

The Fall Playbook What to Cook All Season Long

bon appétit

Sweet & Saucy
**Pork
Chops!**

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Bubbling
**Apple
Gallettes!**

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Loaded
**Baked
Potato Bar!**

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Braised
**Coconut
Chicken!**

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THE WAFFLE
WITH A STORY

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Away

Go here. Eat this. Drink that. Right this minute.



EVERY COOK'S
DREAM SHOP

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ISLAND TIME

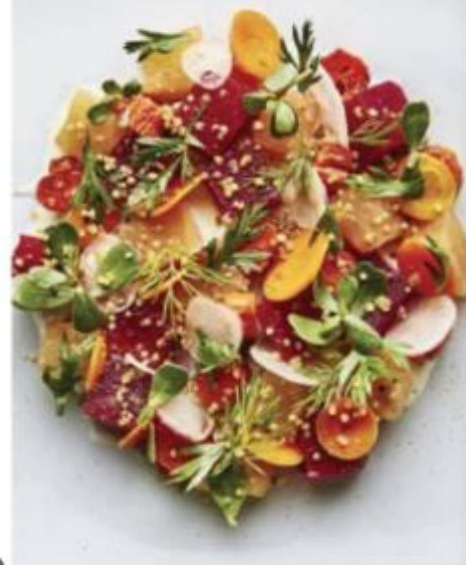
The pastel-hued
streets and fruit carts
give it away:
You're in **San Juan**.
Lucky you!

San Juan

...where restaurants aren't just rebuilding—they're thriving

by ALIZA ABARBANEL

► **HOPE TASTES LIKE** plantains and pernil. Two years after Hurricanes Irma and Maria hit Puerto Rico, rebuilding efforts have led to an increased emphasis on sustainable farming, breaking up the colonial legacy of industrialized agriculture and reliance on imported food while also doubling down on native ingredients. Now local farmers enjoy steady business from seasonally minded chefs pushing the culinary heritage of *cocina criolla*. Both farmers and chefs are powered by a resilient spirit that can be witnessed in real time, as La Placita de Santurce is packed once more with dancers balancing flaky empanadillas and Medalla beer. At these upstart and legacy spots, the food of Puerto Rico has never felt more Puerto Rican.



The New-School Staple

Husband-and-wife team Francis Guzmán and Amelia Dill, who met at Range in San Francisco and worked together at Blue Hill in New York before returning to Guzmán's native Puerto Rico, opened **Vianda** just a few months after Maria. It already feels indispensable. Here, Guzmán puts playful twists on Puerto Rican staples, turning bacalao into aromatic tom kha, topping tender short rib *encebollado* with fat onion rings, and tossing local root vegetables in an herby yogurt dressing (above). Looking at the globe lights and hanging vines, you could be in any trendy farm-to-table restaurant, but when a passing pyrotechnic cocktail perfumes the air with burning rosemary, the magic of Vianda is clear.



↑ It's always a party at Lote 23—watch out for falling Jenga pieces.

ESSENTIALS



The Hot Spots

- Vianda
- Café Regina
- Jungle BaoBao
- 1919
- Cocina al Fondo
- Lote 23

When to Visit

Any time but peak hurricane season, which typically runs mid-August to mid-October

Where to Stay

Condado Vanderbilt for ocean views and **El Convento** for monastic (but decidedly not ascetic) vibes

What to Bring Back

Locally grown coffee, like premium Alto Grande

The Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Spot

You'll see a lot of familiar faces at **Lote 23's** rotating kiosks (Juan José Cuevas did fresh pastas at La Masería; Natalia Rivera Vázquez serves pristine poke at El Jangiri), but we'd come to the open-air food truck park just for Pernilería Los Próceres. Chef Mario Juan Pagán sells different types of tricked-out pernil sandwiches and a slew of sides (yuca in escabeche, arroz guisado). Hurricane Maria interrupted his plans to open a restaurant, but his silver Airstream swings beyond its square footage. We still dream about the *Revolución es Orden* sandwich, shards of crisped slow-roasted pork piled with pickled onions and plantain chips atop a pillowy brioche bun. The politically named menu items (plus a not-so-subtle stencil of Karl Marx) echo PLP's slogan: "Pernil es Patria."



