

# VIEQUES insider

CONNECTING VISITORS TO VIEQUES

APRIL-AUG • 2023

Vol. 7 Issue 2

[www.viequesinsider.com](http://www.viequesinsider.com)

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**VIEQUES  
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CRAB ISLAND RUM

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## LISTINGS



**SERENITY POINT** is a RARE and majestic oceanfront estate located cliffside in Monte Santo Playa on Vieques Island. Designed by the well known New York and San Juan prestigious

firm Marvel Architects, the home is positioned to capture sunset views over El Yunque tropical rain forest. There is not a more sophisticated, unique, and private setting on the water in Puerto Rico. Vieques Island is 20 minutes from San Juan via commercial or private plane or land your helicopter on the sweeping lawn. Vieques is the new hot spot to escape to and truly find your Serenity! **\$6,250,000** <https://bravosboyz.com/property/serenity-point-unparalleled/>

Once in a lifetime, **EL CERRO** - The Ultimate Caribbean Retreat perched on a hilltop with Expansive Caribbean Views is now being offered for sale. This unique hilltop property comprises thirty acres and includes three different homes. Each allows solitude from the others yet they are connected by the privacy



experienced within the confines of the fenced estate. The property comprises eight bedrooms and nine bathrooms and includes a beautiful swimming pool and sauna. The convenient access is from the nearby Esperanza Village and accessed via electronic control. It boasts a haven of privacy and unparalleled views of the Caribbean. **\$6,000,000** <https://bravosboyz.com/property/el-cerro-the-ultimate-caribbean-retreat/>

**TOP MAST** is a large three-unit family home sitting atop the Los Chivos Ridge and offers exquisite views of both the North shore including Puerto Rico and Culebra, as well as views of the South shore with the Cayos of Esperanza, Sun Bay, the Bioluminescent bays and St. Croix in the distance. The views from Top Mast are stunning and completely un-obstructed with expanses of green jungle and ocean! Being able to see almost every remarkable point of interest



on Vieques island from the balconies of your own home is a truly one-of-a-kind experience. **\$799,000** <https://bravosboyz.com/property/top-mast/>



Golden Buddha by Siddhia Hutchinson



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Trophy Rooster by Glen Wielgus

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On The Rim Of The Hill by Glen Wielgus

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**Monday – Saturday: 10AM-2PM. Sometimes Sunday.**

**Calle Munoz Rivera 123, Isabel II, Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, 00765**

**For online sales, information on events and artists visit: [hutchinsonwielgusgallery.com](http://hutchinsonwielgusgallery.com)**

**Other inquiries: 787-556-5409**

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## BOAT CHARTER

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**4 HOURS**



## FISHING CHARTER

Fish the inshore and nearshore of Vieques with the crew that knows where the fish are biting.

**4 HOURS**

## WHAT IS A SALTY SPIRIT?

Trying to include everyone from the crew in one name is how Salty Spirit was born. From surfers, to captains, tour guides, free divers, scuba divers, fishermen, and even beach bums. Locals who found a way to integrate what they enjoy doing on their free time to calling it "work". Therefore, when you get on any trip, be prepared to enter their world and be taken to the best sites of the island. You will enter the world of a Salty Spirit!

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Photography by: @DanielFernandezPhotos



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## BEAUTY INSIDE AND OUT

Spring into summer and enjoy the pageantry of Vieques in full bloom. Mangos and avocados start to drip from the trees as flamboyants blaze across the scenery. Tourism slows down and the ocean heats up, and the locals slowly make their way back to the beaches because for them, of course, it's too cold to swim in the winter.

In this issue of Vieques Insider, the heart of the island—its people— is also on display. As writer Mike Stone explains, he fell in love with Vieques not only for its beauty, but also for the island peoples' decision to protect its natural resources and environment.

On the cover, you'll see a show of resilience and resourcefulness by Vieques fishermen who rebuilt the pier in Esperanza with pallets after it was destroyed time and time again by storm surges. Inside, read about the steadfast dedication of the staff at the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust to preserve the magical Bio Bay and their undying commitment to our natural resources. And cheer on the young athletes of Vieques who overcome the challenges of living on an island while competing on others, with heart, perseverance and the attitude that "it's all part of the dream".

Vieques Insider is proud to connect you to the people, history, culture and ecology of the island and hope that you too find a deeper understanding of the place we call home. Enjoy!

Kelly Thompson

WWW.VIEQUESINSIDER.COM

What's happening on Vieques.com



COMMUNITY CALENDAR  
WWW.VIEQUESINSIDER.COM

# [VIEQUES] insider

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Mark Martin Bras** plays an important role in protecting and preserving the ecological environment of Vieques as Director of Community Relations and field researcher at the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust. He is also co-founder and Community Coordinator of ViequesLove and works daily for preparedness and resilience of the island.

**Amy Gordon** is a freelance travel writer who doesn't feel quite right without a tan. Her articles have appeared in outlets including Harer Traveler, Where Traveler, Biz Bask and Slow Living.

**Joe Lovotti** lives on Vieques and administers the group "Vieques Snorkeling and Underwater Photography" on Facebook.

**Adolfo Rosa Miranda** is the Vice Mayor of Vieques and contributor to the Municipality Updates page.

**Kim Schneider** is a freelance writer, editor and photographer based in Michigan. Her work has taken her around the globe, but she considers Vieques the destination to which she wants to return again and again. Over the years, Kim has won several awards from the Associated Press, the International Regional City Magazine Association and Midwest Travel Writers Association, which named her Mark Twain Travel Writer of the Year.

**Olga Gallego Smith** (la española) is our contributing translator. She is originally from Spain, grew up in Venezuela, and is a retired professor of Spanish Applied Linguistics at the University of Michigan. Olga is a volunteer translator for VIEQUES LOVE and also serves on two Vieques nonprofit organizations— COREFI and VIDAS VIEQUENSES VALEN. She is the founder of LIN-GUASOL (Spanish-<->English Instruction-Translation-Interpreting).

**Mike Stone** is a freelance travel writer, founder of MikeSentMe.com, and a serial entrepreneur based in Boston. Having visited 42 countries and 49 states (Alaska becons!), he enjoys sharing his favorite global experiences and insider city guides to help travelers spend less time researching and more time savoring local gems. He is proud to call Vieques a second home, and is responsible for uncovering many gems including his love of horses, sea turtles, and coconut water ice cubes!

**Photographer Daniel Fernández** is a Puerto Rican-born cinematographer and photographer who lives on Vieques. He has traveled to many corners of the planet, including Antarctica, shooting films, documentaries, commercials and music videos. His work has been shown at Sundance, South by Southwest, Cannes, Los Angeles Film Festival. [www.dfernandezcine.com](http://www.dfernandezcine.com) Facebook and Instagram @dfernandezcine

**Photographer AJ Stetson** Recently called a ninja for his nimble, silent stealth mode on set, AJ Stetson is a film set/unit stills and portrait photographer based in NYC. A dual citizen of the United States and Italy, AJ is also a drone pilot and scuba diver, and captures still and moving images aerially, underwater, in the studio, and on location around the world. [This summer, locations include Ireland, Sardinia, Tuscany, Berlin, Paris, London, and Montreal.] His portrait work, very much like his persona, coaxes the gentle truth of his subject, exposing their very essence and authenticity. On a visit to Vieques for the second time, Vieques Insider had the privilege to partner with AJ on some photography adventures resulting in stunning images (such as the cover) as well as a beautiful friendship. See AJ's work at [www.AJStetson.com](http://www.AJStetson.com) or contact him at 646-450-5590 or [AJ@AJStetson.com](mailto:AJ@AJStetson.com).





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# GETTING HERE



## 3 AIRPORTS IN PUERTO RICO THAT HAVE FLIGHTS TO VIEQUES

San Juan International  
Isla Grande-15 min taxi ride from SJU  
Ceiba-One hour+ taxi ride from SJU

### ✈️ Fly from San Juan International (SJU)

30 minute flight direct from SJU  
www.capeair.com • www.viequesairlink.com

### ✈️ Fly from Isla Grande Airport (SIG)

17 minute flight + 15 minute cab ride from SJU-approx. www.viequesairlink.com

### ✈️ Fly from Ceiba Airport (RVR)

7 minute flight + approx 1hr+ cab ride from San Juan to Ceiba www.viequesairlink.com

### ✈️ Charter Flights to Vieques

www.airflamenco.net • www.viequesairlink.com  
• Air Margarita • Air Flamenco • Air Sunshine  
• Tradewind Airlines • www.taxiaereopr.travel • www.mnaviation.com

### 🚗 🚤 Ferry from Ceiba to Vieques

Requires 1 hour 15 min taxi ride from San Juan International (SJU) to Ceiba (approx. \$100) Ferry ticket \$2 or you can purchase two days ahead of time on www.puertoricoferry.com with additional fees for luggage. There are additional charges for carry on items such as coolers, surfboards, beach chairs, etc. 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] www.puertoricoferry.com

### 👉 Take warm clothes on the ferry! It's very cold when the AC is on.

🚗 Publico Vans are located outside baggage claim at SJU and can seat up to 10-12 people. They are managed by Puerto Rico Tourism and you will be supplied an invoice for your trip before getting in the van. Tips are accepted.

**INSIDER RECOMMENDATION:** The ferry is used by Vieques residents to go to school, doctors appointments, shopping, work and to visit family. During high tourism season the ferry can fill up fast and residents get first boarding priority. If you don't want to chance being left at the ferry dock waiting hours for the next ferry or possibly even overnight, book a flight from one of the three airports!

## INSIDER TIPS

**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. Just connect to your flat tire, inflate and go! It will only seal temporarily so call your rental company for directions on where to go to get it fixed.

