

INDULGE IN PUERTO RICO'S CRIOLLO CUISINE.

# ¡BUEN PROVECHO!

From tropical ice creams to cutting-edge meals,

## PUERTO RICO

is a bona fide foodie destination.



Savoring the flavors of Puerto Rico is as much an adventure as experiencing the destination's exceptional beaches, museums, nature trails and historical sites. From a refreshing cup of tamarind-flavored shaved ice to a sophisticated Nuevo Latino dinner, from fresh fish grilled at a beach shack to a plateful of hearty *mofongo* in a traditional Creole restaurant, Puerto Rico is an ideal vacation choice for vacationers with daring palates. Exceptional food is central to residents' lives and they eagerly share their bounty, plain and fancy, with the culinarily inclined. For Puerto Rican families, homestyle dinners are an essential part of a satisfying life. Loved ones gather for traditional meals of home-cooked foods that incorporate ingredients and cooking techniques from the island's Taíno Indian, Spanish and African heritage. Fried or mashed plantains, roasted pork and chicken with yellow rice are among the specialties.

But Puerto Rico's gastronomic delights don't end there. With 1.9 million visitors annually, this easy-to-reach Spanish-speaking destination is not only exposed to foods from other cultures, it helps set the trends. In San Juan, the stylish Budatai blends the flavors of Puerto Rico, Asia and the mainland United States in scintillating ways, so salmon might be glazed with soy sauce and served with coconut hash. Many of the most innovative menus can be found in SoFo, an especially trendy area of San Juan. In fact, twice a year the main drag is closed to traffic for the SoFo Culinary Festival. More than 35 restaurants, including top-name establishments like Tantra and Marmalade, sell food samples and give culinary demonstrations. Dance troupes perform and musicians entertain.

Daring dishes and quiet classics aren't all that Puerto Rico has to offer. In certain regions of the 3,500-square-mile main island, you'll find lovingly crafted foodstuffs that have been made the same way for generations. In the center of the island, for example, Utuado's Rancho Marina is worthy of its own day trip. Travel to it by boat, which the restaurant will send for free upon request. In Barranquita, Vaca Brava, though not old, has



www.prhta.org  
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become legendary for its obscenely generous portions of creative takes on Puerto Rican classics. French fries with bacon and cheese flow from a two-level platter like molten chocolate, and a rack of ribs arrives tableside bolted to an upright skewer. While you wait, you can ride a mechanical bull or a pony, hike scenic paths, buy tropical fruits and play video games. The feasts are legendary and authentic: goat fricassee, whole red snapper in a robust tomato sauce, and *mofongo* (garlicky mashed green plantain).

Likewise, in the isolated mountain town of Orocovis, restaurants serve a local sausage, *longaniza*, that's nearly impossible to find anywhere else. In Guavate, *lechoneras* line the road, each inviting you to sample pork that's roasted whole on the premises. Try *Añasco* for a spicy muffin-like cake called *hojaldre*, Arecibo for an inch-long fish called *ceti*, which is often served with mashed root vegetables; and Lares for ice cream in fascinating flavors like avocado, codfish, sweet potato and corn.

With obvious pride, Puerto Rico's population is eager to share its bounty, and festivals celebrating a certain food or region's cuisine are held around the calendar. Two programs make it a cinch for visitors to try the best of the island during one visit. One is Saborea Puerto Rico: A Culinary Extravaganza, the Caribbean's largest culinary event. It's held over a weekend every April (April 1 to April 3 in 2011), and a total of 60 restaurants give out samples of their wares in a marketplace-type setting on both Saturday and Sunday. Thirsty? Rums, wines, beer and spirits are handed out just as generously. Throughout both days, notable chefs from Puerto Rico and the U.S. mainland lead cooking demonstrations. The event also includes a festive bash featuring tasty tapas and award-winning rums, all enjoyed to the beats of Latin tunes. Plenty of hands-on culinary activities engage children. No wonder more than 7,000 people, plus dozens of food and travel writers, keep Saborea on their calendars every year. In 2010, noted celebrities such as Robert Irvine from *Dinner Impossible*, Jacques "Mr. Chocolate" Torres, Anne Burrell and Keegan Gerhard participated.

