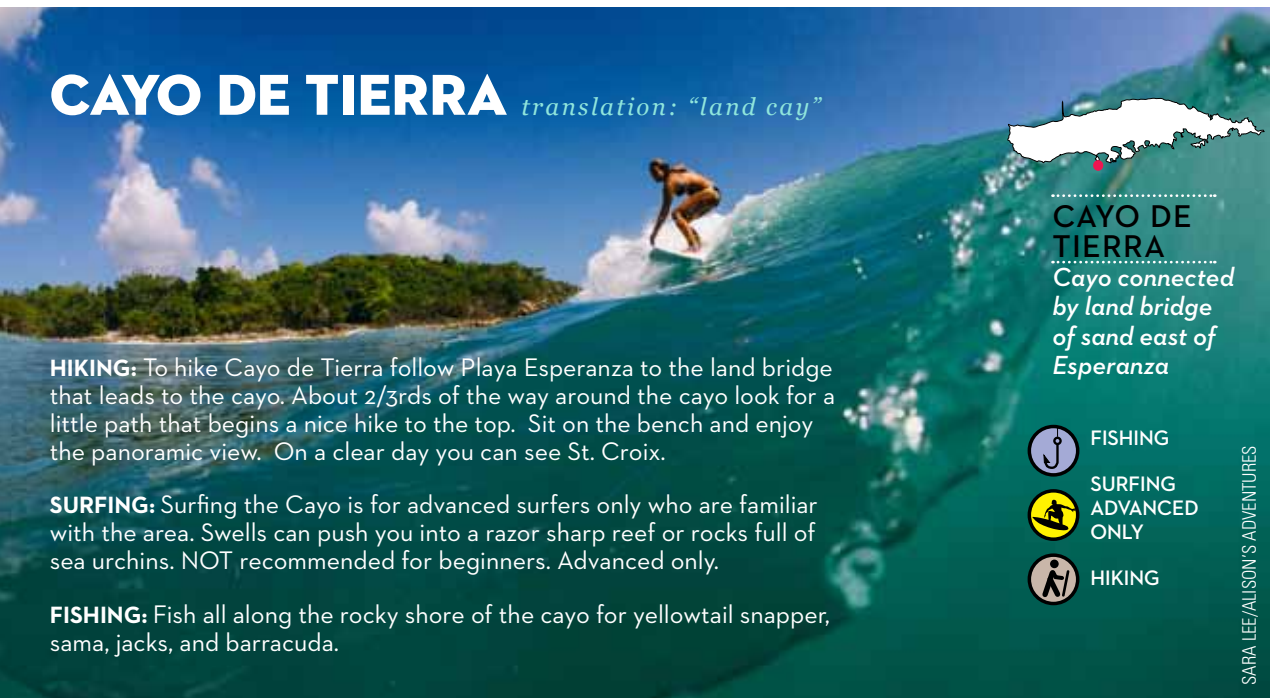


HEADS UP:

Don't swim all around the island because currents and wind on the south side can be rough. Snorkel to the west side of the island as far as the big rock sticking out into the water and then turn around.

CAYO DE TIERRA

translation: "land cay"

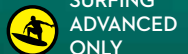


CAYO DE TIERRA

Cayo connected by land bridge of sand east of Esperanza



FISHING



SURFING
ADVANCED
ONLY



HIKING

HIKING: To hike Cayo de Tierra follow Playa Esperanza to the land bridge that leads to the cayo. About 2/3rds of the way around the cayo look for a little path that begins a nice hike to the top. Sit on the bench and enjoy the panoramic view. On a clear day you can see St. Croix.

SURFING: Surfing the Cayo is for advanced surfers only who are familiar with the area. Swells can push you into a razor sharp reef or rocks full of sea urchins. NOT recommended for beginners. Advanced only.

FISHING: Fish all along the rocky shore of the cayo for yellowtail snapper, sama, jacks, and barracuda.

VQS BIOBAY

Bioluminescent bays are extremely rare and poorly understood ecological wonders. A fragile ecosystem that is sensitive to environmental conditions, there are few places in the world that classify as Bioluminescent “Bays”. Puerto Rico has three and Vieques’ bioluminescent bay, Puerto Mosquito, has been declared the brightest in the world by Guinness World Records.

THE RIGHT CONDITIONS



RED / BLACK MANGROVES provide nutrients for the dinoflagellates.



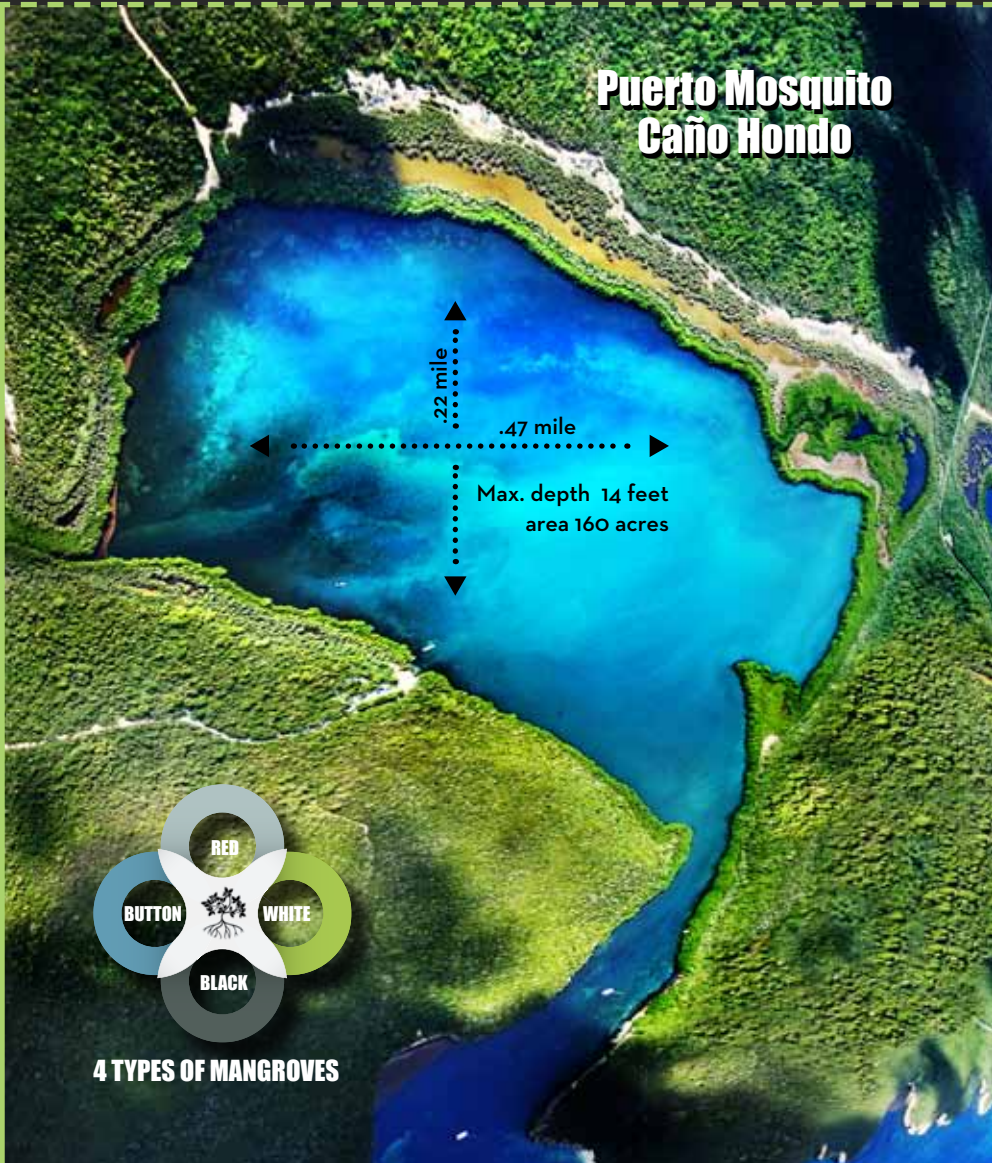
NARROW, SHALLOW ENTRANCE TO THE BAY traps dinoflagellates inside.



WATER DEPTH, TEMPERATURE AND SALINITY allow dinoflagellates to thrive.



PREVAILING WINDS blow across the mouth of the bay from east to west and keep the high concentration of dinoflagellates from “flushing out.”



A CLOSER LOOK AT MANGROVES

Two of the four mangrove species found in Puerto Rico are found around the bioluminescent bay; Red and Black.



Aerial (prop) roots provide erosion control for the bay.



Lenticels in the bark absorb oxygen



[Black Mangrove] Snorkel-like roots (pneumatophores) allow mangroves to cope with daily flooding by the tides

SUMMER

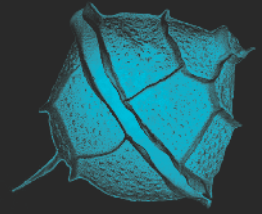
THE SKY

WINTER

STAR ILLUSTRATIONS:
ROBERT MARINO



THE SCIENCE



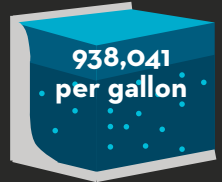
Pyrodinium bahamense
(whirling fire of the bahamas)
Dinoflagellate



LUCIFERIN + OXYGEN LUCIFERASE



**Luciferin & Luciferase
+ oxygen
= Bioluminescence**



**Highest ever recorded
count of dinoflagellates
per gallon.**

MINUTES SECONDS 1/10 SECONDS
00:00:10

**AMOUNT OF TIME
MOST PYRODINIUM
FLASH THEIR LIGHT ORGANS**



Did you know?

Dinoflagellates can have a genome 2-80 times the size of the human genome depending on the species.



