



## Discover Puerto Rico Honors Puerto Rican Female Entrepreneurs on International Women's Day

**San Juan, Puerto Rico, March 8, 2021-** In honor of International Women's Day, Discover Puerto Rico hosted last Wednesday, March 3 their first Virtual International Women's Day Meetup with Puerto Rican female entrepreneurs, who are facilitating the tourism recovery and strengthening the local economy. The panel was composed of Carmen Portela, Co-Founder of Local Guest and Bana, Cristina Sumaza, Co-Founder of Lote 23, and Crystal Díaz, Owner of El Pretexto and Co-Founder of PRoduce. These women shared their inspirational stories as they overcome the hurdles of the pandemic and other crises the Island has endured.

"Supporting and highlighting women-led businesses through Discover Puerto Rico's marketing and earned media efforts is critical. Their businesses impact Puerto Rico's economy and as the Island's Destination Marketing Organization, it is our responsibility to provide support and amplification to ensure these businesses succeed. We saw a rise of entrepreneurship after Hurricane Maria and expect to see a similar trend post-pandemic as Puerto Rican women continue to embody strength and resiliency," said Leah Chandler, CMO of Discover Puerto Rico.

During the panel Carmen Portela explained that Bana is a community that connects, educates and inspires consumers on sustainable living through content, products, experiences and services. Local Guest, a division of Bana, is dedicated to co-creating regenerative tourism experiences by working hand-in-hand with local communities and entrepreneurs. "The last couple of years have been challenging for entrepreneurs in the Island. Nevertheless, we have proven our ability to regroup and pivot. This is something that definitely differentiates businesses and social enterprises born in the Caribbean: our capability to change, shift and morph in order to adapt and solve problems or fill gaps in our ecosystem," expressed Portela.

Cristina Sumaza talked about Lote 23, an outdoor food park in Santurce, Puerto Rico - where a new generation of local chefs developed their businesses using local and native ingredients. You can also find local pop-up vendors that range from plants to trendy jewelry, kombucha and the most recent is a local art vending machine that dispenses products from local artists. Sumaza said, "2018 and 2019 were tough years, sales were never as high as when we launched in 2016, and we put a lot of effort into collaborating with partners that would bring in traffic. In 2019, we formally focused on the tourism industry and created a package for tourists where they could come and try all the kiosks at Lote and we would tell them the story behind the park, the chefs, and the native ingredients. It had great results initially, and then March 15 came, and we were ordered to a total lockdown. We are now looking at becoming economically sustainable, expanding our work, and creating greater impact. We decided to transform our business model into a food incubator, with the mission to continue to create opportunities for chefs, producers and entrepreneurs in Puerto Rico's food industry."

And finally, Crystal Díaz talked about her personal life project, El Pretexto, the first Culinary Farm Lodge in the Island which is in Cayey. It offers an authentic experience of sophisticated culinary tourism in a pleasant environment in the countryside. "El Pretexto is our home that we share with our guests and the whole experience is around food without being a restaurant. One third of tourist spend is devoted to food. Our guests enjoy each morning an amazing breakfast made from scratch with love, with an amazing

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view of the mountain range all the way to the southern coast as we are nestled at 2,600 ft above sea level. Our project not only creates jobs for the community but also brings visitors who spend money in other community businesses as well! Our guests have lunch and dinner in nearby restaurants, our pop-up dinner gives additional income to local chefs, waiters and dishwashers. All the ingredients being sourced locally means that most of the money from the events and the night stays, goes to local producers and keeps circulating in our local economy, and nothing makes me prouder,” explained Díaz.

To continue honoring Puerto Rico’s entrepreneurial women, their achievements and local businesses, Discover Puerto Rico launched a [landing page](#) on their website to support many successful females on the Island. “Our goal is to share stories about these pioneering women who are pouring their passion for their beloved Island into products and programs that will either inspire a trip to Puerto Rico. Also, thanks to Brands of Puerto Rico, an online platform for 100% Puerto Rican products, anyone can easily support women-owned businesses and other local entrepreneurs, while getting a piece of the heart and soul of the Caribbean mailed to them directly,” finalized Chandler.

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