An ongoing way to sample the best of the island is Puerto Rico Zest, a dine-around adventure begun in spring 2010 that invites visitors to enjoy three-course meals at some of Puerto Rico's best restaurants. Each establishment offers two full menus for \$25, \$35 or \$45. To find the restaurants and menus, pick up a Puerto Rico Zest brochure at tourist offices, and look for information online at the website [prhta.org](http://prhta.org). It's a great opportunity for adventurous eaters — and value-oriented ones — with nearly two dozen restaurants participating. You might sample chicken cracklings, baby back ribs and a mango crisp at the Bamboo SeaSide Grill in the Porta del Sol region; cream of pumpkin and sweet potato soup with ginger on langoustines in *azafran* (saffron) broth and plantain crepes with syrup and Nutella at El Comodoro in the Porta Caribe.

A nonstop flight from dozens of mainland U.S. gateways, with no passport required for U.S. citizens to enter, Puerto Rico is an ideal destination for beach, golf, spa, casino and water-sports vacations — and, clearly, culinary ones. Sangria, anyone?

### TASTE OF THE CITY

An urban enclave with colonial charm in some areas, metropolitan panache in others, San Juan is Puerto

Rico's prime cultural center. You can eat well here, from guava- or fish-filled empanada pastries at bakeries to world-class meals in fine dining rooms.

Many hotels line the shores of the Condado area, where on the fourth Sunday of every month Ventana al Mar Park hosts the Ventana al Jazz festival. Locals and visitors alike relax to live jazz sounds while snacking on the foods of many area restaurants.

Duck into San Juan's hotels to find some of the island's best meals. At the **San Juan Marriott Resort & Stellaris Casino**, you'll find sumptuous meals at friendly prices. Ristorante Tuscany, for instance, is a fine-dining establishment where Puerto Rican slow-cooking techniques work wonders on the flavorful foods of Italy's countryside. Plan your visit around a specially priced meal and you can experience an exceptional dinner for no more than you'd spend in a coffee shop. Wednesdays through Sundays, arrive between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. to receive a three-course classic Tuscan repast for only \$20 per person. On Tuesdays, the restaurant offers a four-course tribute to the Piedmont region for only \$29.95. The selections might include cheese fondue with grappa, short ribs in Barolo sauce, and hazelnut panna cotta in a Giandua sauce, plus a glass of house wine. Call 787-722-7000 ext. 6219 or visit [sanjuanrestaurant.com](http://sanjuanrestaurant.com) to make reservations. For a more casual indulgence, try the Surf and Turf promotion at La Vista Restaurant and Ocean Terrace; you'll receive one entree plus complements for \$13.95, two for \$24.95. Choices include salmon, tuna and churrasco-style steak plus luscious sauces including lemon-ginger remoulade. La Vista's Seafood & Prime Rib Buffet, offered daily, is loaded with succulent shellfish plus carved-to-order prime rib, salad, soups, vegetables and desserts for \$32.95. Save your spot by calling 787-722-7000 ext. 6268. This oceanfront Condado Beach hotel has an inviting swimming complex with water slide and whirlpool, refreshingly decorated guest rooms with high-tech extras, a lobby bar with evening entertainment and a casino. 888-817-2033, [marriottsanjuan.com](http://marriottsanjuan.com)

Stylish and sophisticated, the **Conrad San Juan Condado Plaza** lures food lovers with eight foodservice outlets, yet the two under the culinary command of chef Wilo Benet are reason enough alone to lodge here. For two decades, Pikayo has been setting trends followed around the globe, serving a scintillating mélange of European, African, Asian and Caribbean flavors in a plush ambiance. Blackened scallops might be enhanced by piquillo peppers and a frothy corn emulsion. Foie gras might be paired with sweet ripe plantains and black truffle honey. To enjoy Benet's casual creations, opt for Varita Woodburning Rotisserie. Foods range from ripe plantain *piononos* to pulled pork or cod fritters. New menu items include creative lettuce wraps. 888-722-1276, [condadoplaza.com](http://condadoplaza.com)

Isla Verde is an equally upbeat and up-to-date beach enclave within San Juan, rich with welcoming hotels and enviable restaurants.

