



DISCOVER
Puerto Rico

INTERNATIONAL PRESS CLIPPINGS

CANADA

OUTLET	TITLE	MARKET	DATE	UMV CIRCULATION	AD VALUE/ EAV (USD)
Canadian Traveller	Aguadilla: A Novel Intention	Canada	July 2019	250,000	\$2,237
Canadian Traveller	Puerto Rico: Onwards and upwards	Canada	Spring 2019	250,000	\$13,427
TOTAL CLIPS: 2				TOTAL: 500,000	TOTAL EAV: \$15,664

PUERTO RICO:

Onwards & upwards

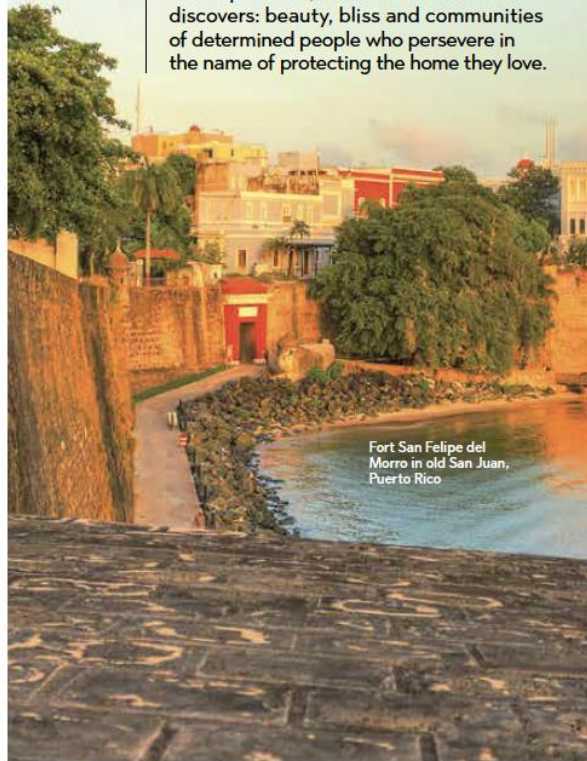
THEY CAME ON FOOT or by car; neighbours and natives; alone, in couples, as families or groups of friends. This was, after all, a big day in Puerto Rico. Aguadilla, a town hugging the tip of the northwestern shore, was celebrating the grand opening of the Island's newest tourist attraction: a massive mural covering an entire section of hillside homes overlooking the sea.

By chance, my rented homeshare sat smack-dab in the middle of it, and I had a front-row seat from my balcony perch situated about halfway up the incline.

