

# VIEQUES INSIDER

Connecting Visitors to Vieques

NOV.-JAN. 2025/26

vol. 8 issue 1

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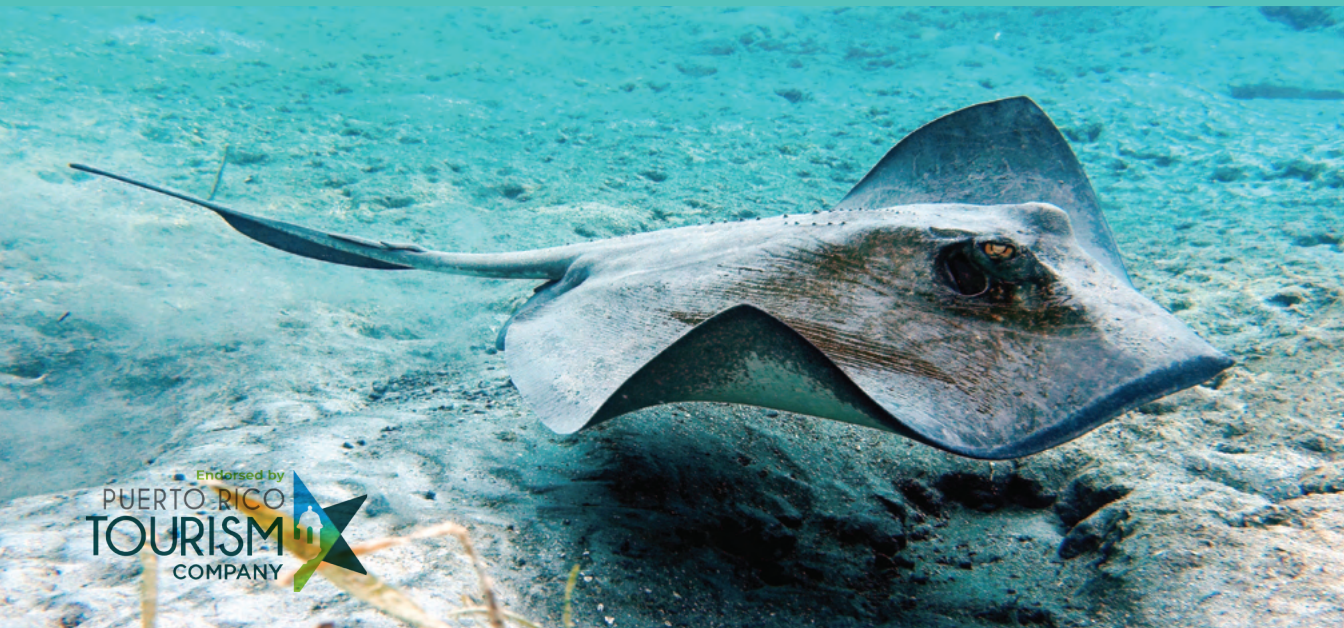
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Freddy is a native of Vieques and this project has allowed him to return to the place where he grew up, reuniting with his friends from his childhood and youth. And for his wife Rebecca, it is a goal accomplished and a dream come true, because it has given them the opportunity to complement their strengths through her husband's creativity and the business experience she has.



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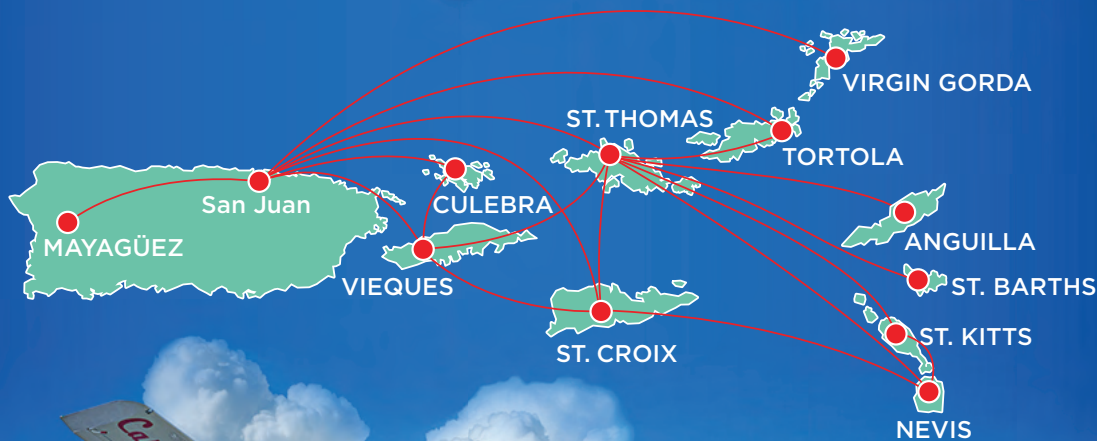
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## BEACH + TRAVEL *Guide*

*Welcome* to Vieques, where life moves to nature's rhythm and time is marked by sunsets and tides. Vieques is not for everyone, and that's what makes it special. Expectations of everyday conveniences might need a slight adjustment, but Vieques rewards you with something far greater: authenticity, beauty, and an irresistible charm that lingers long after you've left.

This Beach & Travel Guide was created to be your companion, whether you're planning your first visit to Vieques or returning to "*La Isla Nena*" to fall in love all over again. If you're here for the first time, rest assured: you're about to discover paradise. If you've been here before, you already know, Vieques has a way of captivating the soul.

Life here moves slowly, and the best moments are often the simplest ones. Inside these pages, you'll find everything you need to make the most of your journey—from beach guides (offering everything from calm snorkeling coves to wild, open stretches of sand) to local sites, food, and practical tips for experiencing Vieques with respect for its natural beauty and welcoming community.

Vieques Insider's mission is to connect visitors with the heart and soul of Vieques—its history, ecology, people, traditions, and hidden gems. We believe that learning about this island enhances every experience, turning a simple vacation into a journey of discovery. In this issue we have gathered some of our favorite articles, photos and helpful information to help you plan your trip and discover all that Vieques has to offer.

For more information about Vieques visit [www.viequesinsider.com](http://www.viequesinsider.com) or scan here.



# VIEQUES AT A GLANCE:

## Essential Facts for Travelers

### PRACTICAL ESSENTIALS

- ★ **Location:** Vieques is a small island located about 7 miles (11 km) off the east coast of Puerto Rico's main island.
- ★ **Size:** Approximately 52 square miles (135 km<sup>2</sup>) - more than double the area of Manhattan.
- ★ **Entry Requirements for U.S. citizens:** No passport required (domestic travel).
- ★ **Entry Requirements for International visitors:** Must meet the same entry requirements as the U.S. mainland (passport and visa/ESTA if applicable).
- ★ **Governance:** Vieques is one of the 78 municipalities of Puerto Rico, a U.S. territory. Everyone born in Puerto Rico, Vieques or Culebra is a U.S. citizen, uses the U.S. dollar, and lives under both Puerto Rican and U.S. federal law, though residents do not have full representation in Congress or a vote for president.
- ★ **Currency:** U.S. Dollar (USD). Cards are widely accepted; carry cash for food trucks, street vendors, tips for tour guides, or during power outages. ATMs are available in Isabel II and Esperanza but may run out of cash on holidays.
- ★ **Language:** Spanish is primary; English is widely spoken in tourism and service sectors.
- ★ **Time Zone:** Atlantic Standard Time (AST) year-round — no Daylight Saving Time. Puerto Rico is the same time as New York in the summer and one hour ahead of New York in the winter.
- ★ **Electricity & Plugs:** Same as mainland U.S. (120V, 60Hz). Power outages occur - bring a power bank.
- ★ **Population:** < 9,000
- ★ **Nickname:** Isla Nena ("Little Girl Island")
- ★ **Highest Point:** Monte Pirata 987 ft (301 m) above sea level.

- ★ **Towns:** Isabel II (north; commercial center) and Esperanza (south; dining and malecon/esplanade).
- ★ **History:** Once home to Arawak and Taíno, sugarcane plantations, infamous pirates, and later U.S. Navy operations.
- ★ **Military History:** For over 60 years, the U.S. Navy used Vieques as a training and bombing range until 2003. Portions of the east and west sides remain off-limits and under federal cleanup for unexploded ordnance and environmental restoration.
- ★ **Fish & Wildlife Lands:** After the Navy's departure in 2003, more than 17,000 acres of former military lands were cleared of ordinance and



- transferred to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, creating the Caribbean's largest national wildlife refuge by land mass.
- ★ **Restricted Areas:** Portions of Vieques remain closed to the public due to ongoing environmental cleanup by the U.S. Navy (see green areas on the map above). These zones—primarily on the eastern and western ends of the island within the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge—were once used for military training and may contain unexploded ordnance. Entry is strictly prohibited outside designated trails and beaches marked as open for public access. Always respect warning signs and stay on approved routes for your safety and the protection of sensitive habitats.
  - ★ **Transportation on Vieques:** Renting a Car is strongly recommended in order to explore all of the island and see remote beaches. Públicos (shared vans) and taxis are available (see directory on page

- 40-41). Uber and Lyft do not operate on Vieques. Car rentals sell out fast in high season—book early.
- ★ **Health & Safety:** There is a CDT (Center for Diagnoses and Treatment) with emergency services in Las Marias. Serious emergencies are airlifted to the main island. The new CDT being built after it was damaged in Hurricane Maria has opened its dialysis center and is on track to be operational soon.
  - ★ **Drinking Water:** Supplied via an underwater pipeline from the Río Blanco watershed (El Yunque Rainforest area) on the main island. It is safe to drink.
  - ★ **Nature & Beaches:** Over half of Vieques is protected as the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. Beaches are pristine with few amenities—bring water, snacks, and shade.
  - ★ **Bioluminescent Bay:** Mosquito Bay is recognized as the record-holding brightest bioluminescent bay in the world. Tours are run by kayak or electric boat, best on moonless nights.
  - ★ **Wild Horses:** Thousands of semi-wild horses roam freely, often seen grazing roadside or along beaches. Take care when driving, as they are often on the road itself.
  - ★ **Local Cuisine Highlights:** mofongo, whole fried fish, arroz con gandules, pastelillos, fresh seafood.
  - ★ **Connectivity:** Wi-Fi and mobile coverage are available but can be inconsistent on remote beaches.

### UNITS OF MEASUREMENTS

- ★ **Distances:** Kilometers
- ★ **Speed Limits:** Miles per hour
- ★ **Gasoline:** Sold by the liter (1 liter = 0.264 gallons; 1 gallon = 3.785 liters)
- ★ **Temperature:** Fahrenheit (°F)

WEATHER

- ★ **Winter (Dec–Apr):** High tourism season; sunny, lower humidity, winter tradewinds; highs 82–84°F (28–29°C); light rain (2–3 in/month).
- ★ **Summer (May–Jul):** Lower tourism; 85–92°F (29–33°C); moderate rain (3–5 in/month).
- ★ **Hurricane Season (Aug–Nov):** Hottest months (88–95°F / 31–35°C); heaviest rain (5–7 in/month). Storms are possible—check forecasts and consider travel insurance.

PREVAILING WINDS

- ★ **Winter:** East to northeast
- ★ **Summer:** Southeast
- ★ **Tides:** Semi-diurnal (two highs/ two lows daily); range rarely exceeds 1.5 ft.

TOURISM SEASONS

- ★ **High Tourism Season:** **late Nov. - March or April:** The busiest tourist season on Vieques is generally Thanksgiving until Easter. Rental cars and accommodations should be booked well in advance and reservations are needed for dining and activities especially on holidays and school breaks.
- ★ **Shoulder Tourism Season:** **May–June:** Fewer crowds and warmer, drier weather make this a pleasant time to visit. The island is in full bloom, and while it’s becoming more popular, there’s still plenty of availability.
- ★ **Hurricane Season:** **June 1–Nov. 30:** During hurricane season, many business may close for vacation especially in Sept. and Oct.



EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance:** 787-741-8261 / 911
- Vieques CDT (Urgent Care):** 787-685-3960, 787-741-0398
- Emergency:** 787-741-8261 or 911
- Fire Dept:** 787-741-2111
- Police:** 787-741-2020

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# Getting Here

## Flight or Ferry



After arriving to San Juan International airport there are four options for getting to Vieques.

- Fly from SJU to Vieques
- Fly from Isla Grande (SIG)
- Fly from Ceiba (RVR)
- Take the ferry from Ceiba

## Flights to Vieques

### ✈ 3 AIRPORTS WITH FLIGHTS TO VIEQUES

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[www.sebastianeroservice.com](http://www.sebastianeroservice.com)  
[www.taxiaereopr.travel](http://www.taxiaereopr.travel)  
[www.viequesairlink.com](http://www.viequesairlink.com)

**From Ceiba Airport – RVR**  
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**Ground Transportation**  
Público Vans are available outside SJU baggage claim. Vans seat 10–12 passengers, are managed by the Puerto Rico Tourism Company, and travelers receive an invoice before boarding.