↑ The pernil-and-plantain-packed sandwich at Pernileria Los Próceres.



↑ At Café Comunción, the espresso is a sweeter Cuban style.

The Vibe-y Bar with Very Good Food

Tiki drinks flow freely throughout the island (Puerto Rico is the birthplace of the piña colada after all), but **Jungle BaoBao at Jungle Bird** has an edge on the competition: Paxx Caraballo Moll's imaginative bar food. The young chef, who promotes LGBTQ+ cooks through the hashtag #QueersInTheKitchen, works with local fishermen and farmers to create punchy plates that stand up to high-octane cocktails. Think fiery fried chicken and crispy "enoki bloom," blooming onion-like mushroom clusters served with togarashi and saffron aioli. It's a hands-on eating experience best enjoyed with a tepache colada, especially on weekends when DJs spin vinyl and the patio becomes a blur of tiki torches and tattoos.

The Fine-Dining Splurge

The sun-kissed and impeccably dressed flock to **1919** inside the ritzy Condado Vanderbilt Hotel, where chef Juan José Cuevas preaches the gospel of local produce from a fine-dining pulpit. Cuevas, who earned

a Michelin star helming Blue Hill, has spent years cultivating relationships with family farms like Frutos Del Guacabo in Manatí and Josco Bravo in the Toa Alta mountains. His tasting menu deploys their produce, taking diners on a whirlwind tour of modern Puerto Rican food with local queen snapper in ají amarillo broth and crispy cochinito (suckling pig) with caramelized eggplant, dried lime, and fresh yogurt. It's a full-throated salute to regional ingredients, as breathtaking as the restaurant's ocean views. Bonus: Well-fed diners are sent off with nutty banana bread.

The Healthish Hang

Tucked behind the eclectic Pública community art space, **Cocina al Fondo** trades in the unexpected. Chef Natalia Vallejo creates quietly healthy food with a fittingly artistic eye, like silky bowls of sweet-corn panna cotta and terrines made with candy-stripe beets and goat cheese. Thoughtful design touches, like plush oversize cushions perched on ample teak benches, inspire hang-outs fueled by arancini-like malanga buñuelos and a glass (maybe



5 STELLAR COFFEE SHOPS

Café Comunción
A bona fide latte art champion runs this coffee shop, so expect frothy cortados.

Don Ruiz
Hit up this O.G. single-origin spot for perfect pour-overs with house-roasted beans.

Café con Cé
There are two main draws: cult Gustos Reserva beans and a killer patio.

Spiga
An Italian-ish café that takes its sourdough as seriously as its espresso.

Café Cuatro Sombras
This café has been growing Arabica beans in the Yauco mountains since 1846. They're best in cortaditos.

two) of cava. Whether you're swinging by for Saturday brunch or seeking a nightcap, you'll feel the urge to linger a little longer. This is the kind of place where we yearn to be a regular.

The Ideal Breakfast

Owner Kali Solack filters trademarks of third-wave coffee shops (small-batch beans, alt-milk lattes) through the rich kaleidoscope of Puerto Rican agriculture at the airy **Café Regina**. Turmeric tea is spiked with fresh pineapple juice, and slices of locally made sourdough come topped with fresh ricotta, sweet star fruit jam, and neat rows of bruléed (and adorably tiny) guineo manzano bananas. But really, you're here for the coffee: Solack cofounded the Beans for Puerto Rico initiative to keep cafés stocked with donated beans after the loss of local crops, and she now sources from Puerto Rican-American roasters like Metric and Máquina. Grab a late-morning affogato, made with ice cream from local creamery Via Láctea, and a spot on the sunny front porch, then revel in an actually idyllic brunch.