

Puerto Rico in their own words

Player on the Hillsdale College volleyball team recall different aspects of their trip to Puerto Rico

El Morro by Clara Leutheuser

One of our free afternoons we visited the beautiful city of Old San Juan, walking up and down the blue cobblestone streets and finding some souvenirs along the way. A focal point of Old San Juan is the fort, El Castillo San Felipe del Morro. El Morro is a nearly 500 year- old fortress built to defend the port city that was renovated and strengthened over the years, as seen in the six-meter-thick outer walls and dome-covered sentry boxes, “garitas.” We had fun exploring the fort, from the lower prison levels to the upper grounds with stunning views of the bay. Unfortunately for Gill, we didn’t have access to one of the more secluded “garitas” down at sea level known as “Devil’s Hideout,” but thanks to the zoom on our cameras we have plenty of documentary evidence. And, of course, the beautiful Puerto Rican weather cooperated marvelously with our photo-shoots. It was great to experience a bit of Puerto Rico’s history while enjoying the sun, the company, and some tasty authentic food!



Food by Amanda Geelhoed

Puerto Rico food is very similar to Cuban and Havana types of food. It is not spicy but very flavorful. Clara and I made a pact that we were going to try local food at every meal that we could. The first night we had dinner on the island we were set free in Old San Juan. We were going to eat at Fatty’s but they only had 12 chairs so we went to Café Puerto Rico. The most favorite Puerto Rican dishes were Mahi Mahi in Puerto Rican sauce, Grouper in Garlic sauce, fried sweet plantains, and Chicken and rice. The seafood is so fresh and they always give you huge portions for a low price. . We went to Chili’s on the next night and they had the same menu that there is here in the States. However, we did get dessert that night five of them to split. We finished them in no joke 2.5 seconds. I think we could give Kobayashi a run for his money in an eating competition. The third night for dinner we got back at 11:00 from the game so we had dinner in the hotel at Outback Steakhouse the menu again is the same as ours and we were all to tired to eat. The next day we beat American university and went to Lupi’ we tried the sweet onion and corn salsa. I tried a Puerto Rican burrito which is just like a normal burrito but instead of a tortilla they use a plantain to wrap it. It sounds terrible but it was surprisingly good. Kitt had Shrimp Cerviche with plantain chips and most of us really like the lime flavor on the cold shrimp. The last night we were on our own for dinner. We slit into two groups and went to dinner. Biggs, Booms, Crowder, Brogie, MoMo, Sydney, Clarece, Kitt and I went to Metropol a bar and restaurant known for its smoked chicken, which of course we told Crowder were the losers from the cock fighting arena next door. The nine of us tried more ethnic foods that night then we did through the whole trip. We tried smoked chicken, lime Mahi Mahi, Tres Leches, Yucca, fried plantains, flan, guava with cream cheese, and black bean soup. The smoked chicken was probably the best chicken any of us had ever tried. The lime Mahi Mahi was nice, light, and tropical. The yucca root was interesting. Syd picked it up expecting it to be like mashed potatoes because that’s what it tasted like. The root proceeded to roll across the table and everyone who wanted to try



it did. Yucca tastes like salty mashed potatoes. The Tres Leches cake was my personal favorite. It was a moist chocolate cake with frosting on top that was torched. The fried plantains were just like the sweet plantains we tried a Café Puerto Rico. Flan is strange. It is thick cold custard. It was very bland. The guava was like a gelatin and you dip it in cream cheese this was Biggs' favorite dessert. The food that we tried was very good overall and I think that we are all glad we broadened our food horizons by trying the local food.

The Hotel by Emily Bennett

The hotel we stayed at in Puerto Rico was the Embassy Suites. We arrived in Puerto Rico at about 10:00 pm after a long day of traveling. We took a shuttle from the airport and arrived at the hotel. We walked in and were immediately amazed at the palm trees, ponds, and waterfalls that were in the lobby. The ceiling of the lobby was about eight floors high and all of the rooms opened up into the lobby. The four elevators had a glass wall that looked out over the lobby and we had a lot of fun watching people from them. Our team was divided up among the floors. The room I shared with Biggs and Brogan was on the sixth floor.

After putting our luggage in our rooms, we all wanted to explore the hotel more. We were at once impressed by the 'Outback Steakhouse' that we found in the lobby. We also discovered a pizza place called 'Noble Romans' that was also in the lobby. We ended up eating here almost every day because it was in such close proximity to the pool. Of course, our favorite part of the hotel was the pool. The pool was lagoon-style and was surrounded by trees and flowers. We even saw lizards scurrying around every so often! There was a hot tub and even a waterfall. Even though the temperature was usually above 80 degrees, the water was always freezing! Apryl had a lot of fun surprising us who were laying on the chairs with a small but cold splash of water. The pool was never crowded so we would all lay in a row of twelve chairs and be content for hours. We had most afternoons off and this is where we spent a lot of our time.