### 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, give them a tap and try again!

**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!

# GETTING AROUND

## AIRLINES

### ➤ Cape Air Baggage Fees

Gate Checked Bag (max 45lb.)-free  
First Checked Bag 0-50 lbs.-\$50  
51-70 lbs.-\$80

### ➤ Vieques Air Link Baggage Fees

Over 25lbs.-\$1.50 per lb

## TRANSPORTATION

### Car Rental Companies

Bravos Boyz Rent a Car	787-741-1856
Fun Brothers	787-435-9337
Island Jeep Rental	787-741-0190
Maritza's Car Rental	787-741-0078
Scoters	939-437-2053
Vieques Car Rental	787-412-8540

➤ Car rentals on Vieques have closing hours! If you arrive after closing time make prior arrangements with the company to receive your car.

### >> GOOD TO KNOW

1 Gallon = 3.78541 Liters  
No Estacionar = No Parking  
Yellow Curb = No Parking

**INSIDER TIP**  
GOLF CART TURN SIGNALS WON'T AUTOMATICALLY TURN OFF! MAKE A MENTAL NOTE-TURN IT OFF!



### ➤ Publicos/Taxis:

Publicos are marked with the letters TC for transportation colectiva (Collective Transportation) meaning that they can pick up other passengers along the route. Look for a van with wording on the side or windshield.

➤ See page 34 for a list of publicos on Vieques.



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# VIEQUES BECKONS

Attraction  
Beyond the Blue

BY MIKE STONE



### DID YOU KNOW?

The red street lights, implemented by the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust, help sea turtle hatchlings make their way to the sea by not attracting them to a bright light. The lights also help mitigate the impact of light pollution on the Bioluminescent Bay.



It takes all of four hours for my crush on Vieques to evolve into full-on infatuation. As my friends and I wander the Esperanza malecon, a timeless stretch of local haunts with names like Duffy's, Bananas, and Lazy Jacks, we gravitate toward the beach to witness an epic magenta sunset. Hues of amber emerging from the streetlights, however, seal the deal and steal my heart. Quipping that we uncovered the Caribbean's "Red Light District," the reason behind the island's rouge tone reveals an awe-inspiring explanation: a universal commitment to the survival of sea turtles.

Now it's true love.

Not only does Vieques flaunt the beauty of an island treasure reminiscent of a tropical oasis movie set, but its residents have prioritized the wellbeing of their endangered marine co-inhabitants. In fact, we soon learn that Puerto Rico is a haven for green sea turtles, leatherback turtles, and hawksbill turtles, with over 60,000 born on its beaches every year.



## So, how does this connect to the red lights?

I soon discovered that sea turtle hatchlings are attracted to the brightest nearby lights. In optimal conditions, the moon would lead them safely toward the ocean. However, if they get disoriented by the glow of street lights, they can be led to dangerous conditions inland. Red lights have the least amount of energy in the visible light spectrum, mitigating the threat to hatchlings and keeping our precious nautical friends thriving. Which is precisely how I feel during my time here. Vieques offers community in a way I have never before experienced in my travels. It's large enough to boast endless natural wonders, including a black sand beach and thousands of horses roaming its dirt roads without a traffic signal in sight, yet intimate enough to make friends with the person seated next to you at a café. Amy Gordon, a former NYC marketing executive who relocated to Vieques to pursue her passion of travel writing, said it perfectly during El Plaza's weekly spoken word open mic: "I love being in a place where pretension is (almost) non-existent. I love going into restaurants and being greeted by name, and often with a hug. I love knowing that the bioluminescent bay is explainable by science but still feels like absolute magic. I love being around people who have chosen to follow their dreams."

You come to recognize people here, and they invite you into their world with open arms.

If you choose to make the journey, you will be rewarded with an unbelievably loyal and proud island family. Discovering the many hidden gems will make your time on Vieques feel like one of its trademark red street lights, guiding you toward the beach as you wonder how it took so long to discover this stunning, magical island.

I'm so grateful to have found my home on Vieques, a strikingly creative, community-oriented, and playful island where a local famously asserted, "We're all here because we're not all there." I feel lucky to have "greenlit" such a meaningful connection to this remarkable enclave, knowing Vieques will always be just a red light away.

Mike Stone is a freelance travel writer, founder of MikeSentMe.com



# Adventure

• AWAITS •  
ON THE WATER

## OUR ADVERTISERS

### ON THE WATER

		SNORKEL	KAYAK TOURS	BOAT TOURS	PADDLEBOARD	BIOBAY BOAT	BIOBAY KAYAK	SCUBA	FISHING BOAT	JETSIS		
Abe's BioBay and Snorkeling	787-435-1362	•	•		•		•				www.abessnorkeling.com	pg. 36
Amity Charters	787-502-3839								•		www.viequessportfishing.com	pg. 58
Black Beard Sports	939-238-6841	•	•	•	•		•	•			www.blackbeardsports.com	pg. 33
Crystal Clear	787-242-1071	•									www.crystalclearvieques.com	pg. 7
Fun Brothers	787-435-9372	•	•		•		•			•	www.funbrothers-vieques.com	pg. 61
Isla Nena Bio Bay	787-403-5581						•				www.borikuatourspr.com	pg. 4
JAK Water Sports	787-644-7112	•	•	•	•		•				www.jakwatersports.com	pg. 41
Nauti Mermaid	754-216-8168	•	•	•	•						www.nautimermaidcharters.com	pg. 5
The Pirates Bio Bay Tours	787-432-6082		•				•				www.thepiratebiobay.com	pg. 26
Salty Spirit	787-477-8664	•	•	•			•		•		www.salty-spirit.com	pg. 5

### EQUIPMENT RENTAL

		SNORKEL RENTAL	KAYAK RENTAL	PADDLEBOARD RENTAL	FISHING SUPPLIES	BIKES	ELECTRIC BIKES	BEACH GEAR	JET SKIS
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JAK Water Sports	787-644-7112	•	•	•		•			
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# Adventure

• AWAITS •  
ON LAND

## HORSEBACK RIDING

Esperanza Riding Company	787-435-0073	pg. 63
Jurutungo Horseback Riding	215-692-7374	pg. 65
Seagate Horseback Riding Tours	201-450-8238	pg. 63

## LAND ADVENTURES/TOURS

Black Beard Sports	939-283-6841	pg. 33
Crab Island Rum Distillery	787-934-8015	pg. 42
The Pirates Bio Bay Tours	787-436-6082	pg. 26
Vieques Buggy Adventures	939-314-3683	pg. 26
Vieques Island Tours & Transportation	787-397-2048	pg. 52

## HIKING TOURS

Black Beard Sports	939-283-6841	pg. 33
Ticatove	787-428-8288 (text)	pg. 58

## SHOPPING

Black Beard Sports	939-283-6841	
Brocoli Beach	954-900-8353	pg. 58
Dulce Mango		pg. 60
El Pescador	787-231-2624	pg. 64
Fishing & Marine Supplies	787-231-2624	
Lulu's Ceramics	787-232-4976	pg. 64
Luna Loca Art Gallery and Gift Shop	803-292-3862	pg. 32
Ola Loca Beach Store	843-271-1910	
MamaPlaya Himalaya	787-548-1010	pg. 60
Scallywags	787-966-7540	pg. 33
Atrevida at El Blok	787-741-6020	
Rosas Depot	787-741-1307	pg. 50
Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust Gift Shop	787-741-8850	
Vieques Gifts	787-435-1244	pg. 36
Tradewinds Gift Shop	787-710-7440	

## SPA/BEAUTY/MASSAGE

Beatriz Beauty Boutique	787-556-8662	pg. 51
Luna Soleil Massage	939.389-5556	pg. 58
Rising Dawn Massage	248-470-5495	pg. 58
Vieques Boutique Spa	939-279-6920	pg. 58
Vieques Massage	787-435-1313	pg. 58

## ART GALLERIES + SHOP, CLASSES

El Fortín Conde Mirasol		
Siddhia Hutchinson and Glen Wielgus Gallery	787-556-5409	pg. 3
Lulu's Ceramics	787-232-4976	pg. 64
Michele King Art		pg. 65
Oro Vieques Gallery and Store	510-682-3064	pg. 9
Painted Paw Studio	615-988-0314	pg. 65

# VIEQUES INSIDER RESTAURANT GUIDE OUR ADVERTISERS

Hours are subject to change. Please check the restaurant's facebook page for current hours and vacation closures.



## DINE OUT!

		MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY		
AURORA'S CHICKEN & GRILL	787-407-9067			11-4:45					RT. 201	pg. 50
BIEKES BISTRO	787-451-9061			11-11			11-4		ISABEL II	pg. 49
BLUE MOON BAR & GRILL	787-741-3318			9AM-10PM					ESPERANZA	pg. 68
CARAMBOLA AT THE BLUE	787-741-3318			7-3 AND 5-10					ESPERANZA	pg. 68
COQUI FIRE CAFÉ	787-741-0401			5-9					ISABEL II	pg. 62
CRAB ISLAND RUM DISTILLERY	787-934-8015					12-8				pg. 42
EL PLAZA	787-519-9510			5-10					ISABEL II	pg. 62
FUSION AT VIEQUES GUESTHOUSE	787-435-1513			THEVIEQUESGUESTHOUSE FOR OPENING DATE					ESPERANZA	pg. 41
LAZY JACKS PUB	787-741-1447			11-1AM		11-2AM		11-1	ESPERANZA	pg. 53
MANGO PUBLIC HOUSE	939-891-2764	1-9					1-9		RT. 201	pg. 64
PLACITA @ EL BLOK	787-741-6020	5-10				5-10		8AM-1PM 5-10	ESPERANZA	pg. 67
ROOFTOP @ EL BLOK (BAR ONLY)	787-741-6020							4-8 BAR & DJ	ESPERANZA	pg. 67
RISING ROOST (GUAKE' TE)	ON FACEBOOK					8AM-1PM			ISABEL II	pg. 49
ST VOODOO'S MAR AZUL	ON FACEBOOK	4-12				4-12AM			ISABEL II	pg. 45
TAVERNA	787-438-1100					5:30-CLOSE			ISABEL II	pg. 59
TRADEWINDS	787-710-7440		4-8 (HAPPY HOUR 4-6)		4-8 BBO		4-8 4-6HH	9-2 BRUNCH	ESPERANZA	pg. 65

