



# Puerto Rico Handbook



## CLIMATE

- The climate in Puerto Rico can change throughout the day. It ranges anywhere from hot and sunny, to humid, cloudy, or rainy.
- Be sure to apply sunscreen regularly, especially on the coast, as the sun is strong in Puerto Rico.

## ELECTRICITY

- You will not need a converter or an adapter, as the outlets are like those in the continental United States.

## CLOTHING

- Reference the Xperitas Puerto Rico packing list for advice on what to bring. Puerto Ricans dress similarly to people from any western country.
- Dress in layers to accommodate the changes in weather, and always bring your raincoat or umbrella, a light sweatshirt, and a water bottle with you in your day pack.
- In Puerto Rico, the dress is casual. However, if you are going to visit a school or church, you will need to wear more formal clothing.
  - For example, jeans/slacks without holes/rips or a long skirt/shorts and a collared shirt or a short-sleeved top.
- As air conditioning tends to be turned up high in some restaurants, you may want to bring a light sweater.

## CULTURAL TIPS

*In Puerto Rico air conditioning is not as common and/or can be very expensive. Don't be surprised if your host family does not have AC. The best way to cool down is to wear light clothing and stay out of the sun.*

*Electricity and gas are much more expensive in Puerto Rico than in other parts of the United States. Be conscious of how long your showers are and make sure to turn off the lights behind you.*

*Be ready to try new foods and always offer to help in the kitchen during your family stay.*

## MONEY

- As it is a part of the United States, the money is the same in Puerto Rico as it is on the mainland. Contact your bank to alert them of your travel plans.
- Bring a combination of cash and cards (about \$200-300 total). Be sure to bring a debit card with a pin number to take out cash from ATM machines.
- Be sure to carry your cards and most of your money in your money belt or neck pouch while travelling!
- While in the country, only walk around with the money that you need and a copy of your passport. The rest can be left in your hotel safe.
- Small bills are better (1s, 5s and 10s), as oftentimes large bills are not accepted at small shops or in markets. Credit cards are accepted in hotels and larger restaurants and stores.
- A backup, emergency card is a good idea in case one card is lost or stolen.

### CULTURAL TIP

*Puerto Ricans don't like bartering and there are very few places where it is culturally and socially acceptable.*

## TIPPING

Tipping is very important as many in the tourism industry depend on tips as a part of their regular income. Here is a guide to tipping in Puerto Rico:

**Guides and drivers** Tips are included in the program price, though you may feel free to tip them an additional amount if you feel they did a great job.

**Restaurants** Tip 15-20% if it is not already included in the bill

**Bellboys** If hotel staff helps you carry your luggage in to or out of the hotel, it is customary to tip them \$1-\$2 for each bag that they carry for you.

**Hotel Maids** Please leave \$2-\$3 per night for the maid. It is nice to leave the tip on a daily basis rather than at the end of your stay, as it might not be the same person cleaning your room each day.

*If you have any other questions about tipping, ask your guide!*

## FOOD

- Breakfast is included daily, and all meals are included during the family stay. Any other included meals are noted on your itinerary.
- Travelers can find food for every budget! Most restaurants are comparable in price to the U.S., though there are smaller, more typical restaurants and cafeterias that are more economical. Buying snacks at *kioskos*, local *comida rápida* restaurants, or the grocery store is usually the cheapest way to go!
- Though the water is safe in most areas, we recommend that you drink bottled water to avoid sickness.
- Mealtimes are pretty similar to the United States, though lunch is usually the largest meal of the day, with a smaller dinner.

## IN-COUNTRY TRANSPORTATION

- Greet the driver.
- Keep buses clean and loud noises to a minimum. Remember that smells intensify in small places.
- Be on time and don't make the buses wait for you.
- Student hotel sleeping arrangements may involve sharing beds, as some hotels utilize a single large bed for their double rooms or two large beds for their triple/quadruple rooms. During the family stay, students may share a room with a host sibling (if applicable), but they will have their own bed.