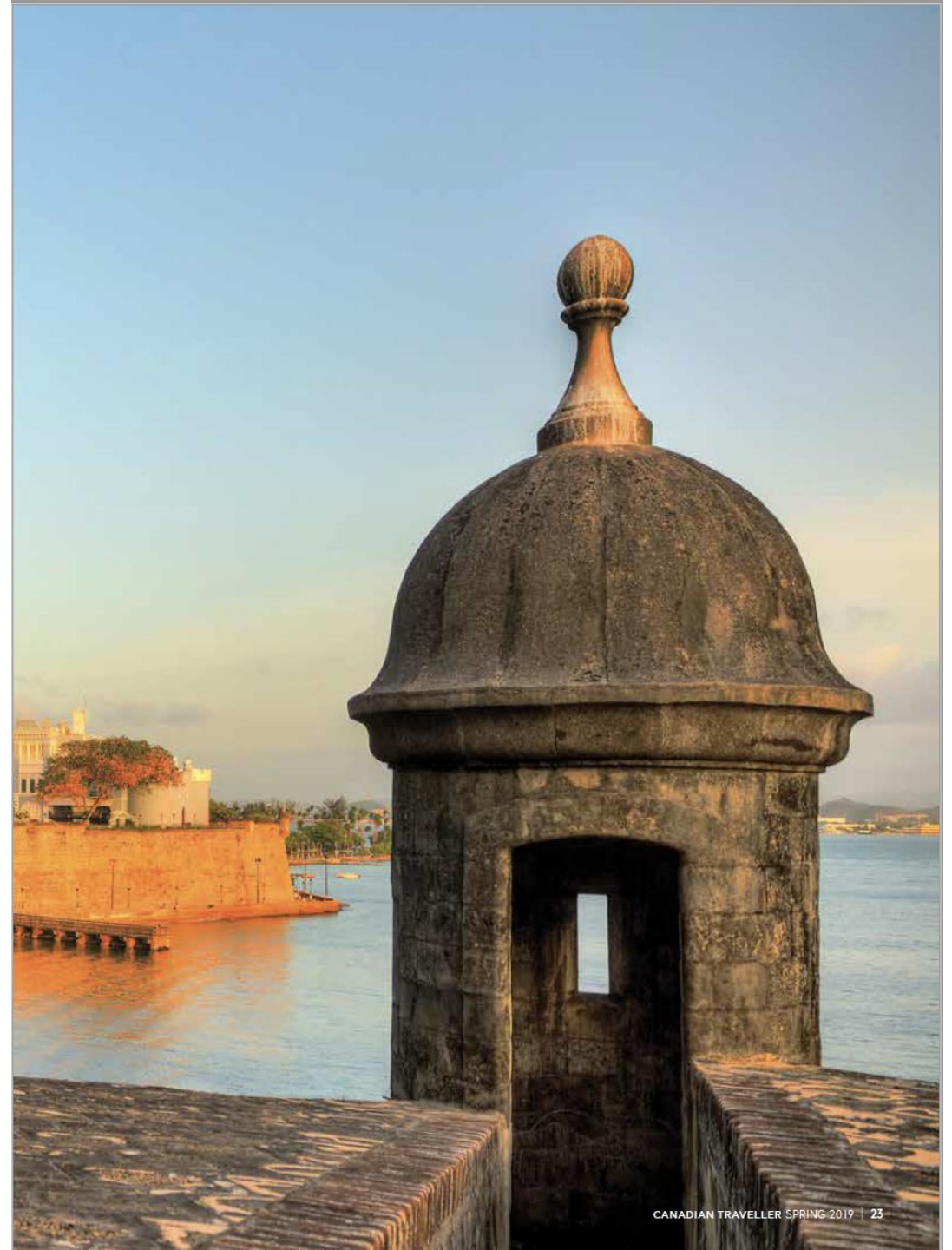
Throughout the festivities, politicians thanked the sponsors who had made this community beautification project possible; organizers sang the praises of architect Samuel Gonzalez Rodriguez, and his team of volunteers; vendors served up grilled *pinchos de pollos* (Puerto Rican chicken skewers) and cans of cold Medalla Light; and bands played long after a canopy of fireworks lit the sky.

And yet, the biggest draw was the way folks could actually immerse themselves in the mammoth masterpiece by climbing ►

The island of Puerto Rico continues to rebuild after being devastated by Hurricane Maria in 2017, with tourism being imperative to the process. And there's plenty for travellers to enjoy and experience, **REBECCA FIELD JAGER** discovers: beauty, bliss and communities of determined people who persevere in the name of protecting the home they love.



Fort San Felipe del Morro in old San Juan, Puerto Rico



Left to right: Aguadilla's metamural, the surf at Rincon, Old San Juan



the steep and uneven staircase that runs up through the middle of it, past balconies and rooftops, and all the way to the top. There, climbers could make their way along a narrow walkway lined with more artists' works.

Marvelling at the fortitude of the steady parade of people passing by, at one point, I locked eyes with an elderly lady using a cane and offered her a sympathetic smile. I was a bit taken aback when she returned my gaze with a quizzical look, as if to say, 'What are you grinning at?'

When the woman descends, don't condescend, I told myself.

To many Puerto Ricans, this uphill climb is a walk in the park – relatively speaking, that is. The island was devastated by Hurricane Maria in September 2017, which resulted in an approximate \$80 billion USD in damages and left more than one million people without power. For an island so dependent on tourism, the road to recovery has been a long one and although for many life has not returned

to its pre-Maria days, Puerto Rico is now open for business. Almost 200 attractions are up and operating and more than 4,000 restaurants are open island-wide. Several hotels and resorts managed to re-open by the end of last year so by mid-2019, total room inventory is expected to be fully restored. Keep in mind, however, that each community is unique and recovering at its own pace.

When I first arrived in Aguadilla, which served as my home base, I was shocked by the abandoned houses and shuttered businesses dotting – or lining – some of its streets. Many of the structures were so dilapidated that only the faded sign of a beauty shop, say, gave any clue as to what type of commerce once took place inside. Clearly, these ruins were the result of the years of economic hardship that had plagued the Island before the hurricane

hit. The wounds Maria inflicted were fresher: boarded-up beach houses, dusty storefront-windows, chained and padlocked doors, and the eerily apocalyptic look of larger vacant structures such as the town's entertainment complex which used to house a skating rink.

