

## Exploring San Juan, Puerto Rico: A Disney Cruise Line Port Review

by Cheryl Pendry, PassPorter Featured Columnist

This is the next article in our Disney Cruise Line series, in which we explore some of [Disney Cruise Line's home ports](#).

<br/>Today it's off to the sunny climate of the Caribbean to visit the capital of Puerto Rico, San Juan.

San Juan has certainly had a dizzy rise through the ranks, from being an occasional port of call for Disney, to becoming the home port for a series of Southern Caribbean itineraries in September and October 2014, and a repositioning cruise back to Port Canaveral. The Southern Caribbean is certainly a mouth-watering prospect, with stops at Antigua, St. Lucia, Grenada, Barbados, and St. Kitts. If our lottery numbers come through, I'll be the first to book this. As well as loving the thought of all those wonderful Caribbean stops, I like the idea of going back to San Juan.

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□ We were fortunate to stop there on the Disney Fantasy in December 2012, just a month after the port debuted on Disney's itineraries. At the time, I would have much preferred an overnight stop, as I really struggled to decide which shore excursions to go with. This is something I don't usually have a problem with, as one will jump out at me, but not here.

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□ I would have loved to have visited the El Yunque rainforest, just over an hour's drive from San Juan, and if we go back, this is going to be at the top of my list of places to visit. It's the only tropical rainforest in the US National Forest system, and as well as traditional hikes, anyone stopping here on a Disney cruise can enjoy sailing along ziplines at the Rainforest Eco Adventure Park, heading out on an ATV at the Caribaldi Rainforest Park, horseback riding at Hacienda Caribalidi, and swimming in the river (subject to weather conditions). Personally, I just want to be able to wander through the rainforest, as I've never seen one before, and take in the unique sights and sounds there. The waterfalls, which I always think are just stunning, are a particular draw for me. Well, if Disney continue to offer those Southern Caribbean itineraries on a regular basis, maybe we can make it back there.

The reason we couldn't find an excursion to El Yunque that would work for us was that my husband, who adores Segways, already had his heart set on the Fortifications Segway Tour, and this proved to be an excellent introduction to much of San Juan itself. We soon found out why it's known as the "walled city," as we cruised by the imposing city walls.

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□The Old Town of San Juan is partially encased within the city walls, and it's packed with historic buildings, many of which were once home to the officers who worked at the two castillos (fortresses). Step in here, and you feel as if you're stepping back in history, as you walk along the cobblestone streets built so many years ago. It's therefore no surprise to learn that this is on the US National Register of Historic Sites, and is also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

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□One of my fondest memories is of the Paseo de la Princesa, which runs along the waterfront. From this grand avenue you can admire the view out to sea and the mountains beyond, the beautiful fountain close at hand, and the Colonial buildings towering above you. Here, as elsewhere in the city, I felt as if I was back in mainland Spain, such is the Spanish influence.

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□For me, the two main attractions in Puerto Rico were the two castillos. We took a walking tour of the first, Castillo San Cristobal, which is right in the center of the city. We learned a huge amount about San Juan's history and how this fortress helped to thwart British invasions. A lot of the castillo's role was due to Puerto Rico's location. Originally part of the Spanish Empire, San Juan was used by both merchant and military ships as both their first and final port of call in the Caribbean, a place of strategic importance. No wonder the various attacks upon the city! As we headed to the top of the castillo, we could understand how it helped to repel those attacks, as it's in a commanding position above San Juan.

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□The second castillo, Castillo San Felipe del Morro, is a little further out from the city, and is a more impressive sight at first glance, with an expanse of greenery in front of it, making it look almost like a palace at the end of the avenue. As soon as you enter, you understand why it is located here, with views across San Juan's imposing harbor. Today, that means when you sail out on your Disney cruise, you'll get a great view of this place.

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□One other attraction that we sadly weren't able to enjoy in San Juan during our all-too-short visit there was the Barcardi Distillery, otherwise known as the Casa Barcardi Visitor Center. We had friends on our cruise who took a shore excursion that included this, and they really enjoyed learning more about the history of rum and the production process. Sadly, they were too young to enjoy the samples that are on offer at the end of the tour.

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□Like all the other Disney Cruise Line ports, a mere day was barely enough to scratch the surface of this glorious city, and our port-of-call visit certainly left me wanting more. That's a key advantage of it now

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being a home port--we have the option to add a day or more to our visits, pre- or post-cruise. If you're listening Disney, keep going with those amazing Southern Caribbean itineraries out of San Juan, and sooner or later, we'll be back to sample both those, and a bit more of this city, and island, as our first taste of it was wonderful.

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□Next, in the final of this series of articles, it's time to head across the Atlantic to visit Barcelona, home to the majority of the Disney Cruise Line's Mediterranean itineraries in 2014.

*About The Author: Cheryl and husband Mark live in England and love to travel, particularly to America. They are in the process of visiting every Disney theme park around the world, having already been to Disneyland Resort Paris, Hong Kong Disneyland and both American Disney resorts. They are now planning for their trip to Japan in the spring to visit the Tokyo Disney Resort. [Click here to view more of Cheryl's articles!](#)*

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