

# Puerto Rico - off the beaten path

by Camille Pepe Sperrazza

"Commodore" Camille is a certified Puerto Rico specialist.

**Royal Isabella Golf Resort** - Located in Porta del Sol, this resort is sometimes called the "Pebble Beach" of the Caribbean because of its magnificent golf course. The luxury boutique hotel is comprised of 20 rooms called "casitas" - they are like having your own little house. Each contains a gorgeous living room with carved wood furniture. Sixteen of the 20 have a queen-size poster bed, two steps up from a sunken living room. The couch opens up into a bed, and wooden doors can separate the two rooms, if desired. You'll have your own private plunge pool, surrounded by lush greenery and a stunning view of the ocean. The bathroom of the casita I viewed led to this same outdoor space, and the huge shower had shower heads on both sides, more than enough room to accommodate two people at once. Continental breakfast is included. Not every casita is identical.



The grounds are magnificent, with views reminiscent of Europe. Trees there grow the fruit from which maracas are made. Food is a farm-to-table concept, utilizing what is grown in the vicinity. You can ask to accompany the chef to pick your food from the farm, and what you select will be cooked for you. Artisan pizza is on the menu, baked in an old world brick oven. Meals are purchased a la carte. An elegant library room offers space to read quietly or mingle. A circular outdoor bar overlooks the grounds and ocean, a great place to catch a cool breeze. Ideal for those who want to get away from it all. Quiet, understated serenity. You won't believe you are in Puerto Rico.

**Rincon** - Apparently Surfin' USA extends to Puerto Rico! All the way west of the island is the surfer town of Rincon. During January through March, this area is also ideal for whale watching. A beachfront resort with a fun dive bar is **The Hotel villa Confresi**, offering a Mexico kind of laid-back vibe. Sit at the bar and the friendly bartenders will tell you tales about about the town. Drinking is affordable. A coconut rum concoction was \$4.00. The cozy beach offers a massive view of the ocean, a small oasis where you can simply hang out in your flip flops, bathing suit, and watch the waves. Water sports can be rented. A small pool is near the bar. A tiny casino is in the lobby. A fun place if you want spend your days hanging out on the beach and aren't concerned about luxury.

**Rincon Hotel** - a larger hotel with a bigger beach is the Rincon. Brides like to get married here because the sunsets are magnificent. It also attracts families. A more upscale experience in Rincon is **Horned Dorset Primavera Rincon** which I did not get to see this trip. Celebrity weddings have taken place there.

**Hilton Ponce Golf and Casino Resort** - Located in the southern, more mountainous

region, this is a huge property, perfect for conventions, meetings, and golf enthusiasts. Enjoy a tasty breakfast, while overlooking fish swimming in the hotel's pond. Try your luck at the casino, the largest one in the area. Nearby is the Serralles Castle, which provides some insight into the production of rum. Don't be fooled by the name. It is more like a mansion than a castle, and is now a museum where you can view rooms reminiscent of the occupants' history. Today, weddings are held here. A car ride away are the hot springs of Coamo, said to be the "Fountain of Youth" Ponce de Leon had hoped to find. Visitors are permitted to bathe in the waters which are in small concrete pools.

**Carabali Rainforest** - Enjoy activities such as horseback riding, go-carts, and ATVs, all within the setting of a rainforest. Friends who don't wish to participate in sports can linger at the **Carabali Rainforest Grill** where food and drinks are served.

Higher above the mountain is the **Rainforest Inn**. There are 12 rooms, each a bit different, most with quaint lofts. Room 2 has two double beds and a loft with another double. Be prepared to duck a bit to access the loft area. Kids will love it. Come here with a large enough group, and you can have the entire place to yourselves. While it is certainly off the beaten path, Luquillo Beach is only a 10-minute car ride away; the aforementioned activities are a ride down the mountain; and surprisingly, there is an upscale restaurant, La Cava del Terror, known for steak, wine, and seafood. A pool on the premises offers majestic mountain views as does the seated outdoor space.

**Gran Melia** - This large sprawling resort is one of the few in Puerto Rico that offers some type of all-inclusive package as an option. But be aware that "all inclusive" here means drinks with meals only, and food during meal times only. You can upgrade your experience to Red Level (concierge service) and have access to a lounge with nightly appetizers and drinks. Then you will also be able to enjoy coffee, tea, and pastries throughout the day. The attractive grounds resemble a Spanish villa, and the size of the property means you may have to call for a golf cart to take you where you want to go. Rooms are spacious. The beach area is rocky so while it looks nice, it isn't really for swimming so stay here if you are content with pools. Saturday night entertainment by the bar was karaoke. Shopping outlets are a 5-minute taxi ride away, and San Juan is about half an hour away. Not too far is Fajardo where you can kayak the BioLuminescent Bay, one of the few places in all the world where you'll see fish that glow in the dark. Some say it is an awesome not-to-miss experience. Be prepared for some strenuous paddling in the dark, and watch out for the branches of the mangrove trees that may get in the way.

If you are looking for more adventure, consider taking on "**La Bestia**" - the beast - the world's highest zip-line. The action takes place at the adventure park, **Toro Verde**, located atop a mountain. Toast your accomplishment at the bar and restaurant where two large green bulls guard the entranceway. I attended a private party here, filled with music and dancing. Drinks were top notch.

For more information about Aruba or to book a trip, [contact](#) "Commodore" Camille today.

This article was accurate when it was written, but everything in life changes. Enjoy the journey!