### INSIDER TIPS

Always check your airline's baggage policy—checked bags incur extra fees!

If you arrive on Vieques before your check-in time you can store luggage at Vieques Laundromat and Luggage Storage so you can hit the grocery store or beach without worrying about leaving your luggage in your car. Located in Isabel II. 860-301-6130



**MARINE TRAFFIC APP**

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

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

Rental cars are not permitted on the cargo boats.

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

A short-term/overnight parking lot with shuttle service is located a short distance from the terminal.

There is a small café at the ferry with limited options: hot dogs, muffins, snacks and coffee.

If you're driving to the ferry, the route isn't well marked. After entering the gate of Roosevelt Roads, follow the road and look for ferry signs—the final turn is marked only by a Roosevelt Roads sign.

## Ferry from Ceiba to Vieques

### 1 HOUR CAB RIDE + 1 HOUR FERRY

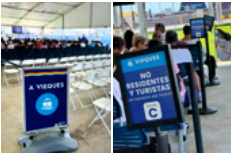
**Ticketing :** Tickets are available online at [www.puertoricoferry.com](http://www.puertoricoferry.com) for about half of the passenger seats. If online shows “sold out,” the site indicates how many seats remain for in-person purchase at the ferry terminal window. As availability drops (approx. last 35 seats), local residents may receive purchase priority. This ensures residents—many of whom rely on the ferry for essential medical, educational, and work travel can get home.

**Fare:** \$2 one-way per passenger, plus luggage/gear fees (\$0.50–\$3.00 per item, depending on size/type).

**Routes:** Ferries run between Ceiba-Vieques and Ceiba-Culebra (no direct ferry between Vieques and Culebra).

**Arrival:** Plan to arrive 45 min-1 hour before departure.

**Seating priority at Ceiba terminal:**  
The Ceiba terminal has a seating priority system, giving preference first to elderly and disabled individuals, followed by local residents, and then tourists. While this system might seem unwelcoming to travelers, it is essential to remember that many residents depend on the ferry for crucial trips related to health, education, or work, and rely on it to return to their families.



**Cell signal:**  
The Ceiba ferry terminal has limited cell service and no public wifi so plan accordingly if you need to contact your rental car company or the manager of the property you are renting.



# Getting Around

## >> GOOD TO KNOW

1 GALLON = 3.78541 LITERS  
NO ESTACIONAR = NO PARKING  
YELLOW CURB = NO PARKING

>  
Getting  
Around VQS

### ★ CAR / SCOOTER / UTV / GOLF CART RENTALS

Several companies operate on Vieques with generally comparable pricing. Most offer Jeeps or SUVs - useful for remote beaches, but 4WD isn't a guarantee against soft sand or mud. Vieques is famous for world-class, surprisingly deep potholes.

**Beach Parking Tips:** Never leave valuables in your vehicle; it's best to leave the car unlocked and empty. At Sun Bay, park only on the grass side of the road, not the ocean side.

**Return Policies:** You'll be charged for wet seats. Think twice before leaving the top off your Jeep.

**Always rent from a licensed company.**

**Book early**—availability is limited in peak seasons. Online checks for rental availability can be unreliable—it is best to call the company.

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787-741-0284(VQS)  
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www.islandjeeprental.com

**Bravos Boyz**  
787-741-1856  
www.bravosboyz.com

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www.maritzascarrental.com

**Fun Brothers**  
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www.funbrothers.com

**Vieques Car Rental**  
787-412-8540  
www.viequescarrental.com

### ★ PÚBLICOS / TAXIS

Públicos are vans marked TC (Transportación Colectiva) and operate like shared taxis (they may pick up additional passengers). Look for vans with signage on the side or windshield.

**Note:** Uber and Lyft do not operate on Vieques.

See page 41 for taxi and publico phone numbers.

**INSIDER TIP**  
CELL SERVICE CAN  
BE SPOTTY ON  
REMOTE BEACHES.  
MAKE SURE TO  
PRE-ARRANGE YOUR  
RIDE!

## safety tips

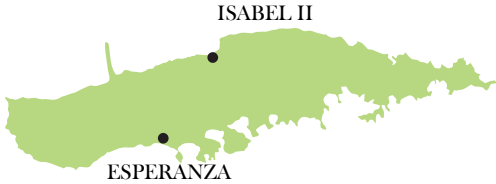
Life on Vieques is relaxed but common sense is needed when it comes to safety and securing your belongings.

**Lock your accommodations when you head out - just like at home.**

**Bring only what you need to the beach; leave valuables behind.**

**At the beach, leave your car unlocked and empty to avoid window damage.**

**Know where you're staying. Over 200 streets are unnamed. Ask your host for the barrio, landmarks, or GPS coordinates so you (and emergency services) can find it.**



## Getting Your Bearings

### SOUTH SIDE **ESPERANZA**

Esperanza, on the southern coast, boasts the deep aqua and crystal clear waters of the Caribbean Sea gently lapping along a picturesque walkway known as the Malecón. Esperanza offers a walkable array of restaurants, museums, stores, piers, boating and social interaction. Sundays are full of music, dominos, and libations. Extend your pleasure east or west along the Caribbean shore to discover art, black sand, roadside food experiences and an endless string of unique beaches so visually outrageous you'll be at a loss for words and pictures.



### NORTH SIDE **ISABEL II**

Bordered by the wavy blue of the Atlantic, the north side offers a loosely organized configuration of main and side streets, churches, stores, bars, restaurants, shops and municipal offices, around the central Plaza, a community square for great gatherings all year round. Charming and colorful, Isabel II ("town" or "el pueblo" to the residents) is named after the first reigning female monarch of Spain. Overlooking the town is the Fortín Conde de Mirasol, the last Spanish fort built in the Americas.



### INSIDER TIPS

★ **A TWIST OR A TAP** If your car won't start when leaving the beach, don't panic! 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!



★ **FIX A FLAT** Pick up one of these cans 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 the tire fixed.

★ **CELL SERVICE AT THE BEACH** If you hire a público, pre-arrange pickup—service can be spotty.





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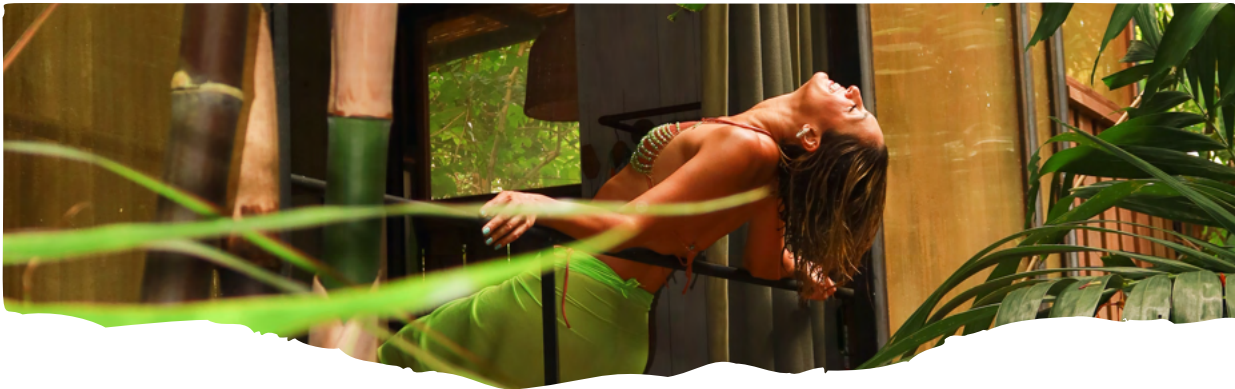


*"I make it a point to visit this restaurant every time I am in Vieques and have enjoyed every experience here."*



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# FINCA VICTORIA

*Ayurvedic Boutique Hotel & Panchakarma Retreat Center*

### YOUR STAY AT FINCA VICTORIA

Finca Victoria is an **Ayurvedic hotel in Vieques** offering guests a space to reconnect through wellness, community, and nature. **Every morning at 8:00 AM we host yoga classes** open to guests for free and **drop-ins, at a cost of \$15 per person**. For those joining from afar, we also offer a **free Zoom Yoga option**. After class, enjoy an **Ayurvedic breakfast served from 8:30 to 10:30 AM for \$21 per person**, prepared with local and seasonal ingredients. Our store features a thoughtful selection of jewelry, conscious clothing, holistic and beauty products, and books. For those who aren't staying with us, we offer **Day Passes** that include yoga, breakfast, and access to our communal areas such as the pool, library, and gardens, inviting you to experience a day of Ayurvedic living at Finca Victoria.

### SEASONAL WELLNESS RETREATS

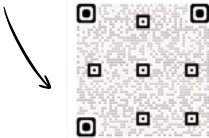
Join our retreats at Finca Victoria and step into programs that go far beyond a typical getaway. **Each year, we host signature gatherings such as the Yoga & Embodiment Retreat with Sylvia de Marco, the Ayurvedic Retreat, the Men's Retreat with Kano Mai, the Ayurvedic Reset, and our Panchakarma Retreats**. These hands-on immersions invite guests to learn, create, and connect—whether through cooking classes, herbal medicine making, embodiment workshops, or even soundscape concerts. Recognized internationally, including **Forbes' Top 12 Wellness Centers in the World**, our retreats blend practice, creativity, and reflection, leaving participants with insights that last long after their stay. **For those looking to craft their own retreat, Finca Victoria also serves as a private venue with 13 unique rooms**, open-air common areas, and wide garden views. Leaders, groups, and families can design experiences at their own pace, in a setting that naturally supports connection, inspiration, and restoration.

### THE SPA EXPERIENCE

At the heart of Finca Victoria lies a Wellness Center rooted in Ayurveda, the world's oldest system of medicine. **The center combines Ayurvedic therapies with Chinese medicine and select Western treatments, offering Panchakarma detoxes, herbal therapies, restorative bodywork, scrubs, cupping, acupuncture and deeply nourishing massages**. Using an array of herbs and aromatic oils, each treatment is crafted to support balance and vitality. The Wellness Center is open to the public, with appointments available through our website under Wellness or by emailing [wellness@lafinca.com](mailto:wellness@lafinca.com).

### DISCOVER FINCA VICTORIA

Step into Finca Victoria to explore our rooms, treehouses, wellness offerings, and yearly retreats. Scan the code to book your stay or learn more about our programs.



# Where to Stay

The possibilities are endless!

When looking for accommodations on Vieques there is no shortage of variety, comfort and style. From eclectic guesthouses, luxury villas, fantastic guesthouses and airbnbs, Vieques *almost* has it all. **What you won't find?** Chain hotels or all-inclusive resorts are not a part of our accommodation offerings. What you will find are incredible places with amazing hosts. Manage your expectations by booking far in advance and asking the right questions. Communication is key to know what amenities and services are offered.



**Turn off the AC** when you head out for the day and switch it back on when you return. Not only will you save energy—you will also avoid attracting **mosquitoes**, which are drawn to the moisture that forms from the unit's condensation.



>  
Where  
to Stay

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## Camping

★ **SunBay** -Camp sites at Sunbay National Park include a view of the ocean and a mile stretch of sandy beach and turquoise water. The unfenced field to the right of the SunBay administrative building (as you face the shore) is the designated area to pitch tents. Camping is \$10.00 per night and check-in/out is coordinated through the Reserve Manager or other staff. There are open outdoor showers and a public bathroom, but bring your own supplies and paper products. Currently, the fencing for the camping area is partially down, so horses roam in. Do not feed or pet the horses. No dogs allowed. Check in at the Administrative Office at Sunbay or try calling the municipal offices at 787-741-5000.

# VIEQUES BEACHES

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



## 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 Navio. 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. Drive 100 feet more to Gallery Oro and park in the lot across the street. 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 sandburs! 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 approx 2 miles. Pass turn to Caracas and continue straight on dirt road for approx 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!