We didn't spend much time at all in our hotel rooms. Ashlee, Brogan, Morgan and I were able to pull off an amazing prank on Hannah one night though :) The night before, Hannah, Ash, and Morgan thought that someone was in their room because they heard a noise, so the next night, I hid in the shower, and Brogan hid behind the window curtains. I banged on the wall and Brogan jumped out at Hannah as she was sitting on the bed.

On Wednesday, we had two matches to play that night, and we had a card tournament in the lobby. The location of our hotel was incredible. We were a block away from the beach, and there was a Baskin Robbins even closer than that! We took advantage of this a couple of times :) Speaking of food, the breakfast at the hotel was awesome! They had an omelet bar and a hot food line every day. They had fresh fruit, bagels and muffins too.

Overall, the hotel we stayed at was amazing. We loved the pool and we felt very lucky to be in such a great location.





Playing the matches by Ashlee Crowder

It was a very cool experience to be able to play at Puerto Rico Junior Olympic complex. It was also cool because even in the ride there we got to see some amazing scenery! Right when we pulled into the parking lot, there was an enormous pool and people were everywhere, and the first thing I noticed in the gym was the open windows. There were two pretty big courts and the windows all along the whole gym only had cages over them, everything was wide open!

Our first game was against the Peruvian National Olympic team and the first thing I said to myself was “wow those girls are tall!” I believe they were only 14 and 15 years old too, and when we watched them warm up we knew we had to bring our “A game.” The game started and either we were a little shaken up or just not ready but we definitely struggled unfortunately. Eventually as the games went on we picked it up a little bit but still ended up losing the set, 1-2. Let’s just say that those girls were really good and no wonder they were on a Junior Olympic team.

Our next game was against a Puerto Rican team as well. They were just as tall too, but I believe a little older just not as old as us. After the last game we played we were definitely ready to bring it. We had a lot more fun this game too, and got to actually enjoy the experience of playing there because we did well. We ended up winning this one of course 2-1 I believe. I just was so glad we got to actually play in a complex like that, with the open windows and against other countries.

Our last game was a day later and we played a team from a Puerto Rican college called “American University.” It was cool to be able to go there and see their campus and facilities. The set up compared to ours was different. The gym was much smaller and the training room was tiny. It was funny though because when we played a bunch of fans came from their school and they were all cheering for both teams. We played this game like a normal match and played best out of 5, and ended up winning it in 4. They definitely gave us a run for our money. It was an awesome experience getting to play the game we loved in a new atmosphere.

The Rainforest by Sydney Dow

On Friday, our last day there, we had the opportunity to walk a trail in a rainforest and to also swim in a waterfall there. We didn't find out until Thursday night that we were going to get to go to the rainforest, and everyone was immediately excited! Hannah was the only one who had been to one before so it was fun new experience to share together as a team. We met our tour guide at the hotel and we had a 45-minute drive to the start of the trail we would be walking. He was extremely enthusiastic, and he shared with us mounds of information about the forest and about Puerto Rico in general.

On the ride up the mountain to the trail, we had a few problems! =) The ride was exceptionally curvy and steep, and we were constantly jerking from one side to the other. Most of the girls were ok, but Hannah, Rachel, and Apryl started to feel very queasy. Apryl put her head on the seat in front of her and just sat there with her head down, but Han and Rach, put lightly, were having trouble keeping their lunch down. When we finally got to our stop, the girls were beyond relieved! Brooklyn, who also felt a little car sick, solved her problem by sitting on the ground and meditating. I think we should have taken lessons from her, and Coach and Steph have definitely trained her well.

Our walk on the trail was beautiful! We were able to see many cool things, but the extent of the exotic creatures we saw were lizards, frogs, and.....a chupacabra =) (our tour guide thought it was hilarious when Brogan and Ashlee asked if they had any of these mythical creatures on the Island). Half way through our walk we took a break to swim in the waterfall. There were a lot of people there, but we were determined to walk all the way over to the falls to get a picture. The water was freezing and the rocks were slippery but most of us managed to get out there for a photo opt. Although we all experienced the slipperiness of the rocks, Morgan surpassed us all in the adventure. As we were all starting to walk out to the water across the rocks, Morgan must have lost her footing because when we looked back, she was laying face down bear hugging the rock. Brogan caught a glimpse of the fall and said that it resembled that of someone belly flopping. Although it was funny, we were more worried about how much it hurt her, but after a couple of minutes she too joined in with smiles.

We finished our walk, and on our way down the mountain we stopped at a viewing tower. From there we could see out across the entire rainforest, all around Puerto Rico, and even out to the island of St. Thomas. It was gorgeous and we spent a good 30 minutes there taking millions of pictures! =)