DINOFLAGELLATE
COUNT ONLINE

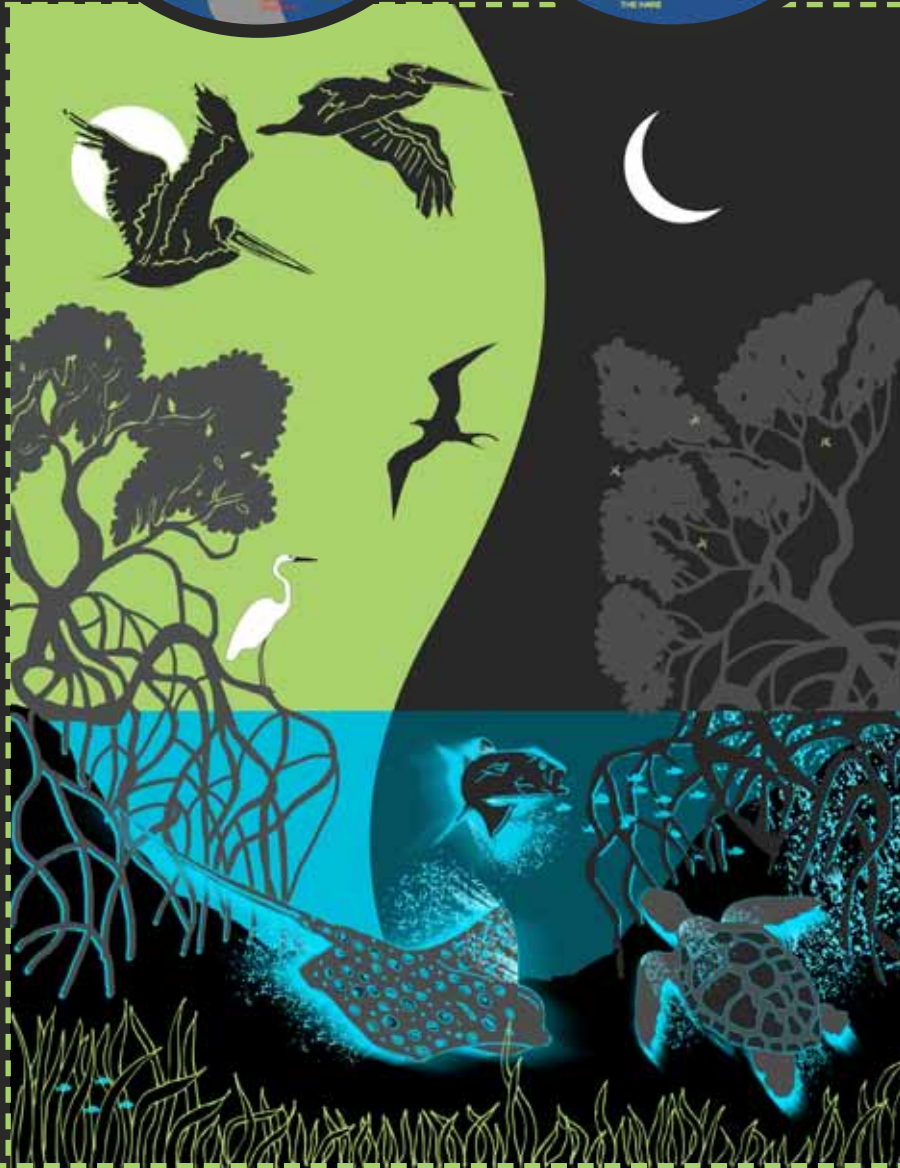


ILLUSTRATION: JADE ROBERTSON AND KELLY THOMPSON

Scientists are still investigating how the nutrients associated with mangroves and other sources interact with dinoflagellates and other organisms in the bays.



Mangroves are estimated to drop around 4 tons of leaf-litter per acre per year.



Seeds germinate on the tree and are buoyant so they can take root as soon as they drop or when the tide goes out.



SARAH LEE/AUSON'S ADVENTURES



A large ball of sardines has been making the end of the pier its home with a barracuda usually in the center.

STEVE SIMONSEN PHOTOGRAPHY



ESPERANZA SUGAR PIER

Historic site
Great snorkeling
Community gathering place



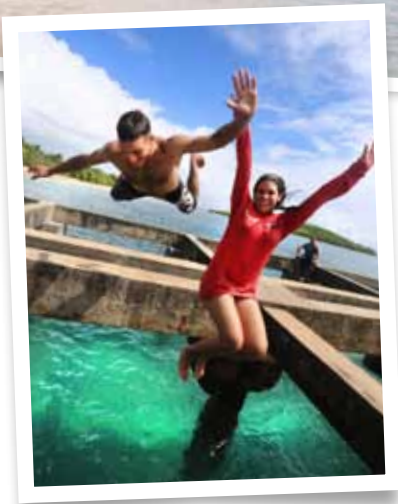
SWIMMING



FISHING



SNORKELING



ESPERANZA SUGAR PIER

EL MUELLE GRANDE *translation: "the big pier"*

"El Muey Grande de Esperanza" was constructed in 1927 and lived up to its name by serving Vieques as a major exportation center for the cash crop of the 20th century; sugarcane. Two sets of tracks ran the length of the pier. The sturdily built structure was designed to hold the weight of two locomotives and their flat cars and cargo simultaneously. A crane at the far end of the pier revolved on its own set of tracks, unloading the precious cargo onto barges.

Until the arrival of the U.S. Navy in 1941, a railroad connecting the pier, sugar cane mill, and surrounding fields provided the main stimulus for island economy. When the "caña" market slowed during the latter half of the century, the pier went quiet while Viequenses searched neighboring islands for work.

Today the 86 year old skeleton of the pier is still a central gathering point for the community with lots of activity above and below the pier. Families and friends gather weekends and holidays to fish and grill, and adults and kids alike enjoy the brief thrill of walking the foot-wide foundation to jump off the end into the crystal clear waters below or snorkel in between the pilings. It is a great place to sit and watch the sunset. Just make sure you navigate your way back before it's too dark!

SNORKELING: The pier's underwater pillars attract all kinds of sea life and offer a prime location for southern shore snorkeling. Snorkel early in the day to avoid activity around the pier scaring the sea life away. Be careful not to brush up against the pillars as they are covered in coral.

JUMPING: Local kids practically grow up on the pier and you will see them effortlessly and fearlessly running the narrow

cement beams to the end of the pier and jumping off...only to climb up the broken rusty ladder hanging at an angle that is barely attached to the cement pillar at the end of the pier. We suggest swimming back to shore.

FISHING: Great spot to fish early morning before swimmers and snorkelers arrive. Snapper and occasional grouper.

PIER WITH FUNCTIONING SUGAR CANE CRANES

Gerry Carr Collection, Vieques Historic Archives



HISTORY: The remnants of old trains used to transport sugarcane to the pier can be seen in the fields behind the pier. Recent vandalism has sparked major concern about the preservation and conservation of these historical artifacts.



PLAYA NEGRA

Adventure hike
Nature walk
Not a swimming beach



HIKING



EXPLORING



PLAYA NEGRA

translation: "black [sand] beach"

Our most unusual beach, Playa Negra is a must see for adventurous types, but it is not a swimming beach because of strong currents and riptides. A bit of a trek through an "arroyo" (stream bed), this beach requires some walking. If it has recently rained expect to walk through mud or ankle deep water.

WHAT MAKES IT BLACK? The black sand is the result of shifting tectonic plates pushing magma up through the surface of high areas like Mount Pirata, the highest point on Vieques. The magnetic, heavy but fine sand washes off the mountain and down through the stream bed creating the black sand beach. Depending on rains the beach can be jet black or a mixture of the black sand and red limestone.



TAKE WITH YOU:

Bug spray, walking stick, camera, water, and don't forget your magnet for fun!



You will often see horses on Playa Negra which is a beautiful sight. Have your camera ready!



PALMA DE CRISTI

DIRECTIONS: Caribbean side. Follow Rt. 996 west out of Esperanza to Rt.201. Turn left and follow road approx. .12 miles to a bridge over the stream bed. There is a pull-off on your left with a guard rail. It is best to drive past it and turn around on the road to the left just past Gallery Galleon. Look for the guardrail now on your right and park just before it.

FLORA: Along the stream bed take note of the snakeplants (an African native), trumpet trees known locally as yagruma, and Palma de Cristi, Christ's palms because as the two-foot palm leaves dry they curl into the shape of a hand. High in the tree canopies look for the beautiful light and dark pink tubular flowers of Rangoon creepers. Look for spined buttressed trunks of towering ceiba trees.

FAUNA: Large colonies of our nocturnally active land crabs

HIKE TO THE BEACH: 1/2 mile through an "arroyo" or dried stream bed.

HEADS UP: Spider webs are sometimes strung across the path of the stream bed. Carry a stick to knock them down.

HAZARDS: Rough surf and reef rock at the beach. Swimming is not advised.

INSIDER TIP: Plan to do more than one beach on the day you visit Playa Negra. You probably won't stay all day because it's not a swimming beach.





APRIL BONAE



APRIL BONAE



VIEQUESTRAVEL.COM



BAILEY WHITEHILL





The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Refuge is open to the public year round.

OCTOBER 1 - MARCH 31
6AM TO 6:30PM

APRIL 1 - SEPTEMBER 30.
6AM TO 7:30PM

VISITORS CENTER:
MONDAY - FRIDAY
8 AM TO 4 PM



Did you know?

Vieques is the most important green sea turtle nesting site in all of Puerto Rico, with the most used nesting beaches.



