

GETTING THE VERY BEST PHOTOS ON YOUR TRIP TO PUERTO RICO

Quick Guide
Written by Karthika Gupta



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Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Many people say that there is some benefit to revisiting a place you have previously visited just to get a different perspective from what you have seen or what you have experienced previously.

I must admit, prior to my most recent trip, I wasn't quite sure about that thought process. After all, there are so many incredible places to see and photograph in the world. Is there really any benefit to revisiting a place? Well! The answer is an irrevocable yes!

My last visit to Puerto Rico was 15 years ago, and until last month I thought I had done and seen everything that there was to see on this beautiful island.

After all, most people associate Puerto Rico with sand, surf, stunning beaches, and warm waters.

Having seen all that during my first trip, I thought I could cross Puerto Rico off my bucket list.

But Puerto Rico is much more than that. With an incredibly diverse landscape of tropical rainforests, lush green hills, and the third largest cave system in the world, there is so much diversity in things to photograph.

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Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Candy-colored homes all around old San Juan make for an interesting backdrop.

CITIES AND TOWNS

Puerto Rico has some incredibly pretty towns and small municipalities scattered all over the island. Of course, San Juan is very picturesque and historic, and well worth the time to walk around and explore. From candy-colored homes to the historic old fort, there is much to see here.

Here are some places to photograph in old San Juan:



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

EL MORRO FORT

El Morro Fort is one the most historic sites in Puerto Rico. It is one of the two forts that were used to protect Old San Juan from invaders. The whole complex is huge with some stunning viewpoints of the Caribbean Sea.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

THE BLACK PUERTO RICAN FLAG AND MURAL

This political mural can be found on an old and abandoned building. The flag was painted black to show Puerto Rico is standing up to the fight and will act on the collapse of the educational system, healthcare workforce, and other issues facing its people.

There are many such examples of street art around the urban areas.

MURALS

Art is a great way to not just connect people from all walks of life, but also a way to experience the pulse of a community. Public art takes this a step further because it builds a sense of place and connectivity, thus improving a community's quality of life.

There are several art murals around old San Juan that are very pretty. Spend a morning walking around the

city and take in these art collections. Your best bet is to download a walking map of Old San Juan and explore.



Key Lesson: San Juan is best explored on foot. Try to capture the city at different times of the day so you can use different kinds of light to your advantage.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

FORTALEZA STREET

Fortaleza Street is most famous for the multitude of umbrellas that decorate the street. Sometimes the umbrellas are taken down and flags are put in place. But regardless, it is very colorful and quite a picturesque scene.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

CALETA DE LAS MONJAS

Caleta de las Monjas is a cute street that leads right to the water. It is close to 'Save A Gato,' where the locals take care of Old San Juan's stray cats. It is possible to see many cats lounging on cars in this area.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