## GOOD TO KNOW

### GROCERY

▶ BUEN PROVECHO  
MON-FRI 8AM-5PM

▶ FAMILY MARKET  
EVERYDAY 6AM-10PM

▶ MORALES  
SUPERDESCUENTO  
RT 200  
MON-SAT 7AM-6PM  
SUN 7AM-12PM  
Holiday hours change

▶ MORALES EMPREZAS  
(PORTELA) ISABEL II  
MON-FRI 7AM-8PM  
SAT 7AM-7PM  
SUN 7AM-3PM

▶ MORALES ALMACENES  
ISABEL II  
MON-FRI 7AM-4PM  
SAT 8AM-12PM

▶ MOLINO  
ISABEL II  
MON-FRI 5AM-9:30  
SAT-SUN 6AM-8:30

▶ PLACITA REYES/FRUIT  
& VEG RT 200 & 201  
TUES & FRI 8-4

▶ VIEQUES FRUIT  
MARKET (MUNDO)  
MON-SAT 8AM-6PM

▶ MAMBOS (RT 997)  
EVERYDAY 7AM-9PM

▶ MI GENTE  
MON-THURS 7AM-9PM  
FRI-SUN 7AM-10PM

### PHARMACY

▶ PHARMACIA REY  
52 C. BENITEZ GUZMAN  
MON-SAT 8AM-7PM  
SUN 10-6

### FARMERS MARKETS

▶ PLACITA REYES  
TUES & FRI 8AM-5PM  
CORNER OF 201 & 200

▶ MERCADO AGROECOLÓGICO  
SAMBUBIA  
2ND AND 4TH FRIDAY OF THE  
MONTH 11AM-2PM ISABEL II  
PLAZA

▶ JAHFLOR FARM  
WWW.PATREON.COM/JOIN/JAH-  
FLOR • FRESH PRODUCE WEEKLY  
PICK UP MEMBERSHIP

### FISH MARKETS

▶ PESCADERIA ANGELYZ  
MON-FRI 10:30AM-2PM  
NEAR FERRY DOCK IN  
ISABEL II

### GAS STATIONS

▶ THALERIA GAS STATION  
ISABEL II  
MON-FRI 7AM-9PM  
SAT-SUN 7AM-10PM

▶ MARISOL GAS STATION  
MONTE SANTO  
EVERYDAY 6AM-8PM

▶ MONTE SANTO  
GAS STATION  
EVERYDAY 6AM-9PM

### WHERE TO RECYCLE

▶ CORNER OF CALLE BAL-  
DORIOTY DE CASTRO AND  
BENITEZ GUZMAN IN ISABEL II,  
across from Boys and Girls Club

▶ BUNKER 403 on the West  
Side of Vieques on 994 serves  
as the recycling center. Past  
the airport, Parque La Ceiba and  
Crab Island Rum Distillery, the  
left turn to the recycling center  
is aprox 1 mi. past distillery. Look  
for the painted pallet signs.) After  
the turn take the right when the  
road splits and go down a little  
hill. The recycling center is the  
third bunker on the left. Leave  
your bagged recyclables on the  
loading dock or in bins located at  
the entrance. Make a day of it by  
visiting the Ceiba tree, Rompeo-  
las pier, Crab Island Rum Distillery  
and then visit the bunkers stop-  
ping at Bunker 403 to recycle!

DRY CARDBOARD • WASHED  
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Hector Melendez, Director of  
Recycling, 787-646-4180.



# FANTASIA CARIBEÑA

A LOOK BEHIND THE “SEAMS” AT THE TROUPE THAT TRAVELS TO NYC EACH YEAR TO REPRESENT VIEQUES.

The NYC Puerto Rican Day Parade has become the largest demonstration of ethnic pride in the nation and honors the inhabitants of Puerto Rico as well as the nearly 4 million Puerto Ricans residing in the States. Seen by over 2 million people and covered by all the major networks, the parade will once again feature the non profit Fantasia Caribeña, whose members have performed in the parade for the last 14 years. Led by the vision and leadership of Marisa Santiago, the troupe conceptualizes and fabricates all of their own elaborate costumes right here on Vieques. With the help of welder José Rijos, a display of pageantry is created from wire frames, feathers, beads, rhinestones and material that rival the world’s finest carnival costumes. This year’s parade will be held June 11, 2023 at 11:00 AM. Raising the funds to participate in the parade is no easy task. This year Fantasia Caribeña needs to raise \$16,500 to ship the costumes and travel to New York. Learn more about Fantasia Caribeña on their Facebook page or make a donation to Banco Popular account #112236472.

**AVENTURA**  
**26-29 OCT, 2023** LGBTQ+ WEEKEND VIEQUES  
 AVENTURAVIEQUES.COM



**PATRONALES 2023**  
 JULY 12-16

## LA NOCHE DE SAN JUAN

**12AM JUNE 23**

BY JOSÉ CARRASQUILLO

In Puerto Rico and Vieques, La Noche de San Juan is a summer family tradition thought to bring good luck to participants. Generations of families, friends and visitors flock to Sunbay or Esperanza beach at midnight between June 23 and 24th to partake in what has become a cultural ritual.

At the stroke of midnight those by the shore turn themselves around and begin walking backwards into the water where they dunk themselves three times in quick succession. La Noche de San Juan is a Christian celebration of pagan origin. The act of walking into the water backwards and dunking three times is symbolic of the act of baptism preached and practiced by St. John. It’s believed that on the eve of this day the waters are blessed with the power to cure diseases, cleanse the soul, drive evil spirits away and bring good luck.

**Patronales** is an annual celebration dedicated to the patron saint of the municipality. Vieques’ Patron saint is the Immaculate Conception of Mary and her official feast day is **December 8th**. The celebration held in **July** in the town plaza is often referred to as Patronales but this is inaccurate. The July celebration is the **Fiestas del Pueblo** and is dedicated to the Virgen del Carmen, Patron Saint of the Fishermen.



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# VIEQUES BEACHES

Download the Vieques Insider Beach Guide at [www.viequesinsider.com](http://www.viequesinsider.com)

For information on hiking trails visit: [www.fws.gov/refuge/vieques](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/vieques)  
<https://www.ticatove.org/vqs-hiking-trails>



## SOUTH SHORE BEACHES

**SUNBAY** Accessible by the gated entrance off 997, Sunbay is a one mile stretch of beach. Sunbay has lifeguards and bathhouse. The entrance is 5 miles from Isabel II and 0.7 miles from Esperanza (the Malecon). There is an entrance fee of \$2-\$4 depending on time of year.

**MEDIA LUNA** Enter the gated entrance off 997 at Sunbay. Follow the dirt road at the end of Sunbay and travel 0.6 more miles to Media Luna. Great for small children, Media Luna is shallow. You can walk 30 ft out into the water and still be in waist deep water. Also, for a free "spa experience," enjoy an exfoliation from the silky, fine sand.



**NAVIO** Follow directions to Media Luna but pass Media Luna and take a left at the sign and go another 0.3 miles. The road is extremely rough and 4wd is sometimes required but you can also park at Media Luna and walk to Navío. Go into the cave on the left side of the beach (if facing the water) for an excellent photo spot! There's good surf so bring your boogie board!

**ESPERANZA BEACH** To the east and west of the fishing piers in Esperanza.

### PLAYA NEGRA (BLACK SAND BEACH)

Leave Esperanza on 996 going west. Come to T (201) and take left. Drive 0.1 mile and there will be a guard rail and small pull off on your left. Park here. [It is easier to turn around if you drive 100 feet more to Gallery Galleon and turn around in drive just past entrance to Gallery.] Walk down the path to the dried stream bed and follow to the right. It is about a 20 minute walk to the beach. If it has rained, stream bed will actually be a small stream. Bring bug spray and water.

### VIEQUES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE\*

**CARACAS\*** From 997, turn into the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge at Km Marker 3.2. Go 2.6 miles to a sign for Caracas. Turn right and go .7 more miles. Little shade except for picnic gazebos in the grass area. Watch out for the sand-burs! Be very careful where you step when you are in the grassy area and kids should wear their shoes down to the sand (or water's edge). Note: Only park in the parking lot, and not in the entire cul-de-sac at the very end, to avoid fines. It is only for emergency vehicle turn around



**PLAYUELA\*** From 997, turn into the Wildlife Refuge at Km Marker 3.2. Go 2.6 miles to the brown sign for Caracas. Turn right and go .6 mile to brown sign for Playuela and Tres Palmitas. Turn right and drive .1 mile to parking area for the Playuela Trail. Walk 10 min on a shaded trail and you're there!

**PATA PRIETA\*** From 997, turn into the Wildlife Refuge at Km Marker 3.2 and go aprox 2 miles. Pass turn to Caracas and continue straight on dirt road for aprox 1 mile and turn right at Pata Prieta sign. After 0.2 miles, follow the road to the right to a small parking area with sign. Walk down the (slippery) gravel path to the left of the sign to the beach. Rough road so 4wd is recommended. Bring a beach umbrella as there is little shade!

**LA CHIVA\*** From 997, turn into the Wildlife Refuge at Km Marker 3.2 and go aprox 2 miles to the end of the paved road. Pass the sign for Caracas and continue straight on the dirt road. La Chiva has numbered spots #1-20. At marker #12 the road splits so stay right if you want to explore La Chiva spots #16-21. There are composting toilets at #3 & #12.

**LA PLATA\*** Follow directions to La Chiva but when road splits take left and go 0.5 miles to reach La Plata. Parking lots/entrances are from #21-26. La Platita is the natural boat ramp at the end of the road.

