

Luxury Vacation Getaways in Puerto Rico



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Getting away to luxuriate without worry is always a dream. And in the Caribbean there are so many gorgeous islands to choose from — all with their own escapist charms. But **Puerto Rico** has steadily come into its own, with a unique mix of lavish resorts, culinary hotspots, and fashionable boutiques to complement its lush tropical backdrops, and pristine beaches. Whether you like seclusion and nature or simple, Old World charm, here are my top luxe spots to while away your days around the Island of Enchantment.

Resort Hotels

With hundreds of miles of Caribbean coastline, beachside resorts are a dime a dozen in Puerto Rico. But of the entire pack, these four are my *take-me-there, take-me-there-now!* favorites.

Dorado Beach, A Ritz-Carlton Reserve

In its heyday, Dorado was a playground for Rockefellers and Hollywood royalty, as home to the first true luxury resort in **Puerto Rico**. Today, the Ritz-Carlton has aptly revived the ultra-exclusive vibe with its fresh reinvention of the Dorado Beach resort, one of only several properties in its exclusive Reserve fold, which focuses on exceptional service in some of the world's most beautiful environs. Without a doubt one of the jewels of Puerto Rico, if not the entire Caribbean, the **Ritz-Carlton's Dorado Beach resort** exudes luxury from its very foundation, tucked into the same lush acreage of Laurance S. Rockefeller's former estate.

Of course, you'll drop serious bank for sprawling suites with floor-to-ceiling glass doors, private terraces with plunge pools, beachfront views, and five-star everything — not to mention dedicated butlers. But isn't luxury all about getting the best without having to fuss for it? And with boasts of three Robert Trent Jones golf courses, a five-acre tropical spa sanctuary with treatment rooms in treehouses, and a fabulous pool complex (complete with its own lazy river and wave machine), the Dorado Beach resort has plenty to pull you away from your room, even if you're cocooning on a Puerto Rican honeymoon.

W Retreat & Spa Vieques Island

Just a short hopper flight from San Juan, Vieques Island offers more seclusion than the Puerto Rican mainland. With a population under 15,000, the 21-mile-long, 4-mile-wide sliver of white sand beaches, rainforest, and wildlife preserves (including the amazing Bioluminescent Bay at Puerto Mosquito) attracts discerning travelers who revel in extra quietude and have a greater love for nature. **The W Retreat & Spa Vieques Island** deftly heightens the serenity with eco-tours, horseback riding, scuba diving, snorkeling, yoga, and a spa with an extensive treatment menu for both women and men. And the best part is space: There just aren't nearly as many other travelers to contend with as on the main island.

With all the posh and stylish amenities you'd expect from the W Hotels brand packaged in a bubble of beautiful tropical surroundings, the beachside W Retreat on Vieques also has become a hotspot for weddings and honeymoons. So if you haven't finished your "I do" list yet, the W's wedding specialists can arrange fabulous packages for nuptials and commitment ceremonies, and openly welcome same-sex couples as well.

St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort

As the only AAA Five Diamond Resort in Puerto Rico, the St. Regis Bahia is renowned for exceptional butler and spa service, award-winning cuisine, luxe suites with private terraces, beautifully tiled swimming pools, and a challenging Robert Trent Jones golf course. But the checkboxes of allure don't stop there. When you wander around the St. Regis Bahia, you'll realize that about two-thirds of the resort property is dedicated to green areas and nature, making it one of the most lush 'n' luxe escapes in Puerto Rico. You'll really feel like you've gotten away.

With vibrant flora and landscape nestled in an old coconut plantation, the **St. Regis Bahia** just charms in a prime location on the northeastern coast of Puerto Rico, open to glowing views of nearly endless shoreline (about a clear two-mile stretch along the resort) and the mountainous El Yunque National Forest, which rests only a few miles to the south with gorgeous rainforest and jungle waterfalls. Outdoor-lovers also will enjoy the resort's nature trails and Audubon International-certified bird sanctuaries within its sprawling tropical grounds and pools.

Hotel El Convento

If there ever were a place to find Old World charm in the Caribbean, Hotel El Convento is it, a definitive destination for timeless elegance in the heart of Old San Juan. Opened in 1962, the historic gem occupies a Carmelite monastery built in the 1600s, and everywhere you look you can see the handiwork of artisans, from the detailed architecture and marble floors to the handcrafted furniture and fixtures. No computer-generated assembly-line nonsense here.

As a darling of countless "best of" lists, the boutique landmark wows with its 58 thoughtfully appointed rooms, including a few show-stopping suites. Honeymooners might love the Gloria Vanderbilt Suite, which has its own living and dining rooms, along with a charming Juliet balcony overlooking Plaza de las Monjas. Plus, **El Convento** is in easy walking distance of museums, restaurants, and all the charms of Old San Juan shops.

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Coveted Restaurant Reservations

Taking into account that Puerto Rican cuisine is a fusion of Spanish, West African, American, and indigenous Taino influences, you can find rich flavors all over the island. To deny the credit of wonderful foods here would just be wrong. Am I going to pass up roadside *alcapurrias* and fried green plantains? Nope. However, if you need a little more panache than just an ol' picnic table and food truck, you can opt for some of Puerto Rico's most-coveted reservations.

Mi Casa by José Andrés

I love tapas, and star chef José Andrés makes it gourmet all the way at the **Ritz-Carlton Reserve in Dorado Beach**. Andrés fuses his Spanish cuisine with local island flavors for some of the best dishes in the Caribbean. And he occasionally enlists fellow world-renowned chefs, such as Anthony Bourdain, for special culinary events at the resort.

