

# a bit of history

Want to know a bit more about Vieques?

Here's a brief timeline to whet the appetite of the history buff in you.

★ **2145 BCE** Archeological findings in Puerto Ferro date back to Pre-Arawak period.

★ **1100 CE** Taino culture abounds in Esperanza.

★ **1493** Columbus lands on the south side of Borinquen (now Puerto Rico) and claims it for Spain.



★ **1508** Ponce de León initiates colonization of Puerto Rico.

★ **1514** Taíno Chiefs Yaureibo and Cacimar from Bieke fight Spanish forces on the east side of Puerto Rico.

★ **1683** British settlers from Anguilla invade Vieques. Danish forces from St. Thomas drive invaders away.

★ **1698** Scottish settlers from Nevis, Anguilla and Tortola invade Vieques. Spanish forces drive invaders away.

★ **1718** British settlers from Anguilla come to Vieques to establish a colony on two different occasions. Both times Spanish forces drive invaders away.

★ **1811** The Spanish colonization of Vieques begins.

★ **1815** Royal Decree of Graces allows other Europeans who swear loyalty to the Spanish Crown to remain in Puerto Rico. French settlers develop Vieques' agrarian economy.

★ **1816** Simón Bolívar, Latin America's Great Liberator, comes to Vieques.



★ **1822** The Spanish commence construction of a town, eventually called Punta Mulas (Isabel II today), on the north side of the island.

★ **1832** Teófilo José Jaime María Le Guillou, a French emigre, is appointed military governor of Vieques.

★ **1844** The municipality of Vieques is formally established; construction of original Catholic Church gets underway.

★ **1845** Construction of Fortín Conde de Mirasol (the Fort) begins.

★ **1863** Britain formally renounces all claims to Vieques.

★ **1873** Abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico (March 22, 1873); Manuel E. Benitez is elected Vieques' first mayor when municipalities are extended the right to vote.

★ **1893** All Saints Church is officially consecrated. Vieques and Ponce were the first places in Puerto Rico under Spanish Monarchy allowed to set up non-Catholic churches.

★ **1896** Punta Mulas lighthouse (north side) is completed.

★ **1898** Spanish-American War. Treaty of Paris gives United States temporary control



of Cuba and ownership of Puerto Rico, Guam and the Philippine islands.

★ **1899** Puerto Ferro lighthouse (south side) is completed.



★ **1917** Jones Act grants United States Citizenship to all Puerto Ricans.

★ **1925** On March 19, a powerful earthquake causes major structural damages to the Puerto Ferro lighthouse. The lighthouse is closed.



★ **1941-49** The United States Navy expropriates nearly two thirds of Vieques for military maneuvers.

★ **1948** Luis Muñoz Marín becomes 1st democratically elected governor of Puerto Rico.

★ **1952** Commonwealth of Puerto Rico is established on July 25.

★ **1961** The film Lord of the Flies is shot in Vieques.

★ **1965** Osvaldo "Val" Gonzalez-Duriex provides air transportation to Vieques and registers his enterprise as Vieques Air Link.

★ **1976** Water from El Yunque (Puerto Rico's rain forest) via underwater pipeline becomes the main water supply for Vieques.

★ **1977 - 1988** "Vieques Pony Express"— Ventura Camacho Dávila is hired by the post office to initiate island-wide delivery of mail. For the next 11 years, Ventura Camacho does his job on horseback.



★ **1978** "Fishermen's War": An international NATO backed training military exercise on Vieques is stopped by fishermen who position themselves in the direct line of fire.

★ **1989** Hugo, since upgraded to a category 5 hurricane, devastates Vieques.

★ **1991** Restoration of Fortín Conde de Mirasol is completed.

★ **1999** David Sanes is killed by a bomb from U.S. Navy military exercises. The tragic death serves as the catalyst for a peace protest that galvanizes all of Puerto Rico. The 'Paz Para Vieques' movement garners international support and becomes instrumental in pressuring the United States Navy to end military exercises on the island.



★ **2001** Vieques National Wildlife Refuge is established (3,100 acres on the western end of Vieques).

★ **2003** U.S. Navy leaves Vieques; 14,573 acres of land on the east end are

added to the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is operated under the U.S. Department of Interior and becomes the largest wildlife refuge in the Caribbean.

★ **2005** U.S. Congress designates parts of Vieques as a Superfund.

★ **2006** Montessori Education arrives in Vieques; Guinness World Records names Mosquito Bay the brightest Bio-bay in the world; MANTA, the educational outreach program of the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust (VCHT) wins EPA's highest award two years in a row.

★ **2007** Comunidad Verde Vieques is established. This is the first re-settlement inside former NAVY land.

★ **2009** First Bio-luminescent Symposium in Puerto Rico is held in Vieques and hosted by the VCHT.

★ **2011** White House report issued by the Vieques Task Force recommends military clean-up, a solid waste strategy, health care, renewable energy, protection of the BioBay and "green" tourism.

★ **2012** Vieques Concert Society (VCS), in partnership

with Jorge Camacho, starts the Vieques Rondalla. JUNTOS begins Humane Education in schools.

★ **2016** VCHT signs an agreement with the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources to co-manage the Mosquito nature reserve.



★ **2017** Hurricane Maria devastates Puerto Rico and Vieques with Category 5-force winds. Communication to the outside world is severed, and it takes 7 months to restore power. Numerous on- and off-island organizations form to provide help.

★ **2019** The death of 13-year old Jai Ventura sparks island-wide grief and a peaceful protest (justiceparajai) about the Vieques hospital. Destroyed in Hurricane Maria,



the hospital *or* CDT (Center for Diagnoses and Treatment) has not been rebuilt. Residents took signed cinderblocks to the town plaza to signify the need to rebuild. They remain in front of the municipal offices.

★ **2019** The Covid-19 pandemic magnifies the island's humanitarian crisis after the devastation of Hurricane Maria and several earthquakes. Fortunately, response to the virus is rapid and thorough and controls the spread.

★ **2019-20** Puerto Rico experiences an unprecedented series of shock swarms. Over 9,000 earthquakes and aftershocks damage thousands of homes and buildings and closes schools.

**TODAY** At press time, Puerto Rico and Vieques are in a steady decline of Covid-19 cases and deaths. Over 80% of the residents are vaccinated. Work begins on the Vieques hospital.

<https://www.facebook.com/ArchivoHistoricodeVieques>  
<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Fort%C3%ADn-Conde-Mirasol/109510962408101>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qSjNzRilCY4>



By Rafael Trelles

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