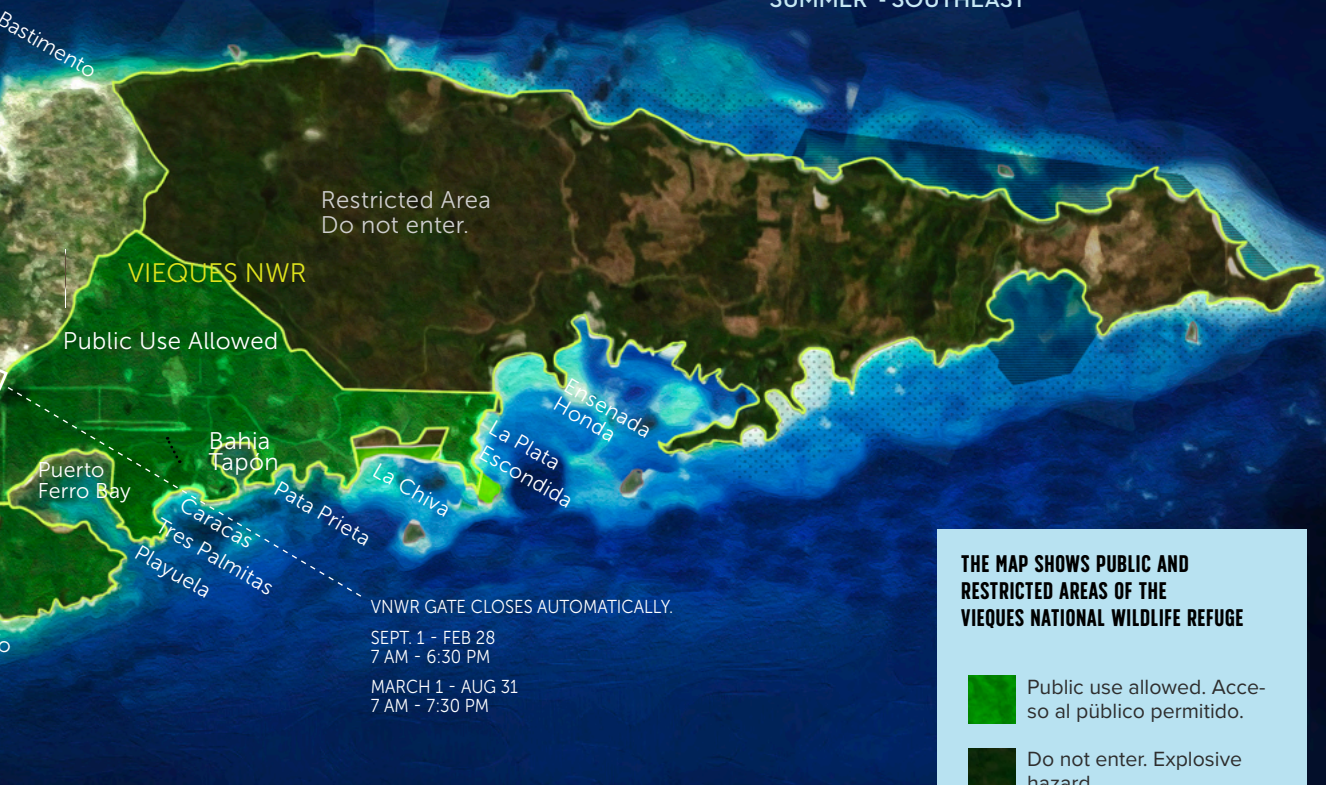
**LA CHIVA\*** From 997, turn into the Wildlife Refuge at Km Marker 3.2 and go approx 2 miles to the end of the paved road. Pass the sign for Caracas and continue straight on the dirt road. La Chiva has numbered spots #1-20. At marker #11 the road splits so stay right if you want to explore La Chiva 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

**PREVAILING WINDS:**  
WINTER - EAST TO NORTHEAST  
SUMMER - SOUTHEAST



**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 área
-  Mariners are prohibited from anchoring, dredging, or trawling in this area. Se prohíbe a los navegantes anclar, dragar o la pesca de arrastre en esta área.

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 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 (north shore), but pass the pier turn and drive about 2 miles to the northwest Refuge entrance. Continue 1 mile to a T-intersection; both left and right lead to beach spots, but the best snorkeling is to the left. Bring water and bug spray, as no-see-ums appear in the late afternoon. The area gets busy with anchored boats on holidays. To get the most out of this snorkel, go with a guide—you'll miss a lot if you don't know where to look.

## 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** On 200 going west 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 200 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** From the Ceiba tree, continue along Route 200 and turn right at the empty concrete structure or lot; the road leads to the pier. The pier is about a mile long and popular with joggers and walkers. Excellent snorkeling can be found on the left (west) side but go with a guide for the best experience. Watch out for low-hanging concrete under the pier, and be aware that the cargo barge docks twice daily, bringing 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!

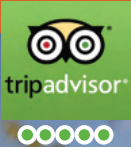
Vieques has the highest number of public beaches of all the municipalities in Puerto Rico. Beaches are in protected areas and are safe. Stay in the designated public areas. Never enter restricted areas that are marked with extensive signage.

**Practice 3Rs**  
Recognize, Retreat,  
Report

**Practiques las 3Rs**  
Reconozca,  
Retroceda, Reporte

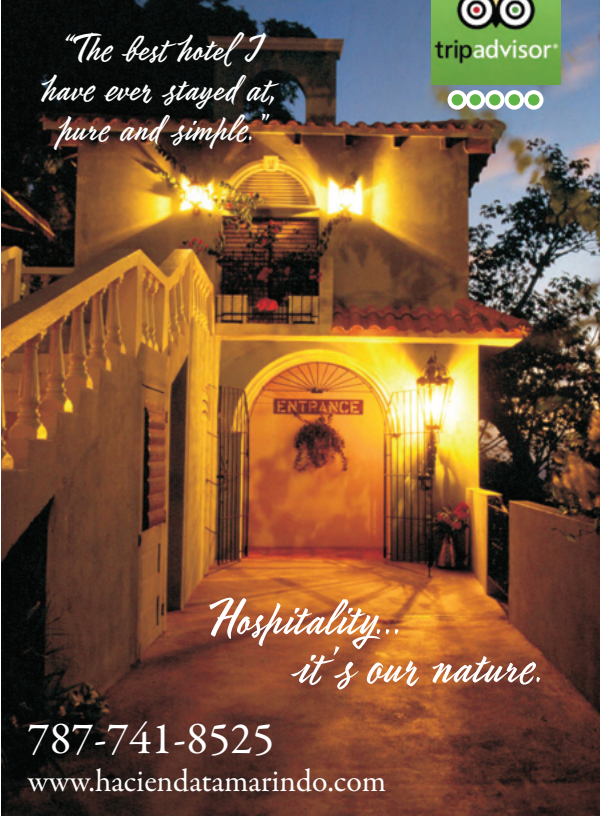


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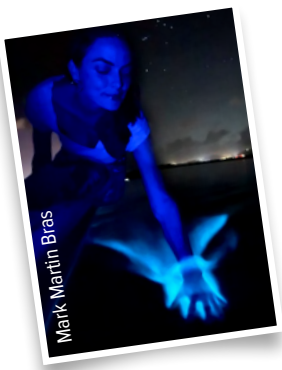
Steve Simonsen



Steve Simonsen

# Water Activities

From serene sailing charters and world-class snorkeling to glowing BioBay tours and kayaking through mangroves, the waters surrounding Vieques invite endless adventure.



Mark Martin Bras

## Biobay

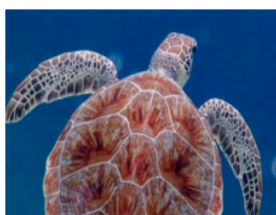
At the top of every visitor's list: experiencing the biobay. Microscopic dinoflagellates glow when disturbed, creating a luminous spectacle beneath the Milky Way. Companies offer tours for essentially the same price and include transportation to the bay and a guided informative tour by kayak or boat.

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On the  
Water



## Snorkeling

Beneath Vieques' crystal-clear waters lies a vibrant world of color and motion. Whether you join a boat excursion or paddle out by kayak with a guide, there are options for every level. Booking with a knowledgeable tour ensures you reach the healthiest reefs, where schools of tropical fish weave through coral gardens and you're likely to encounter sea turtles, or perhaps

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## Sailing

Sail to and snorkel remote offshore coral reefs accessible only by boat. Choose from a half-day or full-day adventure, or opt for a sailing membership that lets you experience the yacht life without the hassle of ownership. Choose to enjoy a stunning sunset at anchor or relax in the harbor aboard a sailboat for a truly unique way to spend your evening.

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## SCUBA Diving

Whether you want to try SCUBA for the day or take an in-depth course, Blackbeard Sports and 18Degree Dive and Snorkel offers equipment, instruction, certified guides, and courses for beginners through advanced open water, and more.

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## Fishing

Try deep sea fishing with Vieques Blue Water Charters. Find all the equipment you need to fish from land at the Pescador Fishing and Marine Supplies. Denise will take care of all your fishing supply needs but call ahead for directions and to confirm open hours.

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#### DID YOU KNOW?

You don't need a fishing license for recreational fishing on Vieques but you must follow all regulations regarding closed seasons and minimum size limits for each species. Visit the [www.fisheries.noaa.gov](http://www.fisheries.noaa.gov)

## Boat Tours

Choose to see the Biobay by boat with Isla Nena Biobay, go deep sea fishing with Vieques Blue Water Charters.

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even a graceful ray, or even an elusive octopus.

## Paddleboarding & Kayaking

Calm waters make SUP relaxing and fun; kayak tours explore mangroves, the Bio Bay, and open water. Rent equipment or take a tour with guides who know the best areas and can ensure your safety.

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## Surfing

If you're thinking of catching a wave on Vieques, it's worth knowing that many of the surfable breaks sit over rocky reef or coral bottoms rather than soft sand. The reef systems at local surfing sites are dramatic and precarious. If you don't know the reef well, it's wise to hold off surfing on Vieques. On the flip side, a good learning spot is the west side of Playa Caracas. It tends to have a gentler break and soft sand, making it a great place for first timers trying to learn.



Elliot Anderson



On the  
Water



# Snorkeling Vieques

**The secret is out.** Vieques has grown from a hidden treasure to one of the top snorkeling destinations in the Caribbean.



## 3 Ways to Snorkel Vieques

### 1. OPEN-WATER REEFS (BY BOAT ONLY)

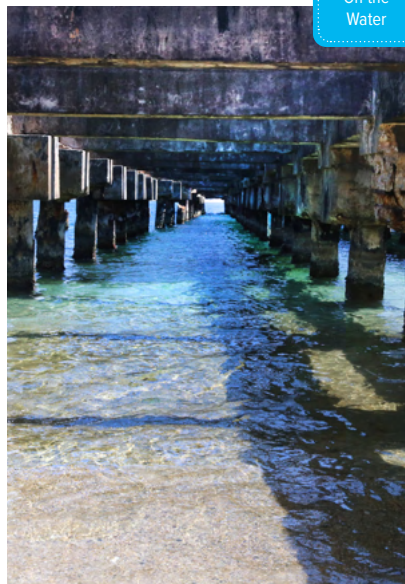
Some of the island's most spectacular reefs—like Lemon on the south shore, or Cayo Blanco and Mosquito Reef on the north—can only be accessed with a charter. These reefs are alive with vibrant corals, fish, and sea turtles.

### 2. INSHORE REEFS (WITH A TOUR)

Guided tours by kayak or swim are a safe and family-friendly way to explore reefs close to shore. Licensed guides tailor trips to your skill level and ensure you see the best wildlife while protecting fragile reef systems.

### 3. EXPLORATION SNORKEL (FROM LAND)

For strong swimmers and experienced snorkelers, several spots are accessible right from the beach. Always check conditions before entering, and never snorkel alone.



## 5 Land-Accessible Snorkel Spots

### > 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 instead. If you are an experienced snorkeler here are 5 recommended spots.

#### MOSQUITO PIER (ROMPEOLAS)

A mile-long jetty on the north shore with coral, colorful fish, and often sea turtles around its 40-foot pilings. Enter from rough stone steps at the last palm on the left—take care with the entry.

#### ESPERANZA SUGAR PIER

Once the main dock for Vieques' sugar industry, today only concrete pillars remain stretching 200 feet into the sea 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.

#### CARACAS

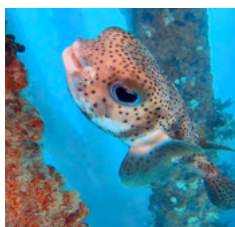
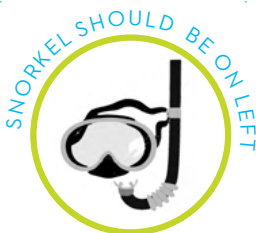
Caracas is a swimming beach so head to the left or right sides to enter the water to snorkel. Usually calm, this location has rocky areas on the east end and usually very good visibility. Look for rays.

#### LA CHIVA 10

La Chiva 10 is undoubtedly the standout beach for underwater photography. A novice should keep close to the shoreline. The experts can swim out to deeper water. Rays, Tarpon, and various corals will put your head on a swivel, so keep track of your partner.

#### PUNTA ARENAS

At the far western tip of the island, this reef offers consistent visibility, plentiful fish, and abundant turtles. Enter by the sandy area near the beach hut. Beware of scorpion fish on the bottom and strong currents at the tip. Nurse sharks sometimes rest under the rocks here. The best times are between 10 am and 2 pm as the noseeums (biting gnats) come out in the afternoon.