When you check into Isla Verde's **Verdanza Hotel**, you'll be handed a *limber* — a typical Puerto Rican frozen fruit treat made with tropical sweets like coconut or passion fruit. That sets the tone for the playful yet passionate temptations that are integral to this new casual urban-inspired hotel. Executive chef Damián Hernández is the youngest chef to head up a full-service hotel's kitchen on the island, and the 29-year-old's youthful

exuberance brings a unique vivacity to the Verdanza's offerings. Step into Eighty20 Bistro and you'll find mainland trends jazzed up with tropical flavors. Snapper is served Napoleon-style, the tender fillet sautéed in cilantro butter and layered with crispy corn tortillas and grated mozzarella cheese. Pico de gallo is enlivened with pineapple, shrimp with bold jerk spices. For a more authentic experience, opt for Coladas Restaurant. Amid jewel tones and tavern-style seating, you can sample island favorites like fried green plantains with crab stew and coconut custard. Be sure to order a namesake frozen colada like Sunset Tamarind. Satisfy your yen for Asian foods at J.H. Yee's Asian Bistro, often filled with locals. If you arrive with a group such as a wedding party, reserve an evening for Grilling With the Chefs. An outdoor kitchen will be set up in a lovely garden and, with the help of professionals, members of your group will prepare the night's dinner. These options are typical for the upbeat, chic 222-room hotel, which boasts a water park and free bike taxi rides to the beach that's only steps away. *800-625-0312, verdanzahotel.com*

**El San Juan Hotel & Casino, The Waldorf-Astoria** is a sizzling-hot Isla Verde hotel where even a day by the pool or beach has the panache of an in-demand nightclub — so imagine how *au courant* the food is. Eight restaurants offer options from a strong cup of coffee to prime steaks, but the buzz is hottest about KOCO. Chef Hector Crespo cleverly weaves together Caribbean and Latin flavors here, where artfully plated meals are served in a cool atmosphere. Begin perhaps with *batata* lollipops — sweet potato-malanga croquettes stuffed with ginger-scented pork. Pan-seared halibut comes with coconut risotto, grilled churrasco steak with hand-cut jerk-flavored

fries. For a less fussy experience, opt for the new Brother Jimmy's BBQ, where the food is fine yet you'll be surrounded by TVs showing sporting matches. Executive Chef Wayne Michaelson takes his art as seriously here. That's why specialties like meaty St. Louis-style ribs with a choice of five tempting sauces bring in such a crowd. *888-579-2632, elsanjuanhotel.com*

### NORTHEASTERN EATS

Sprawling resort hotels boasting several restaurants, swimming complexes, spas, casinos and even golf courses are typical in the eastern portion of the island. The fascinating El Yunque rain forest is nearby. For a taste of real Puerto Rico, make a stop in quiet Quebradillas, where the century-plus-old bakery Panadería Los Cocos prepares crusty breads in wood-burning ovens. At Luquillo Beach, a few dozen fried-seafood kiosks known collectively as La Parilla dish out the likes of lobster tacos and grilled red snapper.

If a butler unpacks your bags and your bed is made with soft Pratesi linens, just imagine how special the food will be at **The St. Regis Bahia Beach Resort**. Scheduled to debut in October 2010, this world-class luxury hotel will be part of a 483-acre golf and recreation community ... and, yes, the dining options will be spectacular.

At the heart of the culinary offerings is Fern Restaurant, which will be operated by globally renowned chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, whose A-list restaurants operate in the United States, the United Kingdom and Asia. Creatively adapting to his environment at the St. Regis, Vongerichten will work wonders with the best that Puerto Rico has to offer: juicy papayas and sweet

mangos, earthy yucca and versatile coconut. Seeking the freshest seafood possible, he'll focus dishes around grouper, wahoo and dorado plucked from local waters. While a celebrity chef will not be the energizing force behind the St. Regis' three other dining outlets, you can rest assured that every bite, from a burger to a bouillabaisse, will be prepared with impressive skill.


