

PUERTO RICO'S TOURISM CONTINUES TO THRIVE DESPITE ECONOMIC PROBLEMS



Tourism industry continues to thrive against all odds despite massive economic woes that Puerto Rico is facing. Tourists seem to mind less about these problems as they continue to arrive in droves in 2015 while hotel expansion remains on the up and nine cruise ships are already scheduled to visit this amazing island in the current 2015/2016 season.

Not to be held down by the economic misery, the island's hotel occupancy is up by 6.1%, according to Ingrid Rivera Rocafort from Puerto Rico Tourism Company (PRTC). To support these sentiments, the Caribbean Tourism Organization (CTO) notes that 656,912 overnight land tourists have arrived in the period between January and April, which is a 4% increase on 2014 statistics. **Additionally, there has been a 26% increase of cruise passengers during the same period**, which perfectly highlights tremendous tourism growth despite economic despairs.

Land tourism continues to thrive. This is indicated by the continuation of new hotels in the tourism hub of San Juan's Condado. Most of these hotels are in the last phases with the highlight being the Hyatt Place, which has cost a whopping \$29.7 million. Another hotel, Marriott property, is expected to start development in a month's time. These are not all. There are other major developments including a property in the historic Ashford Avenue, the Condado Vanderbilt, the Hyatt House San Juan, as well as the Ritz Carlton Reserve among others.

Regarding the cruise industry, Puerto Rico is doing just fine with nine cruise ships expected in 2015/2016 season. Two of Royal Caribbean Cruise ships that can carry around 8,000 tourists are set to dock at the island, which is not only a good sign during this low season, but also very exciting. These incredible ships and their passengers seem not to mind the economic struggles that the island faces, but are more attracted to the island's improved infrastructure, flexibility in docking time and exotic destinations.

Most of these ships are said to choose San Juan over other Caribbean ports because it is spectacularly appealing and historic. This is not to mention the extensive renovations that are expected to be complete in the next 18 months.

Nevertheless, tourists give the impression that they are attracted by the 500 year-old walls and the grandeur of the old San Juan city, its incredible restaurants, bars and boutiques, which can all be experienced by walking rather than taxi. Travelers can also explore beyond San Juan with unique attractions such as Toro Verde and the El Yunque Rain Forest, which is 45 minute drive from San Juan.

Air accessibility in Puerto Rico is arguably the best in the Caribbean. The island's main airport, Luis Munoz Marin serves more than 26 airlines including major carriers such as Delta Airlines, American Airlines, Southwest Airlines and Jet Blue, among others. This has called for **a \$750 million renovation and expansion of the airport to serve traveler better** by adding exquisite facilities, amenities, cuisines, as well as exceptional shopping options.

Locals and visitors alike find it easy to connect between San Juan and other places such as Condado and Convention districts as there are new pedestrian and bike paths, thanks to PRTC and the city's

officials.

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