VIEQUES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE BEACH AREAS

In 2001 Congress established the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge on the western end of Vieques. After 2003 and the Navy's withdrawal from Vieques, the wildlife refuge increased to approximately 18,000 acres of land by adding acreage on the eastern end. The USFWS Works with many partners, such as the Puerto Rico Department of Natural Resources, TICATOVE, the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, the Vieques Municipality, Para La Naturaleza and many others as the Federal agency responsible for the conservation of these public lands.

At one time a military base, a practice area for beach assaults, and an infamous bombing range, the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge is now home to a large collection of unique and stunning beaches that endlessly captivate visitors and locals alike. This amazing chunk of Vieques offers a wonderland of breathtaking views, meditative beaches, otherworldly waters and mad displays of nature at her best. From the weather-beaten remains of the Puerto Ferro lighthouse to the lake-like views of Ensenada Honda; from the eerie coral sculptures of La Plata to the family filled gazebos of Caracas; from the multiple personalities of La Chiva to the not-so-secret gem of Pata Prieta; you will never absorb all that lies before you in one visit. The Wildlife Refuge all but ensures your return to Vieques, to once again see that special beach that haunts your dreams or to visit the many more you missed.

TICATOVE

Ticatove focuses on research and preservation of sea turtles but also has programs concerned with bats, reptiles and plants. Vieques is an ideal nesting site for leatherback, hawksbill and green sea turtles. The sea turtle program employs volunteers to help the staff monitor nesting activity on a large portion of Vieques' many beaches. Please help ensure the survival of endangered sea turtles and their young by being aware of beach activity that can put them in peril. For more information please contact the Ticatove facebook page or email ticatovevieques@yahoo.com.



4
mile
beach

PLAYA GRANDE

Long walks
Rugged coastline
Spectacular views
Fishing



FISHING



HIKING



EXPLORING



SEA TURTLE
NESTING SITE

STEVE SIMONSEN PHOTOGRAPHY



PLAYA GRANDE

translation: "big beach"

This Caribbean beach, on US Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) protected land usually has rough surf and strong rip tides so swimming is not recommended. But don't cross it off your list! If you enjoy a long walk on the beach with spectacular views and a nice breeze this is the one!



Photo: Vieques Historic Archives, Bonnie Donohue Collection, photo by US Navy March, 1941

< The Playa Grande Sugar Mill in operation. The other principal sugar mills on Vieques were Puerto Real in Esperanza, Arkadia on the western side and Santa Maria in the barrio of Santa Maria. For more information on Vieques history visit El Fortín Conde de Mirasol.

DIRECTIONS: Follow Rt. 996 west out of Esperanza. Follow the road left at radar field gate and then right at the beach.

ACCESSIBILITY: Convenient. Road is maintained by Fish and Wildlife Service.

HAZARDS: Rough surf and riptides. Swimming is not advised. Wear shoes to scramble over the boulders.

FISHING: Pass the first parking lot to the parking area by the bridge where you see a rock jetty. Fish all along here looking for rocks and deeper water

10 feet out where there is a drop-off after a rock shelf. Fish for tarpon, jacks, snapper, and if you are really lucky, dorado.

NIGHT FISHING: Open for night fishing except during sea turtle nesting season (mid-April to mid-June). Watch for postings.

ORIENTATION/VIEWS: Look back towards Esperanza for beautiful views.

FLORA: Highlights during spring and summer are the elegant, fragrant white flowers of our native spider lily known locally as lirio araña.

BRING: Good shoes, water, camera.

TURTLES: FWS patrol at night mid-April through mid-June during the turtle nesting season to mark the nests and move the eggs higher up the beach if necessary. Do not disturb marked nests or a large mound of sand.



PLAYA GRANDE SUGAR MILL: From the mid-1800s coffee, sugarcane, plantain, cotton, and tobacco plantations covered much of the island. Sugarcane crops reached their peak in 1922 with four processing mills in this area. Remnants of those plantations still exist. Contact the Vieques Historic Trust for an exciting tour of the once vibrant Playa Grande sugar mill.



PUNTA ARENAS

Wild stretch
of beach
**Best known
for snorkeling**
Boater's paradise

-  SNORKELING
-  SWIMMING
-  FISHING
-  GAZEBOS
-  SHADE
-  EXPLORING
-  TURTLE
NESTING SITE

Where the Caribbean
meets the Atlantic.
The northeastern tip
of Punta Arenas is one
of the largest sand drifts
in the Caribbean.



PUNTA ARENAS *translation: "sandy point"*

Part of the FWS National Wildlife Refuge, Punta Arenas is a 3/4 mile stretch of beach on the northwestern tip of the island. From the air you can see where the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea meet and form a sand drift – hence the name “sandy point.” Some say the main attraction here is best seen under the water. But the beach is wild and the water usually calm and clear making it a beautiful beach to visit. No-see-ums (gnats) can come out early morning and late afternoon so try to visit between 10am and 2 pm.

DIRECTIONS: Drive west on Rt. 200 past airport and Rompeolas. Follow signs for Refuge. Turn right or left at dead end for turn-offs to beach. Turn left for a beach with a gazebo. Turn right for a long expanse of sandy beach leading to the point.



FORMER NAVY NAME:
Green Beach

SNORKELING: Punta Arenas is best known for snorkeling and has one of the most beautiful, accessible reefs on the island starting on the southern or first entry point. Turn left when the road comes to a Y for a beach with a gazebo. From here enter the water and swim to the left. Follow the “fingers” of coral. Watch for boat traffic, especially on weekends and holidays. Punta Arenas is great snorkeling for beginners to advanced. Depth ranges from 3 to 18 feet. Snorkeling to the west or northwest tip is not advised. The powerplant for Vieques is located just off the point.

FISHING: Rod & reel. Fish the rocky points on the southwest of the beach. Work your way west.

NIGHT FISHING: Punta Arenas is also open for nighttime fishing. (Fishing only! If you don't have fishing gear with you, you could be fined.)

BEACH: Wild beach with palms leaning out over the water and driftwood washed up on shore.

Why so many bugs?
Prevailing winds are from East to Northeast. The combination of Punta Arenas' location being shielded from the winds along with dense vegetation make it an environment for mosquitos and no-see-ums.

FLORA: Mixed evergreen-deciduous forest in the southeast. Species include the slender fan palm, which is endemic to Puerto Rico and the Virgin islands, the *Stahlia monosperma* and the *Goetzea elegans* – both Commonwealth and federally listed endangered species. Notice the black mangrove forests on the right as you are driving to Punta Arenas.

SIGHTINGS: Hawksbill sea turtles nest on the beach. Loggerheads and manatees can be found near shore. Dolphins and humpback, sperm and sei whales can be found off shore during

their migrations. Vieques has 10 species of snakes, many of which can be found here, but their densities are low due to mongoose population.

WAVES: Mostly calm but can be windy and choppy at the point.

ACCESSIBILITY: The drive to Punta Arenas is long and full of potholes but there is much to see on the way.

BOATING: Punta Arenas is a boater's paradise and you will find boats moored here with their grills smokin' and music playing. If a quiet beach is your thing avoid Punta Arenas during holiday weekends.



Manatees have been sighted in the estuaries of seagrass. This northwestern area covers approximately 5,000 acres and is the largest sea grass bed in Puerto Rico. Species include a mix of turtle grass, manatee grass and shoal grass.

Make a day of it!

WEST END ITINERARY

Plan ahead and visit the other attractions on the west end of the island after your day at the beach.

1. SNORKEL/BEACH

Snorkel or spend time at the beach at Punta Arenas between 10am and 2 pm to avoid the no-see-ums.

2. KIANI LAGOON

On the way back from Punta Arenas explore Kiani Lagoon.



Wind through a mangrove forest on a bridge that goes into the lagoon and immerse yourself in nature. You will see many species of birds, crabs, fish and lizards.

3. BUNKERS

Next take a turn off the road and drive through the hidden Navy bunkers. This is a loop that will bring you back to the main road.

4. EL PARQUE DE LA CEIBA

As you head east on 200 toward the airport you will see our 300 year old Ceiba Tree at the bend in the road. The tree is a source of pride, respect and spirituality on the island. Take a walk around its massive, thorny trunk and enjoy Mother Nature in one of her finest forms. There is also a nice little beach a short stroll away. Great fishing spot too!



PLAYUELA

Short hike to beach
Secluded
Romantic
Eastern trailhead to hiking trail



HIKING



SWIMMING



LOUNGING



SNORKELING

3

Did you know?

Vieques actually has three bioluminescent bays: Puerto Mosquito, Puerto Ferro, and Tapón. Puerto Mosquito is the brightest bioluminescent bay in the world.



TRES PALMITAS

Area of Puerto Ferro Bay
Great kayaking and paddleboarding
A safe harbor for boats.



KAYAK



PADDLEBOARD



SNORKEL



FISH

PLAYUELA *translation: "little beach"*

This Caribbean beach requires a short hike so it is almost always empty. On the east end of the beach there are nice waves for boogie boarding. Trek with your camera to the west end and up to the point for a great view looking east toward Caracas or west toward the Puerto Ferro lighthouse. Due to its location and shape, Playuela tends to "catch" a lot of seaweed. The eastern trail head to the Vereda Cerro Playuela trail system is located at the far west end of the beach.



DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Turn right at sign for Caracas, then right again at Playuela sign. A short drive will bring you to a sign and parking area.

ACCESSIBILITY/ PLAYUELA TRAIL: The beach is an easy .38 mile hike on a dirt road with a mangrove swamp on

the right. The trail and beach are part of the Playuela Trail system. At far west end of the beach begins the Verda Cerro (Hill) Playuela Trail.

SNORKEL: Snorkel out to Cayo Melón which is visible from Playuela and Caracas. Snorkel around the west side.

FLORA: The stream to the right of the path to the beach is colored red due to a combination of naturally occurring red algae and the strong iron content in the soil. Near the beach there are thorny trees to the right known as horse nicker. The large, shiny seeds are collected by children for games.