Discerning travelers will be lodging in the St. Regis' 139 junior suites and one-bedroom resort residential units, where over-the-top is standard. Top-shelf sundries, Bose sound systems and oversized tubs are among the givens in the guest rooms. At the property's Remède Spa, you'll be greeted with a flute of chilled champagne along with ultra-rich truffles created by chocolatier Jacques Torres. Adventures on the bordering rivers? Lazy days at the beach? Windsurfing and diving? They're all tempting, but they may just be time-killers as you count the minutes until it's time for another St. Regis meal. *877-787-3447, stregis.com/bahiabeach*

With diversions ranging from a water park to golf to water sports to a marina, spa and scheduled activities, you're sure to build up quite an appetite at **El Conquistador Resort, The Waldorf-Astoria Collection** and its all-villa resort that shares the same grounds, **Las Casitas Resort, The Waldorf-Astoria Collection**. With 23 restaurants, bars and lounges on the premises, satisfying that hunger will always be a pleasure. For an indulgence, dress up and spend an evening at Strip House steakhouse, where the over-the-top bordello-esque decor is the backdrop for meals of prime steaks and decadent 24-layer chocolate cake. From sushi to Teppanyaki tables, Blossoms covers Asian cuisine no matter what style you prefer. La Piccola Fontana

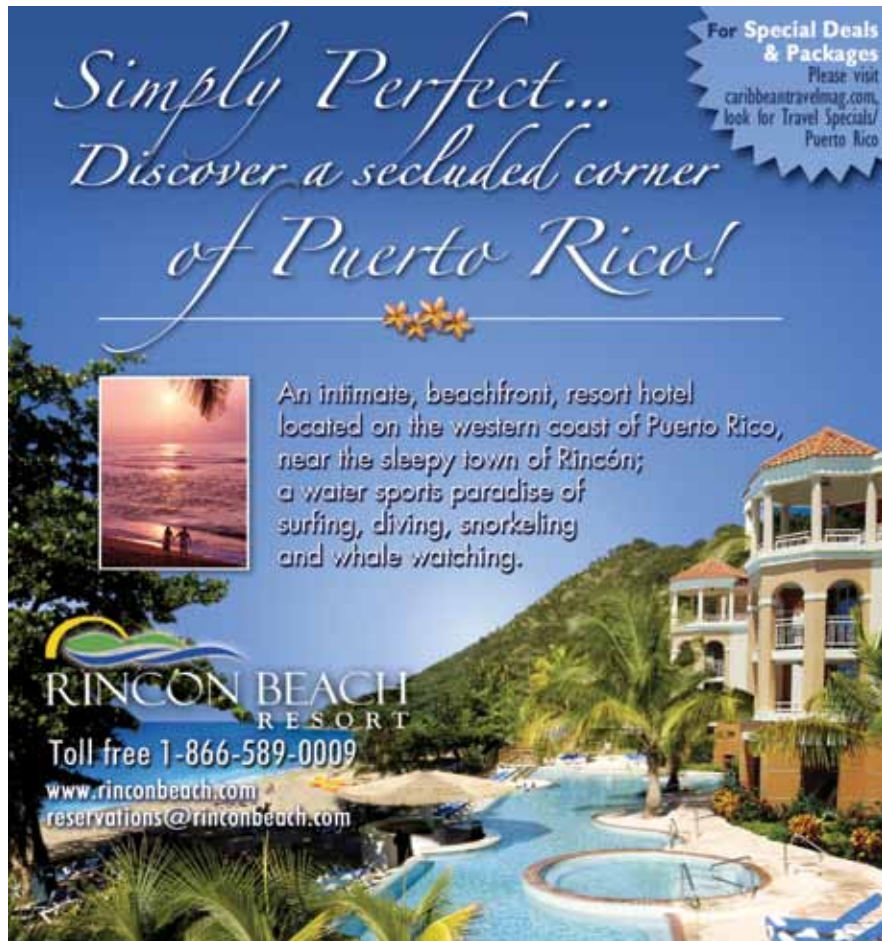
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specializes in the foods of Northern Italy, while the flavors of Caribbean-infused seafood are the featured meals at the marina-front Stingray Cafe with flavors of the sun. For kids, plenty of eateries on the property offer children's menus. 888-543-1282, [elconresort.com](http://elconresort.com); 888-557-6372, [lascasitasvillage.com](http://lascasitasvillage.com)

**NORTHEASTERN EATS**

With 11 restaurants, three of them the kind of crave-worthy dining spots about which guests enthusiastically e-mail home, the **Rio Mar Beach Resort – A Wyndham Grand Resort** is a magnet for culinary travelers. Do they enjoy the 500-acre beachfront property with two golf courses, a Peter Burwash International Tennis Center, oceanfront swimming pools, a Mandara Spa and a 7,000-square-foot casino? Of course. But those who plan vacations with meals in mind are also big fans of executive chef Jan Pfeiffer's epicurean efforts.

