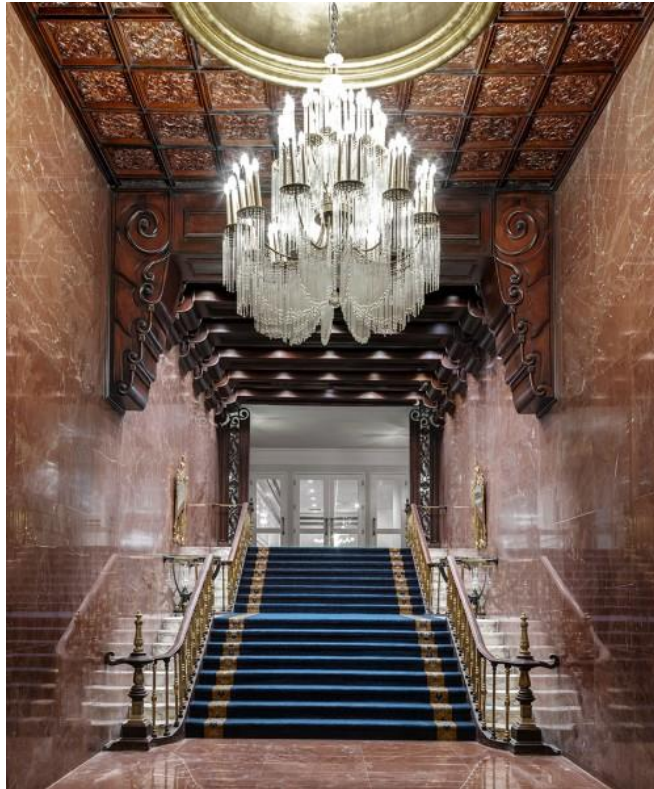


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Puerto Rico's Hottest Hotel is Back in Business

The El San Juan Hotel puts the final polish on its renovation with the Memorial Day weekend debut of its Beach Club

Written by Frances Dodds

Perhaps the greatest marker of a true vacation destination is its capacity to transport you—body and mind—to somewhere wholly different. And when you walk out of the torrential Puerto Rico sunshine into the lobby of the [El San Juan Hotel](#), as your eyes adjust to the sultry light, there is no doubt you will feel just that: transported. A truly spectacular chandelier hangs just in front of you, a shimmering sun around which the rest of the cavernous, ornately carved mahogany lobby turns. Commissioned in the mid-1950s, the chandelier is the third largest of its kind in the world. It's comprised of 7,000 pieces of precious Czech crystal—every one of which was taken down and polished individually in the resort's recent multi-million dollar renovation.

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Guest Suite with Ocean View

The renovation, completed in full this spring, breathes new life into one of Puerto Rico's establishment luxury destinations—a resort that has long managed to pull off a delicate balancing act of providing both nostalgic ambience and of-the-moment entertainment. Originally opened by Pan American in 1959, the hotel was built close to the airport, and exhibits unusual degrees of both space and attention to detail. The 60s, a peak moment for Puerto Rican tourism, saw high flyers jetting on and off of the island for weekends, and the El San Juan became a beacon for the greatest entertainers of the day. The melodies of Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Liza Minnelli, Sammy Davis Jr., The Supremes and many others echoed through the lobby of the El San Juan.



El San Juan Beach Club

Sadly, the 70s and the oil embargo were not so good to Puerto Rico, and after years of decline, the El San Juan shuttered in 1983. Since then, the resort has changed hands a number of times—most recently in 2015, when it was inducted into the Hilton's Curio Collection, their portfolio of unique, signature properties. The \$40 million

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renovation by Jeffrey Beers, following a six-month closure, includes a remodel of all 388 rooms and suites, along with the addition of new meeting spaces, restaurants and shops, a spa and fitness center and a new pool with 22 cabanas. ←

These cabanas—along with over 20 day beds for lounging poolside—will be in full use this Memorial Day weekend, as the hotel puts the final touch on its renovation with the grand opening of its El San Juan Beach Club. The club will transform the hotel’s outdoor pool area into a chic St. Barth’s-esque party scene, with artisanal cocktails, gourmet bites, and live entertainment from DJ Ivan Robles and DJ Arlette (and in the lobby, music from El San Juan Big Band, directed by two-time Latin Grammy nominee Charlie Sepulveda and Billboard Latin Music Award nominees La Tribu de Abrante). The weekend will continue with a non-stop flurry of firsts, as on Friday the hotel debuts its Brava Nightclub, and on Sunday unveils its new French Caribbean restaurant by Executive Chef Gonzalo Rivera, Aquarelle, with a sunset black and white party.



Puerto Rico Vacation

While all of this sounds exciting enough on paper, the true luxury of the El San Juan is in the richness of the details. We were welcomed at check-in with complimentary cocktails, and taken to our room by a concierge who not only showed us the ins and outs of our beautifully decorated room in the Tower, but gave us recommendations for what nights to hit the dance club and when there would be live music in the lobby. We looked out at the ocean from our floor-to-ceiling window, at the water-skiers and parasailers, floating over the gently peaking waves. And later that evening, at dusk, we swam up to the pool bar as a light breeze from the beach (La Isla Verde, recently named the best urban beach in America) rustled the palm trees and wafted over the white cotton cabanas. There was no doubt: this was how it feels to be transported.