Marmalade Restaurant & Wine Bar

Thoughtfully planned tasting menus and multi-course meals win over even the most finicky foodies here. One of the best reservations to snag in Old San Juan, whether you're a couple or in a group of friends. And a bonus for your ears: no children under 7 allowed.

Fern at St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort

Of course, the St. Regis Bahia is already a fave of mine, but the Caribbean fusion of Jean-Georges makes the restaurant a destination for many patrons staying elsewhere. And the open-air ocean views and sophisticated décor don't hurt. Plus, you're more likely to find patrons dressing up in classic Caribbean style here. Jackets are optional, but absolutely no beachwear.

Perla at La Concha Resort

Designed like an enormous clamshell resting in a reflecting pool, **Perla** is definitely memorable, and often a pick on Puerto Rico's romantic restaurant lists. Enjoy haute contemporary cuisine and some of the island's most refined seafood, such as lobster beurre blanc with truffle risotto.

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Local Fashion Boutiques

Although Puerto Rico, just like the mainland U.S., has plenty of upscale clothing chains and a smattering of designer international brands, you can still enjoy the luxury of local in some of Puerto Rico's most beloved and stylish homegrown fashions.

Olé

Although this small shop isn't flashy or upscale by any means, the lovely staff will find or create the perfect Panama hat to make you look like a million bucks. Also find a collection of unique Puerto Rican antiques and collectibles in this unexpected little trove.

Lisa Cappalli

Daughter of her own Puerto Rican designer Mili Arango, **Lisa Cappalli** carries on her family style with her own boutique in Old San Juan — when she's not travelling the world for fashion shows. Women can find handmade clothes, ranging from flowy casual to exquisite lace pieces. Although many stores in Puerto Rico sell her clothing, you can visit her boutique on O'Donnell Street in Old San Juan.

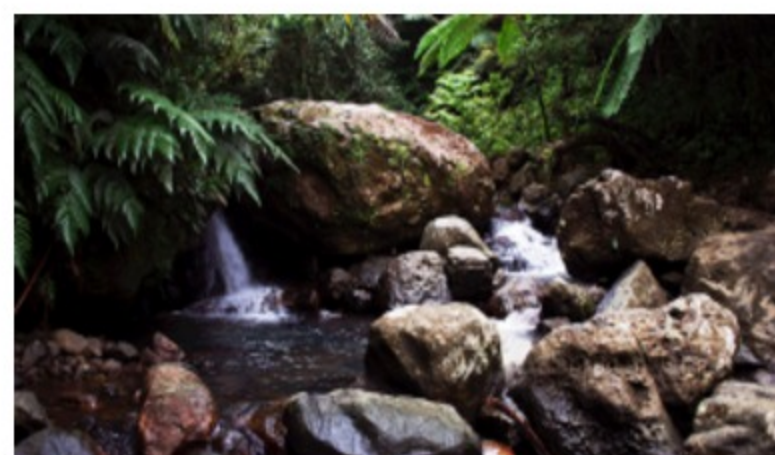
Stella Nolasco

One of Puerto Rico's most stellar fashion designers, **Stella Nolasco** has dressed the likes of Beyoncé and has even collaborated with John Malkovich on his Technobohemian clothing line. You can eye her fashions up close at her boutique on Avenida de Diego in Old San Juan.

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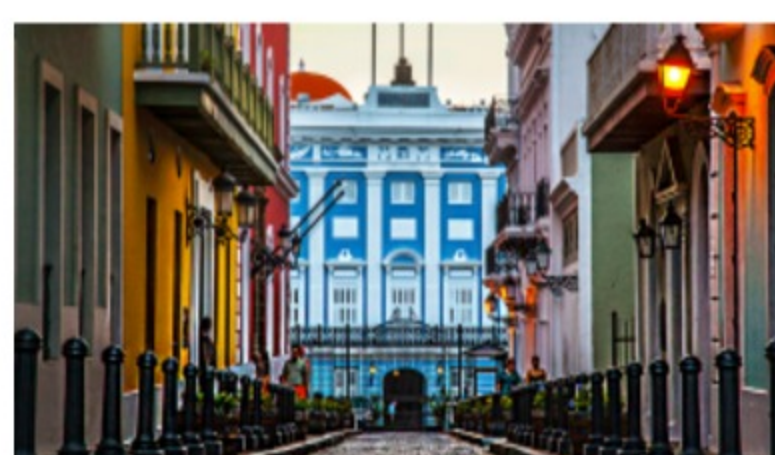
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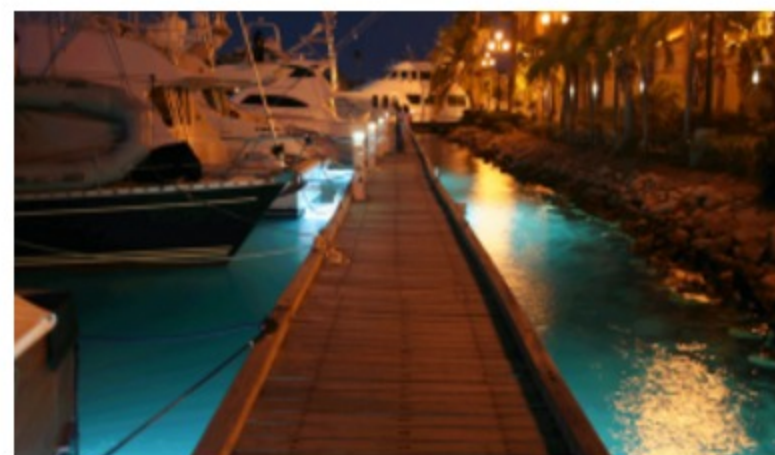
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