### Sea Life You May Encounter

Turtle, ray, shark, barracuda, octopus, eel, conch, lobster, manatee, sea urchin, starfish, crab and too many species of tropical fish to name.

VIEQUES INSIDER RECOMMENDS

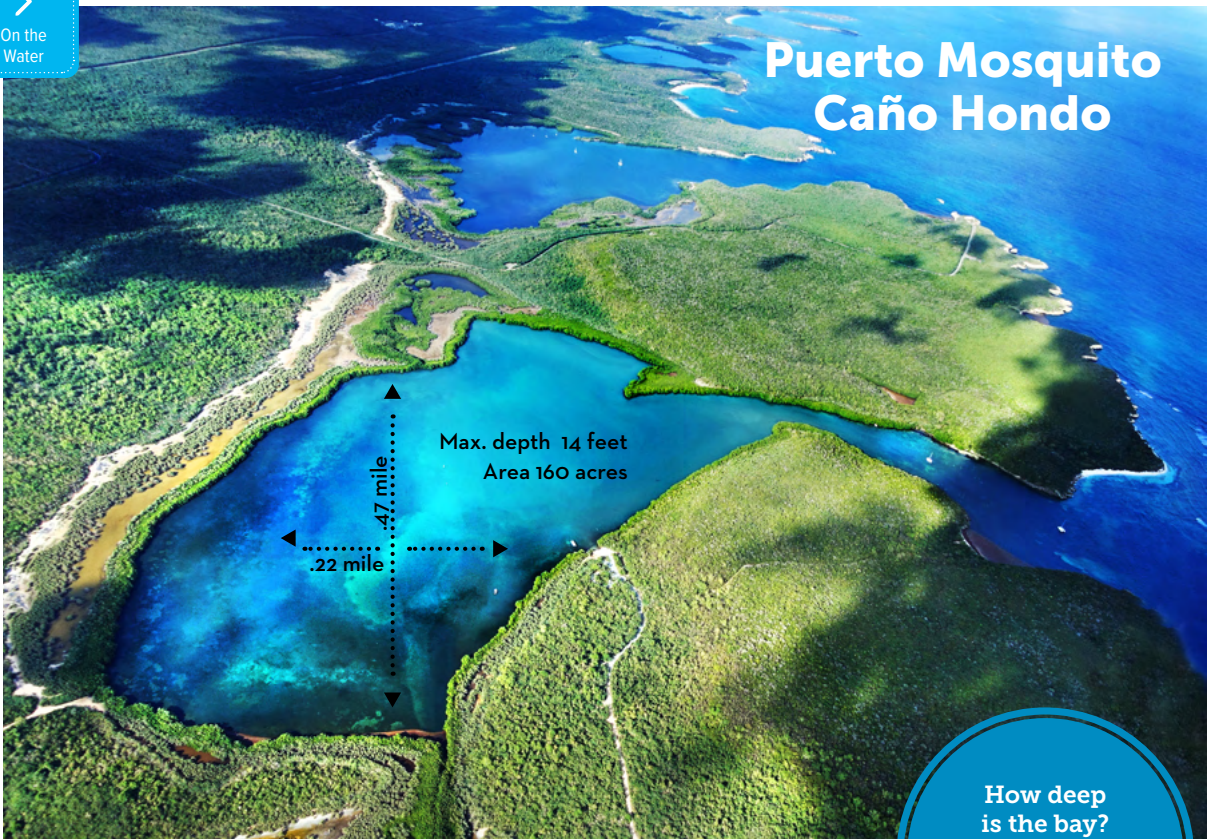
### Go with a Guide

The safest and most responsible way to snorkel is with a licensed, insured local tour company. Unless you're highly experienced, always go with a pro—especially if it's your first time. Guides know the best spots, protect the reef, and keep you safe.



On the  
Water

## Puerto Mosquito Caño Hondo



How deep  
is the bay?  
**14.5 feet at its  
deepest but  
most of the bay  
is shallow.**

## Vieques' Bioluminescent Bay

### The brightest in the world.

On the southern coast of Vieques lies one of the world's most extraordinary natural wonders, Puerto Mosquito Bioluminescent Bay, the brightest of its kind on Earth. On dark, moonless nights, each paddle stroke and splash of water glows an otherworldly blue-green, creating an unforgettable experience for visitors.

The water's glow comes from millions of microscopic plankton called *Pyrodinium Bahamense*—tiny, single-celled organisms that produce light through a natural chemical reaction. Inside each cell, luciferin combines with luciferase and oxygen, releasing energy as light. The effect is visible only at night; during the day, these organisms rest invisible beneath the surface.

**So why is Vieques' BioBay the brightest in the world?** Its brilliance results from a perfect mix of conditions: a narrow, shallow entrance that traps the plankton inside; steady winds that prevent flushing; and ideal water depth, salinity, and temperature. Nutrients from surrounding mangroves feed the organisms, while over 40 years of conservation have kept the ecosystem healthy and protected.

Visitors can experience this living light show by booking a kayak or electric boat tour with a licensed guide. Guides not only ensure safety and environmental responsibility—they're also trained in conservation and first aid, and they help preserve the bay through adherence to strict regulations. Swimming, however, is prohibited, since sunscreens, oils, and even soap residue can harm the delicate organisms that make the bay glow.

If you've never kayaked before, don't worry, the bay's calm waters and experienced guides make it beginner-friendly. The best time to visit is on a moonless night or during the new moon, when the darkness allows the glow to shine brightest.

The BioBay glows year-round, though brightness can vary with weather, water temperature, and moonlight. Warmer, calmer nights tend to offer the most dazzling displays.

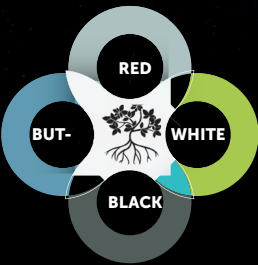
Each visit to Puerto Mosquito is a reminder of nature's quiet brilliance—a place where every ripple lights up, every stroke sparkles, and the island of Vieques reveals one of its most magical secrets.

#### Is bioluminescence the same as phosphorescence?

Phosphorescence occurs when absorbed light energy is slowly released, causing a delayed glow after the light source is gone. Unlike bioluminescence, which is a natural light produced by living organisms, and a biological process that happens within the cell.

#### Why can't I swim in the bay instead of taking a tour?

Swimming is prohibited to reduce human impact on the bay. Body lotions, oils, soap residue, and other chemicals can negatively affect the delicate ecosystem.



**THE CONDITIONS**

ALL FOUR TYPES OF MANGROVES LIVE IN THE BAY AND ARE PART OF THE ECOSYSTEM



**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** from east to west prevent the dinoflagellates from flushing out.

**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.

**MOON CALENDAR 2025**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31
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Up the hill from Maritza's



Sunbay  
Photo by: Steve Simonsen



Navio



Media Luna

## Beach Trifecta

Three of the most beautiful yet uniquely diverse beaches lie just beyond the entrance gate to Sunbay on Rt. 997. Ahead lies Sunbay, to the east Media Luna and further east down a bumpy road is Navio. You can hit them all in one day with a little planning!

► **Sunbay-** A spectacular one-mile expanse of white sand with plenty of shade, Sunbay is the perfect destination to wind down, relax and enjoy the crystal clear water of the Caribbean. It is the only beach on Vieques with rest rooms, showers and food service. Sunbay is the preferred beach where locals gather for dominos, barbeques and beach games. Once you find your spot in the sun you may find it difficult to leave!

► **Media Luna-** After Sunbay, head east and then follow the signs to Media Luna. This beach is ideal for small children. It features sand as soft as powder, and lots of shallow, calm and warm water, ensuring comfort for kids and confidence for parents. The grass areas among the trees can accommodate large group cook-outs or a private family picnic. The gazebos and picnic areas are recently updated.

► **Navio-** Just a few hundred yards east of Media Luna sits Navio, the beach for the adventurer. This open water beach creates the largest waves on the southern shore. Boogie boarding and body surfing are the predominant water activities but there is also very good snorkeling along the eastern shoreline. The cave to the east is an amazing photo opportunity. Bring a beach umbrella.



SIMPLE DIRECTIONS  
TO FOLD A BEACH  
CHAIR: TIP, STEP,  
AND FOLD!



## ¿CÓMO SE DICE...? HOW DO YOU SAY...?

Basic Spanish for your visit to Vieques

### GREETINGS:

Hola, ¿cómo estás?	Hi. How are you?
Buenos días, Buen día	Good morning
Buenas tardes	Good afternoon
Buenas noches	Good evening/night
Feliz Navidad	Merry Christmas
Feliz Año Nuevo	Happy New Year
Buen Provecho	Enjoy your meal

### FAREWELLS:

Qué tenga un buen día	Have a nice day
Hasta pronto	See you soon
Qué Dios le bendiga	May God bless you
Hasta luego	See you later
Adiós	Goodbye
Buenas noches	Goodnight

### AROUND TOWN:

Por favor & Gracias	Please & thank you
¿Cuánto cuesta...?	How much is it...?

Efectivo	Cash
Me gustaría...	I would like...
Yo quiero...	I want...
Yo tengo / Yo no tengo...	I have / I don't have
No entiendo.	I don't understand.
¿Dónde está...?	Where is...?


### DIRECTIONS:

¿Cómo se llega a...?	How do I get to...?
A la derecha	To the right
A la izquierda	To the left
Derecho/recto	Straight
Sube/baja	Go up/go down
En la esquina	on the corner



## 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](http://www.sargassoalliance.org).



# Vieques

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*with Angie Adams*

BILINGUAL, LOCAL TOUR GUIDE



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# PLAYA NEGRA

Playa Negra is more than just a beach; it's a testament to the natural forces that have shaped Vieques into the vibrant and diverse island it is today. Its mix of beauty, science, and adventure makes it a must-visit for anyone wanting to experience the island's unique character. Tucked away southwest of Esperanza, this beach requires a half-mile hike through an arroyo (stream bed), which may hold a small stream after recent rain. The beach is better for exploring than swimming, as the water can be rough and the currents strong.

## 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.

The sand is rich in magnetite, a mineral that comes from the volcanic rock found in Vieques' ancient geological formations. Over time, rain and streams have carried this black material down the hillsides to meet the lighter-colored sands of the coastline, creating a striking mix that shimmers in the sunlight. Depending on rains, the beach can be jet black or a mixture of the black sand and red limestone. If you scoop up a handful of Playa Negra's black sand, you will be surprised at how heavy it is. Magnetite has a density of approximately 5.2 grams per cubic centimeter, which is significantly higher than typical quartz sand (2.6 g/

cubic centimeter). This makes magnetite-rich sand much heavier than ordinary beach sand.

Magnetite is composed of about 72.4% iron, making it one of the densest naturally occurring minerals on Earth. This high iron content increases the overall mass of sand containing magnetite. This unique physical property adds to the fascination of magnetic black sand beaches, making them a great place to explore geology in action!



**Mind the Heat:** Black sand absorbs heat quickly. Wear shoes to protect your feet from the midday sun.

**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.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Because of its magnetic properties, visitors with phones that have magnetic cases should be careful setting them down, as the sand may stick to the case or cause scratches.

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Photos by [www.colibri.realty](http://www.colibri.realty)

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Wednesday-Catholic Church Rectory (bilingual), 5:00pm  
Thursday-Playa Gallito, 8:30am  
Friday-Catholic Church Rectory (bilingual), 5:00pm  
Saturday-Catholic Church Rectory, 10:30am  
Sunday-Women's Discussion Ceiba Tree, 8:00am  
Sunday-Catholic Church Rectory, 10:30am  
Contact: Lin 787-380-4990 or Dotti 787-741-0639

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Thursday -Catholic Church Rectory, 5pm  
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# Adventures on Land

## Discover the Hidden Gems of Vieques

### HIKING

Here are just a few suggested hikes to For detailed trail maps, GPS, terrain, and bike-friendly paths, visit [www.ticatove.com/trails](http://www.ticatove.com/trails).

**Note:** Depending on the time of the year, storms, rainfall and staffing the paths may be overgrown or in need of attention.

► **Novillo / Pirate’s Cove Trail-** After entering the FWS gate, take an immediate right toward Puerto Ferro Lighthouse. Park at the first lot on the left; the trailhead is across the gravel road. Expect varied terrain with seagrass, land crab nesting areas, red clay and gray mangrove silt, air plants, vanilla vines, and thatch-palm canopies. The impact of Hurricane

María on mangroves is still visible, and VCHT replanting efforts continue across the bay. The trail opens to Novillo Beach, with a connector to Pirate’s Cove. It’s a moderate hike with rocky slopes, so bring water and proper footwear. Snorkeling at Pirate’s Cove is rare but excellent on calm days. Stay on marked trails and watch for a tricky turn on the way back; the trail continues straight, and it’s easy to miss the right turn if you’re not watching the trail markers closely.

