


WEEKEND TRAVEL

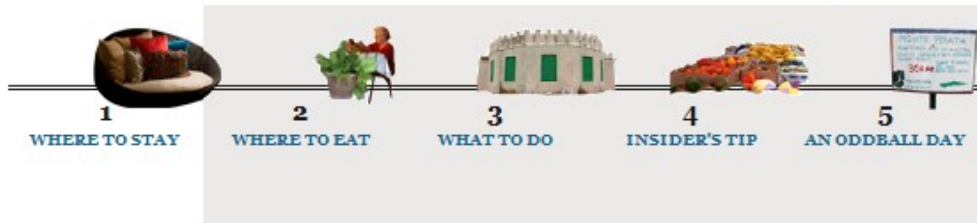
More Destinations 

The Five-Point Weekend Escape Plan

See a More Stylish Side of Vieques

Its natural beauty and low-key atmosphere are still intact, but the island's luxury factor has risen with a new swath of high-end hotels and more-refined dining options.

VIEQUES ONLINE >>



1. Where to Stay



The rooms at the W Retreat & Spa are housed in small buildings scattered throughout the property.

(Photo: Courtesy of W Retreat & Spa)

Relax on 30 hilly waterfront acres at the year-old **W Retreat & Spa** (from \$389), the brand's first Caribbean outpost and the island's only full-service resort. Admire the handiwork of Spanish design star Patricia Urquiola, who outfitted all 157 rooms with laser-cut screens, painted-steel bathtubs, and polished cement floors. Stay on the grounds for dinner at Alain Ducasse's **Mix on the Beach**, which showcases Gallic cuisine influenced by Latin flavors.

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Book **Vieques Rentals'** new [three-bedroom, three-bathroom villa](#) (\$4,000 per week) designed by John Hix to enjoy the same concrete-chic cool found at the architect's ever-popular Hix Island House, only with a greater degree of privacy. With a queen bed in every room, the ecofriendly dwelling comfortably accommodates six people, and the trade winds keep the house cool in the absence of air conditioning. Ask the owners to arrange a cocktail party with a catering company on the breezy rooftop deck, which overlooks a placid marsh and offers views of the island's landscape.

Get cozy in **Malecón House** (from \$159), a ten-room B&B that opened last year on the seafront promenade in the town of Esperanza. Owners Marsha and Robin Shepherd formerly ran a string of upscale properties on St. Barts, and here they've converted a private home into a clean-lined, whitewashed abode where each room overlooks the water or the plant-filled garden. Playa Esperanza and Playa Negrita, some of the island's best beaches, are a short walk away.

2. Where to Eat



El Quenepo serves modern Puerto Rican cuisine on the ocean.

(Photo: Courtesy of El Quenepo)

Dine on seafood in an oceanfront bungalow at **El Quenepo** (148 Calle Flamboyán; 787-741-1215), an Esperanza newcomer where traditional Puerto Rican dishes get a cosmopolitan upgrade. Local conch becomes rich, New England-style chowder (\$12), while shrimp and lobster are served in a fried breadfruit shell (\$34). There's a pricey, mostly European selection of wines, but the cocktails and local beers are bargains.

Treat your taste buds to an eclectic meal at **Next Course** (Route 201; 787-741-1028), chef Buddy Stone's global restaurant inspired by his extensive travels throughout Europe and Asia. Here, you're likely to find wontons and tempura sitting alongside ceviches and risotto. For dessert, the locals' favorite is a homemade ice-cream sandwich (\$9) made with still-warm chocolate chip peanut butter cookies.

Dine with chatty locals at **El Patio**, an unpretentious, Formica-filled diner in Isabel Segunda. Dinner might be flash-fried local shrimp (\$19) or hefty Argentine steaks (\$19) with a side of rice and beans (\$4). Owner Gui Sanchez and his family have run the eatery since 1993, lending it an authentic, homespun feel that you're unlikely to find in some of the island's glitzier restaurants.

3. What to Do



Red Beach, part of the Vieques National Wildlife Refuge, is a favorite spot for both locals and tourists.

