

Real Images of Puerto Rico

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Figure 1 San Cristobal fortress (Wikipedia 2021).

HISTORY OF PUERTO RICO, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF ITS ARCHITECTURE

Puerto Rico is a huge Caribbean island in the West Indies with a total area of around 3,500 square miles. It is part of the Greater Antilles chain, which also includes Cuba, Jamaica, and Hispaniola. Puerto Rico has a 3.4 million population and a diverse culture influenced by Spanish, American, and Afro-Caribbean influences (Editors n.d.).

SPANISH GOVERNANCE

During the second voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus arrived in Puerto Rico in 1493, and Puerto Rico got its name when the Spaniards found a lot of gold in the rivers, which means “rich port.” After the Spanish conquered the island, they built the first buildings for defense and military needs. These buildings have been an important world heritage until today. El Morro Fortress, San Juan Cathedral, and the Dominican Convent are among the most prominent.

The greatest fortress in the Caribbean, El Morro, has guarded San Juan Bay for more than four centuries. Construction began at 1540, when King Charles V of Spain gave his approval, and was completed in 1589, including the surrounding walls. It was designated as a “World Heritage Site” in 1973, joining the ranks of Versailles, the Taj Mahal, and the Egyptian pyramids. (“Architecture in Puerto Rico” n.d.)

The old city walls and the nearby San Cristobal fortress are two more notable examples of Spanish colonial military architecture in San Juan. San Cristobal was erected in 1634 and finished in 1771, with a complex system of outworks that provided defense in depth and was one of the greatest defenses ever built in the world. Military fortress can also be seen as a demonstration of Puerto Rico’s early modernization. Although Puerto Rico has some complicated agricultural systems under the intervention of Spain, it is still in the stage of lack of infrastructure. (“History” n.d.) Figure 1 shows the San Cristobal fortress.

AMERICAN GOVERNANCE

In 1898, the United States won Puerto Rico from Spain after the end of the Spanish-American War. The United States employs American architects and engineers to construct large-scale projects, and it influences Puerto Rico’s local culture through these projects, such as the reconstruction of the education system and civil administration, in the hopes of branding Puerto Rico as part of the United States’ expanding economic sphere (Hertz, n.d.). At the same time, new architectural expressions such as California mission style and Spanish revival architecture developed, successfully imprinting the impact of the United States and other colonial powers in the minds of multiple generations in Puerto Rico at the time. The offices of the American sugar company, the power company, the University of New Puerto Rico, the first public school, Protestant and Methodist churches, and others were all built in these styles. Among them, the California mission



Figure 2: New University of Puerto Rico (Wikipedia 2021).

style is influenced by Spanish culture as well, with arched openings with windows, entrances and arcades, and curving gables as its dominant architectural style. In contrast to California's mission style, Spanish revival style is rich in ornamentation and frequently incorporates monolithic body and tiled roofs. The Spanish revival architectural style can be seen at the University of Puerto Rico. Spanish revival style is seen as a type of architecture that symbolizes Spain's golden age while also demonstrating Puerto Rico's submissive position in terms of Spanish cultural norms. Figure 2 shows the Spanish revival style.

TOURISM AND MODERNISM DEVELOPMENT

Following the Spanish-American War, tourism gradually increased. When the United States acquired sovereignty of Puerto Rico in 1898, it happened to coincide with a global economic downturn, and the island was undoubtedly negatively impacted, which lasted until after World War II. Until then, the US began to develop industry in Puerto Rico and attract investment. Among them, the United States began to engage in tourism as an important tool for economic revitalization, building huge hotels and promoting international travel. Tourism has been important to the economic well-being of Caribbean islands for a lot of years.