► **Puerto Mosquito NNL Trail-** Starting about 1.4 miles from the main gate of the Fish and Wildlife Refuge, this trail climbs roughly 1.3 miles to an observation platform with sweeping views of the Caribbean. From the top, you can see all three of Vieques’

bioluminescent bays. While a rocky road forms a triangular loop, it’s best to descend via the forest trail for a more pleasant and shaded return rather than following the rocky and paved roads back down.

► **Tapón Loop Trail-** This moderate 0.9-mile loop winds through mangrove forest and coastal scrub, offering glimpses of the third-largest bioluminescent bay on Vieques. The trail begins 1.8 miles inside the eastern gate of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. Turn right at the Caracas sign; the trailhead and parking area are about 300 yards before the beach. For a shorter option, a 0.5-mile trail starts at the east end of Caracas. The path provides a peaceful mix of shaded and open terrain

with rewarding views along the way. Composting toilets and gazebos are available at Caracas, but be sure to bring your own drinking water, as none is available within the refuge.

► **Cayo de Tierra Trail-** This is a short and sweet 0.4-mile loop (or about 0.6 miles if you walk in from Sun Bay or Esperanza) that takes you over to a cliff-top vantage point on a coral and rock trail. Follow the beach and then the land bridge to the Cayo de Tierra east of Esperanza to a 90 ft elevation and great views of Sunbay and the Caribbean Sea. This is a great place to spot many varieties of birds.



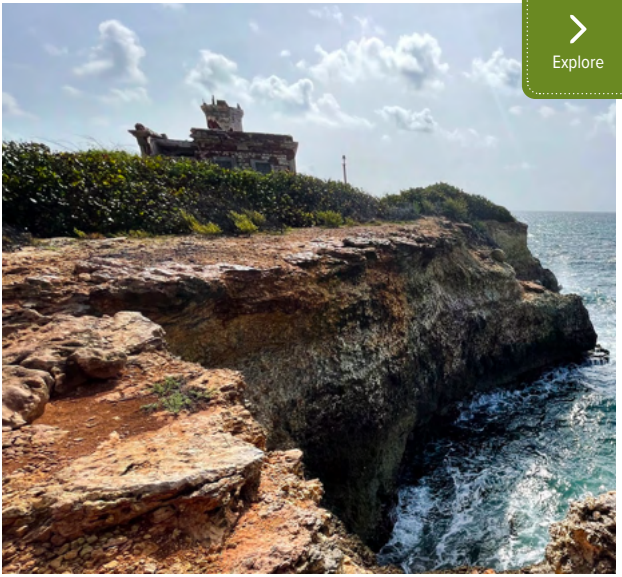
## Monte Pirata Vieques’ highest peak

Monte Pirata, the highest point in Vieques, stands within the western track of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. Towering at 987 feet high, it offers stunning panoramic views of the surrounding Caribbean Sea.

Monte Pirata is home to the only subtropical moist forest of its kind among the 568 National Wildlife Refuges that make up the world’s largest conservation system. Along the trail, hikers may encounter indigenous plants, birds, and other wildlife, highlighting the area’s ecological importance.

A 1.2-mile paved road leads to the summit of Mount Pirata, offering a steep but manageable hike that takes about 30 to 60 minutes. For those who prefer a lighter climb, it’s now possible to drive halfway up the mountain, skipping the steepest section. Adventurous hikers looking for a more challenging route can take an off-road trail located about a few miles from the start. This path climbs through dense forest, transitioning from a subtropical dry zone to a moist zone. Along the way, hikers can enjoy the quiet of the mountainside and observe the abundance of birds and insects that thrive in this unique habitat.

**For those choosing to hike Monte Pirata, be prepared for a challenging 1.2-mile ascent with a steep 987 ft. elevation gain, suitable for those in good physical shape. Stay hydrated by carrying ample water during this demanding trek.**



## SEE THE SITES

➤ **Parque La Ceiba**- The Ceiba tree is revered in many cultures as the connection between heaven and earth and holds a significant place in the hearts of the local community on Vieques. Our Ceiba, central to Parque La Ceiba located on the West end of the island before Rompeolas pier, is over 300 years old.

The longevity of the Ceiba tree, also known as Kapok tree, is a marvel of nature. With a lifespan that can extend up to 500 years or more, it serves as a testament to longevity and resilience. One of the key factors contributing to its vitality is its adaptable root system. The Ceiba’s strong and extensive roots spread wide and deep, enabling it to absorb water and nutrients from various sources. The roots also grow to form “buckets” that collect rain water making them remarkably resistant to drought. In addition to its impressive root system, the Ceiba tree avoids broken limbs by growing hard pointed spikes on its branches, making them nearly impossible to climb on.

Visit Parque la Ceiba and take some time to appreciate her and feel the deep-rooted connections of the island’s history and resilience.

**Directions:** Drive west past the airport on Rt. 200. The park is on your right when you reach the curve to go toward Rompeolas pier.

➤ **Puerto Ferro Lighthouse**- Begun under Spanish rule in 1896, completed in 1899 under U.S. administration, Puerto Ferro (Faro Berdiales) guided merchant ships along the southern coast. An earthquake in 1925 damaged the structure; it was abandoned in 1926. The ruins now offer sweeping views of the Caribbean from the surrounding rocky cliffs, as well as a small, rugged beach just down the path from the lighthouse itself.

**Directions;** Enter the Refuge off Rt. 997. Immediate right onto the gravel road. Park at the first lot (by the “Do Not Enter” sign) for 1-mile hike/bike access and an informational kiosk; or continue to the second lot 150 yards from the lighthouse. Important: Stay on the road and marked paths. Do not approach unstable cliff edges or restricted areas.

➤ **Puerto Ferro Archaeological Site**- Between Isabel II and Esperanza lies one of Puerto Rico’s oldest archaeological sites, El Hombre de Puerto Ferro. Named for the skeletal remains of a man found within a circle of giant boulders, this ancient burial site has been carbon dated to between 700 BCE and 2145 BCE, predating the Arawak inhabitants. The Rocas de Puerto Ferro are natural granodiorite boulders from the 65-million-year-old Vieques Pluton,

The oldest human remains ever found in Vieques were discovered at this site. The Puerto Ferro man, a human skeleton found at this site, dated somewhere between 700 BCE and 2145 BCE, a long stretch of time during which the original Pre-Arawak people of Vieques inhabited the area



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Explore

often referred to as a “mini-Stonehenge.” A low, 68-foot stone line may align with notable locations such as St. Croix’s Salt River Bay, though the evidence remains inconclusive. The massive central boulders, with trees growing through them, create an incredible photo opportunity.

**Directions:** Look for a yellow cement marker on Route 997 between the Refuge and Sun Bay. Turn onto the dirt road and continue a short distance.

► **Bunker Business (Military History)-** By 1941, the U.S. Navy controlled two-thirds of Vieques. The western end was used for massive munitions storage, while the eastern end served as training ranges. Along Route 200, past the Ceiba tree and Rompeolas, turn left onto unmarked roads to find earth-covered igloo magazines—arched bunkers built to vent explosions upward and remain camouflaged. Some are open and empty, while others are locked. Explore carefully and at your own risk.

► **Playa Grande Sugar Ruins-** The Playa Grande Sugar Mill on Vieques is one of the island’s most significant historical sites, offering a fascinating glimpse into the island’s colonial and industrial past. Dating from the 16th to the 20th century, the ruins tell the story of Vieques’ role in the Caribbean sugar trade and its connections to European powers and local sugar barons. Visitors can explore the remains of the former mill, where stone sluices, grinding wheels, arched tunnels, and rusting boilers lie intertwined with the tropical jungle. The experience blends history, archaeology, and nature, offering a vivid look at how time and vegetation have reclaimed this once-thriving working sugar mill.

► **Fortín Conde de Mirasol-** Perched on a hilltop overlooking the town of Isabel II, is the last Spanish fort built in the Americas and one of Vieques’ most significant historical landmarks. Completed in 1845, it once served as a military outpost and administrative center during the Spanish colonial period, offering sweeping views of the island and the sea. Recently the fort has suffered structural damage and is currently closed to the public. Though access is restricted, the site remains an enduring symbol of Vieques’ history, resilience, and cultural pride.



# BIRDING

Humans aren’t the only visitors. About 60% of Vieques’ birds come from elsewhere; many winter here, others are passage migrants. Protected habitats like the Refuge support rich diversity—of 2,000 migratory bird species worldwide, 110 visit Vieques. Look for Semipalmated Sandpipers, Cattle Egrets (often on horses’ backs), Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, Great Blue Herons, and more. Endangered species such as the Yellow-shouldered Blackbird and Puerto Rican Parrot are being reintroduced; Brown Pelican and Peregrine Falcon have rebounded.

Hike the trails of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge. Its forests, mangroves, cliffs, and quiet shorelines host different bird species, including the endemic Puerto Rican Woodpecker.

Vieques is also a vital stopover for migratory species such as yellowlegs, egrets, and plovers. According to *Birds of Vieques*, Puerto Rico author Daphne Gemmill, the island’s lagoons are key feeding areas for both resident and migratory birds like Black-necked Stilts, White-cheeked Pintails, and Blue Herons. During winter, look for seabirds such as Brown Boobys, Royal Terns, and Magnificent Frigatebirds gliding along the coast.

Check with the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust for their Birding Tour schedule.





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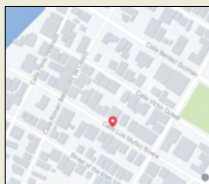
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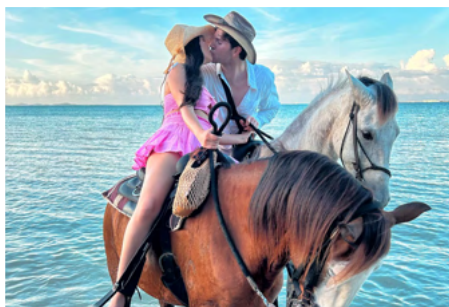
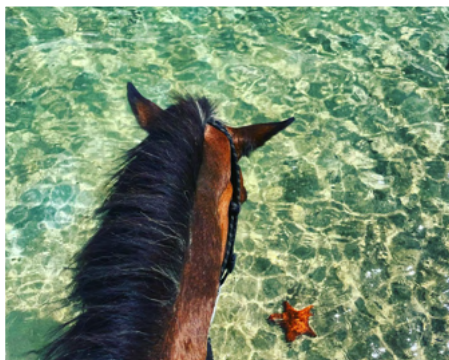
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If riding a horse on the beach is on your bucket list, you are in the right place!

# The Horses of Vieques

After arriving on Vieques your first encounter may very well be with a horse. Strolling on beaches or grazing by the side of the roads and the grounds of your guesthouse, these majestic animals have free rein of the island. Allowing the horses to roam freely offers the island visitor idyllic scenes of a time when cars and traffic were less prevalent. The sight of a watchful mare guiding her wobbly foal along a dirt road or frisky, saddleless horses at play against white sand and blue sea evokes feelings of nature's tranquility. On the other hand, seeing a horse injured and without proper medical care or suffering from malnutrition during droughts evokes sadness and frustration. The challenge for Vieques horse owners and residents is to find the balance. If you are visiting, please take care when driving along our narrow roads that are shared with the horses, especially at night. Daily life on Vieques is simpatico with these magnificent and docile creatures, as much an integral part of the island as the sand

and sea. They are still a major mode of transportation for some locals. You'll see many Viequeses riding, sometimes bareback, headed to the local store or human watering hole. Additionally, there are several horseback riding businesses offering beach rides on both coasts of the island, as well as interior rides through the streets and up the mountainsides. Grab the opportunity and the reins to take a horseback ride on gorgeous beaches, along barrio streets and on paths through the interior of the island. It is an experience not to be missed.

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## Cabalgatas

Celebrating Horsemanship and Vieques Culture

During your time on Vieques, you might be lucky enough to witness a cabalgata, a traditional horseback procession that remains a vibrant part of the island's culture. Riders decorate their horses, gather at a meeting spot, and ride together from one establishment to another, sometimes crossing the island from Isabel II to Esperanza, with stops along the way for refreshments for both riders and horses. Deeply rooted in Hispanic tradition, cabalgatas trace their origins to medieval chivalry, when nobles paraded through towns to display their horses and riding skills. On Vieques, they have become a joyful way to preserve the island's equestrian heritage and teach younger generations about horse care.



Watch Out!  
oooh...  
that's  
gotta hurt.

**Avoid the things that can turn paradise to pain.**



➤ **Bayahonda:** The Bayahonda shrub is known for its long, tough thorns that can easily pierce through flip-flops and even pop a car tire. These hardy plants grow low along trails and roadsides, especially in dry coastal areas. Be cautious when walking or parking nearby, and wear sturdy shoes if you plan to explore off the main paths.