TRES PALMITAS

translation: "three palms"

Tres Palmitas is an area in Puerto Ferro Bay sometimes called Barracuda Bay because of the number of barracuda seen there. The beauty of Tres Palmitas is in the variety of ecosystems on display.

It is a great place to take a kayak or paddleboard and explore the mangrove channels. The Puerto Ferro Bay also has bioluminescence but the concentration is not as high as that found in Puerto Mosquito.



STEVIE SIMONSEN PHOTOGRAPHY

MANGROVES: This is the perfect place to observe all four types of mangrove in all stages; Red, Black, White and Button. Aerial roots, lenticels in the bark, snorkel-like roots (Black Mangrove) poking out of the mud and seeds germinating on the trees are all visible from shore. Flip a Black Mangrove leaf over to see the salt crystals forming on the back.

PADDLEBOARDING: Go into the mangrove channels to the right. One of the channels opens to a shallow pool to explore. On the left you'll see the vegetation shift to more palms and rock formations as it opens to the ocean. Paddle to a small private beach called Playa Corcho and enjoy the views.

FISHING: Fish the shallow muddy flats of Puerto Ferro for snook, tarpon and bone fish.

NIGHT FISHING: The FWS Refuge is open to the public for night fishing every other Friday. Check at FWS for more details.

PARKING: With the exception of one handicap parking spot there is no parking allowed in the Tres Palmitas area. The natural boat ramp is for pick up and drop off only so unload your kayaks and then return to designated parking areas.



TRAIL SYSTEM VEREDA CERRO PLAYUELA

Hiking or biking trails on the Vieques Wildlife Refuge
Great views



HIKING



BIKING



PLAYUELA TRAIL

VEREDA CERRO (HILL) PLAYUELA

1.4
aprox.
miles
of trails

HIKING / BIKING TRAILS

The trail is a total of 1.4 miles and divides into four different trails. One is the trail that leads to Playuela and includes the length of the beach. From the west end of the beach begins Vereda Cerro (hill) Playuela which winds up a steep hill (hence the name) for .08 miles and then continues on to signage about the trails. If you are biking carry your bike up or down the steep hill. Once you reach the first sign you can take a path to the left to the top of cliffs with a nice view of Caracas (.25 miles / hiking only.) Take a left and then a right to Playa Corcho, or take a right to Tres Palmitas. The trail is loaded with pineapple-like bromeliads clinging to woody trunks, vining vanilla orchids draping the treetops, clattering thatch palms, and several colorful spiny and succulent plants. The careful observer can identify 19+ species of birds, from warblers to waders and hummers to cooing doves. All will be treated to the aerodynamics of the Jamaican fruit bat, the exuberant chirping of coquis and the scampering of ameiva ground lizards along the trail.

BRING: Water, bug repellent and good walking shoes.

DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Turn right at sign for Caracas, then right again at Playuela sign. Trailhead is at Playuela and before Tres Palmitas. The trailheads are clearly marked with a large sign and parking areas.

Native Puerto Rican thatch palm, also called the Puerto Rican hat palm. Fronds are woven into straw hats. The Tropical Dry Forest habitat this palm is found in is becoming rare in the Caribbean.



HEADS UP: Stay on trail and don't get too close to the cliffs. Do not bike the trail to the cliffs or the steep part of the trail beginning on the west end of Playuela.



DID YOU KNOW: The cellulose in wood is nearly impossible to digest. So why are termites so successful? They harbor an intestine full of endomicrobia (microscopic fauna) in the form of flagellate bacteria in the genus *Trichonympha*. These bacteria break down the cellulose. Newly hatched termites do not possess this microfauna, so their first meal is regurgitated wood pulp from a fellow termite. At that time they ingest the bacteria they'll need for the rest of their lives. Knock on wood.



CARACAS

CARACAS

*Open cove beach with turquoise water and white sand
Gazebos in grassy area with BBQ pits
Watch out for sandburs*

-  SWIMMING
-  LOUNGING
-  GAZEBOS
-  BBQ PITS
-  SHADE
-  SNORKELING
-  SURFING BEGINNER
-  RESTROOM
-  TURTLE NESTING SITE



HEADS UP:

Sandburs. Don't let these pesky buggers ruin your beach day. Wear footwear to walk back and forth to the water.

psssst...

Caracas is the "go to" beach on Christmas day with hundreds of people celebrating island style.

Caracas has a grass field with 9 cabanas at the edge of a sandy beach all with a BBQ pit which makes it the perfect place for a picnic or get together. If you are planning on using a gazebo get there early in high season because they are occupied fast. Be careful where you step and put your blanket! Sand burs are prevalent on Caracas and you will want to wear footwear until you reach the waters edge. Burs are painful to step on and difficult to remove!

DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Turn right at sign for Caracas and follow the road to beach.

FORMER NAVY NAME: Red Beach

WAVES: Gentle waves at west end make it the perfect place to learn to surf.

SNORKELING: Around eastern side.

FLORA: In the parking area, a fair-sized ceiba, a seaside maho and lots of seaside Morning Glory. Grass areas at Caracas are not native. This grass was planted to provide erosion control and green recreational sites for visitors.

HISTORY: In 1816 Simón Bolívar, the South American liberator born in Caracas, Venezuela, landed in Vieques while evading the Spanish during the fight for the independence of South America. His reputation as a champion for freedom from Spain's rule was honored by the people of Vieques more than 100 years ago by naming this beach Caracas, after the capital of Venezuela, his country of birth.

LENGTH: 1/4 mile

PARKING: Paved lot for most of beach with a fenced-in grassy area at the west end. Do not block the entrance to the cul-de-sac or you could get a ticket. There are two handicap parking spots in the cul-de-sac. Bathroom available at west end.



KATE ANDERSON



MARC DELUCIA/SUP

STEVE SIMONSEN PHOTOGRAPHY



PATA PRIETA

Beautiful protected cove
Usually calm
Clear turquoise water
No shade



SWIMMING



LOUNGING



SNORKELING



SHADE

PATA PRIETA *translation: "black leg"*

Pata Prieta is a beautiful, protected, U-shaped cove and stretch of white sand .13 miles long. It was once the "secret beach" of Vieques because it wasn't on the Vieques map. It was our little secret. Now that its location is noted the parking area can get quite crowded by midday. This is the ultimate stretch of beach to relax with a cooler and a friend by your side, but take an umbrella because there is little to no shade. Head to Pata Prieta in the morning and then to another beach with shade for a few more hours of beach time.

PATA PRIETA OR "BLACK FOOT" WAS NAMED WHEN LOCALS FOUND A SMALL HERD OF COWS DROWNED AFTER A STORM WITH THEIR BLACK LEGS STICKING OUT OF THE WATER.



DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Pass sign for Caracas and keep going straight on gravel road. Sign for Pata Prieta is approximately 1 mile ahead on the right. Turn right and follow the road to a small parking area.

ACCESSIBILITY: Gravel and dirt road, rough but manageable.

HEADS UP! The rocky path leading down to the beach is fairly treacherous for the elderly and kids. They should be assisted on the path. Wasp nests in the poles at beginning of path down to beach.

SNORKELING: Great snorkeling on east and west end of the beach. The leeward side drops from a shallow depth to 30 feet where you will see some bigger fish.

PARKING: Small lot. Get there early or you won't find a spot!

FLORA: As you drive to the beach notice the vast acreage of Tropical Dry Forest. Upon entering the beach proper to the left (south-east) is an excellent stand of slender sea-purslane. Midway down the beach is a grand specimen of a prickly mampoo.

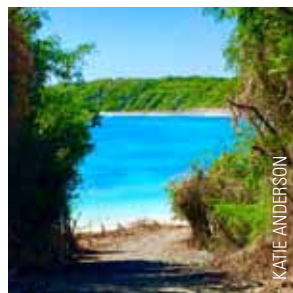
FAUNA: Look for Manta Rays, listen for hermit crabs in the brush, see octopus hiding in the rocks, lots of curious angel fish.

WAVES: Mostly calm unless high winds are coming from the south.

UNIQUE CHARACTERISTICS: Usually calm and clear turquoise water, rock sculptures at western end,

"fairy tree" decorated with shells and coral.

BRING: Beach umbrella, sunscreen, hat, and flip flops.



KATIE ANDERSON

DID YOU KNOW?

The sun's UV rays bounce off of the sand. You can still get sunburned sitting under an umbrella. Apply sunscreen.





LA CHIVA

Blue, blue,
blue water

1.5 mile stretch
of diverse beach
spots numbered

#1-#23

Perfect for
swimming,
relaxing, and
snorkeling

*"You could go to
La Chiva everyday
for a week and still
not see all it has
to offer. It is so
diverse!"*



ENTRANCE TO #19



#4



ISLA LA CHIVA



LA CHIVA

Blue, blue,
blue water

1.5 mile stretch of
beach with spots
numbered 1-23

Beautiful tur-
quoise water

Perfect for swim-
ming, relaxing,
and snorkeling

 SWIMMING

 LOUNGING

 SNORKELING

 SCUBA

 WALKING

 GAZEBOS

 FISHING

 KAYAKING

 PADDLEBOARDING

 BOAT RAMP

 TURTLE
NESTING SITE

#1-PIRATE'S COVE
SNORKEL OR DIVE

#4-9 BEACH AREAS W/
BREEZE

#10-11 SNORKEL TO
CAYO LA CHIVA

#12-15 BEACH AREAS
CALMER WATER

#15-18 SECLUDED
BEACH AREA

#19 ROCKY POINT ON
PUNTA COÑEJO

#20-21 ROAD TO END
OF PUNTA COÑEJO

#22-23 EAST SIDE
COÑEJO BEACH



LA CHIVA *translation: "the goat"*

Ask someone to meet you at La Chiva and they'll probably give you a number, the one on the sign that marks the turn or pull-off they use. This almost eight mile road loop means different things to different people, with rocky fishing spots, gorgeous walkable strands, shallow areas for snorkeling or swimming, gazebos for picnics and parties, and other-worldly rugged landscapes. There are four turn-offs before the lagoon bridge. Drive the whole loop for the experience, get out and take some pictures, then pick your number.

DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Pass sign for Caracas to gravel road. Go approximately 1 mile to big sign for La Chiva. Bear right. Turn off #1 is on your right. (See number descriptions for more info)

FORMER NAVY NAME:
Blue Beach.

ACCESSIBILITY: Gravel washboard road that turns to sand. Pull-offs on the right.

#1 PIRATES COVE/ EL TANQUE: Not technically part of La Chiva but a designated area, this is a rocky beach great for snorkeling and land entry to scuba. To the right of the remains of a concrete boat ramp is a pebble beach that is easy access to the water. There are three reef systems here, front, east and west. In front of the boat ramp is a natural reef built over time on the rock system supporting the ramp. To the east is a coral shelf or wall that drops from the shallows to around 30

ft. The west reef is a beautiful, unique, soft coral reef where you will see brightly colored fish in the soft flowing seafans and whips.

#2-3: Rocky entry points fun to explore but not for swimming or lounging. This area is also called Galinde.

#4: First sandy entry point with a gazebo.

#5: First beach after the bridge and the start of a long, walkable strand of sandy beach. Gazebo and large trash can available.

#6 - 9: A soft curve of beautiful sandy beach with little to no shade but a nice breeze. Beautiful vistas, a view of the cayo and late-day colorful skies. Great for walking, swimming, sunning and, due to the fairly steady breezes, kite-flying. Buy a cheap kite at the supermarket and tie it to your chair.

If you need shade bring your umbrella and sand drill.

#10 AND 11: More spots for walking, swimming and sunning, and add snorkeling. Each has a gazebo for shade and picnics. A point forms here beginning a second curved beach cove. At the point is a sand bar leading toward the cayo. It is shallow but please don't walk to the Cayo because of juvenile coral growing here that you won't see. Instead, swim to the right of the sand drift where there is a finger of reef coral. Don't walk or step down. There is great snorkeling all around the cayo. Rocky on the west side and a prairie of brain coral on the east. Also to the east about 200 feet from the Cayo is another colorful prairie of soft coral. Pick a side but don't snorkel all the way around unless you are an advanced swimmer. You are not allowed on the cayo.

#12 - 15: More calm water areas, easy beach access, beautiful vistas and white sand. Extensive shallow water areas for walking,



#20

The numbered signs might be knocked over because the horses love to rub their butts on them!



#15

STEVE SIMONSEN PHOTOGRAPHY



RAS!

You'll notice a certain percentage of our population - men and women - sporting the hairstyle known as "dreadlocks", that coiled-looking head of twining, serpentine curls. Did you know the first known examples of dreadlocks date to ancient Egypt? Figures adorned with locked hairstyles have appeared on bas-reliefs, statuary and other artifacts. In fact, the mummified remains of Egyptian royalty sporting dreadlocks have been recovered from ancient tombs. To facilitate luster and ease of twisting a gel made from our abundant wild prickly pear cactus is employed. You can't get more natural than that!



#19



floating and swimming. All have gazebos with parking and trash cans.

#15: Great place to paddleboard because it is usually calm and clear. Stay within the area and don't go out past the point.

#16 - 18: Secluded beach spots with cabanas.

#19: A beautifully picturesque shallow rocky area connecting to a tiny cay, Punta Coñejo (Rabbit Point), a rocky peninsula where the U.S. Navy had an observation post. The vegetation changes to a dry adaptive scrub with numerous varieties of cactus.

#20 AND #21 / CALLE: Drive to the cul-de-sac, park and get out the camera and binoculars. Amazing views from this rocky point of land at the east end of La Chiva. Defiant cacti stand tall and alone on this rough piece of terrain that drops jaggedly to the

sea. Can you spot what remains of the Puerto Ferro lighthouse to the west or the Navy observation post to the east?

#22 - 23: Little strip of beach is on the east side of Punta Conejo called Conejo Beach. Small, rocky beach areas side by side.

HEADS UP: Beware the poisonous manchineel tree at #13 and #21. Read the FWS sign posted there.

FISHING: Rod and reel fishing on Punta Conejo, starting at #19.

NIGHT FISHING: The refuge is open to the public for night fishing every other Friday. Check at FWS for more details.



CAYO LA CHIVA

The cayo with many names, it is also called Manuelquí for a man (Manuel) who lived there. It is also nicknamed Cayo Pepsicola because supposedly Manuel drank a lot of Pepsi.

OPERATION PORTREX

In 1950 a simulated attack on Blue Beach was staged by a joint effort of Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine forces. The "D-Day"-like maneuvers took two months of preparation by land forces charged with protecting the beach and inland areas from the "assault". As a result the topography off La Chiva was substantially altered. Bulldozers scraped the land, digging deep anti-tank trenches and felling palm trees and bushes. Much of the thorny growth, mixed with barbed wire, was wrapped around the palm trunks as defensive barriers. A camouflaged, deeply-dug shelter for 50 caliber machine guns was also placed on the cayo off Blue Beach to disrupt the beach landing from behind.





BAILEY WHITEHILL



FRANK SPOSATO



LA PLATA *translation: "silver [beach]"*

Because it is the farthest accessible beach on the national wildlife refuge it is never crowded. Terrific snorkeling off the beach and an interesting little second beach (Platita) reachable by a walk in the water. Sparkling clear waters on a calm day and fine white sand.

DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Pass sign for Caracas to gravel road. Go approximately 1 mile to big sign for La Chiva. Bear right. Follow road past La Chiva beaches to #13 and look for road and sign for La Plata on your left. Take the left. Beach turn-off numbers are 24 - 28 and are close to the beach.

FORMER NAVY NAME:
Silver Beach.

SNORKELING: Lovely coral, fish and sea fans off beach to the right. For more adventure keep going around point.

FISHING: Rod and reel fishing at the east and west ends of La Plata.

NIGHT FISHING: The refuge is open to the public for night fishing every other Friday. Check at FWS for more details.



The tiny cove to the east is only accessible by walking or swimming through chest high water. Rock and coral sculptures have been mysteriously appearing on the beach over the last few years. The eerie yet beautiful sight gives a sense of the spiritual side of nature. To get there wade or swim around the rock point at the east end of La Plata. The beach has prickly sandburs making it difficult to walk around the figures. Please do not disturb the formations. There is some confusion that this beach is La Platita but it is a continuation of La Plata.



LA PLATA

Farthest eastern beach open to the public on FWS land. Never crowded. White sand, blue water. Rock sculptures on little beach around rock jetty.

-  SWIMMING
-  LOUNGING
-  SNORKELING
-  FISHING
-  EXPLORING
-  KAYAKING
-  TURTLE NESTING SITE
-  NO SHADE



Remember this trick? You might need it at La Plata. If your car won't start check your battery cable connections. Tighten them up or give them a tap and try again!

LA PLATITA

La Platita is the natural boat ramp to Ensenada Honda. There is not a sandy beach here.

FISHING: The shore of La Platita is only 6-12 inches deep and is considered one of the best spots for fly fishing in Puerto Rico... possibly the Caribbean. Also great for bone fishing - wade out into the shallow water and look for tailing (tails of the bone fish surfacing when they are feeding from the bottom.)

PLATITA

Natural boat ramp to Ensenada Honda

-  FISHING
-  BOAT RAMP



ESCONDIDA

translation: "hidden beach"

ESCONDIDA

*Smallest beach on Vieques
Private No shade
One parking spot*



SWIMMING



LOUNGING

Escondida is only 400 ft in length and the smallest beach on Vieques (that you can drive to). With very little area to park you may just have it all to yourself. Depending on wind direction, this beach can sometimes be the "catch all" for seaweed and rubbish. Or it can be pristine if the wind is coming from the north.



A SARGASSUM SAGA

Sargassum is a brown, buoyant, free-floating seaweed that shows up occasionally on the beaches of Vieques. It comes from the Sargasso Sea, a massive collection of sargassum seaweed located in the open waters of the Atlantic Ocean around Bermuda. Sargassum plays host to a myriad of marine life that depend on this seaweed for their existence. Increasing sea temperatures as well as changing weather patterns seem to be the primary causes for these unpredictable arrivals. For more information contact the Sargasso Sea Commission at www.sargassoalliance.org.



CAYO BLANCO

*North shore
(Atlantic) cayo
accessible by boat*



SNORKELING
ACCESSIBLE BY
BOAT



PHOTOS BY: CAPT. JUDI / SEA VIEQUES

CAYO BLANCO

translation: "white cay"

Mountainous star coral grows 1/16" per year. This particular piece is approximately seven feet tall, meaning it is approximately 1300 years old.

Cayo Blanco is world class snorkeling accessible only by boat. Book a tour to see many species of endangered coral and a huge variety of fish that make this their home. Federally protected species found here include elkhorn, staghorn and pillar. Other corals visible include club finger, brain, boulder star and mountainous star. Fastest growing coral is staghorn and slowest is mountainous star, which grows only 1/16" per year. Cayo Blanco is host to a growth of mountainous star coral that is 20' tall and 20' wide at the bottom, so it took between 3000 and 3500 years for it to reach the size it is now. Amazing!




PHOTOS BY: JAK WATER SPORTS



ENSENADA HONDA

Outstanding snorkeling on Vieques only accessible by boat
Fishing from the shore for bone fish

-   SNORKELING AND SCUBA ACCESSIBLE BY BOAT
-  BOAT RAMP
-  FISHING

Did you know?