The Hotel La Concha was built against this backdrop, but it has had an incalculable impact on Puerto Rico's modernity. The hotel was designed by Osvaldo Toro and Miguel Ferrer and opened in 1958. It is considered to be one of the first instances of tropical

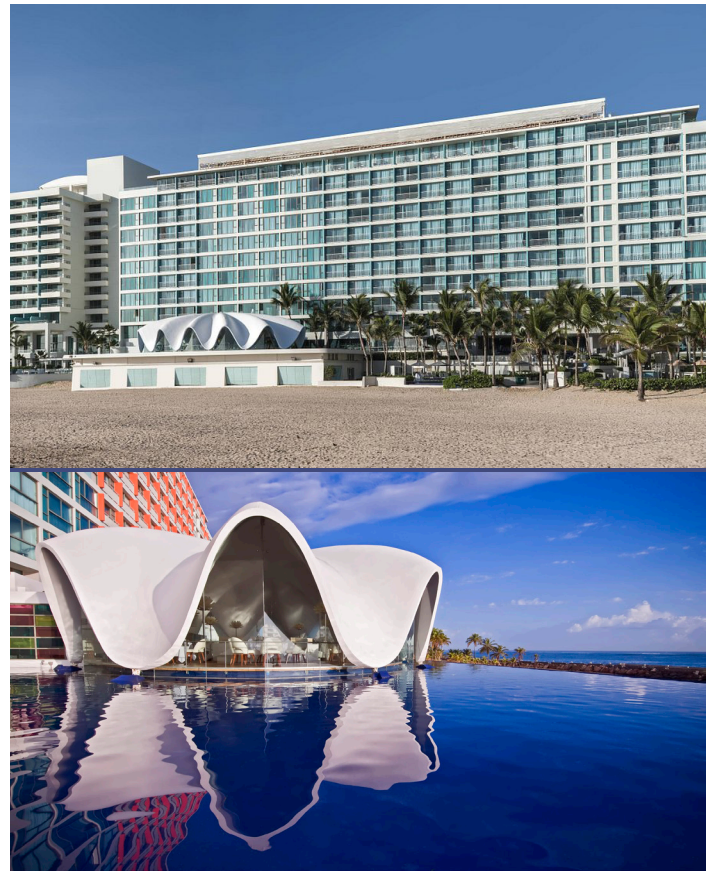


Figure 3: La Concha Hotel (Wikipedia 2021).

architecture. The hotel incorporates modern architectural elements such as transparency and a roof garden, as well as adapting to the tropical environment by constructing an arched roof, curved ceiling, and cross ventilation system, as well as combining the open hotel lobby with the natural environment through the use of natural light. Furthermore, La Concha, a hotel club with a shell-like wavy structure that floats in shallow water, integrates modernist with a tropical environment, setting a precedent for tropical modernism in Puerto Rico.

The first local architects to advocate for contemporary architecture in Puerto Rico were Osvaldo Toro and Miguel Ferrer. Their goal is to utterly deconstruct people's perceptions of the picturesque scenery imposed on Puerto Rico by the US and replace it with a vision of the island's progress and industrialization set against a tropical backdrop. This process has also been expedited by political developments. Muoz Marin was chosen as Puerto Rico's first governor in 1948. One of his political principles was to eschew colonial-era ornamentation and kinds.

It was mostly a small-scale enterprise in the 1950s, attracting predominantly wealthy guests who stayed for extended periods of time and stayed in reasonably expensive hotels. Most Caribbean islands adopted mass tourism as a paradigm for growth in the 1960s and 1970s. The majority of hotels built during this time were designed in an international style. When plane travel became more affordable to middle-class North Americans and Europeans in the 1980s, mass tourism grew. Large-scale sea cruises became



Figure 4: Puerto Rico's agricultural sovereignty (Life thyme 2021)

popular among this group of tourists by the 1990s.

SOCIAL PROBLEMS CAUSED BY COLONIALISM AND TOURISM INTERVENTION

Enclave and theming happens a lot after the mass tourism, and tourism intervention has caused a lot of social problems such as environmental pressures, gentrification, loss of culture and authenticity, cultural ignorance, economic leakage.