### ON THE WEST SIDE

**PLAYA GRANDE\*** Leave Esperanza on 996 going west and come to a T (rt. 201). Take a left. Go 1 mile to where the road dead ends and take a left. Follow road to the bottom of the hill, where you will be entering the southwest area of the Wildlife Refuge. Take a right onto dirt road to find a beach spot. Great beach for walking. Playa Grande is a turtle nesting beach so be sure to keep dogs on a leash and watch out for roped off nests. If you follow the dirt road west, you will



THE MAP SHOWS PUBLIC AND RESTRICTED AREAS OF THE VIEQUES NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

- Public use allowed. Acceso al público permitido.
- Do not enter. Explosive hazard.
- No entre. Peligro de explosión.
- Mariners prohibited from entering this area Se prohíbe a los navegantes entrar a esta area
- Mariners are prohibited from anchoring, dredging, or trawling in this area. Se prohíbe

run into the rugged Punta Vaca beach area. Good for hiking and nature exploration, but not safe for swimming.

**PUNTA ARENAS\*** Follow directions to Rompeolas on the north shore but go past turn for pier and drive approximately 2 miles. You will come to a sign that says you are entering northwest area of the Wildlife Refuge. Drive 1 mile and come to a T / there are spots to the left and to the right with the best snorkeling to your left. Make sure to bring water and bug spray. No-see-ums come out in the late afternoon.

## NORTH SHORE BEACHES

**SEA GLASS BEACH** Drive into Isabel II on 200 and make a left onto main street (Calle Muñoz Rivera). Almost at the end of the street you will see an intersection with a church on your right. Make a left here and at the next intersection make a right. Park on the street (not in the yellow!) and walk to the left of the gazebo down a path to the beach.

**LA CHATA** Drive by the ferry on your left and go up the steep hill to the right of El Yaté Bar. Go by the lighthouse on your left and take the next right down a steep little hill. Curve to your left and follow along this shoreline road. Pass La Lanchita on left and drive approximately 0.35 miles to a left turn onto a small dirt drive with two palms and large rocks at the end. La Chata! Keep your

eyes open for sea glass. Don't be surprised if you are swimming with horses! Many people come here to exercise them.

**EL GALLITO** Pass the W on 200 going west and look for a parking area and short peninsula on your right. The beach is on the right. Great place to be at sunset!

**EL PARQUE CEIBA** Go west on 201 approximately 1 mile past the airport and follow the sharp curve to the right. Go down a small hill and the Ceiba tree is on your right. Enjoy the Ceiba tree without climbing, marking or damaging the roots.

**ROMPEOLAS** Follow directions to the Ceiba tree but pass the Ceiba and continue on the main road to the left. Take the next right at the empty concrete structure with parking lot and this road will take you to the pier. Rompeolas pier is 1 mile long so it is great for beginning joggers or walkers! Great snorkeling on the left side of the pier but go with a guide. Twice a day the cargo barge docks at Rompeolas so you will find traffic in the early morning and late evening.

**BLAYDIN BEACH OR MOSQUITO BEACH** Follow directions to the pier but right before going out onto the pier there is a small sandy road to the left that leads to a shallow beach. There are lots of starfish here so be very careful where you step!

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

Vieques has the highest number of public beaches of all the municipalities in Puerto Rico. Beaches are in protected areas and are safe. Stay in the designated public areas. Never enter restricted areas that are marked with extensive signage.

**Practice 3Rs**  
Recognize, Retreat, Report  
**Practiques las 3Rs**  
Reconozca, Retroceda, Reporte



**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.



# Últimas Noticias del Municipio

ALCALDE:  
JOSÉ A. CORCINO ACEVEDO  
VICE ALCALDE:  
JOSÉ A. CORCINO ACEVEDO

## ¿Por qué se ha tardado tanto en recibir financiación para los proyectos?

Para ser elegible para fondos federales, el municipio debe radicar auditorías todos los años. El Municipio de Vieques no fue elegible para recibir fondos en los años 2017 al 2020 debido a que estas auditorías no se radicaron por la pasada administración.

## ¿Es el Municipio de Vieques elegible ahora para recibir fondos?

Sí. El Alcalde Junito Corcino y su administración han estado haciendo los trámites pertinentes y han completado las auditorías individuales de los años 2017, 2018, 2019 y 2020 para que así Vieques pueda recibir fondos federales.

## ¿Qué fuentes de financiamiento están disponibles para Vieques?

Fondos Estatales, Fondos Municipales, Fondos Federales, Fondos Globales para el Desarrollo Comunitario (siglas en inglés: CDBG, Community Development Block Grants-DR y MIT), Fondos de FEMA, Fondos del Departamento de Vivienda

## CENTRO MÉDICO DE VIEQUES

\$86,000,000 • FEMA AND DOH

La construcción del nuevo Centro Médico en Vieques se llevará a cabo en tres fases y comenzará en el mes de abril del presente año. El contrato ha sido adjudicado a la compañía Caribe Techno para el diseño/construcción del Centro Médico según el diseño conceptual aprobado.

LA FASE I incluirá la Sala de Emergencias y el Centro de Diálisis. Inicio propuesto en junio

FASE II comience en enero de 2024.

Se propone que la FASE III comience a mediados del año 2024.

La construcción del edificio costará 86 millones de dólares, frente a los 43 millones que FEMA calculó en un principio, debido a los códigos y requisitos de construcción que no se tuvieron en cuenta cuando se calculó la construcción en las fases iniciales del proyecto. FEMA aportará 43 millones de dólares y el 25% de estos fondos ya han sido transferidos al municipio para iniciar la construcción. Tras muchas negociaciones con el Gobernador Pedro Pierluissi, la parte restante de la financiación será aportada por el Departamento de Salud de PR.

Las nuevas instalaciones incluirán una certificación de "Green Building" y energía solar. Además, el centro contará con Sala de Emergencias, Centro de Diálisis, Farmacia, Laboratorio, Área de Diagnóstico por Imágenes, Centro de Neonatología y Parto, Centro de Cirugía Menor, Servicios Dentales, Servicios Sociales, Clínicas Externas y Laboratorio. El diseño aprobado incluye un helipuerto, cisterna, generador, ascensor y nueva zona de aparcamiento. También incluye unidades residenciales para médicos visitantes y especialistas.

## REPARACIÓN DE CARRETERAS

\$2,100,000 • PR DOT

El Departamento de Transporte del Estado ha financiado 2 millones para reparar las carreteras PR 200 y PR 201. El primer proyecto será el tramo de la Carretera 201 desde La Hueca hasta el barrio Florida, que comenzará en abril. El segundo proyecto será pavimentar la carretera PR 200 desde la gasolinera del pueblo hasta Rompeolas. Con la financiación del municipio y la del CDBG (Community Development Block

Grant) se repararán casi todas las carreteras de Santa María. El municipio también está tratando de recuperar los fondos que se designaron para reparar carreteras en los años 2017-19 y que no se utilizaron.

## TERMINAL DEL FERRY A LA PLAZA DE ISABEL II

\$11,414,349.75 • CDBG

Se han asignado fondos para reparar y revitalizar carreteras, aceras, jardines y la plaza del pueblo.

- La Plaza del Mercado. \$2,208,950.00
- Mejorar la fachada y entrada a la terminal de ferry. \$2,813,210.90
- Mejorar la Plaza. \$1,857,522.00
- Mejorar Calle del Casco Urbano. \$4,534.666

## PARQUES MUNICIPALES Y VERTEDERO

\$2,701,772.27 • FEMA

FEMA ha asignado fondos para revitalizar los parques de béisbol de los barrios Santa María, Monte Santo, la Esperanza y Florida. El Coliseo Nelson Diepa en el barrio El Fortín recibió fondos, pero los ingenieros determinaron que las columnas estructurales necesitan reparación, por lo que la cantidad será actualizada después de una nueva inspección.

## COMPLEJO DEPORTIVO LUJÁN

\$2.700.000 • VIVIENDA

El Departamento de Vivienda ha asignado \$ 2.700.000 para la finalización del complejo deportivo. El plan revisado incluye la creación de espacios para oficinas, una cancha de baloncesto, voleibol y tenis en el edificio principal, y la construcción de dos canchas de béisbol. El estadio y las canchas de béisbol sólo se utilizarían durante el día.

## ADMINISTRACIÓN DEL BALNEARIO SUNBAY

La DNRA ha transferido la administración de Sunbay al municipio de Vieques. La DNRA seguirá administrando Media Luna y Navio. El 80% de los fondos recaudados ahora por la entrada se usarán por el Municipio para el mantenimiento y las operaciones y la DNRA se encargará de arreglar la cerca y los gazebos.

La convocatoria de propuestas se abrió para que las empresas de construcción enviaran solicitudes, pero no se recibieron propuestas de empresas de vieques para ninguna de ellas.





# Municipality Update

MAYOR:

JOSÉ A. CORCINO ACEVEDO

VICE MAYOR:

ADOLFO ROSA MIRANDA



## Why has it taken so long to receive funding for projects?

In order to be eligible for federal funding, audits need to be filed each year by the municipality. Vieques municipality had not been eligible for funding for 2017-2020 years due to these audits not being filed or filed incorrectly by the past administration.

## Is Vieques Municipality now eligible to receive funding?

Yes. Alcade Junito Corcino and his administration have been reconciling this paperwork and have completed single audits for years 2017-2020, making Vieques eligible to now receive the funding.

## What sources of funding are available to Vieques?

State, Municipal, Federal, CDBG (Community Development Block Grants-DR and MIT), FEMA and Vivienda.



## VIEQUES HOSPITAL \$86,000,000 • Fema and DOH

Construction of the new Vieques Hospital will happen in three phases and begin in June, 2023. The contract has been awarded to Caribe Techno for design/build of the hospital according to the approved design concept.