(Photo: Flickr/Brian Glass)

Make the most of Vieques's compact size and well-marked roads by **beach hopping** from coast to coast. Reserve a rental car a couple of weeks in advance by calling **Maritza's Car Rental** (787-741-0078) and then explore the sandy shores on both the island's Caribbean and Atlantic sides. Head for **Red Beach** on the southern coast for clear waters fronting a placid cove; or marine-life-filled **Blue Beach** nearby, which offers excellent snorkeling through calm, turquoise waves. Not far from Esperanza, **Media Luna Beach** is the best option for shallow, kid-friendly shores.

Wear your best island attire to **gallery opening parties**, where you'll clink wine glasses with see-and-be-seen locals who flock to these lively gatherings in the absence of other cultural events. **Siddhia Hutchinson Fine Arts Gallery** (Calle 3 A15, Isabell II, 00765; 787-741-1343) hosts monthly openings, where you'll likely find landscape paintings by the owner and other artists. Newcomer **Galeria de Arte Deda** hosts monthly receptions as well and features a more progressive selection of works.

Throw on a bathing suit to explore **Mosquito Bay**, a bioluminescent body of water that is the most stunning natural wonder on the island. Numerous tour operators offer “bio-bay” excursions, but only newcomer **Vieques Adventures** uses clear fiberglass kayaks for the best views of the glowing water, dense with photosensitive plankton. Tours begin just after sunset, and the 90-minute trip (from \$35) sails past mangrove swamps out to the placid lagoon where you can dive in.

Learn about the island’s colonial past at the **Vieques Museum of Art and History** (\$3 admission; 787-741-1717), where small-scale exhibitions display artifacts from Spanish rule and the island’s native Taino people, as well as historical archives and documentaries. Standing on a hill above the port town of Isabel Segunda, the museum occupies the historically significant **El Fortin Conde de Mirasol**, a neo-Moorish fort and prison that was last used in 1892 during the Spanish-American War.

4. Insider’s Tip



The Placita Reyes farmers’ market offers fresh fruits and locally made breads, cakes, and cookies.

(Photo: Flickr/Fcb)

Walk into any grocery store on the island and you’re likely to find overpriced produce that’s often past its due date. For fresh mangoes, apples, and berries, venture instead to the newly opened **Placita Reyes farmers’ market** held on Tuesday and Wednesday mornings behind the GE plant near Isabel Segunda. Along with locally grown micro-greens, fruits arrive from small-scale farmers on Puerto Rico, and the offerings are complemented by Vieques-based vendors selling fresh fruit juices, seasonal honey, and handmade candies. You can also pick up fresh-from-the-oven breads, cakes, and cookies, including many items that are gluten-free. Arrive by 8 a.m. for the freshest finds.

5. Oddball Day



Club Tumby is a nightlife hot spot on the western tip of the island.

(Photo: Courtesy of Club Tumby)

Lace up your hiking boots for a trek back to Vieques's not-so-distant military past, which ended in 2003 when the U.S. Navy withdrew from the island after six decades of occupation. Fuel up first with a stop at **Panadería La Viequense** (352 Antonio G. Mellado Street; 787-741-8213) in Isabel Segunda for morning pastries like sugar-sprinkled pan de Mallorca, and then grab their huge namesake sandwich (with turkey, ham, pepperoni, and pickles) for the road before taking off to the island's western flank. Park at the base of **Monte Pirata** and then make the hour-long ascent on a series of paved and unpaved roads, teeming with wildlife and colorful flowers, until you've reached the peak, which at 1,000 feet is the highest point on the island. Once on top, explore more than 100 abandoned military bunkers, now emptied of their former caches of bombs and artillery shells. Now covered in weeds, the bunkers make an eerie sight, but they're offset by the panoramic views of Vieques, Culebra, and the Puerto Rican mainland. After making your way back down the mountain, rest up at sea level before ending the day back in a bunker that's been transformed into the 10,000-square-foot nightclub **Club Tumby** on the island's western tip. Arrive late to dance among Puerto Rican PYTs to the sounds of salsa, merengue, and reggaeton deep in the jungle.

6. Links

[Enchanted Isle](#) is a no-frills, info-packed site dedicated to all things Vieques and nearby Culebra.

Look for everything from hotel and villa-rental deals to island happenings and gossip on [Vieques Tourism](#), which includes original and aggregated content.

[Vieques Island Blog](#) is written by locals and compiles information on just about every worthwhile event happening on the island.