Mangroves may be Puerto Rico's most endangered ecosystem. Worldwide they are disappearing at rates comparable to those of Tropical Wet Forests (1.5 percent/year). Typical species include red, black and white mangroves.

"You see everything. The color of life there is very bright and the water is always clear and calm. I like to think of it as my house, with many different rooms to snorkel through, and then a huge window to the world in the living room."

Carlos Bermudez-JAK Water Sports

ENSENADA HONDA *translation: "deep inlet"*

Ensenada Honda, surrounded by the largest mangrove forest on Vieques, is also the largest protected body of water. In some areas depths reach 36 feet, but the entrance is shallow and has many reefs making it treacherous for cruising boats to enter. For sailors it is a popular stop because of its beauty and as a safe haven in a storm. Because of lack of human interaction key coral killers (agricultural runoff of fertilizers and chemicals, sedimentation from construction) are not found here. Ensenada Honda, having large areas of red mangrove forest, plentiful seagrass beds and healthy coral reefs is an excellent example of a very balanced and healthy ecosystem. Full of life above and below the surface, snorkeling here is an unforgettable experience.



SNORKELING: This undersea garden of world class snorkeling is only accessible by boat with a tour guide. One mile out from shore there is a reef nicknamed Gaviota (seagull). Snorkel over hard and soft corals in depths of 5-20 feet. The bay offers novice or skilled snorkelers the unique opportunity to see all manner of marine life here.

FISHING: Drive to La Platita and wade out into the shallow water to fish. The shore is only 6-12 inches deep and is considered one of the best spots for fly fishing in Puerto Rico. It is also a great place to bone fish.



EL GALLITO

Stretch of beach just off Rt. 200
Pull over to watch the sunset or take a quick dip
Great snorkeling when calm



SWIMMING



LOUNGING



SNORKELING
WHEN CALM



SHADE



OCCASIONAL
WAVES



SURFING BEGINNER - MODERATE



EL GALLITO

translation: "little rooster"

This is one of the first beaches you see heading east on Rt. 200 from the airport. The peninsula at El Gallito is where many locals park to watch the sunset or just chill for a moment, catching the spectacular views of Puerto Rico. But the best views are from the beach, with black rocks set against white sand and blue sky. It's the perfect photo spot! El Gallito is also a nice swimming beach depending on wind and waves, but look out for the intermittent rock shelves on the sandy bottom. FYI: that's the W Retreat and Spa on the overlooking bluff to your right and a great snorkeling reef sits just below it!



APRIL ROMAE

INSIDER TIP: There are no trash cans so bring a bag to pack your trash.

DIRECTIONS: Pass the W on your right going west on Rt. 200 and look for a parking area and short peninsula along the water.

ENGLISH NICKNAME: Gringo Beach.

ACCESSIBILITY: Easy pull-off from Rt. 200. Not as secluded or private as other beaches.

SNORKELING: When conditions are calm on the north shore (usually April-Nov) snorkel around the east point

toward the W Resort to a beautiful coral reef (shown in the picture). Snorkel the west part of the beach around the rocks below the peninsula.

SURFING: The west end of Gallito is a great place for beginner surfers. Low swells and a safe sandy bottom make this a great place to learn.

SHADE: Low sea grapes to sit under.

FISHING: Great rod and

reel fishing to the west of the rocky peninsula.

ORIENTATION/VIEWS: Main island Puerto Rico.

SUNSETS: Many cars drive out onto the peninsula to watch the sunset but the best view is from the beach!



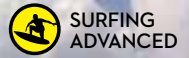
LA CHATA

The surfers beach *Walk*, beach comb and watch the sunset

LA CHATA

translation: smooth stone

La Chata is a favorite for a late afternoon or early evening stroll to hunt for seaglass, shells, driftwood and interesting treasures that the tide washes up. It is a nice beach for wading but the currents here can be surprisingly strong. On the right day you can watch some of our local surfers and bodyboarders catching the waves. It is a tricky area to surf due to a razor sharp reef and high coral and rock points. It is not recommended for beginners or even advanced surfers who don't know the reef. This is also a beach where locals come to exercise or wash their horses in the surf. Keep your eyes open during the months of January-March for whales migrating between Vieques and Culebra.



SURFING
ADVANCED



WAVES



BEACH COMBING



SNORKELING
WHEN CALM



DOGS ON LEASH



DIRECTIONS: The entrance to the hidden gem of La Chata is tucked near a driveway in the barrio of Bravos de Boston. The easiest way to find it is to drive along the shore going east on Northshore Road.

Look for a Moroccan style house appropriately named El Maroc and take the second left after that house. You will know you have the right drive if you see three tall palms at the entrance to the beach.

SURFING: Advanced only, with knowledge of the reef.

SNORKELING: If the north shore is calm the snorkeling is great around the little peninsula of rocks.

DOGS: Great for walking or swimming with your dogs but please keep them on a leash. There may be stray dogs roaming the beach.

SEA GLASS BEACH

If you like to beach comb for seaglass this rocky stretch is one you should find. It is not a swimming or lounging beach and parking is difficult because it is in Isabel II. The glass is said to come from an old dump site nearby. A rock shelf in the water provides a natural tumbler for creating sea glass and smooth "river rocks".

DIRECTIONS: Drive into Isabel II on Rt/ 200 and follow the main street (Calle Muñoz Rivera). Near the end of the street you will see an intersection with a church on your right. Make a left and at the next intersection a right. Park on the street (not in the yellow!) and walk to the left of the gazebo down a path to the beach.

FISHING: While your companions are shopping in the stores of Isabel II, take your rod and reel down to this beach and throw in a line. Tarpon, snook, and jacks can be caught here!





BLAYDÍN

Known as Starfish Beach for the abundance of Caribbean red starfish
Beginner snorkeler spot



SNORKELING



PADDLEBOARDING



KAYAKING



SARAH LEE / ALISON'S ADVENTURES

Please don't take starfish out of the water because they will quickly suffocate. If you find a starfish on the shore return it to the water.

Lovely but small Atlantic Ocean beach area with shallow, calm water and nice views of Puerto Rico. Planes fly overhead en route to the VQS airport while starfish lay calmly on the sandy bottom.

DIRECTIONS: Drive west on Rt. 200 past airport. Turn onto the road for Rompeolas and pull off at the sandy parking area on left.

SNORKELING: This is a great place to snorkel with young kids or true beginners. Easy entry to shallow water along sea grass beds which will gradually change to rock and coral. See schools of small fish, manta rays, lots of starfish, and occasionally a turtle. For experienced snorkelers continue along the rock bed of Rompeolas to the pier. Stay fairly close to the rocks or breakwater and be aware there is a lot of boat traffic. Use a snorkel flag.

PADDLEBOARDING AND KAYAKING: Paddle toward the west side of Rompeolas which is always calm. The east side is usually choppy and windy.

FLORA: To the right there is a large citrus-leaved fig and next to it an unlabeled poisonous Manchineel tree.

HEADS UP: No-seesums can be prevalent here if there is no breeze.

ROMPEOLAS

ALSO KNOWN AS MOSQUITO PIER

Rompeolas is a 1.1 mile stretch of sea wall jutting out into the Atlantic Ocean, with calm water on the western side and waves to the east. A paved road and a broad roadside make it a beautiful spot to bike, walk, jog, fish and relax. At the end of the sea wall is a pier that extends another .13 miles out over the ocean with pilings reaching to depths of 40 feet.

SNORKELING ROMPEOLAS

There is great snorkeling all along the rocks to the leeward side of Rompeolas. Enter the water at Blaydín, the concrete dock or the boat ramps. Stay fairly close to the rocks to avoid boat-ers. Use a snorkel flag.

SNORKELING UNDER MOSQUITO PIER

It is highly recommended to snorkel Mosquito Pier with an experienced guide or tour group for the most educational and optimized experience. The water depth goes from 4 feet to 40 feet very fast so inexperienced snorkelers can get anxious. It is recommended to enter the water at the steps right before the gate. Beware, the steps can be slippery! Below the steps there is a pebble beach and you won't damage coral by entering the water here. There are examples of endangered Staghorn and Elkhorn coral so be careful not to touch anything or step down.

HEADS UP: Snorkeling under the pier is a unique experience because you are a mile out into the open ocean but under a man made structure that has become a sanctuary for marine life. Be aware that the depth drops to 40 feet. Avoid touching the pilings that have sharp barnacles and fire coral on them.

SCUBA: For a spectacular experience in a unique location take an intro scuba course under the pier where you are almost guaranteed to see marine

life that rivals some of the best dive locations in the world.

FLORA: On the eastern side of Rompeolas is a large Australian pine (*Casuarina equisetifolia*). Native to Australia, the pine was introduced here for its unparalleled resistance to drought and salt.

FISHING FROM ROMPEOLAS:

Along the length of both sides of the breakwater.

Fishing from the pier is discouraged because it is detrimental to the endangered sea turtles that live below the pier.



ISLA NEVA SCUBA



MARC DELUCCA / SUP



ROMPEOLAS MOSQUITO PIER

One mile breakwater
*Calm on the west side
and choppy on the east*
World class snorkeling
Nice place to walk or jog

TURTLES UNDER THE PIER

For over a decade the pier area was off limits to the public and had become a safe haven for sea turtles. Sea sponges and coral grow on the pilings making it a unique environment and an ideal feeding ground for Green and Hawksbill turtles. Recently the pier was reopened to the public. Unfortunately, fishing from the pier is having detrimental effects on the families of sea turtles below. They are getting entangled in the hooks and fishing lines, preventing them from surfacing for air. Since the reopening of the pier numerous Hawksbill turtles have been rescued by local scuba tour operators and TICATOVE, a local conservation group focused on the preservation of sea turtles. Please help us to protect our sea turtles by choosing to fish on the mile of paved road before the pier or at any of the many other locations on the island.