**PHASE I • Will include the emergency room and dialysis center. Proposed start in June, 2023**

**PHASE II • Proposed start in January, 2024**

**PHASE III • Proposed start is mid-2024**

Construction of the building will cost \$86 million as opposed to the original \$43 million FEMA estimate due to building codes and requirements that were not considered at that time. FEMA will provide \$43 million, and 25% of these funds have already been transferred to the municipality to begin construction. After many negotiations with Governor Pedro Pierluissi, the rest of the funding will be provided by the PR Department of Health.

The new facilities will include a Green Building certification and solar power. In addition, the center will have an emergency room, dialysis center, pharmacy, laboratory, imaging area, neonatal and birthing center, small surgery center, dental services, social services, external clinics and laboratory. The approved design includes a helipad, cistern, generator, elevator, and new parking area. It also includes off-site residential units for visiting physicians and specialists.



## ROADS \$2,100,000 • PR DOT

The State Department of Transportation has funded \$2 million to repair roads PR 200 and PR 201. The first project on Rt. 201 from La Hueca to barrio Florida will begin in April. The second phase is to pave Rt. 200 from the gas station in town to Rompeolas. The Municipality funding combined with CDBG (Community Development Block Grant) funding will repair almost all roads in Santa Maria. The municipality is also trying to recover funds from 2017-19 that were designated for roads but not utilized.

## FERRY PORT TO PLAZA, ISABEL II

\$11,414,349.75 • CDBG

Funding has been allocated to revitalize areas of Isabel II from the ferry port to the Plaza.

Projects include:

- Plaza del Mercado. \$2,208,950.00
- Improve the facade and entrance to the ferry terminal. \$2,813,210.90
- Improve the Public Plaza. \$1,857,522.00
- Improve Calle del Casco Urbano. \$4,534.666



## VIEQUES MUNICIPAL PARKS AND LAND FILL

\$2,701,772.27 • FEMA

FEMA has allocated funding to revitalize the baseball parks in barrios Santa Maria, Monte Santo, Esperanza and Florida. The Coliseo Nelson Diepa in barrio El Fortin was allocated funding, but engineers determined that the structural columns are in need of repair so the amount will be revised after further inspection.



## LUJAN SPORTS COMPLEX \$2,700,000 • VIVIENDA

Department of Vivienda has allocated \$2.7 million for the completion of the sports complex. The revised plan is to create office spaces, a basketball, volleyball and tennis court in the main building and construct the two baseball fields. The stadium and baseball fields would only be used during daylight hours.



## SUNBAY ADMINISTRATION

DNRA has transferred administration of Sunbay to the municipality. DNRA will continue to administrate Media Luna and Navio. 80% of the funds collected at the gate will now be used by the municipality for maintenance and operations, and DRNA will fix the fencing and gazebos.

request for proposals were open to construction companies to apply. proposals from vieques companies were not received for any of the RFPs.



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# THE PIRATES BIO BAY TOURS AND RENTALS



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Crystal Chapman

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**939-314-3683**

**787-382-5242**

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#### SNORKEL SPOTLIGHT

# 3 Snorkel Spots

accessible by  
land

PHOTOS AND ARTICLE BY JOE LOVOTTI

Snorkeling is one of the true joys of the Caribbean, and Vieques is no exception. We have beautiful coral reefs that you can access directly from shore, along with open water treasures accessible only by boat. In this issue we will discuss three of the dozens of snorkel spots on Vieques that are accessible right from the beach. However, this peaceful pastime comes with responsibility – many of our creatures and corals are endangered – so we all need to do our part to help preserve them for future generations.

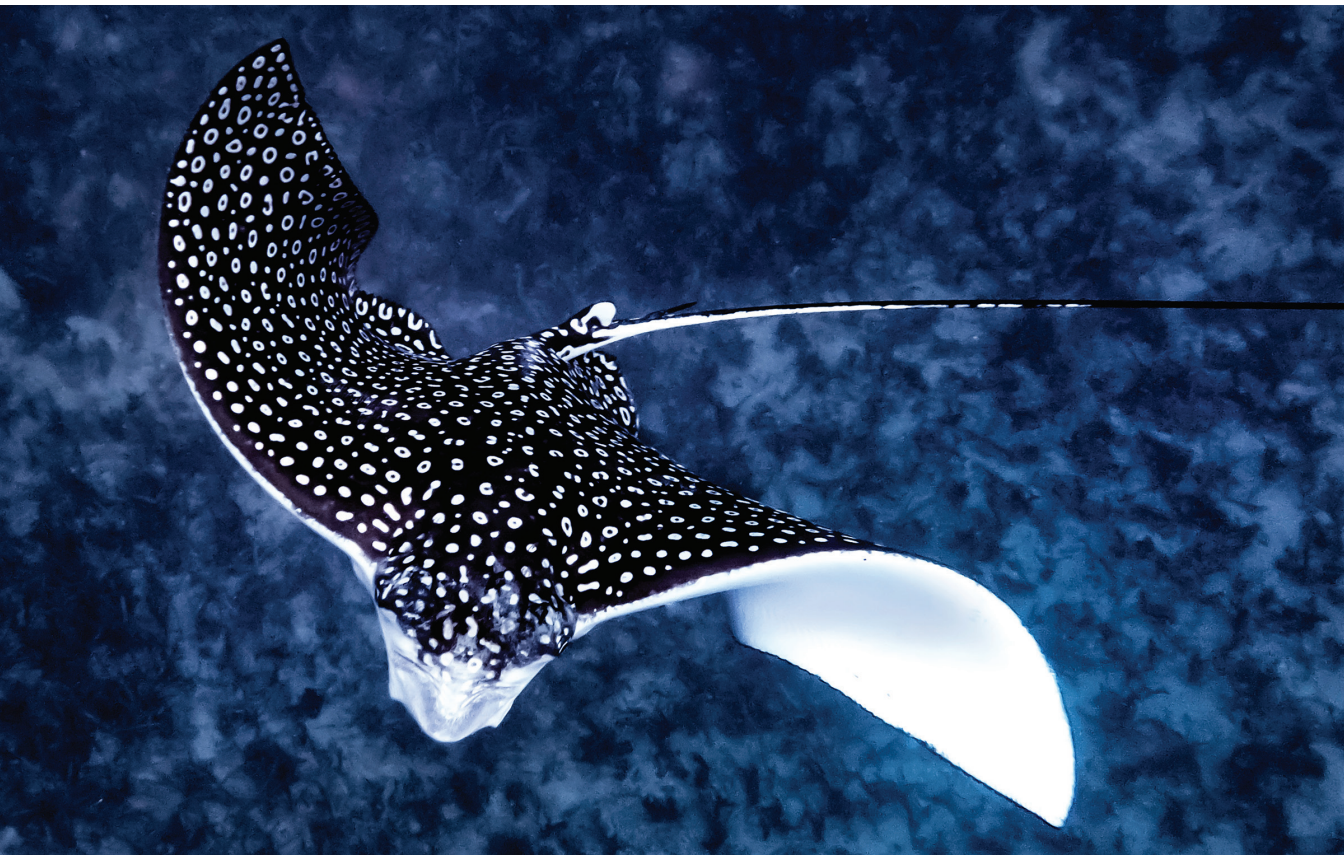
#### ➤ RESPONSIBLE SNORKELING

➤ **GO WITH A GUIDE!** By far the best way to be a responsible snorkeler is to book your excursion through a licensed and insured tour company. Unless you are a very experienced snorkeler with many hours in the ocean, it is always best to go with a pro. And, needless to say, if you've never snorkeled before, going with a guide is the **ONLY** way to safely learn! They will show you the very best spots on the reef to see the most wildlife, and at the same time help you keep yourself and the reef safe.

#### ➤ PROTECT VIEQUES REEFS :

**If you can't raise your head out of the water to adjust your mask without stepping down (and damaging the reef below),**

**DON'T  
venture out on your own!  
Go with a guide.**



*If you are an experienced snorkeler, here are three locations accessible by land.*

### » THE PIER AT ROMPEOLAS

Also known as Mosquito Pier, named after the ship of our most famous local pirate. Anyone on the island can direct you to this great location and if you flew to Vieques, you likely saw it as you landed—it's hard to miss! Rompeolas is a mile long jetty off the north shore with a deep water pier at the end. Drive down the length of the jetty and stop at the last palm tree on the left. There you will find a set of rough stone stairs into the water. Take extra care, as this entry takes some work.

From the shallow entry area, you will snorkel along the jetty to the pier. Once there you can snorkel the length of the pier, admiring the huge pilings that go down 40 feet, colorful corals, fish big and small, and very often sea turtles. But watch your head! There are a couple low hanging parts of the pier.



### » PUNTA ARENAS

This is the most consistent shore snorkel spot on the island for both visibility and fish, as well as turtles!

To get here you take Route 200 west to the reserve gate, and then drive all the way to the western tip of the island. Keep to the left at the end of the road and you'll find a shade hut on the beach with parking. Enter the water at the sandy area in front of the hut. Be careful—this spot is home to poisonous scorpion fish and stepping on one will be a very bad day! Once you are in, swim out a little and you will find a rocky reef in 10 feet of water. Follow that to the right until it ends, taking care not to go any further as there can be strong currents as you get near the tip of the island. From there you will see white buoys further out. Snorkel to them and look around as you are almost certain to find turtles—both the abundant green turtles and, if you're lucky, the more elusive hawksbills. Keep your distance from these peaceful creatures, and don't touch (it's actually illegal!). They may approach you, but keep your hands by your sides and simply enjoy their company. From there, work your way back in and to the left to shallower water. Along the way look under the rock ledges and see if you

can spot a sleepy nurse shark. Finish by swinging around back to the beach where you started.

Punta Arenas is possibly the MOST popular location for our fantastic local tour companies, and going with one will guarantee you see the VERY best of this beautiful location while keeping safety first.