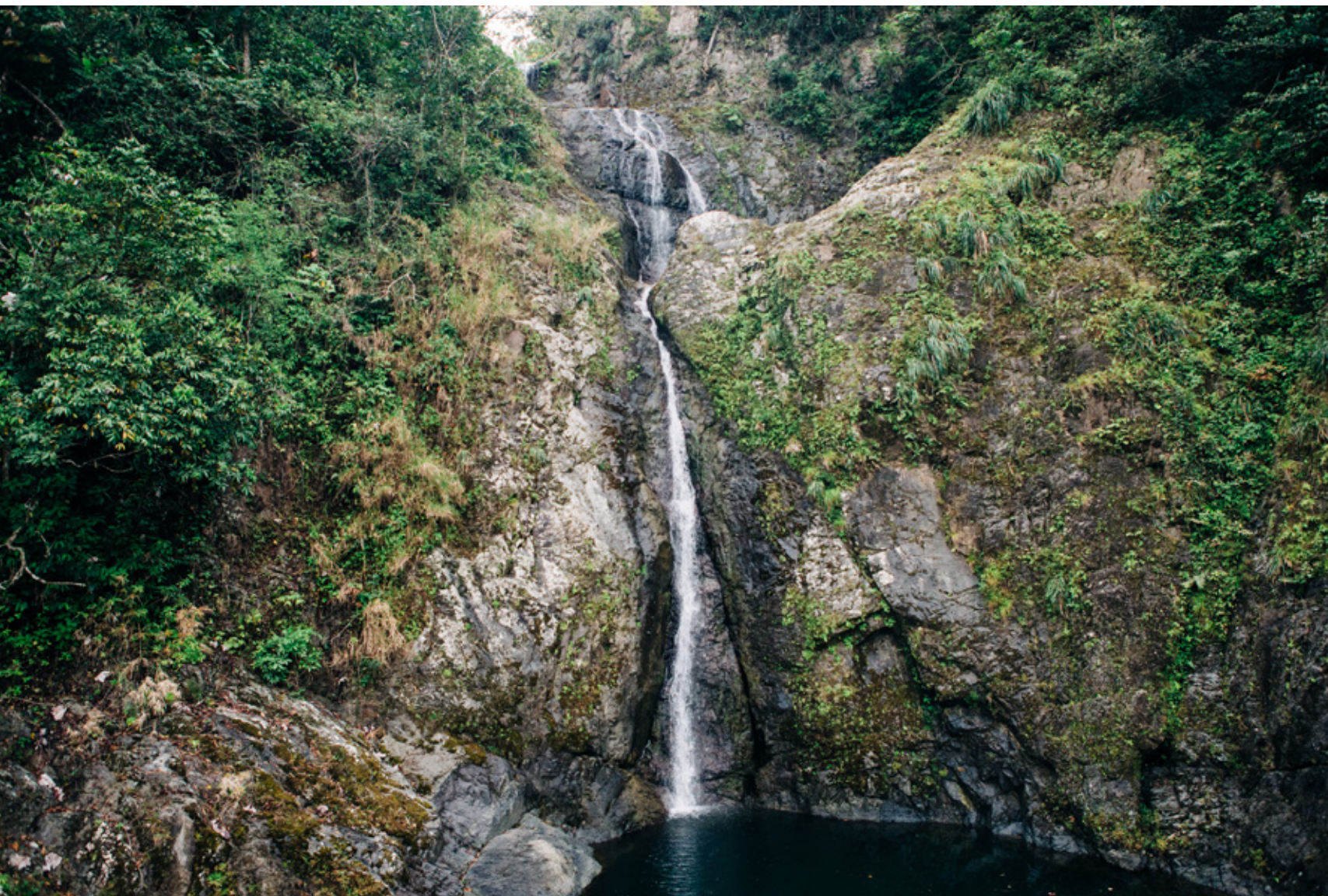
PLAZUELA LA ROGATIVA

This scenic viewpoint gives you a 180-degree view of San Juan with crystal blue waters in the background and the governor's mansion and parts of the fort walls that surround the island. It is a great place to catch the sunset.

There are many views similar to this for you to photograph in and around San Juan.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

LANDSCAPES AND OUTDOORS

The landscape around Puerto Rico is lush and green. From the beautiful Orocovis mountains to over 21 national forests, Puerto Rico has a lot of greenery all around. With this greenery comes beautiful flora and fauna, waterfalls, endemic birds, and animals. Take some time and explore the island's forests and rainforests. Take a guided hike and learn all about the birds and the plants.

Taking a hike in one of the two rainforests that are located in Puerto Rico is a must.

El Yunque is located on the slopes of the Sierra de Luquillo Mountains and encompasses almost 28,000 acres.

El Yunque is more popular among tourists and tends to get crowded.


There are many waterfalls in El Yunque that are quite pretty and worth the hike.


Toro Negro, on the other hand, is quieter and more enjoyable. With over 18 kilometers of trails, there is a lot to see and take in. It also has a natural pool that is very popular in the summer months.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

There is an observation tower atop the Cerro Doña Juana, which is Orocovis's highest point, and it offers one of the best 360-degree views of Puerto Rico.