One signature restaurant, Palio, is a sophisticated, intimate ode to Italy. Warm woods and white linens are the backdrop for Old Country classics like Tuscan *pasta e fagioli*, a bean soup, and grilled Angus beef tenderloin with a hearty gorgonzola crust. For straightforward American fare, consider the Grille Room, an airy steakhouse with stunning ocean views through floor-to-ceiling windows. Grilled steak, fish and shellfish come with a choice of sauces, including a French Béarnaise and a Latin chimichurri. Asian flavors at Shimas blend with those of the West. Lamb chops are rubbed with a Hunan 12-spice mix and finished with star anise glaze and green mango slaw. Sizzling spring rolls are stuffed with Caribbean duck and served with an orange-ginger soy glaze.

Rio Mar has plenty of options offering fresh American and Caribbean fare, including Marbella, an inviting casual restaurant open for three meals every day, and Seabreeze, situated right by the pool. Scuba diving, a children's club, an array of boutiques ... it sometimes seems like the Rio Mar's extensive menu of activities is designed to help guests build up an appetite for yet another luscious meal. 877-636-0636, [wyndhamriomar.com](http://wyndhamriomar.com)

**FLIP FLOPS AND FISH FRIES**

In the Porta del Sol, as the western region is known, relaxation comes naturally. Small beach towns, young folks riding the surf, and simple stands selling grilled fish and are among the simple pleasures. Las Curvás de Rincon is a hilltop cluster of such eateries. In Mayagüez, be sure to sample a pastry called *brazo gitano*—a jelly roll or Swiss roll. In La Parguera, try the signature sangria.

In a region known as down-to-earth with family-run inns and barefoot-friendly restaurants, the **Rincon Beach Resort** rises like a beacon of civility. This four-star deluxe beachfront hotel wows guests with elegantly appointed guest rooms and a sea-view swimming pool—plus ambitious menus that make the resort a dining destination. Its signature restaurant is really three eateries in one: The Brasas main dining room is delightfully traditional, with wrought iron and dark woods. Its menu, however, is contemporary—with a load of classic touches. Guests might enjoy local fruits in the form of a rack of veal topped with a sauce of Port wine and guava. Caribbean lobster might be enhanced by mustard cream. New and classic meld, too, on the open-air terrace and on the enclosed patio, where those looking for a lighter meal might opt for tapas and sangria. Chorizo in a Port wine sauce, and piquillo peppers stuffed with goat cheese and chorizo, are among the options. By the pool, the Pelican Grill complements its typical American favorites with tempting island flavors.


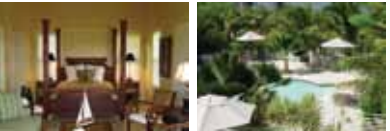
Try a yellowfin tuna sandwich with roasted red pepper aioli on garlic pita bread. Paired with a fruity cocktail, you'll be in Puerto Rican heaven. If you're lodging in one of Rincon Beach Resort's villas, feel free to request in advance that snacks and breakfast items be waiting in your kitchen. 866-589-0009, [rinconbeach.com](http://rinconbeach.com)

**QUIET CARIBBEAN**

Porta Caribe, the island's southern strip, doesn't have as many hotels as some other coastal areas, which means the food is authentic and the crowds are small. Join local families at Ponce's La Guanica boardwalk, where you can fill up on anything from a churrasco-style steak to a piña colada in a to-go cup. Coffee aficionados stock up on robust dark beans at the NUPCAY warehouse, where farmers collectively roast their product.