➤ **Black Sea Urchins:** Vital nighttime algae-grazers that help keep reefs healthy, but their sharp spines can deliver a painful sting. Look carefully where you step and never touch them.

➤ **Stinging Coral:** Corals are cnidarians (related to jellyfish) and contain stinging cells called nematocysts or cnidocytes. These stinging cells can cause a painful rash that can last from weeks to months. For this reason, and for the coral's safety, it is important to always follow the rule "only stand on sand" when swimming in the ocean.

➤ **Fire Ants:** Learn to recognize their nests as treading on one is an apocalyptic nightmare! They are brown, rounded mounds on the ground that look like fine compost. If bitten, simply apply dabs of rubbing alcohol.

➤ **No-see-ums (sand flies):** These tiny biting insects come out in the late afternoon and are especially active at dusk, particularly on beaches with dense vegetation. Be sure to have bug spray ready, and plan your visit to places like Punta Arenas earlier in the day to avoid them.

➤ **Scorpion Fish:** These cryptic venomous fish that disguise themselves amongst shallow rocks and coral are another great reason to practice the safety tip of "only stand on sand" while in the water—never coral or rock.



**Watch out!** for the Coast  
**Sandbur - very prevalent at many of the southside beaches and painful to step on. (Cenchrus incertus)**

➤ Called abrojo de playa in Spanish, this sandbur is part of a 10-inch high, mat-forming grass that spreads in 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.

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Photo courtesy of [www.epanderson.com](http://www.epanderson.com)



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# a Bit of History

WANT TO KNOW 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. Benítez 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" González-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



Catholic Church and Plaza, Malden, Vieques, P. R.

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.

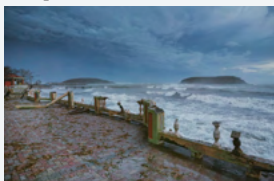
★ **2006** Montessori Education arrives in Vieques; Guinness World Records names Mosquito Bay the brightest Bio-bay in the world; MAN-ITA, the educational outreach program of the Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust (VCHT) wins EPA's highest award two years in a row.

★ **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.

★ **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) is in the process of being rebuilt.

★ **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 after-shocks damage thousands of homes and buildings and closes schools.

★ **2025** The newly built hospital opens the doors to the dialysis center.



**OPERATION PORTREX** In 1950 a simulated attack on Blue Beach (La Chiva) 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 of 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.

## ESPERANZA SUGAR PIER

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

**PIER WITH FUNCTIONING SUGAR CANE CRANES**

Gerry Carr Collection, Vieques Historic Archives

"El Muelle 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!



# SAVOR *the* Flavor

The beaches are magnificent, the vistas stunning and the people friendly. It's Vieques. But the island has another wonderful surprise in store for you: the dining experience. Our skilled and versatile chefs bring you delectables from the sea, land and farms for a culinary experience. The variety of offerings will have you wishing that you had more time and a bigger appetite. Be sure to check restaurant Facebook pages for schedule changes and special offerings. Some restaurants require reservations but even if they don't, it is best to make one. ¡Buen provecho!



HERE'S A TIP  
Don't forget to  
tip!  
15-20%  
customary.

If you are fortunate enough to purchase live lobster do not put in fresh water. Wrap it in damp newspaper or a damp hand towel and place in fridge. It should last for about 48 hours. Lobsters hate to be dry and start to decompose as soon as they die.

## MENU

CHURRASCO..... FLANK STEAK  
BISTEC..... STEAK  
PERNIL..... PORK SHOULDER  
LECHÓN..... ROAST PIG  
CHULETA..... PORK CHOP  
POLLO..... CHICKEN  
CARNE..... MEAT  
JAMÓN..... HAM  
CABRITO..... GOAT  
PAVO..... TURKEY  
TOCINETA..... BACON  
CERDO..... PORK  
CHICHARRÓN..... PORK CRACKLINGS  
SALCHICHAS..... SAUSAGES  
ATÚN..... TUNA  
PESCADO..... FISH  
DORADO..... MAHI  
TIBURÓN..... SHARK  
LANGOSTA..... LOBSTER  
BACALAO..... SALT COD  
CARRUCHO..... CONCH

A LA PARILLA..... GRILLED  
FRITO..... FRIED  
ASADO..... ROASTED  
GUISADO..... STEWED  
EN ESCABECHE..... PICKLED

ARROZ BLANCO CON HABICHUELAS  
WHITE RICE & BEANS  
PAPAS FRITAS / FRENCH FRIES  
AMARILLOS / FRIED SWEET PLANTAINS  
TOSTONES / FRIED GREEN PLANTAINS  
AREPAS / FRIED DOUGH  
ARROZ CON GANDULES /  
RICE WITH PIGEON PEAS  
PASTELES / PUERTO RICAN  
TAMALES  
PAPA ASADA / BAKED POTATOES  
MAMPOSTEO / FLAVORFUL RICE  
COOKED WITH HERBS AND VEGETABLES

**BUEN PROVECHO** = *Enjoy your meal!*

**LECHÓN** is the name for roast pig that has been cooked long and slow, in many cases overnight. Lechón is to Christmas in Vieques what turkey is to Thanksgiving in the States. The recipe is a simple one: pigs are covered in a marinade of salt, pepper, oregano and “sazón” - a local seasoning made from paprika, coriander, cumin, oregano, and garlic. They are then roasted on a spit in a giant concrete propane oven, then finished over charcoal to give the meat that old-fashioned flavour. Because of the slow cook the juices stay intact, helping to keep the meat moist and tender. Outside exposure to the coals makes the skin brown and crackly, as unique a treat as the meat itself.



*try something* **new...**



#### **PASTELES**

Pasteles are sometimes described as Puerto Rican tamales, but made with root vegetables instead of corn. Making them is labor intensive work, traditionally done during the holiday season. Fortunately, many restaurants here on Vieques serve pasteles around the holidays.



#### **CONCH**

Conch can be served many ways but don't miss the way that Biekes Bistro does it. Cooked in a rich, creamy curry base and with tostones, deep fried plantain or breadfruit. Be adventurous!



#### **MAMPOSTEO**

A delicious blend of beans, rice, and spices, each restaurant has their own special recipe. Some restaurants turn up the heat by serving it with their homemade hot sauce. Not to be missed!



#### **MOFONGO**

Mofongo is a mashed mixture of plantains, breadfruit or yuca, garlic and spices. It is fried or baked with your choice of fish, lobster, beef or pork. Each restaurant has their own unique recipe. Your choice!



### **CRAB ISLAND RUM**

Don't miss this island treasure! Crab Island Rum embodies the true spirit of Vieques, filled with creativity, passion, and resilience. Founded by Ivan Torres Ortiz, the distillery stands as a symbol of perseverance, turning challenges into a proud local success. Visit to enjoy live music, island-inspired food, and tropical cocktails made with fresh local fruit. Stop by the distillery or check their Facebook page for hours and events, and discover the rich, authentic flavor that captures the essence of Vieques in every sip.

➤ **HIGH SEASON ON VIEQUES IS THANKSGIVING THROUGH EASTER. RESERVATIONS ARE RECOMMENDED. BUSINESSES AND RESTAURANTS SOMETIMES CHANGE THEIR HOURS AFTER EASTER WHEN TOURISM STARTS TO SLOW DOWN. ALWAYS CHECK THE RESTAURANT GUIDE FOR HOURS AND CLOSURES. WWW.VIEQUEINSIDER.COM**





## THE VERSATILITY OF PLANTAINS

**Tostones** and **amarillos** are two beloved Puerto Rican dishes made from plantains, a close cousin of the banana. **Tostones** are made from green, unripe plantains that are sliced, fried, flattened, and fried again until crispy and golden—often served with garlic or mayo-ketchup sauce. **Amarillos**, on the other hand, are ripe, sweet plantains that are sliced and fried once until caramelized on the outside and tender inside. These dishes showcase the versatility of the plantain and are a staple on nearly every Puerto Rican table, complementing everything from rice and beans to seafood and meats.

## Coquito

No Vieques guide would be complete without this festive favorite! Our traditional homemade eggnog blends creamy coconut, warm island spices, and a generous splash of rum for the perfect taste of Vieques in a glass.

### THE EASY RECIPE

2 cans (12 oz. each) Evaporated Milk

1 can (15 oz.) Cream of Coconut

1 can (13.5 oz.) Coconut Milk

½ cup Sweetened Condensed Milk

½ cup white rum (optional)

1 tsp. vanilla extract

½ tsp. ground cinnamon, plus more for garnish, if desired



In bowl of blender, add evaporated milk, cream of coconut, coconut milk, sweetened condensed milk, rum (if using), vanilla extract and ground cinnamon. Blend on high until mixture is well combined. Pour coconut mixture into glass bottles or containers. Transfer to refrigerator. Chill until cold. To serve, stir or shake bottle well to combine. Pour coquito into small serving glasses. Garnish with ground cinnamon and cinnamon sticks, if desired.

## Make good choices!

### SWEET PERFECTION



**Quesitos** are delicious puff pastries with cream cheese filling. Find them at any of the local bakeries. But get there early!



**Arepas** can be fried or baked and are served at many restaurants as a side dish. Look for baked arepas stuffed with guava and cheese being sold around the island.

## BETTER MAKE MINE A Light

pronounced Med-da-ya

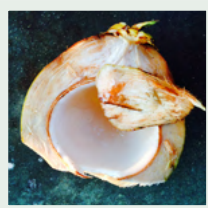
Until 2011, this was the only mass-produced beer in Puerto Rico and comes in one version only; Light.



# SE VENDEN COCOS



around the island you will see vendors selling coconuts at roadside stands or out of trucks parked along the road. The owners will remove the top of a young, green coconut with a machete and give you a straw to drink the coconut water inside. True local performance art with a sweet reward. Coconut water is the opaque liquid that comes straight from the inside of a young (unripened) coconut. Coconut water from green coconuts contains electrolytes, is naturally fat free, has less sugar, less sodium and more potassium than most sports drinks, and is delicious!



WHEN YOU ARE FINISHED DRINKING THE COCONUT WATER, ASK THE VENDOR TO CUT THE COCONUT IN HALF FOR THE SWEET MEAT INSIDE. A SLICE OF THE OUTSIDE HUSK MAKES A PERFECT SPOON!

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# EDIBLE SOUVENIRS



We all want to bring exotic treats of our Vieques vacation home with us - it's natural. But according to the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (whose acronym, APHIS, is a clever reference to Aphis, the genus of a ubiquitous plant pest-the common aphid) all passenger baggage traveling from Puerto Rico to the U.S. mainland is subject to inspection. These inspections are conducted by officials of the USDA and APHIS prior to departure. Be prepared to open and close your baggage. If you have agricultural items with you, tell the inspector. Failure to do so can result in travel delays and fines of \$1,000 or more.

## THERE ARE SEVERAL PLANTS THAT ARE ILLEGAL TO BRING BACK INTO THE UNITED STATES:



Mangos: because of the mango borer, which may infect the U. S. mango crop.



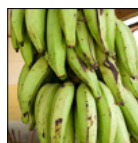
Pigeon peas (gandules in Spanish): because of the pigeon pea borer which might affect America's soybean and legume industry.



Citrus (of all types): because insect, bacterial, fungal and viral pathogens might be devastating to the Mainland's citrus industry.



Additionally, sour sop, passionfruit and potted plants are forbidden.



**BUT HAPPILY, AVOCADO, PAPAYA, COCONUT AND PLANTAIN CAN BE TAKEN LEGALLY INTO THE U.S.**

➤ **Be sure to stop at the roadside kiosks for a true taste of the island's best grab-and-go bites.**

## Pincho-mania!

The Caribbean Pincho is usually pork, shark, chicken or beef skewered with a really long wooden toothpick, grilled to perfection and then slathered with barbeque sauce. Topped off with a slice of pan de agua (Puerto Rican version of French bread), it is served simply on the stick and wrapped in tin foil. It is the quintessential "finger food".