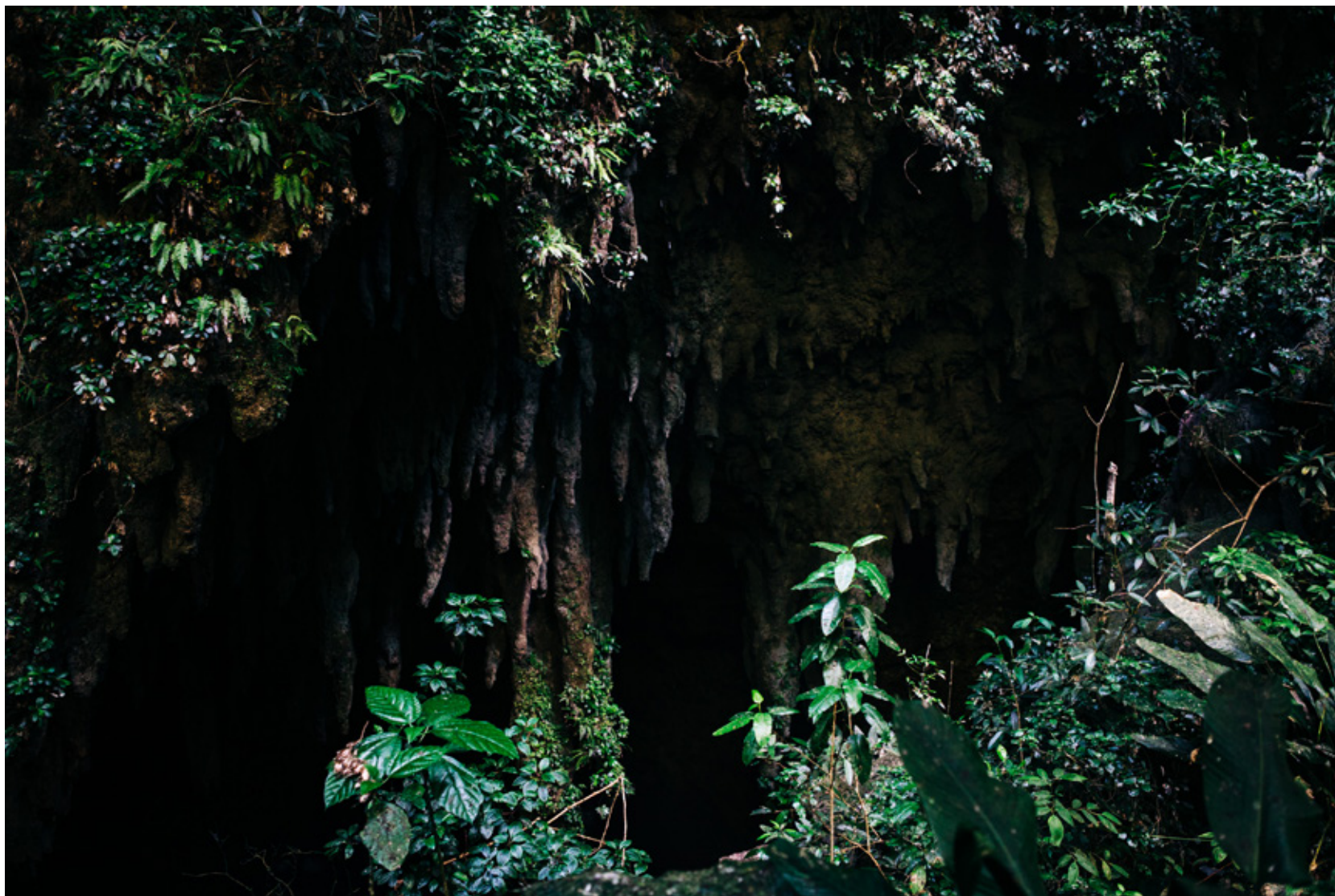
 **Key Lesson:** Make sure to take a rain jacket and some rain protective gear for your camera since both El Yunque and Toro Negro are tropical rainforests, and a quickly arriving downpour is quite common.

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Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Stunning Cerro Doña Juana provides a 360-degree view of Puerto Rico.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

The best way to explore these caves is to use one of the guided tours so that you can get the history of the place as well as learn about some of the unique formations inside the cave system.

UNDERGROUND CAVES

Did you know that Puerto Rico has the third largest cave system in the world?

The Rio Camuy cave system was formed millions of years ago by the Camuy River, and it still flows underground in the caves.

The whole cave system consists of beautiful stalactites and stalagmites as well as other rock formations because of the water erosion.

There is even a 400-foot deep sink hole that provides unprecedented views of both the caves and their beautiful rock formations.

If you are lucky, you can even see some of the hundreds of bats that make their homes in the crevices around the caves.



Key Lesson: This is one place where you might want to take your camera's flash so you can take photos of the rock formations within the caves.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

The damp air inside of the caves adds an interesting element to your photos.

BIOLUMINESCENCE

Of course, no trip to Puerto Rico would be complete without experiencing one of the most amazing phenomena known to man, Bioluminescence.