"After the hurricane, no electricity, no ice," a local told me.

Sadly, even with the electricity long-since back on, the drop in tourism and mass exodus of locals following Maria has rendered many ventures unviable.

For now.

Here's the thing: during my walkabouts, I soon discovered businesses – old, new, or newly re-opened – bustling with activity. Finding them, and then, frequenting them – a small department store, a pharmacy, a clothing retailer – became the favourite part of my days. In the mornings, I looked ▶

Discover Puerto Rico, AGI, Drone





Crash Boat, Aguadilla

forward to joining the line-up at Panaderia La Marina, a bakery with pastries so good nothing could keep customers away; and I made afternoon pit-stops at Tu Mojito, a seaside oasis offering every version of mojito imaginable; and once in a while, I opted to hang out for happy hour with the local gang at Rompeolas, a beach bar and casual eatery.

At Espinar Beach, on the outskirts of town, I met a young woman who lives in Minnesota but grew up in Aguadilla. A few years ago, Melisa Lopez Franzen and her husband purchased a three-storey beachfront house as a vacation home and income property. Incredibly, the closing date was the very day Maria struck, and after dealing with red tape and damages, the couple's first renters were linesmen working to restore the Island's electricity.

"Now, of course, we have other guests booking. And everywhere you look, people are opening new businesses and restaurants. Puerto Ricans, you know, are very resilient."

Melisa's tone was not defensive, but her chin jutted out a little when she spoke.

LET'S GO SURFING NOW, EVERYBODY'S LEARNING HOW...

Rincon, a.k.a. "The Caribbean's Hawai'i" lies just southwest of Aguadilla. Two things put it on the map as a global surf destination. One, in 1962, lyrics to the Beach Boys' hit *Surfin' Safari*, made mention of the town; and two, the televised 1968 World Surfing Championship was held here. Driving in, it's all you imagine a surf town to be, its main drag lined with bistros, bars and beach-related boutiques. The place appeared to be in such good shape, and I wondered if Maria, perhaps catching the vibe, had mellowed when she arrived.

"No," a local beachside shop owner told me emphatically. "The whole island got hit hard. We didn't have electricity here for four months so you had to line up at the bank and the grocery store for hours."

His buddy standing next to him piped in, "Yeah, but we did a lot of partying."

Isabela, a city famed for its Guajataca Forest walking trails, rivers and caves, arguably offers a more authentic surf scene. At Jobos Beach, expert locals ride the waves seemingly oblivious to the dangerous riptide

and currents that on occasion, drown or pull the unlucky out to sea. No barricades line the massive rock that folks like me climb for a peek at the enormous blowhole and churning waters. Risk, it seems, is just part of the Puerto Rican way of life. In fact, in a flurry of cautionary online reviews of the beach, one critique suggests that a local surfer's biggest worry is whether he or she will have to take a break from the fun to pull some hapless tourist to safety.

RECOVERY AND RE-DISCOVERY

I've never been a big fan of history or even antiques, but lately, I've developed an appreciation for old things (projection!) so I chose to spend my last day and night in Old San Juan. I doubled down by selecting a homeshare in a beautiful three-storey guest home built in the early 1800s, and steps from Castillo San Cristobal, one of two massive fortifications that for centuries defended the city.

When You Go

WHAT TO DO: Which way to the beach? Pretty much every way, and each with an ambience and best-place-to-activity of its own. Surfing, snorkelling and diving are big at **Steps (Rincon)** and **Crash Boat (Aguadilla)**; go paddle-boarding at **Sandy (Rincon)**; kayakers and nature lovers should head to **La Parguera**, one of three bioluminescent bays.

WHERE TO EAT: Two recently opened spots that stand out: **Casa Del Dorado**, a laid-back, open-air restaurant located on **Espinar Beach** in **Aguadilla** serves up yummy local dishes such as *mofongo*, *churrasco*, and the freshest seafood around. In Old San Juan, the family owned-and-operated, **La Carreta**, on **Calle Luna**, wowed me with its big authentic brunch and personable stellar service. Bar bites and bevies available at night – a full dinner menu is expected to be rolled out shortly.

GETTING AROUND: If you want to explore the Island, you need to rent a car. No bus system connects the communities and many places are only one-or-two taxi towns. Rates in Puerto Rico fluctuate according to the season but for the most part are reasonably affordable especially along the airport strip in San Juan. Availability fluctuates as well, so book ahead.