### » REMEMBER, NEVER SNORKEL ALONE.

» **DON'T TOUCH.** The only thing you (or your fins!) should touch while snorkeling is water. Corals are fragile creatures that can easily be injured or even killed with just a touch. **Once you leave shore, never stand up—even on what may appear to be only rocks or sand.** These often have microscopic baby coral polyps starting to grow! Additionally, corals can also hurt YOU! All corals sting like jellyfish, and some (like fire coral) are far more painful than others. Keep a respectful distance from everything as you snorkel, both for your safety and theirs.

## REASONS TO SNORKEL WITH A GUIDE

We have dangerous rip currents around Vieques during high season. A licensed guide will ensure your safety.

See the BEST parts of the reef...guides know where the coolest creatures hide!

Going with a local tour company supports our small businesses and strengthens our community!

Local snorkel guides are often amateur (or even professional!) marine biologists, excellent at identifying all the species you see.

When choosing a guide, make sure your guide is fully licensed, insured, and permitted for your safety and the safety of the reef!



### ➤ ESPERANZA SUGAR PIER

This is one of the easiest locations to find on Vieques. Just get yourself to the east end of the Malecon in Esperanza and walk to the beach. There are two piers: a small Fisherman's Pier and the much larger Esperanza Sugar Pier further to the east. This pier was once the main dock for the sugar industry on Vieques. All that's left today is a maze of concrete pillars that stretch out over 200 feet, taking you from shore to a depth of around 10 feet. If you are an experienced snorkeler and want to teach your kids the basics, this spot is ideal. It has a sandy beach for entry, some soft corals and sponges on the concrete columns, and always some fish under the pier. If you are lucky, you might see large schools of small fish hanging out in the relative safety of the pier.

### ➤ CHECK RIP CURRENTS AND BEACH ADVISORIES ON [WWW.WEATHER.GOV](http://WWW.WEATHER.GOV).

### ➤ USE REEF-SAFE MINERAL SUNSCREEN.


The chemicals in normal sunscreen have been scientifically proven to cause coral bleaching and death. If you love reefs, help protect them by purchasing reef safe mineral sunscreen. Or just wear a rash guard/swim shirt or other sun protective clothing!



### ➤ TAKE ONLY PICTURES; LEAVE ONLY BUBBLES.

Everything at the reef is part of the reef. Never take shells, coral, sand dollars, sand, or anything else. The touch nothing rule really means touch nothing! While these things may seem small, they all serve an important purpose on the reef. Remove trash from the reef only if you are 100% sure you will not cause any harm in the attempt.

**Joe's notes:** *Living on Vieques we snorkel every week all year round and never get tired of visiting our salty friends. The reefs change with the tides, and even though we have been snorkeling now 35 years, we still find new creatures every month or so. Your time in the water will be great exercise but also a soul-feeding meditation with the calming sound of the ocean in your ears and an exotic world before your eyes. Wherever you choose to snorkel, please be kind to the reefs and their creatures so they will be here to enjoy for many years to come!*

Joe Lovotti lives on Vieques and administers the group  Vieques Snorkeling and Underwater Photography .

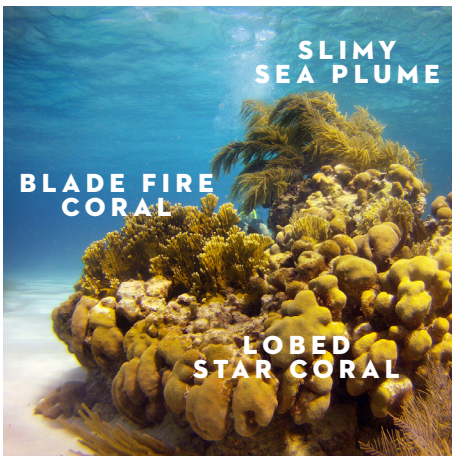


TEXT AND PHOTOS BY: CRISTINA VON ESSEN

▶ Earth's tropical waters are full of reef builders, generally called corals, that grow in various colors and sizes. Most of us perceive their amazing colors and patterns as rocks or plants, but they are actually microscopic organisms living in colonies. They provide an amazing visual display through their pigments and clear polyps.

There are two main types of corals; hard and soft. Hard corals build reefs by creating calcium deposits while soft corals are seen dancing with the movement of the waves. Around Puerto Rico you can see both types growing near the shore.

In Vieques we are lucky enough to have some very healthy colonies of hard and soft corals that you can see when you jump into the water, including Elkhorn and Staghorn, two species which were recently added to the Threatened Coral Species list.



Because we have these amazing ecosystems around us, it is very important that we take care of them. If we want to keep corals around for future generations to enjoy, we must remember these simple rules.



As the name suggests, this is one of those corals you want to avoid. The name is misleading as they are actually closer to jellyfish than corals.

They have many growth patterns but are easy to spot with their mustard yellow color. Fire coral has a hard surface that can scrape the skin and small hairs that actually cause the sting. They are easy to spot from a distance so are avoidable. If you accidentally brush against one, thoroughly rinse and wash the area with mild soap. Soaking the skin in white vinegar works wonders. Keep an eye on the area as redness and itching/burning is expected. If you are concerned about the affected area, contact your doctor.



• Don't step on the corals.

• Use reef-safe products.

• Get proper equipment.

• Learn proper snorkeling techniques.

• Take only pictures.

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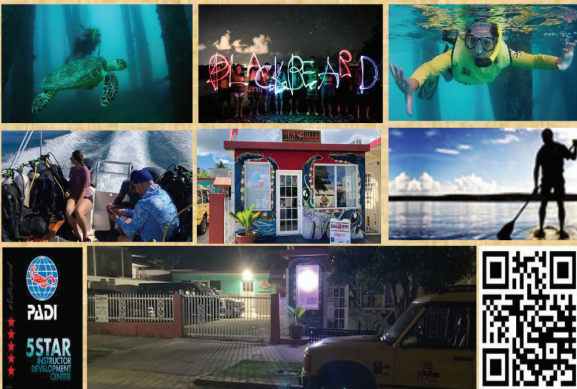
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VIEQUES BIOLUMINESCENT BAY

# Where Magic and Science COEXIST

BY KIM SCHNEIDER

Mark Martin Bras and others with the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust combine science with something more akin to poetry. Their hope is the soul spark from the fiery blue glow of the island's bioluminescent bay might lead to never-ending conservation of this and more of the most magical natural spots on earth.



**I**t's a fair bet that no one has as close a connection as Mark Martin Bras to the mystical glowing waters of Vieques' Mosquito Bay, not even the guides who paddle it nightly.

The scientist trained specifically in the research of bioluminescence has over the years scooped out roughly 3,800 liters of bay water one graduated cylinder at a time, taking samples from between 12 to 16 inches below the surface and in four set locations.

The organization behind the conservation and scientific research of the Biobay is the VCHT, co-managers of the reserve. As a field researcher and director of community outreach, Mark has been sampling the biobay one night a week over the past 15 years, rain or shine.

The samples go to the lab at VCHT, where colleagues put those samples under a powerful microscope and record the relative concentration of dinoflagellates—the mysterious single cell plankton that emit the magical blue glow when the bay waters are disturbed. From work such as this, they've determined that the spot dubbed the world's brightest bioluminescent bay is glowing brighter than ever.

Mark takes time every research outing to soak in the more esoteric nature of the experience, and when possible, to introduce it to others. The VCHT runs a youth program called Manta (Movement in Support of our Environmental Treasures), sparking within young people a key conservation ethic for preserving one of the most fragile yet powerful ecosystems on earth.



“I think the bay is a great classroom in many ways,” he [Mark] says. “It's a natural resource. But it's also a great place to show that magic and science can coexist.”

It's a midweek eve during the island's peak tourist season, and darkness has settled over Mosquito Bay as Mark bounces his truck down a road leading to the water's edge as he does one evening a week. The road smooths toward the end; recent restoration to reduce runoff is one of VCHT's many significant efforts to reduce potential threats to the still enigmatic formula that creates the glow.

Mark steps briefly into the warm and shallow waters (two ingredients key for bioluminescence), then into the



Airamzul Cabral Guadalupe, VCHT biologist holds a water quality sonde.

research boat, tossing in a suitcase full of equipment that will measure factors such as temperature and salinity. The Bay entry area is bustling as the boat captain backs the electric-powered research vessel past a group of headlamp-decked tour guides who are situating biobay tour-goers in clear-bottom kayaks.

The paddlers head in one direction to play in the magic. Guides will soon show them how to turn paddles into light sabers, dip their hands into the waters and watch the remaining organisms sparkle like diamonds in the dark.

Mark goes instead toward the first sampling site, a protected cove under a sky so filled with stars that it's hard to know if the water glow is star reflections or bioluminescence. Here, he takes the first of the four 90-ml samples, dipping in the cylinder and pouring out the excess to reach the precise amount collected each week. He'll add that to an iodine solution in bottles labelled by test site. These will later be analyzed to compare water factors he's measuring from a device hanging from the side of the boat. It all helps to build correlations between parameters like tides and weather with the oxygen levels, pH, temperature and salinity, which helps to steer conservation measures and get science a step closer to solving (and preserving) the mystery of bioluminescence.

As a school of fish scatters through the dark waters, a guest on the boat gasps. The movement creates what appears to be dozens of glowing, blue meteors shooting off in every direction from the bow.

"See what I mean?" Mark says, laughing. He'd just shared the reactions he sees among first-timers exposed to the bay as well as by those for whom time amid the bioluminescence has marked various stages in their life, almost as life with a lover or family member does. The glow feeds their soul.

**"It's a blue mind effect," he says, "that connection to nature, that Thoreau-like thing that being in nature creates."**

"It's a calmness in the brain that was necessary for humans, but they forget. We can't forget. The beauty of the bioluminescent bay doesn't let us forget that."