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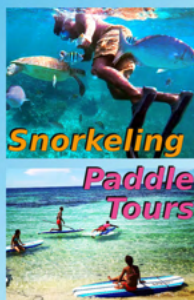
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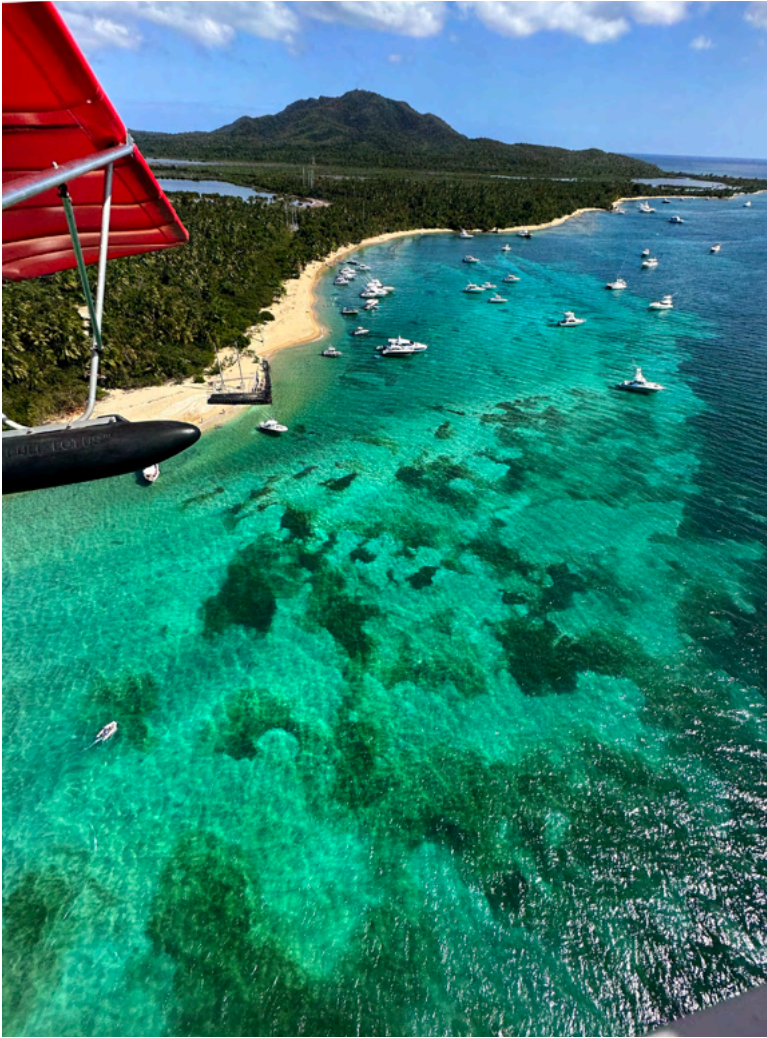
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# 12 QUESTIONS

## ASKED AND ANSWERED

Welcome to Vieques Insider's Q&A, where we explore some of the tougher questions about an island paradise with a complex side. We've gathered some of the most frequently asked questions about Vieques and answered them as accurately as possible. Before your visit and during your stay, we encourage you to dive deeper into the island's history, ecology, and culture. Vieques is a place of stunning natural beauty, but like anywhere, it also faces challenges. We hope these answers provide valuable insight into the island's unique issues and help make your trip more meaningful.

### ► Is Vieques safe?

Yes, as long as you use common sense and stay aware of your surroundings. Misconceptions about safety in Vieques are common, even among Puerto Ricans, with some concerned about encountering unexploded ordnance. However, areas that contain ordnance are clearly marked and off limits to the public. If you follow the laws and stay on designated trails or roads, you won't encounter danger.

Like other tourist destinations, Vieques occasionally experiences minor theft, but this can generally be avoided by taking simple precautions—securing valuables, being mindful of your surroundings, and not leaving belongings in plain sight unattended. While the island faces socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, a lack of affordable housing, and drug-related activity, as are typical of small Caribbean islands, visitors are rarely affected beyond isolated cases of petty theft.

### ► Why are some beaches and areas of Vieques off limits to the public?

The U.S. Navy used parts of Vieques as a military training site



until 2003. After years of military exercises, certain areas still contain unexploded ordnance. Cleanup efforts continue, but some regions remain off limits to ensure public safety. If you do see something that could be a munition, follow the rules of the 3R's; Recognize, Retreat, Report.

### ► Ferry or fly?

The best choice depends on the time of year. During holidays, school breaks, the Christmas shopping season, and peak tourism periods, the ferry may not be ideal.

Residents have priority boarding, as many rely on the ferry for essential trips related to health, education, and work, or simply to return home to their families. In the past, we have had ferries break down, need maintenance or inspection, or just not have the

capacity to carry all of the passengers waiting to board. Non-residents risk being bumped if the ferry is full and may need to wait for the next one or even find overnight

accommodations. Thankfully, recent improvements have added more trips and larger ferries to the schedule.

Buy tickets online ahead of time at [www.puertoricoferry.com](http://www.puertoricoferry.com).

**Vieques Insider Opinion:** *If your budget allows it, fly! Especially if you have limited time on Vieques and want to avoid spending hours at the ferry terminal and an additional hour on the boat.*



### ► Do I need to rent a car?

It is highly recommended. Vieques has taxis and taxi vans (Publicos) but at busy times of the

year they are in high demand and may not be accessible or travel to the remote areas of the island. Most beaches, restaurants, and attractions are spread out. Renting a car gives you the freedom to explore the island at your own pace.



► **Why are there so many stray dogs?**

Addressing the stray dog situation in Vieques requires a combination of community education, increased spaying/neutering efforts, and enhanced animal control services. Enormous strides are being made by community nonprofits like the Vieques Humane Society and Animal Rescue and Our Big Fat Caribbean Rescue. These organizations are the backbone of animal care and should be applauded. Also, some residents in our community dedicate a lot of time feeding, trapping, fostering, and transporting animals, but the need often exceeds available resources. You can offer support! Visit these nonprofits web pages to see how you can help. Donations are most needed, but you can also be a flight angel and fly animals to their forever homes in the states, foster, or volunteer. Want to adopt your new furry family member while on vacation? The humane society will take care of all the paperwork you need to get your new baby home!

[www.viequeshumansociety.org](http://www.viequeshumansociety.org)  
[www.ourbigfatcaribbeanrescue.org](http://www.ourbigfatcaribbeanrescue.org)



Linda Quinn

► **Are the horses wild?**

The answer is not a simple yes or no and will strike up an age-old debate regarding their status. For the most part, the horses are not wild, but many of their owners do not keep them on their own land. When the horse is needed, the owner will go and find it. Generally, horses will return to their grazing land time after time, and families and herds stick together, following the same routes to their spots. Many of the horses are branded, and on a small island like Vieques, everyone knows everyone — and their horses. Allowing the horses to roam freely offers idyllic scenes of a time when cars were less prevalent on Vieques. On the other hand, seeing a horse injured and without proper

medical care or suffering from malnutrition during droughts, evokes sadness and frustration. If you see an injured horse that needs attention, call the police at 787-741-2020.

► **Where are the best beaches?**

Vieques Insider Opinion: That is impossible to answer! Each beach has its own personality and

unique beauty, and you could explore a new beach every day for two weeks and still not see them all. However, here are some Insider Fave Picks to get you started. For swimming and sunbathing we recommend Sunbay, La Chiva, Pata Prieta, and Playa Caracas. For snorkeling, check out La Chiva and Punta Arenas. For kids check out Media Luna which is shallow and calm. Or explore the beach across from Tradewinds on the Malecon to find baby hermit crabs and tidepools of marine life! If you're looking for adventure, don't miss Playa Negra, Playa Novillo, Navio, and Playa Cocal. These are just a few of our favorites, but don't let us limit your imagination and beach hopping!



► **Why are some streetlights red?**

Sea turtle hatchlings are instinctively drawn to the brightest light nearby, ideally the moon, to guide them safely to the ocean. Unfortunately, artificial streetlights can disorient them, causing them to head inland, where they face dangerous conditions. To protect these vulnerable creatures the red lights have been implemented as they emit the least energy in the visible light spectrum, minimizing the risk to hatchlings.

On Vieques, the red lights serve an additional purpose unique to the island: reducing light pollution that impacts the bioluminescent bay. By using red lighting, the visibility of the bay's natural glow from bioluminescent organisms is preserved. This is why red lights can also be seen on hillsides and in areas far from turtle nesting sites, helping ensure both the safety of marine life and the protection of the island's natural wonders.

► **Can I bring a rental car on the ferry?**

No. Agencies restrict vehicles to the main island; ferry priority goes to residents/local vehicles.

► **Is the water safe to drink?**

Yes. Our drinking water comes from rivers of El Yunque, the Rainforest of Puerto Rico. In compliance with state and federal regulations, the Aqueduct and Sewer Authority analyze more than 90 possible contaminants that may be in drinking

water. Vieques drinking water is 100% compliant and verified by the EPA. It is safe to drink, so save your money and the environment. Skip the plastic water bottles!

► **Are the restaurants Vegetarian/Vegan/ Gluten-Free/Food Allergy friendly?**

The restaurants in Vieques are often wonderful at accommodating



special diets. Almost every restaurant in Vieques has vegetarian (sometimes vegan) options, and we're not just talking french fries. More than one local pizza joint has cauliflower crust pizza available for those who are GF. Talk to your server if you have special dietary needs, and check the menu for a restaurant online before going.

► **What if I need health services?**

Travelers should have a health plan in place before visiting Vieques. With limited healthcare options and only one pharmacy on the island, it's essential to bring all necessary prescriptions and ensure you have enough for the duration of your stay.

**For the ambulance, call 911 or 787-741-8261.** Over 200 streets on Vieques are unnamed, so it is a good idea to know the name, barrio, and address of your Airbnb or guesthouse in case of emergencies. The CDT (Center for Diagnosis and Treatment) offers a 24-hour emergency room with basic services and experienced doctors. **For emergencies, you can go to the CDT at 787-765-2929** or locate it via Google Maps by searching **Centro de Salud de Vieques**.

For health issues that require treatment unavailable on the island, patients are typically flown to a hospital on the main island of Puerto Rico. It's also recommended to keep a written list of your medications in your wallet. For minor ailments or concerns, you can visit **HealthPro Med** on Calle Regimien-to 65 de Infantería in Isabel II or call them at **787-468-2000**.



**VQS H2O**  
Vieques drinking water is 100% safe to drink and delicious, not to mention compliant and verified by the EPA. So save your money and skip the bottled water! Bring your own thermoflask to take with you to the beach. Hydrate! Your body and the island will thank you!



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# VIEQUES HUMANE SOCIETY



[viequeshumanesociety.org](http://viequeshumanesociety.org)

VHS, the island's only open-admission shelter, alleviates the suffering of our island's animals by providing temporary shelter, finding forever homes, offering spay-neuter services and a low-cost veterinary clinic for our community.



## VOLUNTEER WITH US

SCAN TO DONATE



SCAN TO LEARN MORE

Visitors are always warmly welcomed at our shelter! Volunteer opportunities include walking dogs, cuddling cats, hosting a pet for a field trip or sleepover, and escorting a pet on your flight to its new home.



**IMPORTANT:** Please resist the urge to pick up roaming animals; they're likely owned and will return home on their own!

*I found a sick or injured animal. What should I do?*

**Dogs & cats:** call Vieques Humane Society at (787) 741-0209 or send us a message through our Facebook page.

**Horses:** call the Municipal Police at (787) 741-0290



[/viequeshumanesociety](https://www.facebook.com/viequeshumanesociety)



**VIEQUES HUMANE SOCIETY  
& animal rescue, inc.**




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 online: [viequeshumane.org](http://viequeshumane.org) (scroll to Miss Fuzzi)

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**VIEQUES  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY**  
*a non-profit 501(c)(3)*

# Mother Nature's Guests

be "in-the-know"

Gorgeous beaches, cooling trade winds, swaying palm trees accented by multi-colored bougainvillea - Vieques is a true tropical paradise. However, with the tropics come guests courtesy of Mother Nature. **Advice: Arrive prepared and with an open mind to not let a critter encounter get between you and your unforgettable vacation.**

- 1. Ants.** Constantly searching for water and food, ants will find the tiniest crumb (or a microscopic drop of sugar based nectar). **Advice:** Put anything remotely edible away inside the refrigerator or in sealed containers. Store toiletries in ziplock plastic bags.
- 2. Reptiles.** These abound here but are totally harmless. You may see them scurrying and scuttling about outdoors and in. Remember how important they are as they feast on insects for nourishment. Outdoors you will encounter several species of anoles and ground lizards as well as the main herpetological attraction: the green iguana. At night, (indoors or outdoors,) you may notice the Puerto Rican Upland gecko. Due to the mongoose, Vieques harbors no snake species.
- 3. Roosters:** Roaming free range all over Vieques, roosters crow and crow and crow. I don't simply mean at 3:00 am, but all night long.
- 4. No-see-ums:** Also called sand flies, noseeums are infinitesimal biting cousins of the common house fly. **Advice:** don't sweat the small stuff but don't be on the beach at dusk when these little pests come out.
- 5. Mosquitoes:** Mosquitoes are one insect to always prepare for. Employ insect repellent containing DEET or citronella oil and wear long sleeve clothing at night.
- 6. Cockroaches:** These are a simple fact of island life. Rest assured that a cockroach sighting is not a sign of uncleanness. Tropical living requires some compromising between ourselves and the insects. But no matter what war we wage against them - the strongest pesticide money can buy - when it comes to cockroaches, there's always "more where that one came from."