IT IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED TO SNORKEL OR SCUBA DIVE UNDER THE PIER WITH PROFESSIONAL GUIDES FOR THE MOST EDUCATIONAL AND SAFE EXPERIENCE.

"When snorkeling, if there happen to be scuba divers below, which there often are, take a ride on their bubbles for a real treat. Exuberance!"

*Eileen Cunitillo
- Vieques Snorkel Group*

Boat ramps
Steps and pebble beach for entry point to snorkel under the pier. Quick drop from 4 to 40 ft.



SNORKELING



WALKING



PADDLEBOARDING



BOAT RAMP



KAYAKING



BIKING



close encounters

A SNAPSHOT LOOK AT THE CRITTERS OF VIEQUES



IGUANA

Vieques is inundated with iguanas. You'll see these light-green, dark-green, tan or even greyish lizards lounging in trees, ambling along the thoroughfares or scuttling across the road - and not always successfully. Young iguanas are psychedelic green and look like miniature dinosaurs carved out of pistachio ice cream. Classified as *Iguana iguana*, it is believed these reptiles arrived on Vieques (as well as the rest of the Caribbean) because the Taino Indians dropped off breeding adults on the various islands to ensure a steady food supply upon returning.



VQS HORSES

+ EGRET COMPANIONS

Horses roam the island of Vieques in great numbers, constantly foraging for food and water. That could mean grasses, bushes or even trash cans, hence the open bag of trash alongside the road. Despite having free range of the island, some of the horses have owners (look for brands). Generally grazing in their favorite spots, the horses can be rounded up when needed for transportation or recreational riding. Watch for horses in the streets and slow down. Oh, and watch out for those lovely presents they leave you. Doesn't work with flip flops.

MONGOOSE ON THE LOOSE

It is believed that rats were "stow-away" migrants on board European ships that came to the Caribbean during the early years of exploration. Some versions of the lore say Columbus brought them, other versions give Ponce de Leon credit. Regardless, someone wasn't watching the gangplank and the critters discovered a new world along with the explorers. In time, the rodents became an enemy of farmers raising sugar cane here, consuming up to a third of the crop each year. Finally in 1872 from the Malay Peninsula (far east of India) a carnivorous mammal was imported: the small Indian mongoose (the "small" is part of their common name), *Herpestes auropunctatus*, locally called mangosta. Unfortunately, like most plans challenging Mother Nature at her own game, folly awaited. The mongoose eliminated the field rat (the dominant despoiler of cane), but the tree rat expanded into the field rat's niche and the mongoose could do nothing about it as the mongoose does not climb trees. Instead of eating these new rodents, the mongoose consumed our native birds, reptiles, amphibians and insects causing an on-going centuries-old ecological disaster. They are also responsible for the almost complete eradication of snakes on Vieques. Incidentally, the official plural of mongoose is mongooses not mongees!



co-qui!

< THE GENUS NAME FOR THE COQUI FROG, *ELEUTHERODACTYLIS*, TRANSLATES FROM THE LATINIZED GREEK FOR "FREE TOES" ALLUDING TO THE FACT THE TOES ARE UN-WEBBED.

16

species of tiny tree frogs belong to the genus *Eleutherodactylis*, but only one (*E. coqui*) is considered the "true" coqui.



30,000 OFFSPRING MONTHLY

Lionfish can live in depths between 2 and 1000 feet and in almost any habitat from patch reefs over walls to mangroves. Year round they produce up to 30,000 offspring monthly and prey on a large variety of fish, shrimp and crabs. Their high adaptability, prolific reproduction and all-encompassing appetite make them especially dangerous as an invasive species. Fishermen, dive operators, the Vieques Trust and others on our island are trying to keep the population in check.

oooh...
that's gotta hurt.



BLACK SEA URCHIN

CUSTODIANS OF THE CORAL

Our black sea urchin, abundant along the rocky shores and coral reefs of Vieques, are an amazing but potentially painful member of the spiny-skinned invertebrates family which includes starfish and sand dollars. The Vieques black sea urchins have an ecologically important job to do. Using their tiny, tubular feet, and long, needle-like spines that can inflict an excruciating puncture wound, they clean the coral reefs of algae that could potentially smother the coral. Working at night they are the custodians of the reef, by day they are a potential injury if you don't watch where you step! So, don't mess with the urchins. They're busy. They have cleaning to do.

Did you know?

Sea urchins can move their spines individually so when they sense you coming the spines are all pointed at you.



JELLYFISH AND PORTUGESE MAN O'WAR - **2 totally different stings!**

Jellyfish enjoy the warm, shallow waters around Vieques and rarely cause harm. Unless of course you come into contact with one.

Should that happen, the number one priority is to get to shore ASAP. Most stings are minimal but the danger is in having an allergic reaction to the venom. Anyone who is allergic to bees or wasps may also have a dangerous allergic reaction to a jellyfish sting. Watch for any breathing problems, nausea, or dizziness, and seek medical care immediately.

If stung by a jellyfish you want to deactivate the nematocysts (the thousands of tiny stinging parts on the tentacles), remove them, and provide pain relief. Putting together a simple kit of easily obtained items, stowed in your car, can be very helpful. A bottle of vinegar, a can of shaving cream, a plastic knife and a few paper towels are all you need.

Pour the vinegar over the tentacles attached to your skin which inactivates the nematocysts from further stinging. Apply the shaving cream on the tentacles and gently scrape off with the plastic knife. This works the same way shaving cream makes whiskers easier to remove when shaving. And dispose of the shaving cream and tentacles slurry in the paper towels, making sure

not to come in contact with any of the mess. Pain relief with any of the over the counter pain medications will help with the residual pain that can last hours or days.

By the way, don't pour fresh water over the affected area. This will cause more pain.

The Portuguese Man O' War is often confused with a regular jellyfish but its venom is different and so the stings are treated differently.

Again, the majority of time their stings cause local pain and tingling but can progress to more severe systemic problems including nausea, headache, chills and, possibly death. Removal of the tentacles is just as important as with a jellyfish sting, but don't use vinegar which causes an increase in toxin release and an increase in pain. Applying heat to the affected area can quickly alleviate the pain - warmed seawater (not fresh water) or any other warmed object will do. Careful with the kids who may come across a jellyfish or Man O' War washed up on shore. They can be blue, purple or pink and may look like a beach toy with bad consequences.

But again, if you have any other symptoms, aside from local pain and tingling, go to the local ER for help. And if you haven't had a tetanus shot within the past 5 years, time for that last sting!

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SIGHTS TO SEE



the puerto ferro lighthouse



“DARKNESS
REIGNS AT THE
FOOT OF THE
LIGHTHOUSE.”

-JAPANESE PROVERB

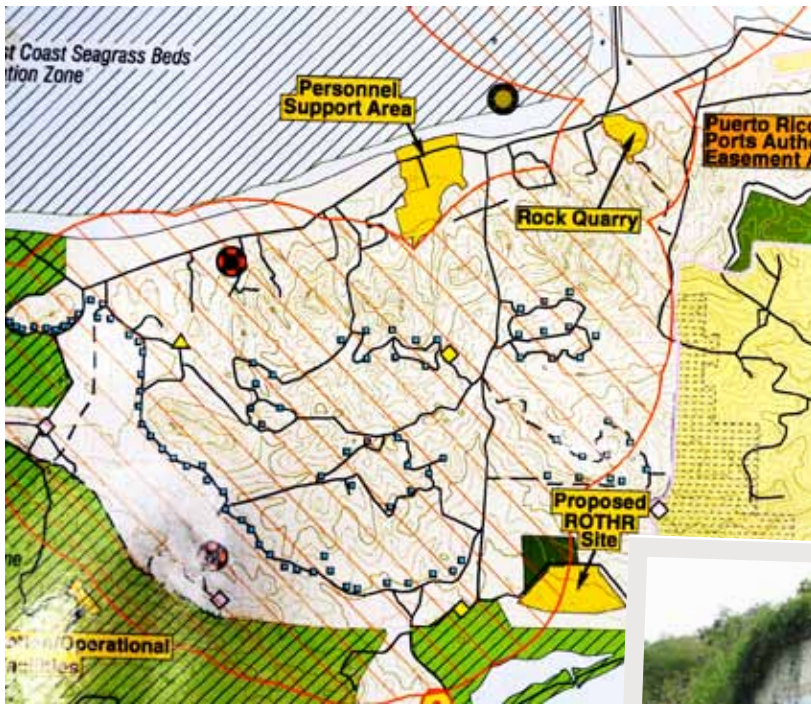
The remaining structure of the Puerto Ferro lighthouse, or “faro”, is located just inside the entrance of the Vieques Wildlife Refuge. Begun under Spanish rule in 1896 the lighthouse construction was halted during the Spanish-American War. Once Puerto Rico was taken over by the United States the lighthouse was completed and became operational in 1899.

Perched on a south shore cliff, Puerto Ferro was part of a strategic lighthouse plan for all of Puerto Rico guiding merchant ships carrying mostly sugar cane and cattle. The light from the 36 foot tower could be seen from any given point in the surrounding waters.

A similar design lighthouse, Punta Mulas, still functions on the north side of Vieques at the harbor in Isabel Segunda.

Also referred to as “Faro Berdiales” after the family who is said to have operated it, the Puerto Ferro lighthouse functioned for approximately 27 years. In March of 1925 an earthquake damaged the building so badly that it was abandoned the next year. Closed to the public until recently, visitors can now observe the ruins still weathering in the salt spray and sun. The site offers a majestic view of the Caribbean, with southern currents breaking on rocky cliffs and beaches stretching east and west as far as the eye can see.