FRAGILE ECONOMIC:

When Spain invaded Puerto Rico, large-scale plantations displaced traditional agriculture, resulting in the consolidation of agricultural land and property ownership. The United States colonized Puerto Rico following the Spanish-American War in 1898. The rest of Puerto Rico's agricultural efforts were mandated to be focused on cash crops like sugar cane and coffee.

Following that, in the 1940s, Puerto Rico developed an import-oriented food system as a result of Congress's Bootstrap initiative, a push to overhaul Puerto Rico's economy with a concentration on

manufacturing and tourism, steering the island away from agriculture and industry. The situation is exacerbated by tax exemptions and incentives for investment in these sectors. "Puerto Rico's economy has always been categorized by being an import economy: we produce things we do not consume but then we have to import things we do consume, especially in agriculture," noted Gladys González-Martínez, a professor of agricultural economics at the University of Puerto Rico. ("A Local Food Revolution in Puerto Rico - EcoWatch" n.d.)

Since 1982, its farmland has decreased sharply, and most of its crops production has reduced over 95% since 1960. Currently, Puerto Rico produces only around 15% of the food it consumes, importing around 85% of food from over 50 different countries. And about 80 percent of its shipping must go through American port of Jacksonville, Florida according to the Jones Act, a federal law that restricts foreign vessels. Because of the mentioned issues, in Puerto Rico, the costs of basics are inflated and access to fresh food is limited, in comparison to the mainland United States.

Figure 4 shows the huge cash crop planted in Puerto Rico



Figure 5 International shipping Puerto Rico (Latin America Cargo 2021)



Figure 6: Clearing out in Vieques (Repeating Islands 2011)

ENVIRONMENT DEGRADATION

The most serious environmental risks to Puerto Rico are the island's disappearing natural habitat and the resulting impact on soil erosion and wildlife due to the mass tourism and colonial intervention. For instance, in Vieques, a small island in the Puerto Rico, tourism has caused the retreat of the bioluminescent sea. In addition, the ongoing cleanup of the lands originally held by the US Navy, which stored bombs and conducted bombing practice on the island, is the most pressing environmental concern in Vieques as well ("Environmental Issues in Puerto Rico" 2013). Figure 6 shows the bombs in Vieques, and figure 7 shows the bioluminescent sea in Vieques.

DISPLACEMENT:

The disparity between tourists and locals is exacerbated by tourism. Although tourism is an important means of stimulating economic development, it inevitably encroaches on local people's land and labor force, displacing and exploiting locals in tourist hotspots. Following that, we'll look at some examples of tourist attractions to see how they alter buildings and landscapes, as well as the living conditions of native Puerto Ricans. Figure 8 shows the displaced Puerto Ricans



Figure 8: Displaced Puerto Ricans (ARELIS R. HERNÁNDEZ 2018)



Figure 7: Bioluminescent Bay (BoricuaOnline.com 2021)



Figure 9: Fairmont El San Juan Hotel (Planetware 2021)

PUERTO RICO ARCHITECTURE MORPHOLOGY COMPARISON BETWEEN TOURIST SPACES AND RESIDENTIAL AREAS

COLONIAL AND TOURISM INTERVENTION:

Tourists' perception of the Puerto Rico should be quite different from that of the locals, that is to say, the real history or natural environment of the Puerto Rico has been artificially transformed or hidden. Western colonial countries attract tourists' gaze through books, paintings, photos, and other media, and further consolidate and enhance tourists' impression of tropical paradise in the Puerto Rico with carefully contrived architectures, physical spaces, and performances, thus achieving the transformation of western countries from tourism propaganda to economic colonization in the Puerto Rico area.

With the popularity of mass tourism, tourists go to the Puerto Rico themselves to experience the atmosphere of tropical paradise. In order to attract more tourists' gaze, western colonial managers and local white business elites redesigned and packaged the physical areas and buildings in the Puerto Rico to make them look as orderly and picturesque as in the photos, especially the hotel landscape or hotel enclave (Nduom 2019).

