

Browse, Binge and Buy Buy Buy

By **AMY GORDON**



San Juan's Plaza Las Americas is the largest shopping mall in the Caribbean.



Puerto Rico might be best known for its sandy beaches and stunning scenery, but when you're ready to get out of the sun and engage in some serious retail therapy, the island is packed with opportunities to browse and buy. From high-end luxury to discounted outlet stores, options abound for every style and budget.

Shopping junkies should embark

on their retail journeys at San Juan's Plaza Las Americas, the largest shopping mall in the Caribbean. Since 1968, this sprawling, 1.8 million-square-foot epicenter has thrilled high-end shoppers and frugal patrons alike, with stores to appeal to a plethora of ages and interests.

Anchored by department stores Macy's, JCPenney and Sears, the mall includes more than 300 exciting

outposts. Clothes horses can find sporty apparel at American Eagle, Pac Sun, Abercrombie & Fitch and stay up on the latest trends at affordable prices at Forever 21, Gap, and Old Navy and dress to impress with designer fashion-forward apparel from Carolina Herrera, Michael Kors, as well as UNOde50 and Zara stores both from Spain. Parents can stock up on what their kids crave at The Children's Place, Disney Store, and Build-A-Bear Workshop while picking up something special for themselves at Tiffany & Co., Vom Fass, Victoria's Secret, Sephora or KuryJeweler, the official Rolex retailer in Puerto Rico besides having the most exclusive brands in the world with unmatched personal service. Swing by home-grown stores like Hecho en Puerto Rico to purchase a vast array of items made in Puerto Rico, from coffee and rum to soap and clothing, or hippie-chic looks from Valija and Hecho a Mano,

among others. And if you need a suite case to accommodate all of your purchases, Kipling and Totto have a stellar selection.

When hunger strikes, there's no shortage of delectable options where you can rest your feet and warm your belly, from fast-food outlets like Mr. Pretzels for salty, doughy treats to full-service crowd pleasers like The Cheesecake Factory. Sit down for a pasta-filled feast (with unlimited breadsticks, of course) at The Olive Garden, savor noodle dishes, lettuce wraps, crispy beef and other modern Chinese fare at PF Chang's, or opt for a classic burger and fries at Applebee's. Afterwards, follow your nose to David's Cookies for fresh-baked, gooey sweets.

Plaza Carolina, Puerto Rico's second largest shopping center, is anchored by JCPenney, TJ Maxx and Sears features a variety of affordable stores

like Aeropostale, Bath & Body Works, Champs Store, Charlotte Russe, Exentrix, Foot Locker, among others. The mall offers many dining options from sit down places such as Chili's to Pizza Hut and small kiosks.

For a more refined mall-going excursion that appeals to patrons looking for a relaxed setting, The Mall of San Juan delivers. This elegant mall spots a mix of uber-high-end labels like Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Versace, Giuseppe Zanotti Design, Bulgari, Jimmy Choo, Coach, and anchor store, Nordstrom as well as more accessible spots like H&M, and Banana Republic. Many of the more than 100 stores here are unique to the market and are world-renowned brands like Tiffany, Salvatore Ferragamo, Daniel Espinosa Jewelry, Geox, Omega Boutique, Joaquin Blanco and if you're looking to spend your money at locally-owned boutiques there is Desigual, Jorge Bared Jeweler,

Lido Jewelers, and local designer boutiques such as Luis Antonio and Gustavo Arango- there are plenty from which to choose.

The shopping experience is made even more pleasant with amenities like valet parking and an on-site concierge service. When you enter, make your first stop the Information



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Desk, where jovial staff are on hand to help navigate the mall and answer any questions. But that's not all - they'll give you a shopping passport that includes a slew of discounts, and they might even load you up with coupons for free beauty treatments, coffee and more.

Dining at the Mall of San Juan is a true pleasure. On the first floor, guests can sit down for sushi and Japanese fare at Kona Grill or flavorful Puerto Rican dishes at the newly opened Metropol. One flight up, Vin'us wine bar is the place to go for vintages you might not find anywhere else in the area. For additional delectable options with a side of sprawling views, take the glass-encased elevator to the third floor. The open-air patio sports comfy couches and chairs where you can throw your bags down and take a load off before heading over to one of the rooftop's two stellar dining options. As its name suggests, Burger & Beer Joint serves sumptuous options for both, and with deliciously crispy pizza, fresh salads and al-dente pasta, Il Nuovo Mercato conjures the feeling of relaxed meal in Italy.

The Mall of San Juan also boasts

alliances with Sony Music, Uforia Lounge of KQ105 and the Corporation of Musical Arts to bring patrons a slate of top-notch entertainment, including past performances from showstoppers like Draco, Prince Royce and the Symphonic Orchestra of Puerto Rico. And if you're traveling with kids, be sure to stop in on a Tuesday, when youngsters can engage in free activities like art, crafts, yoga, and reading sessions.