DIRECTIONS: Enter Reserve off Rt. 997. Take an immediate right onto a gravel road. Follow the gravel road until you come to a Do Not Enter sign and a parking area on your left. This parking is for those who wish to hike or bike to the lighthouse (approximately 1 mile) but it also has an informational kiosk about the area. You can then continue on (past the sign) to the second parking lot that is only 150 yards from the lighthouse. Do not go off the road for any reason and don't leave the designated path to the light house or Berdiales beach.



bunker business



By 1941, in the heat of wartime America, the United States Navy owned and occupied two-thirds of Vieques, restricting access to both ends of the island. To the east, an active military training facility and bombing range; to the west, weapons and ammunition storage. Adventuring west down Rt. 200 past the cherished Ceiba tree and Rompeolas (Mosquito Pier) you may notice a series of obscure roads on your left. Take one and discover some peculiar structures built into the surrounding terrain. These are military bunkers left behind by the Navy.

But continue farther and you will see, facing away from the main road onto service roads,

large numbers of barrel-arched, earth covered bunkers of a type the Navy used between 1928 and the '80s (and sometimes after). When introduced, they were popularly known as "igloo magazines". They were designed so that they would explode upwards, not outwards, reducing the chance of "sympathetic explosions". They face away from the main road for the same reason - to minimize the damage of any possible explosion. They merge with the contours of the land like "hobbit-houses".

Today, bunker exploration is a fun opportunity for the more daring visitor. The roads wind through the labyrinth of ruins all the way southwest to Playa Grande. Many of the paths have been reclaimed by the

jungle but many are still navigable by Jeep or motorbike. Precautionary advice: some of the bunkers are open, some empty, some containing miscellaneous objects like computers and satellites. Others remain padlocked, claimed for municipality and private use alike. Explore and enjoy at your own risk.

DIRECTIONS: Turn left 2.8 miles past the turn for Rompeolas. If you see a water treatment building on the right hand side, you just missed the turn. The first building you will see once you have turned is number 401. Bear right and stay on that road, the bunkers will be on your left hand side. In 1.2 miles you will come to an intersection, left to leave, right to continue.

Did you know?

Bats are vital to the health of natural ecosystems and are often considered "keystone species" that are essential to tropical ecosystems. The bunkers serve as artificial caves for bats. If you see bats hanging from the ceiling when exploring, politely move on.

SIGHTS TO SEE



the puerto ferro archaeological site

Did you know?

In 1990 Luis Chanlatte and Yvonne Narganes discovered bones of Puerto Ferro man assumed to belong to one of the first groups of humans to inhabit Vieques.

Hidden in plain sight down a rough dirt path off Rt. 997 between Isabel Segunda and Esperanza lies one of the oldest archaeological sites in Puerto Rico and all of the Greater Antilles; the Puerto Ferro Archaeological Site.

The oldest human remains ever found in Vieques were discovered at this site. They are dated somewhere between 700 BCE and 2145 BCE, a long stretch of time during which the original Pre-Arawak people of Vieques inhabited the site. Marking the site are “Las Rocas de Puerto Ferro”, giant boulders sometimes referred to as a mini-Stonehenge because they appear arranged in such a fashion that they elicit speculation. There is no scientific proof that

the boulders were ever moved. They are, rather, the underground remains of the original volcanic formation of Vieques. More specifically, the stone formation is part of the estimated 65 million year old “Vieques Pluton”, a mass of igneous rock that originally covered the entire western half of Vieques and some of the east. The boulders are composed of granodiorite, which is intermediate between granite and diorite. In addition to the massive boulders at Puerto Ferro there is a line of smaller stones set low in the ground that runs 68 feet in length. Robert Marino, curator for the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, believes the line of stones was used for celestial navigation. He has taken readings which seem to indicate

the line points directly to an archaeological site in Salt River Bay, St. Croix. The line also cuts across Puerto Mosquito, Vieques’ bioluminescent bay. Salt River Bay has been intermittently bioluminescent in the past.

Directions: To arrive at the Puerto Ferro site look for a cement marker painted yellow on Rt. 997 between the Refuge and Sun Bay. Turn onto the dirt road. The site is a short drive down this road.



DID YOU KNOW?

Dogs are allowed on all beaches except Sunbay, Media Luna, and Navio.

HOWEVER, if your dog is not on a leash you run the risk of a fine.

There are many reasons for the leash law, please respect them.

1.

There are many stray dogs on the island and the beaches. Your dog running on the beach could surprise them in their territory and cause them to attack your dog.

2.

Some adults and children are afraid of dogs and want to relax on the beach.

3.

Vieques is a prime nesting site for Leatherback turtles which are at critical risk of extinction. Dogs will naturally dig if they find a nest, putting the eggs or hatchlings at risk.

4.

Dogs are domestic animals but will naturally interfere with wildlife.

KNOWING THE ROPES

ISLAND ETIQUETTE AND GENERAL RULES



For the most enjoyable, educational and safe experience Vieques Insider recommends snorkeling, diving, sailing, paddleboarding, or visiting the BioBay with a licensed tour guide.

ON THE BEACH

Campfires are not permitted on any Vieques beaches.

If you see a turtle or turtle nest being disturbed please report it immediately to USFWS.

Please do not make structures or huts on the beach. If you make a castle or dig a hole in the sand please level it when you leave. Baby turtles can become trapped in these structures or holes on their way to the ocean.

BEACH SPEED LIMITS

are for your own safety and safety of others. Beach roads and beaches are close to each other and pedestrians can't distinguish between the two.

Speeding causes a washboard effect on gravel roads, can cause damage to rental and personal cars from thrown stones, and decreases driving visibility due to dust. Please go slow to minimize wear and tear and maximize safety.

Do not go off road to avoid speed bumps. You will be fined.

SNORKELING

Use a snorkel flag. They are for your protection.

Do not stand or walk on the coral.

Apply sunscreen 20 minutes before entering the water. Evidence suggests that some ingredients in sunscreen can cause coral to bleach.

Don't snorkel alone.

Don't try to snorkel against a strong current.

PADDLEBOARDING / KAYAKING

No watersports inside of buoyed areas at Sunbay and Media Luna

Life jackets are required. It's the law.

Stay in water deep enough that if you fall you don't touch the bottom. This protects you from coral and sea urchins and them from you.

Head into the wind when starting a paddleboard tour. This puts the wind behind you on the way back when you are tired.

If you get tired kneel or sit down to paddle.

FISHING

When fishing, vacate an area if you see people snorkeling or swimming nearby.

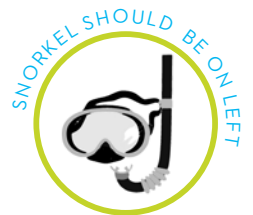
Take everything with you when you leave including broken line and tackle. Turtles and other marine life can get tangled in it.

When releasing a fish hold it by the lower jaw and tail. Never hold a fish by its stomach or gills. Try to keep the fish in the water to avoid removing its outer layer of slime.

insider tips



This is one of the most useful tools to have in your beach bag. It makes putting up a beach umbrella easy.



MUNITIONS SAFETY

If you see something that could be a munition, follow the 3Rs.



RECOGNIZE

RETREAT

REPORT

Call the Police at 911 or 787-741-2020



VIEQUES

LAT 18.1263
LONG 65.4401



VIEQUES RECYCLES

RECYCLING OFFICE AND DROP OFF -WEST END

Follow 200 going West.

After you pass the pier take your first left before the large field across from Milivy Church. (If you get to the church you have gone too far.) / Drive 0.25 miles and look for signs for the recycling office on the left.

ESPERANZA

Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust is across from the Malecon and next to Duffy's Restaurant. The recycling containers are in front yard.

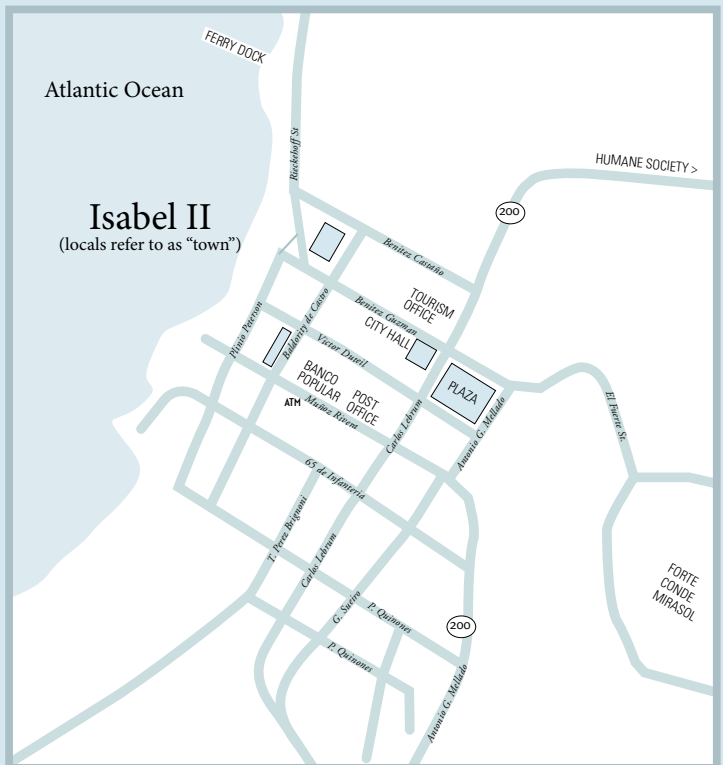
BARRIO FLORIDA

Driving west on 200 toward airport, take a left onto 201. Take the first right into the AAA Office. The recycling containers are at the end on the left.

MATERIALS RECYCLED

**PLASTIC, CARDBOARD,
PAPER, ALUMINUM**

For more information
contact Gladys Velazquez
787.741.5000 ext. 2351.



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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW!



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