> Island Critters

co-qui!

16

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

< 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.

## DID YOU KNOW?

HOW THE COQUI GOT TO HAWAII

Our beloved Coqui frog, the official mascot of Puerto Rico, lives in Hawaii as well. It is reported that the Coqui (pronounced Ko Kee, like the sound it makes) was accidentally transported to Hawaii in a shipment of plants, either in living or frog-egg form. The response from Hawaiians was as if the sky was falling. The mayor of Hawaii declared a state of emergency. The unique, two-toned sound of the Coqui that Puerto Ricans love so much was described as a shrill shriek and thought to run down property values. Millions of dollars have been spent over the past ten years to eradicate the Coqui on Hawaii at the same time efforts are underway in Puerto Rico to protect them. Numbers here are on the decline due to land development, fungal infections and pesticides. Despite Hawaii's efforts, including their "frogicides", the Coqui has spread due to lack of natural predators, like scorpions and tarantulas. Hawaiian resident, Sara Lee, on a recent visit to Vieques said of the Coquis in Hawaii, "We are getting used to them. At least they're not poisonous - just annoying." Meanwhile, here in Vieques, we love the sound. co qui! co-qui! Carry on!

## 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 mongeese!



# Where to find

Hidden gems, travel necessities and local treasures.

*the good stuff.*

## ● FRESH FISH, LOBSTER AND CONCH >>

The first level of El Norte Restaurant across from the ferry is a fresh fish market. Check hours on their facebook page.

## ● LECHÓN >>

Don Tito's Lechonera on Calle Patricio Tito Maldonado roasts pigs on Friday night to fill orders for Saturdays and holidays. Order by the pound before Thursday to pick up on the following Saturday 787-617-2748.

## ● LIMBERS >>

Watch for the signs that say "Hay Limbers" at households around the island to purchase this frozen treat.

## ● FARMERS MARKET >>

Placita Reyes (Rt. 200 & 201) Tues & Fri 8 a.m.-5 p.m

## ● SEAGLASS >>

Most beaches have some amount of seaglass but La Chata, Playa Cofi, and Playa Voltio are popular sites to find it. Check the Insider beach map on pages 24-25 for locations or visit [www.viequesbeachmap.com](http://www.viequesbeachmap.com) for more information.



## ● PUERTO RICAN COFFEE >>

Rising Roost, Family Market and Morales are places where you can find Puerto Rican coffee beans, whole or ground. Have it prepared for you at Rising Roost to get your day started right. They

use Gustos Reserva /Juracán a blend of beans from Yauco, Adjuntas and Las Marias Puerto Rico.

## ● FISHING SUPPLIES >>

El Pescador Fishing & Marine Supply (Barrio Santa María). Rods, yo-yo's, spearfishing gear, lures, tackle. Call ahead: 787-231-2624 (Denise).

## ● CHAMPAGNE AND WINE >>

Diverse selections can be found at the Family Market in Isabel II, Morales grocery store on 200, or La Tienda Verde in Esperanza.

## ● LOCAL FOOD >>

Along with all of the great restaurants on the island, the food trucks and kiosks serve island specialties—step up and enjoy!

## ● LOCAL RUM

>>Handcrafted right here on Vieques, CRAB ISLAND RUM is not to be missed. Find it in local restaurants or stores. Take a tour, have a drink at the bar and enjoy live music at the distillery Thurs-Sat. 12-8.



## ● A FURRY FIX >>

walk a dog on the beach, foster, cuddle, or be a pet escort to the States. Vieques Humane Society 787-741-0209.

● VEGAN FARE >>Our talented restaurant chefs and diverse

menus usually accommodate all diets, but for a vegan "experience" make reservations at Finca Victoria's Vegan Friday Dinner or watch for pop up vegan nights at EL Plaza.

## ● CAR VACUUM AND TIRE AIR PUMP >>

Find a car vacuum and an air pump for your tires at Gomera Guzman on Rt. 200. at the intersection where there is a sign for La Praa.

## ● SCHEDULE OF EVENTS >>

Find out what's happening this week at [viequesinsider.com](http://viequesinsider.com).

## ● CHARGERS/ELECTRONICS>>

Quiñones Electronics next to Banco Popular (Isabel II).

● FARMERS MARKETS >> Placita Reyes on the corner of 201 and 200 has fresh fruit and veggies on Tuesdays and Fridays 8am-5pm.

● VIEQUES AUDIO TOURS >> Visit [www.puertoricoaudiotours.com](http://www.puertoricoaudiotours.com) for an audio tour that explores Vieques history, facts about the military presence, sugarcane industry, and more!



# Good to Know



## GROCERY

- ▶ 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

## PHARMACY

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

## 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

**Bunker 403** on the West Side of Vieques on 994 serves as the recycling center. Currently dry cardboard, washed plastic and aluminum cans are recycled (aluminum and plastic does not need to be separated). Past the airport, Parque La Ceiba and Crab Island Rum Distillery, the left turn to the recycling center is aprox 1 mi. past distillery. (If you get to the Arcadia Water Station with a field of solar panels on your right you have missed the turn.) 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 recycables on the loading dock or in bins located at the entrance. Make a day of it by visiting the Ceiba tree, Rompeolas pier, Crab Island Rum Distillery and then visit the bunkers stopping at Bunker 403 to recycle!

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# The Vieques National Wildlife Refuge

Untouched Natural Beauty and Remarkable Biodiversity

**F**ounded by President Theodore Roosevelt in 1903 and administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Department of the Interior, the National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest and most diverse network of conservation lands in the world. Encompassing more than 850 million land and marine acres across dozens of habitat types and over 560 wildlife refuges, the system protects iconic species and offers some of the best wildlife-viewing opportunities on Earth.

In 2001, the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge (VNWR) was established to protect and preserve the island's natural resources in perpetuity. It manages lands on both the western and eastern ends of Vieques and is the most ecologically diverse refuge in the Caribbean complex, encompassing two life zones: subtropical dry and subtropical moist.

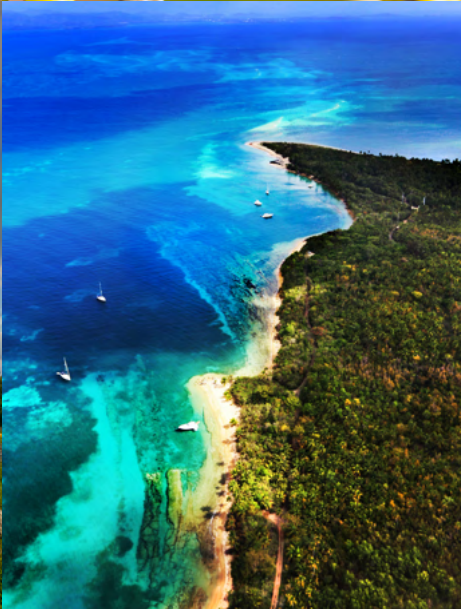
The Vieques NWR conserves the only subtropical moist forest managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. After El Yunque National Forest, it is the second largest conservation area in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Among the top fifty most visited refuges in the nation, Vieques NWR is a natural treasure and a major economic driver for the island. Along with the Ceiba Tree Ecological Park, the Cerro El Buey Wildlife Refuge, and the Bioluminescent Bay Natural Reserve, it contributes significantly to local tourism and the island's economy.

The refuge encompasses diverse habitats including beaches, coastal lagoons, mangrove wetlands, and upland forests—home to some of the best examples of subtropical dry forest in the Caribbean. Surrounding marine areas include coral reefs and seagrass beds. The refuge shelters numerous federally and commonwealth-protected species, such as the Antillean manatee, several bat and land crab species, four species of sea turtles (green, loggerhead, hawksbill, and leatherback), 190 bird species, and over 900 plant species.

Vieques NWR also protects archaeological and historical resources representing the Taíno, sugar cane, and military eras, and it is part of the Puerto Mosquito National Natural Landmark.





As a former military site, the refuge still contains Munitions of Concern (MEC), including Unexploded Ordnance (UXO), and is listed under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA). Visitors are urged to follow the **3 R's: Recognize, Retreat, and Report** any suspicious items.

Extensive cleanup efforts have removed large quantities of munitions, and many areas are now open to the public. However, some remain restricted due to ongoing remediation.

**For updates, visit:**  
[www.navfac.navy.mil/vieques](http://www.navfac.navy.mil/vieques)  
[www.facebook.com/viequesrestoration](https://www.facebook.com/viequesrestoration)

**Learn more about the refuge at:**  
[www.fws.gov/refuge/vieques](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/vieques)  
[www.facebook.com/ViequesNWR](https://www.facebook.com/ViequesNWR)



**INSIDER  
TIP**

Do not use Google Maps GPS when navigating the VNWR. It may direct you to closed or restricted areas and show nonexistent roads.



**VIEQUES NATIONAL  
WILDLIFE REFUGE  
APROX. 18,000 ACRES**

The VNWR makes up about 51% of the island. It is managed by the USFWS. 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.

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www.rotaryvieques.com  
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www.communitythroughcolors.org  
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Navy League Vieques  
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www.ticatove.org  
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787-225-5604  
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Vieques Tennis  
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Vieques Conservation and Historical Trust  
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www.viequeslove.org



## YOU'VE DECIDED TO ADOPT AN ISLAND ANIMAL. NOW WHAT?

You've fallen in love with an island dog or cat. Vieques Humane Society (VHS) can help! If your new friend is a street animal, first we check to make sure she does not already have a family. Island culture allows free-roaming pets, so your new love may just be enjoying an extra meal and your company for a few days. Once that's settled, VHS will steer you in the right direction to prepare for travel, including what to do if you are traveling before your pet can see the vet (a travel requirement).

### FOR TRAVEL TO THE CONTINENTAL U.S. YOU'LL NEED:

- >>> Health certificate from a veterinarian issued no more than 10 days prior to travel
- >>> Up-to-date vaccines and rabies certificates
- >>> Airline-approved travel kennel
- >>> A plan to get your animal from Vieques to San Juan
- >>> A call to your commercial airline to understand their travel regulations related to temperature, weight, in-cabin or cargo restrictions, reservation needs and costs, check-in time, etc.

For street animals, email a photo and location where you first met to VHS. All this takes time, so if you've decided to adopt, get the process started ASAP. Your action will save a life!

**More details:** [www.viequeshumanesociety.org/travel](http://www.viequeshumanesociety.org/travel)  
To get started, call VHS at 787.741.0209 or email [hello@viequeshumanesociety.org](mailto:hello@viequeshumanesociety.org).  
Check the VHS website for dogs and cats ready for adoption: [www.viequeshumanesociety.org/adopt](http://www.viequeshumanesociety.org/adopt)

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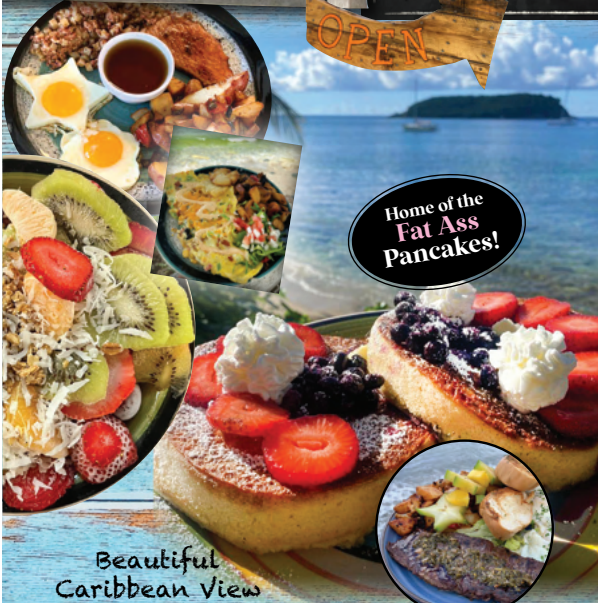


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*Dogs and Cats Rescued from Inhumane conditions*

*Community Outreach and Education*

*Helping wherever, however we can, in supporting our animals and their owners*



## We *they* need your help.

It is donations from people like you that enable us to help the animals of Vieques. Without you we would not be able to buy the medicine, supplies and food necessary to keep rescues alive and well. Even the smallest donation can make the difference.

### Mission Statement

Our Big Fat Caribbean Rescue is dedicated to improving the lives of Vieques' animals by providing free spay/neuter, non-profit veterinary clinics, thereby strengthening the human-animal bond through Community Outreach and Education. We believe helping an animal helps a person, their family and their community.



[www.ourbigfatcaribbeanrescue.org](http://www.ourbigfatcaribbeanrescue.org)



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