But obviously, this behavior of selectively changing architectures and environment purely to attract tourists a number of negative consequences. In addition to the possibility that the history of the city will be forgotten, house prices in tourist hotspots will steadily rise, forcing locals to leave because they can no longer afford to live there. Furthermore, natives will be evicted simply because they do not fit into the tourist zone and are unable to provide tourists with tourist performances because they are authentic. (Dumont, Asensio, and Mortari 2010)



Figure 10: Dorado Beach, A Ritz-Carlton and Condado Vanderbilt Hotel (Insider 2021)



Figure 11: Informal settlements (Laura Bachmann 2017).

INFORMAL HOUSING:

Uncontrolled rural development, which is closely linked to Puerto Rico's widespread practice of informal housing, having an adverse effect on soil erosion and sedimentation on water bodies, increasing flash flood events, as well as contamination of ground waters according to a 2002 study.(Clancy et al. 2020)

Puerto Rico's property market was further depreciated by the consequences of the economic crisis from 2006 to 2016, as well as the impact of Hurricane Maria (2017). As a result of the depopulation and declining median property values in Puerto Rico, there is less demand for housing. According to a 2007 study commissioned by the Puerto Rico Builders Association, 55 percent of residential and commercial construction is informal, which was not built up to code, and informal housing is not intended to withstand natural disasters. As a result, there is a major housing crisis.

Obviously, there are many hidden dangers in these informal houses, for instance, informal housing can't resist natural disasters

in Puerto Rico, such as hurricanes. I'm thinking about how to make the local government distribute tourism income to residents as reasonably and fairly as possible, so that those who live in informal houses can improve their quality of life and enjoy the benefits of tourism fairly. Figure 11 and 12 show the informal housing in Puerto Rico. In figure 12, you can see the condense residential area which do not fit the building permits.



Figure 12: Informal Housing (APA 2019).



Figure 13: Abandoned house 1 (Pinterest 2021)

VACANT HOUSING:

In addition, rising crime rates and the gradual drop in property prices also increase the vacant houses in Puerto Rico. The percentage of empty dwellings in Puerto Rico climbed from 11 percent in 2006 to 18 percent in 2016, according to the American Community Survey. In 2016, around 250,000 of Puerto Rico's 1.5 million residences were unoccupied. More over half of the unoccupied properties (57%) were classified as "other vacant," which includes foreclosed and abandoned residences, up from 44 percent in 2006 to 57 percent in 2016. The remaining 43% consisted of vacation homes. These also have been progressively declining, particularly since the start of the economic crisis.

It's worth mentioning that the tourism sector can't promise a lower vacancy rate because the industry is so closely tied to the seasons. As a result, the government must suggest a variety of strategies to stimulate the local economy, reduce reliance on tourism and imports, and increase local autonomy.

In conclusion, Unlike most of Latin America, Puerto Rico has completed the transition from historicism to modernism and from rural to urban areas by diverting public funds to privately-run hotels catering to wealthy foreigners rather than social public

works. Around the 1960s, tropical modernist architecture began to emerge in Puerto Rico, which represents cultural freedom by breaking the colonial past. At the same time, the growing tourism industry, as a vehicle for economic revitalization, has had a number of negative consequences for Puerto Ricans, such as the loss of culture and authenticity, as well as environment degradation and displacement. To address these issues, urban planning and architectural strategies should be devised. Smart growth planning, for example, could aid in the prevention of urban sprawl and the reduction of informal housing. Improvements to the architecture of informal dwellings can also help it withstand harsh climate occurrences. Tropical modernism can assist Puerto Rico in identifying an architectural style that is compatible with modernism and the tropical environment, as well as breaking the colony's intrinsic image. Figure 13 and 14 are vacant houses in Puerto Rico.



Figure 14: Abandoned house 2 (Pinterest 2021).



Figure 15: Old San Juan (Washington Post 2021)

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Figure 16: The Mission Basilica San Juan Capistrano (Wikipedia 2021).