A tranquil retreat on its own 20-acre beachfront

property, **Copamarina Beach Resort and Spa** tends to draw kudos for its food as well as for its activities, spa and proximity to a dry forest. Indeed, gourmets travel from throughout the island to dine at Alexandra, the signature restaurant. Under the passionate care of chef Ernie Reyes Oliver, a member of the Puerto Rico National Culinary Team, Alexandra serves New Latin cuisine, joyfully pairing Puerto Rico's luscious staples with a variety of culinary techniques. Here, a simple pork tenderloin is made magical when stuffed with shrimp *salpicon* and served with a *brandade* (puree) of yautia (a root vegetable) and chorizo sausage; on the side is a slaw of jicama and mango. For a gourmet take on a traditional item, try the deep-fried whole red snapper in Creole sauce with mashed cassava. Not every Copamarina meal can be an indulgent repast, and that's why the also-popular Las Palmas offers up more budget-friendly favorites like

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breaded shrimp in guava sauce and bourbon-barbecued-glazed ribs. Sea views are always on the menu. Guests may come for the food, yet the distractions are numerous and welcome. Copamarina is a dive hotel with its own scuba operator on the premises. Those looking to enjoy the Caribbean Sea without air tanks are encouraged to use the kayaks and new paddleboards. Tennis, two adult pools, two kiddie pools, two Jacuzzis, a full-service day spa and a fitness center are among the Copamarina's other diversions. 800-468-4553, [copamarina.com](http://copamarina.com)

**ISLAND ADVENTURES**

Off the coast of Puerto Rico's mainland, Culebra and Vieques are nearly unspoiled getaways with mile upon mile of undisturbed beaches to explore. The hotels are intimate, the beaches among the Puerto Rico's very best and the food delectable. On Vieques, you might even spot horses roaming freely yet enjoy a special meal at Carambola restaurant at Inn on the Blue Horizon or at any of the restaurants within the new W Retreat & Spa. Pick up a souvenir bottle of Coqui Fire Hot Sauce, which is made on the island. *Billi* (a local liquor fermented with rum and an island fruit called *kenepa*) is another Vieques creation. On Culebra, most restaurants are clustered in the town of Dewey and many feature fish plucked from the Caribbean Sea daily.

When you tell your friends about your meals at the **Club Seaborne Restaurant**, they'll book their own vacations within a week. At Club Seaborne, guests dine while seated comfortably on a screened-in porch. The tables overlook the pool, which is surrounded by tropical plants and flowers, Fulladoza Bay and verdant mountains beyond that. You'll be pampered with a Novo Latino Tropical meal that belies the rural environment. Picture a plate filled with fresh Culebra lobster. Dig your fork into Seaborne paella. Seared grouper in leek sauce with Caribbean rice, veal tenderloin wrapped in pastry dough ... those are the kinds of luscious treats that await. And every dessert is created in-house by the chef. The wine selection is impressive and eclectic. For a special treat, dine in the wine cellar itself. The restaurant is part of Club Seaborne, a boutique hotel. A lounge with a 60-inch television, two courtesy rum drinks made with Puerto Rican spirits, use of kayaks and adult bicycles, pool and beach towels, and ground transportation to and from the hotel are among the extras at this intimate property. Hotel staffers will arrange for water taxis and massages, among other services. 787-742-3169, [clubseaborne.com](http://clubseaborne.com)

You can easily reach Vieques' local and gourmet restaurants from **Casa del Marullo**, yet this welcoming villa has everything you'll need to prepare your own meals. The view can't be beat -- the ocean is right beyond your private 245 feet of sandy beach, with St. Thomas, Culebra and the Puerto Rico mainland beyond. Oh, you'll be so comfortable. When not lounging in the hammock, snorkeling steps from your expansive patio or cooling off in the alfresco shower, you may want to enjoy the island's tropical delicacies in your two-bedroom, two-bathroom home away from home. Pick up some fresh-from-the-sea fish at a local market and grill it on the barbecue. Slice up some mangoes and passion fruit and whip them up in the smoothie maker, or have a personal chef create meals just for you in your kitchen. The villa is well-supplied with amenities from games to beach chairs, plus cable TV and CD and DVD players. It has ceiling fans and is air conditioned throughout. Yes, life is good at "The House of Waves." 914-260-6356, [casadelmarullo.com](http://casadelmarullo.com)

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