There are only five bioluminescent bays in the world, and Puerto Rico has three of them: Mosquito Bay in Vieques, Laguna Grande in Fajardo, and La Parguera in Lajas.

You can either opt for a kayak adventure or a glass-bottomed boat.

Bioluminescence is best experienced at night, so make sure to use photo gear that does well in low light situations. You may have to increase your ISO or lower your shutter speed to ensure that you are able to capture the bioluminescent light. **Flash is not the best option here.**



Key Lesson: If you are in the water in a kayak or a canoe, it is best to protect your gear with a waterproof casing. Try to limit your gear to perhaps one camera and one lens as you might not have the option of changing your lens while in a kayak.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

FOOD AND DRINK

The food culture in Puerto Rico is directly related to its history.

With ingredients like plantains (that were brought over by African slaves) to spices (from the Spanish conquerors), as well as indigenous herbs like culantro (similar to the popular cilantro) that grows in the wild, Puerto Rican dishes pay homage to these local ingredients and local narratives.

Take the time to explore your culinary pallet while in Puerto Rico, and don't forget to take photos of the different foods that you eat. This just adds a delicious layer to your photo travel adventures.



Photograph by Karthika Gupta

Chinchorreos are found in big cities and also around the countryside.

Don't just focus on the popular and best restaurants to visit on the island. Try the local chinchorreos and roadside fruit stalls. A chinchorreo or diner is more than just a place to feed hungry visitors. Often owned by the same family for generations, these restaurants are invested in preserving their food culture and traditions for the long haul.

💎 **Key Lesson:** There are many popular chinchorreos on the island and your best bet is to perhaps rent a car and explore them.

💎 **Key Lesson:** When photographing fruit stalls and other local establishments, make sure to purchase something to give back to the local economy, especially if you are taking photos of the people and their products.

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Photograph by Karthika Gupta



Photograph by Zixi Zhou

CONCLUSION

Puerto Rico is a photographer's delight as there are so many things to photograph.

What makes this island unique is that the culture and the history are reflected in almost all aspects of life here.

Puerto Rico's people, culture, and heritage are an amalgamation of centuries of different lifestyles, and it is constantly evolving. It is worth many visits to photograph all that she has to offer: culture, history, relaxation, and of course, outdoor adventure.

It's a slice of old Europe right in the backyard of the United States.

Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) What is the best way to explore all that old San Juan has to offer?
- 2) What is the one thing you should have when hiking in Puerto Rico's rainforests?
- 3) What is the best way to photograph the underground caves in Puerto Rico?
- 4) How can you make sure you are being an ethical traveler and photographer when visiting local establishments?



Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



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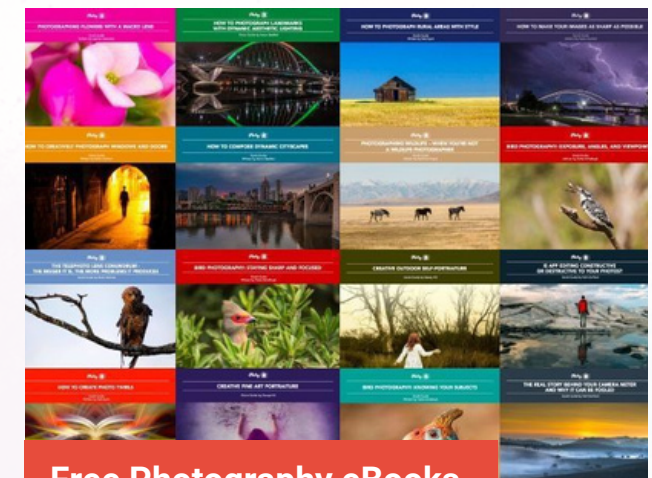
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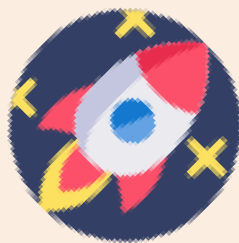
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Karthika Gupta is a wedding, lifestyle, portrait, and editorial photographer based in Chicago. Her style of photography is fun, fresh, and organic. She strives to capture authentic emotions and interactions among her clients and emotive imagery in her commercial work.

She loves connecting with other creatives and photographers and is always ready for an engaging conversation about photography and the art of storytelling.

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