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**TRAVELERS VISIT PUERTO RICO AT AN UNPRECEDENTED PACE**

*Discover Puerto Rico Announces First Quarter 2019 Lodging Demand and Forecasts Record Growth*

**(San Juan, Puerto Rico, April 29, 2019)** – Discover Puerto Rico, Puerto Rico’s first-ever Destination Marketing Organization (DMO), announced today that 2019 Q1 lodging demand is on par with 2017 Q1 levels just fourteen months post-hurricane Maria, signaling an unprecedented pace of recovery for a destination. Total demand for independent rentals is up 72 percent from 2017 Q1 levels, underscoring a large growth in visitors<sup>1</sup>. Forecast for the rest of the year looks promising as the remainder of 2019 is booking 24.1 percent higher than 2018 levels<sup>2</sup>. This is expected to continue to rise as the average booking to arrival window is approximately 2.5 months.

“Puerto Rico is looking more and more like a historic comeback story, and I’m proud to see the Island’s travel and tourism industry play a starring role,” said Roger Dow, president and CEO of the U.S. Travel Association. “Discover Puerto Rico has proven that a destination’s marketing arm is an indispensable component of a successful turnaround.”

“We learned a great deal from our tourism counterparts in other destinations who have faced adversity, and that helped focus our efforts. We gleaned insights and historical data related to perception, and closely observed how media handled recovery coverage. We optimized our plans to ensure strong results.” said Brad Dean, CEO of Discover Puerto Rico.

Since its inception in July 2018, Discover Puerto Rico has embarked on a mission to solidify Puerto Rico’s brand equity and accelerate its visitor economy, empowering the Island to fully capitalize on its rich tourism product and thrive as a leading Caribbean destination. Discover Puerto Rico set a short-term goal to drive a record pace for recovery and reach pre-Maria levels by the hurricane’s two-year anniversary. Based on the 2019 Q1 results, Discover Puerto Rico has achieved this goal much sooner than anticipated, proving itself as one of the Island’s first successes of privatization.

“The DMO was established to put the destination and economy first, by ensuring consistency and best-in-class marketing strategies to increase business and leisure visitation,” said Dean. “This is an exciting time for Puerto Rico’s visitor economy, and it’s rewarding to see early success. However, this is just the first step – our ultimate objective is to put the transformative power of

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<sup>1</sup> Source: STR Monthly Trend Report, January-March, 2019. AirDNA Monthly Market Summary Report, January-March 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Source: TravelClick Demand360, April 21, 2019.

travel to work in Puerto Rico by doubling the size of the visitor economy, benefiting the Island's residents and businesses," he added.

Puerto Rico's tourism industry has made great strides in record time. Additional milestones include:

- 2019 Q1 leads and bookings in the Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Events (MICE) space far surpass past 3-year and 5-year averages. Meeting planners are finding Puerto Rico a top choice given its ease of doing business as a U.S. territory and allure of a Caribbean destination.
- Air access has been growing at all airports. San Juan International airport (SJU) saw a 23.8 percent year-over-year increase in air traffic in the first quarter of 2019 compared to the first three months of 2018. This is a strong sign of growth, as more carriers expand capacity and add new routes.
- Puerto Rico's cruise industry has broken records. January 2019 numbers reflect an increase from previous years of 28.9 percent of visitors to the port and there has been a 56.6 percent increase in homeport cruise passengers compared to January 2018.
- There are approximately 156 hotels accepting reservations. Short-term rentals provide travelers more than 8,000 options across the entire Island and sister islands of Vieques and Culebra.

Major online travel agencies like Priceline, Kayak and Expedia Group have also publicly reported accelerated increase in demand for lodging on the Island. Priceline has reported that room night bookings are up 125 percent in Q1. Kayak.com analyzed Spring Break search traffic across all 50 states and saw a 115 percent search increase compared to 2018. The hot spot most commonly searched for in 30 out of 50 states was San Juan. Expedia Group's most recent data reports that demand increased by 440 percent and 40 percent, respectively, in Q4 2018 as compared to the same period in 2017.

In July of 2018, Discover Puerto Rico quickly embarked on a brand repositioning process to ensure an immediate impact on the visitor economy. As the organization approached the one-year anniversary of hurricane Maria, its #CoverTheProgress campaign challenged media to focus on the positive progress of the tourism industry. A bold move not previously taken by a destination that faced adversity, the campaign shifted the perception of Puerto Rico, placing the Island in the consideration set of travelers and meeting planners. The organization also activated a Google Content Initiative, rapidly updating and improving visual assets available to travelers online.

In Q4 of 2018, Discover Puerto Rico focused on securing third-party endorsements via media and influencers, to spread word of Puerto Rico's offerings. Achieving the #1 spot on *The New York Times* "52 Places to Go" list, among other notable accolades received, helped the Island become one of the hottest destinations to visit in 2019. Kicking off the year with Lin Manuel Miranda reprising his role in "Hamilton" and the Tonight Show starring Jimmy Fallon's special episode in Puerto Rico, paired with an aggressive push to position Puerto Rico as the ideal destination for Spring Break, helped drive the momentum forward.

Just last month, Discover Puerto launched a new brand identity, including a new logo, and a revamped website, featuring dynamic content designed to engage visitors across all digital formats. And last week, the organization launched a new brand campaign called "Have We Met Yet?" The new campaign re-introduces Puerto Rico to the world and draws inspiration from the Island's unique cultural and natural offerings – including its iconic doors, the hospitable and

welcoming nature of its people, and its geographical position as a United States territory conveniently located to the south of the mainland.

“We’re thrilled to see the impact the DMO’s efforts are having on the local community. Puerto Rico has an incredible opportunity to elevate its stature, globally, and this is just the beginning.” said Leah Chandler, CMO of Discover Puerto Rico.

Through research, innovation, collaboration and best-in-class marketing practices, Discover Puerto Rico continues to work with industry stakeholders and destination leaders to promote Puerto Rico as a premier global destination. The Island was recently selected as the host destination for the upcoming World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) 2020 Global Summit – further evidence that Puerto Rico’s tourism industry is thriving.

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#### **About Discover Puerto Rico**

Discover Puerto Rico is a newly established private, not for-profit Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) whose mission is to make Puerto Rico visible to the world as a premier travel destination. The DMO brings prosperity to the people of Puerto Rico by collaboratively positioning the Island’s diversity and uniqueness for leisure, business and events. It is responsible for all global marketing, sales and promotion of the destination and works collaboratively with key local governmental and non-governmental players throughout Puerto Rico’s visitor economy and community at large, to empower economic growth. To discover all the beauty the Island has to offer, visit [DiscoverPuertoRico.com](https://www.discoverpuertorico.com).