On his research sheet, Mark notes the abundance of fish. Every observation, including evidence of great biodiversity, helps to better quantify that bioluminescent delicate formula. The way fish the size of sharks—tarpons—are around him, shooting past in pursuit of mullets and pilchards and ballyhoos, is a powerful opening for sharing another trust mission: cultural preservation.

"What you just saw is one of the best special effects to sell the story of magic," he says. "If you were a Viking or a Taino (the native Vieques culture), imagine a 100-foot blue whale going at 10 knots through this Bay or a super pod of dolphins. The sea was an iconic deity to them: some feared it, some blessed it. Even Dante's Divine Comedy had bioluminescence involved in it."

Waters filled with glowing fish, he notes, meant good things for coastal indigenous cultures; that there was biodiversity and nutrients; that the ecosystem was doing well. It still reflects such things today, and additionally ensures that the scientific methodology remains anything but dry.

The importance of VCHT's work is evident again at another collection site near the Bay's mouth. Hurricane Maria wiped out nearly all the mangroves that form a barrier to the Bay's mouth that keep the rare plankton from floating out to sea. VCHT designed and implemented the Mangrove Project to grow thousands of mangroves in a solar nursery, replanting

them behind the decimated ones. VCHT is also adding barriers of sea grass as well as biodegradable sandbags which offer further ecosystem stability.

During outings here and at other collection sites, Mark has witnessed firsthand the way growth and related increases in city lights dim the glow, much in the way a bright city erases the night sky. Such observations led to successful advocacy by VCHT for the red lights you'll see atop streetlights around the island. They help to limit confusion for the island's nesting sea turtles; they also help to keep light from impacting bioluminescence.

Just as it takes many interdependent factors for the Bay to glow, it takes interdependency between humans and nature for us to do the same. Mark Martin Bras understands that. His dream is for the Vieques Bioluminescent Bay Reserve to be designated a world biosphere reserve, and in doing so elevate the perception of the world's bioluminescent bays. To him, they are not just tourist attractions; they are both healthy and necessary for humans to experience life with the full power of nature.

It's... that connection to nature, that Thoreau-like thing that being in nature creates," he says, "a space to remind people of hope, of what nature is supposed to be. [The Bioluminescent Bay] is a place to make them a lot more whole."



Mangrove Project biologist, Erick Bermúdez Carambot, plants a mangrove that was grown in the VCHT nursery at the mouth of the Bio Bay.



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One of the primary goals of VCHT is to preserve and study the three bioluminescent bays found on the island. The Trust supports a broad array of educational programs for the community, with a special focus on youth through lectures, experiential learning, educational exhibits, seminars, creative and fun environmental education programs, publications, computer resources and a unique scholarship program for Viequense students.

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**Did you enjoy a trip to the Bio Bay?**

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**3 Did you know?**  
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A VIEQUES "MUST DO"

# THE CRAB ISLAND RUM DISTILLERY

**MUSIC, FOOD, HISTORY, CULTURE,  
ART AND, OF COURSE...RUM.**

BY KIM SCHNEIDER

Will Colón and his Combo have played just a few notes of an original salsa tune and the crowd is already breaking out in applause. A few stand, hips swaying to the beat, when singer Luis Rafael Gonzales stops mid-song, smiles and notes wryly, "And that was just the sound check!"





## THIS IS VIEQUES, 100 PERCENT.

As day morphs into evening, 80-year old band leader Will Colón skillfully thrums the pan of his steel drum. He sets a lively tempo for a night of open-air communal fun as he finishes a song about the island's famed malecón, and his combo backs him on bass, guitar, bongos and congas.

A food truck staff hustles through the mixed crowd of travelers and locals carrying trays of lobster-stuffed empanadas, fried squid with a sweet chili sauce and platters of traditional rice and beans. A German shepherd named Duncan meanders onto the stage, stopping amid the band until he spots his owner—the man behind the dream, founder Ivan Torres Ortiz.

Ivan is working the bar this bustling Saturday, something else he does when he isn't solving a problem in the distillation room, taking a phone call and greeting guests. He adds droppers of hand-made bitters with the precision of a surgeon, then blends and shakes Mojitos, Parcheros, Chironjadas, Crabchatas and an impressive list of other concoctions he's created. The drinks star his craft-distilled Crab Island Rum, aged in Kentucky bourbon barrels, or his signature varieties distilled with local orange peels or Puerto Rican mountain coffee. To finish the cocktails, he adds touches like mint or passionfruit grown on this pastoral land at the base of Monte Pirata, the highest mountain on Vieques.

The 41-year-old father of two, a Vieques resident since he was just a toddler, launched his vision to make rum on the island while at the Minnesota State University pursuing his master's degree in

geographic information systems. He saw the popularity of microbreweries and admired both the craft behind the brewing process and the way they'd become a gathering spot, a community. He sought to combine both when opening his Crab Island Rum tasting room and cocktail bar in 2021.

"I'm trying to use real fruit, doing a nice presentation with the cocktails. I don't want to be a rum and Coke bar. I want to offer variety," he says. "I think it's fun. I think it's different. That motivates me. On top of that, I think I'm good at it."



Rum as a product and a gathering centerpiece only makes sense in a country where the piña colada was invented and where much sugar cane was once harvested (it's still known as the world's rum capital). Vieques itself once boasted a half dozen sugar plantations that covered a large percentage of the island and accounted for almost 100 percent of the crop exports. Among Ivan's business treasures is a weathered metal

plate found on the island from an old but advanced continuous distillation still imported from Paris and used in the 1800s. While that rum seems never to have been branded, that's likely because rum at the time was used mostly for bartering, Ivan says.

The U.S. Navy bought out the last of the sugar plantations when it moved onto the island in the 1940s. One piece of the leftover infrastructure—the island's fire station—became a perfect spot for Ivan to set up his distilling equipment and tasting room once he cleaned it up and added key touches such as power and water.

Crab Island, his brand name, has an even older history. When England was one of several Colonial-era countries vying for control of Vieques they



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proclaimed it “Crab Island”. The variation on the native Taino name “Bieke” (little island) is the one that stuck, but locals still affectionately use the “Crab Island” nickname.

At the Crab Island tasting room on the island’s northwest side, drinks are served on a covered open-air patio surrounded by bamboo and tamarind trees. There’s music, especially popular on Saturdays when Will Colón demonstrates the steel drum prowess he first gained as a child in 1957. There’s something extra special, he says, about taking the stage at Crab Island, where locals come and mingle—dance too—with visitors from around the world.

**“FOR ME, IT SEEMS LIKE I’M BACK IN THE MIDDLE OF THOSE SUGAR MILLS AND FACTORIES. I KNOW OUR HISTORY AND HOW IT WAS, AND I FEEL LIKE I’M IN THE MIDDLE OF IT ALL, HEARING THE PEOPLE.”**



## ONE-STOP VIEQUES

A visit to Crab Island Rum offers the island’s signature beverage, music, food and art. It’s a one-stop cultural experience for the island vibe and souvenirs.

The distillery is open to the public Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, with live music offered on Thursdays and Saturdays. Tastings are offered inside one bay of the distillery. The other bay houses two fermentation tanks and a still. Crab Island uses a six-day fermentation process, says Ivan Torres Ortiz. “We distill three times a week and make about 20 gallons of rum every time—very high alcohol by volume. Part of our quality commitment is we don’t cheat on cost. We take only the good stuff, the cleanest alcohol for the final product.”

There are no current tours of the actual distilling process, but staff is available to answer questions while you taste the straight rum or learn ways to use the signature orange and coffee rum varieties by sampling some of Crab Island’s custom cocktails. The onsite food truck, La Tabla del Chef, offers stuffed empanadas and rice and bean plates as well as a long list of daily specials. You’ll also find jewelry, handmade from the island’s bounty of sea glass and beach shells.

For the cocktail menu, current hours, event offerings and more, go to [www.crabislandrum.com](http://www.crabislandrum.com).



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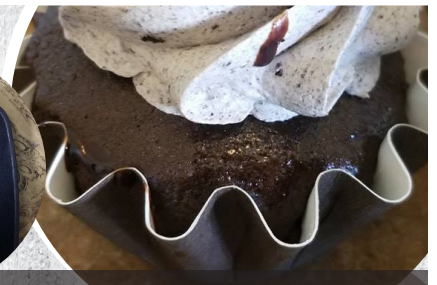
Hooves on the Ground is a non-profit 501(c)3 charitable organization providing humane care for horses on Vieques. Services provided are emergency medical treatment, veterinary care, vaccinations, farrier service, de-worming, search & rescue for injured horses, trailering, gelding, wellness checks and community outreach. To learn more and to donate visit [www.vqshooves.org](http://www.vqshooves.org).