Puerto Rico also has other quality shopping malls like San Patricio Plaza in Guaynabo, Plaza Rio Hondo in Bayamon, Plaza del Caribe in Ponce and the Mayaguez Mall in Mayaguez, which is situated in the beautiful western coast of the island.

The Mayaguez Mall (the third largest in Puerto Rico) and has over 120 well rounded stores, restaurants and entertainment outlets catering to all budgets. That is why it's known as the main shopping center in the west. It even has a heliport within the mall property.

The key outlets at the Mayaguez Mall include department store anchors Sears and JCPenney as well as stores like Pandora, Taus, Totto, Florsheim, Marshalls, Shoe Carnival.

An affordable outpost for seasoned shoppers is Puerto Rico Premium Outlets in Barceloneta, just a 45-minute drive from San Juan.



Also, you can enjoy before or after your shopping spree a variety of tourism attractions, relax at spectacular nearby beaches, eat good food or opt to visit a casino at the Holiday Inn Mayaguez or at the Mayaguez Resort & Casino.

Meanwhile, fabulous haute couture and jewelry emporiums – emblazoned with the most famous names in fashion are situated in luxury condominiums that share space with swimsuit and trendy surf shops, local independently owned boutiques, upscale jewelry stores and souvenir shops, along palm-lined ocean-side drives in Isla Verde beach district and the swanky and highly popular Condado.

A short walk away, the iconic Caribe Hilton (scheduled to reopen in spring 2019), said to be the birthplace of the piña colada cocktail - is just steps from Paseo Caribe, an open-air shopping plaza with unique options ranging from unique luxury brands to gastronomic treasure like El Mercado – an upscale food market with a mix of local gourmet restaurants, butcher shops and other gourmet food boutiques under one roof, to It Girl, a hot spot for ultra-feminine clothing and accessories that are always on trend.

To enjoy a shopping trip with a hearty dose of Puerto Rican history and culture, Old San Juan is the ideal destination. As you stroll up and down the blue cobblestone



The Outlets at Montehiedra is a mix of brand name outlet stores and local offerings in one level enclosed mall housing over 100 stores.

streets and take in the pastel-colored buildings and distinct architecture in this section of the city, there is no shortage of unique and charming shops to duck into for everything from custom-fitted hats to one-of-a-kind art to Fair Trade Certified home decor sourced from around the world. (For more on where to quench your retail thirst in Old San Juan, see "Find that unique travel memento in Old San Juan" on Page 70).

Elsewhere in San Juan, there is an explosion of retail creativity taking place in up and coming urban zones in downtown Santurce and along Laiza Street by the beach at Ocean Park as well as in the Miramar neighborhood and the Hato Rey financial district. You'll find street fashion boutiques, up and coming food shops, and beachwear stores among others.

Thrifty travelers can score discounts throughout the island. Looking for brand names like Calvin Klein, Guess, and Tommy Hilfger but don't want to spend too much money? The Outlet 66 Mall in Canovanas

is your answer. As you stroll up and down the corridors in this expansive shopping haven, stock up on marked-down fragrances, sneakers and even underwear. The space recently got a makeover, changing up its look to appeal to younger customers, which includes modern and cleaner store facades, and tenants like Aeropostale, Burlington, Journey's, Lids, Nautica, Sketchers, Trollbeads, among others and the addition of the awesomely thrilling Sector Sixty6 entertainment complex for gaming and more (see sidebar "Adrenaline junkie overload at The Outlet 66 Mall" on Page 66).

Another affordable outpost for seasoned shoppers is Puerto Rico Premium Outlets in Barceloneta, just a 45-minute drive from San Juan (but the drive is totally worth it) and features 90 designer and brand name stores. At this outdoor, colorful village-style outlet mall with great looking window displays, you can score huge savings of up to 65% off on pretty much anything at popular designer spots like Ann Taylor,

Michael Kors, and Lacoste. There are also a chock full of factory outlet shops like Ann Taylor Factory Store, Michael Kors Outlet, Gap Factory, Maidenform Outlet, Guess Factory, Loft Outlet, Nautica Factory, Nike Factory Outlet, Polo Ralph Lauren Factory Store, Puma Outlet, Aldo Outlet, The Children's Place Outlet, Banana Republic Factory Store, Disney Store Outlet, Old Navy Outlet and Vans Outlet offering great prices on merchandise from top manufacturers and distributors.

When you've exhausted your shopping allowance and extraordinary experience because of the outlet's tropical outdoor atmosphere, sit down to grab a bite to eat, ranging from quick options like Charley's Philly Steaks, California BBQ and full-service dining at Olive Garden or Chili's Grill and Bar.

The Outlets at Montehiedra, a mix of brand name outlet stores and local offerings in a one level enclosed mall housing over 100 stores ranging from Gap to Polo Ralph Lauren Factor Store and anchored by Big Kmart, the Home Depot and Marshall's.

No matter where you go on the island, stellar shopping opportunities are open for business.

So get out your credit card, don a pair of comfortable shoes (or buy them!) and get ready to shop your heart out, Puerto Rico style. ■