Discover Puerto Rico. Free vector maps

My host, Daniel del Valle, an art collector, told me that in the days following the hurricane, he rediscovered what it means to be a Puerto Rican.

"I found beauty in the people's willingness to help each other and contribute to the extent they could to the recovery of our country."

Me, I found beauty in the teams of tourists disembarking the cruise ships, the scores of locals out with their families, the laughter floating up from packed restaurants and nightclubs, and the comfort of being in a 500-year-old city that has survived invasions, economic and political strife, and yes, multiple natural disasters.

Recently, The New York Times named Puerto Rico as number one on its 52 Places to Go in 2019 list. Accolades such as this will undoubtedly help propel the Island to a full recovery. But so too will road-trips to smaller communities where the only "hardship" I experienced during my journey was an ache, like a phantom pain stemming from the loss of something that should be there. I felt it when strolling along a stretch of deserted boardwalk, or when I was walking along a ribbon of sandy beach

and looked back to see the only footprints were my own.

But don't go for the boardwalks and beaches – go for the people.

The day after Aguadilla's grand opening celebration, from my balcony perch, I spotted Othoniel Acevedo who lives in one of the adjacent hillside units, carrying a pail of soapy water and heading towards one of the ground-level buildings, in front of which many folks had posed for selfies.

"People put their foot on the wall and left scuff marks all over the place! Can you believe it?" he called up to me, seemingly indignant but his voice carried more than a tinge of pride.

I wanted to tell him that with tens of thousands of visitors expected to pass through in the coming months, his mini-restoration attempts would prove futile, but I held my tongue.

Instead, I watched a man who'd confessed to me that he had sat in the darkness crying like a baby as Maria shook his home, lift a sponge, and tenderly wash the dirt away. 🇵🇷



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Crash Boat Beach, Aguadilla



Aguadilla: A NOVEL INTENTION

BY REBECCA FIELD JAGER

THE FIRST TIME I laid eyes on Playa Crash Boat, I clutched my paperback with glee. Having visited several beaches in Puerto Rico only to have the riveting performances of surfers divert me from reading, here, with nary a wave in sight, I'd finally be able to bury my toes in the sand and my head in a book.

Situated in the city of Aguadilla on the north-west tip of the island, Crash Boat is a family beach, its swells too inconsistent to deem it a bona-fide surf paradise such as the beaches of nearby Rincon.

As I strolled from the parking lot, an old van with a huge Puerto Rican flag painted on its side, caught my eye. A young man was working out of the back, whacking the tops off of coconuts like a well-practised executioner and selling the coconut water for a buck. I could hardly be expected to turn that down so I lined up and bought one.

As I stood sipping my drink and surveying the land for prime reading real estate, I spied a couple of wee water-winged wonders "swimming" near the shore. Oh, I remember how my children used to crawl along like that, using their arms to propel themselves forward with their bodies floating straight-out behind, like tadpoles with newly developed front legs. I lost myself – and god knows how much time – in a nostalgic trance.

Coming to, I noticed folks were walking by with libations and I wondered where they'd scored their alcohol. I spotted a colourful structure, and moseyed over, tossing my empty coconut on the way. I ordered a beer from a gentleman whose beautifully weathered face peeked out at me from a long rectangular window, and sat down at picnic table nearby. Maybe I'll just read here, I thought. But no, the place was serving lunch snacks and starting to get

busy and I felt badly taking up so much space. I walked back to the water's edge and literally forced myself to sit.

But then, just as a jet ski whizzed and a stand-up paddleboarder glided by, a series of whoops stopped my heart. Uh oh, were the surfers here? Nah, it was just a bunch of teenagers cannonballing off the edge of the pier.

With a silent apology to the author I gave up on even cracking open my book. There was nothing about Crash Boat Beach I wanted to escape from. ☹

When you go

WHAT TO DO: Crash Boat draws enthusiasts of all sorts of activities including swimming, fishing, snorkeling, scuba-diving and stand-up paddleboarding.

WHERE TO EAT: Snack on Latino favourites and cold beverages sold by beach vendors or grab picnic supplies from the grocery store in **Aguadilla**. Dine in at **Rompeolas**, a beach bar and restaurant where locals hang out and you can get a decent sit-down meal.

WHERE TO STAY: A good way to get to know Puerto Rico is by staying in a home-share. Many are located on, or within walking distance, of the beach.