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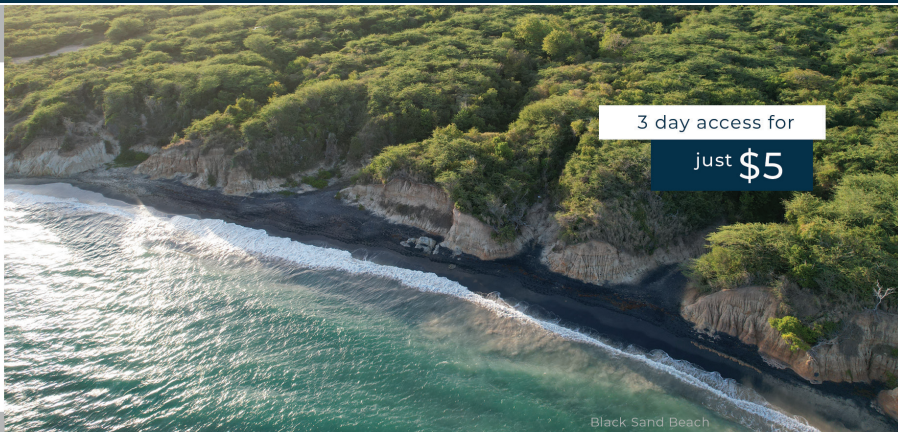
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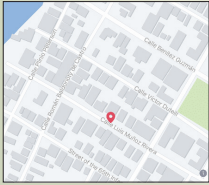




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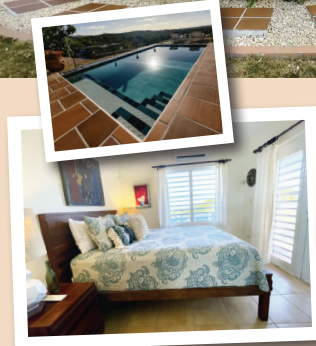
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*Johnmuelle  
Ponce*

BY AMY GORDON

PHOTO BY AJ STETSON

**E**very Saturday from the time he was seven years old, Johnnuelle Ponce was up at 4:00 a.m. to make the 6:30 a.m. ferry from Vieques to Puerto Rico's main island. Accompanied by both of his parents, he'd take the journey week in and week out for one reason: to play baseball. "My dad was my coach and knew that I had a lot of potential, so he wanted me to go the next level and play with more experienced teams than we had on Vieques," Johnnuelle explains. They'd arrive at the field by 8 for a 9 a.m. game, play all weekend, and come back home Sunday night in time for school on Monday morning. The schedule was rigorous, but his devotion to the sport he loves paid off.

*And paid off in a big way.* When Johnnuelle suits up as a center-fielder for the Frontier League's Gateway Grizzlies this spring, the 26-year-old will fulfill a lifelong dream of playing professional baseball in the United States. The Frontier League is the longest running active professional independent baseball league in the United States. The league has 14 teams spanning from St. Louis, Missouri to Quebec City, Canada, and for many players is a jumping off point into Major League Baseball. Johnnuelle will play center field for the Grizzlies.

Student athletes everywhere work hard, but when you grow up on Vieques, pursuing your passions is even more difficult. For Johnnuelle, baseball had to take precedence over everything else in his life. The youngest of five kids, his entire family rallied around making his dream come true.

"My teammates were already in their beds, and I was still waiting for the ferry to Vieques," Johnnuelle recalls

**"IF THERE WERE PROBLEMS WITH THE FERRY, WE HAD TO SLEEP IN THE CAR ON THE DOCK UNTIL THE NEXT DAY."**

of his back-and-forth childhood. And while he missed out on lots of sleep and time with family and friends, he never missed a game. It was exhausting at times, but "when you have

a dream and you know what you really want for your future, it doesn't matter. It's all part of it," he explains. After honing his skills as an outfielder, the phenom earned the title of Athlete of the Year at German Rieckehoff Morales High School three years in a row and received a scholarship to Northeast Texas Community College. When he transferred to Northwestern Oklahoma State



**"WHEN YOU HAVE A DREAM AND YOU KNOW WHAT YOU REALLY WANT FOR YOUR FUTURE, IT DOESN'T MATTER. IT'S ALL PART OF IT."**

University after two years, he became one of the most decorated athletes in the school's history. He was named to the Great American Conference Decade team, awarded Great American Conference Player of the Year, and was fifth in the nation in home runs and sixth in total bases. From there, it was back to Puerto Rico where he played for the Double A Fajardo Cariduros for seven years before making his debut in a league in Quebec last year. He helped lead his team to

a championship, and that's when he got the coveted call from the Frontier League, a professional partner league of Major League Baseball. He quickly, and ecstatically, accepted.

Through the highs and the lows, Johnnuelle has drawn strength and support from the tight-knit community in Vieques, where he feels the

love just as strongly on his worst days on the field as he does on his best. "There are times when I don't feel motivated at all, but then someone tells you 'hey keep going, we support you,' and it opens my eyes and helps me to get on track again," he says.

He's also well aware of the responsibility that comes with being a standout sports star in a small town. "I have to always be a leader," he explains. "I have to always be doing good things, because that's what the kids will see and do, too."

Johnnuelle says "Seeing the young athletes on the

ferry makes me proud of them for doing what they love. It also makes me work harder to knowing that I could be part of their inspiration. I know the struggles that they are going to face. But it is all part of the dream."



## A MESSAGE TO THE VIEQUES ATHLETES

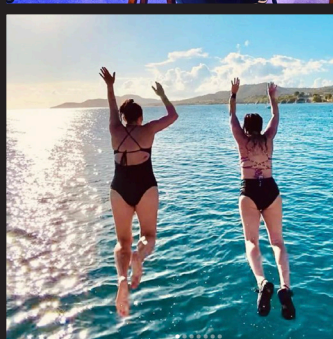
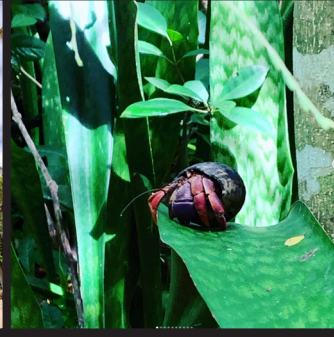
Vieques Insider congratulates the young athletes, parents and coaches on Vieques, who participate in a sport. Teams on Vieques are coached by volunteers and raise their own funds for equipment, uniforms and travel. They compete with teams in Puerto Rico by waking at 5am to take the early ferry and return to their beds late at night.

It is not easy physically, mentally or financially for the kids or their families. The parents, relatives and coaches deserve all the credit in the world for supporting these young athletes. When you see a young athlete on the ferry before the sun comes up or late in the evening after a long day, give them a high five. They deserve it!

Vieques Insider desea felicitar a todos los jóvenes atletas viequenses que participan en un deporte, así como a sus padres y entrenadores. Los equipos deportivos de Vieques están dirigidos por entrenadores voluntarios, quienes con mucha dedicación recaudan los fondos necesarios para comprar equipos, uniformes y viajar a la Isla Grande cuando hay competiciones. Los muchachos y muchachas se tienen que levantar a las 5 de la mañana para tomar el ferry y normalmente no regresan a su casa en Vieques hasta altas horas de la noche, después de un día entero de competición. Esto no es nada fácil para estos jóvenes y sus familias, que hacen un gran sacrificio económico para que sus hijos puedan competir en su deporte. Todos los padres, familiares y entrenadores merecen nuestro reconocimiento por su gran labor con los jóvenes atletas. Así que queremos pedirles a ustedes los lectores que feliciten a estos formidables jóvenes y les "choquen los cinco" siempre que los vean en el ferry. Sin duda, ellos se lo merecen.







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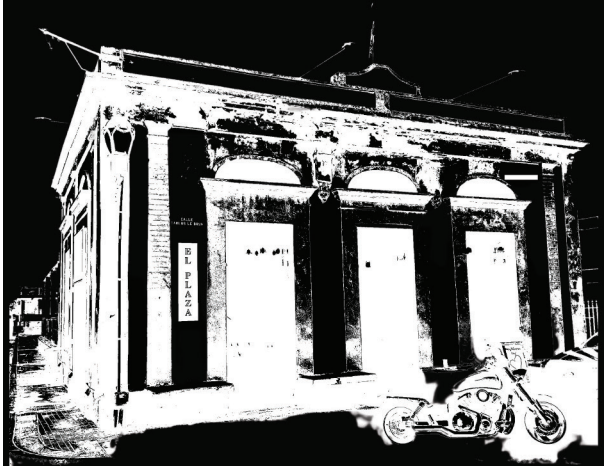
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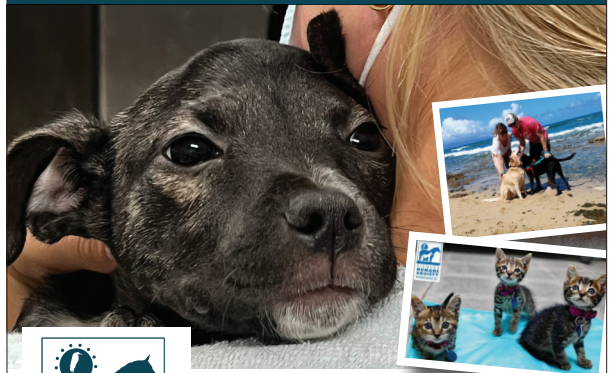
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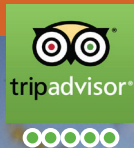
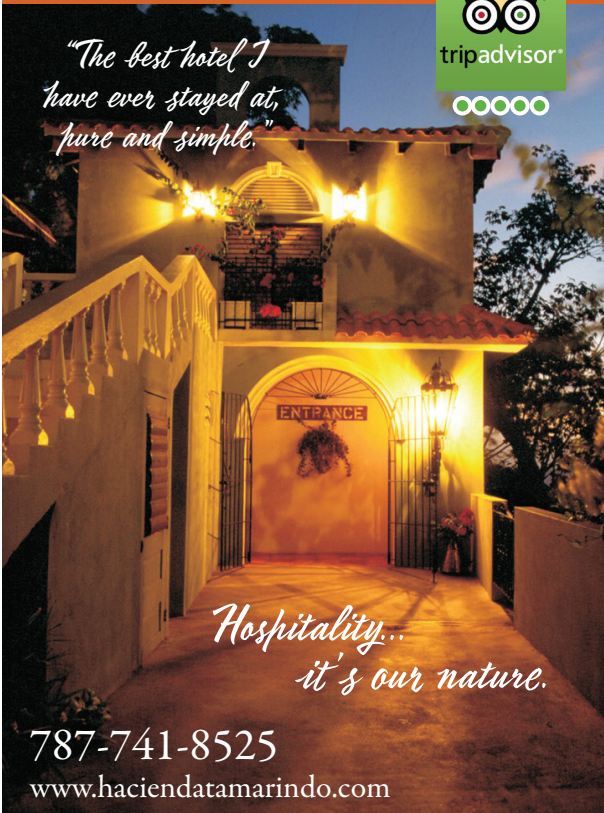
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