## Health & Safety

- Be sure to keep your identification (passport, license, visa, green card, or documentation) most of your money, and your cards in your money belt or neck pouch!
- If there is a safe in your hotel room, lock your valuables in there while you are out and about. If not, hide money and valuables in your suitcase. Don't forget to check the hotel safe before leaving!
- Pickpocketing is common in large cities, and they are very good at what they do. Pay extra close attention to your belongings and be sure to keep your valuables close to you at all times, especially when in crowds of people or walking on the street.
- If you have a purse/bag, bring a cross-body purse/bag that zips shut. If you are carrying a backpack, be sure that valuables are not located in easily accessible pockets. We also recommend wearing your backpack in front of you versus on your back as you may normally do.
- Always travel in groups of **three or more**.
- Remember that the Xperitas emergency line is available 24/7, but please only call it when you are experiencing a true emergency.
- Review the travel and vaccine recommendations for travelers provided by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). See Current Health and Safety Updates for information about current world events and illnesses.
- Keep printed insurance card on you at all times.

# Communication

## COMMUNICATION TIPS

*Puerto Ricans often greet each other with a handshake. Women may greet men and other women with a beso, or a kiss on the cheek. When entering a room or a store, it is very common to greet the other people around with an hola, buenos días, or buenas tardes. When leaving, don't forget to say hasta luego, ciao, or adios.*

*Puerto Ricans love to make people feel comfortable, so they might automatically respond in English. Students should be considerate and firm, and say, "I am learning Spanish. Can you please speak to me in Spanish?"*

*(Estoy aprendiendo español. ¿Podrías hablar conmigo en español?)*

*Overall, just keep an open mind and try not to refer to stereotypes!*

- Check with your cell phone provider regarding any international fees (they often do not apply for Puerto Rico). At least one leader needs to have an international phone plan in order to be in touch with Xperitas if needed.
- For students, we advise using WiFi. There is often WiFi (or a computer for public use) available in your hotel, but keep in mind the connection is often weak. You can download messaging apps, such as WhatsApp, to communicate with people at home for free while connected to WiFi.
- Ask your leader(s) about their policy around technology use while on the program.
- A great way for the entire group to stay in communication with parents/guardians back home is via a blog, WhatsApp group chat, private Facebook group, or group email.
- During the family stay, you may or may not have access to internet, though you will have the contact information of both the local Family Stay Coordinator, as well as your group leader(s). If you do have internet, please be mindful of the time spent on your phone and try to focus on engaging with your host family.

# Xperitas-Arranged Family Stay Experience®

- Your family is excited to meet you! The family stay is a great learning experience. Be sure to keep an open mind, do your best at practicing your Spanish language skills, and have fun getting to know your family.
- Try to be proactive and engage with your host family, such as asking to help cook a meal, offering to go with them to the local market or grocery store, playing a game of cards (Spot-it or Phase 10 are good options), bringing a scrapbook of your family at home), asking to go explore a nearby park, etc. These simple actions can go a long way in breaking the ice, helping with the language barrier/facilitating conversation, and learning about the local culture.
- Try to disconnect during the family stay by not using your phone all the time and embrace the time to connect with your host family. Disconnecting and truly being present for the experience will allow you to notice more about your surroundings and be more intentional in your observations. We encourage parents/guardians to allow space for their children to disconnect as well.
- If you have any questions or concerns while staying with your host family, please contact your group leader(s) as they can best assist you and work with the local Family Stay Coordinator and Xperitas as applicable.
- If you submitted your family stay applications by the deadline, you should receive your host family's information about 2 weeks prior to departure.
- Respond as soon as possible when your host family contacts you. Keep your social media profiles clean and try not to judge your host by their profiles – better to get to know your host family through talking to them.
- As our host families are considered volunteers, It is nice to bring your host family a gift from your home state and/or a scrapbook or photos to show them what life is like where you live.
- In Puerto Rico, toilet paper is usually thrown in the trash can to avoid causing problems with the plumbing. If you have any questions about this, please ask your host family.
- Leave a thank you note for your hosts at your house on the last day of the family stay, as sending it via mail can be complicated.