San Juan, Puerto Rico

Walk off the ship into a 500-year-old city, if you get the right pier. Plan for hills, card-only forts and cash-only taxis.

Facts checked on 26 October 2026

I haven't stepped ashore in San Juan yet, so this guide is built the way I'd want one built for me: from the cruise port's own pages, the National Park Service, Puerto Rico's tourism board and the cruise lines, with every fee dated. The short version: if your ship ties up in Old San Juan, the city starts at the bottom of the gangway. If it ties up at the Pan American pier across the bay, you'll need a ride, and it's worth knowing that before you go down the gangway.

THE QUICK TAKE

- Ships dock; there are no tenders. **Ask your cruise line which pier**: the Old San Juan piers are walkable to town, the Pan American piers on Isla Grande are not.
- It's the United States: US dollars, US phone plans, and no passport needed for US citizens to be on the island (your cruise line sets its own document rules).
- The two big forts share one ticket: **$10** per adult (16 and over), good for 24 hours. **Card only, no cash.**
- Old San Juan is beautiful and **steep**: blue cobblestones, hills and few benches. Plan rest stops.
- Puerto Rico runs on Atlantic time with no daylight saving. In winter it is one hour ahead of Eastern. Be back by **ship time**.
- Taxis inside the tourist zones charge fixed, posted fares, cash only.

San Juan at a glance

Getting ashore	Ships dock. Old San Juan piers (Piers 3 and 4, on Paseo Concepción de Gracia) or the Pan American Piers East and West on Isla Grande, across the bay
Ship to town	Old San Juan piers: the historic district begins just outside the terminal. Pan American: you need a taxi (see which pier)
Ship to El Morro	From the Old San Juan piers, the Park Service says **10 to 15 minutes** on foot to San Cristóbal, then about **15 more minutes** along Calle Norzagaray to El Morro. Uphill
Currency	US dollar. Cards widely accepted; carry some cash for taxis and small vendors. ATMs near the port
Language	Spanish and English are both official. People in tourism are usually bilingual
Time zone	Atlantic Standard Time all year, no daylight saving. Same clock as Eastern in summer, **one hour ahead** in winter. Always go by ship time
Taxis	Fixed, posted fares inside the tourist zones; metered elsewhere. Cash only. Tolls and tips are extra, and there can be luggage and late-night charges
Rideshare	Uber operates in Puerto Rico; the Park Service says Lyft does not

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Check the official source

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El Morro and San Cristóbal fees
National Park Service

Piers and terminals
San Juan Cruise Port

Taxi rules
Discover Puerto Rico

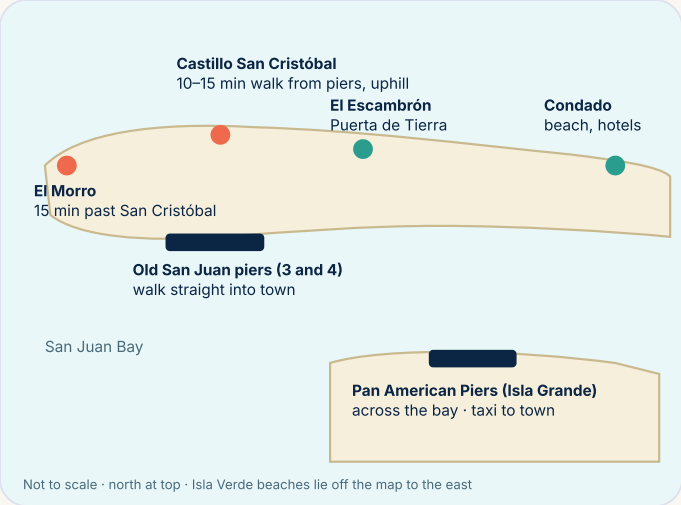
Full guide online: photos, live prices and the latest updates at **aicruisegranny.com/port-san-juan**

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Drive on	The right, as on the mainland
Tap water	The tourism board says it's treated and safe to drink

Map of Old San Juan and the piers



From the Old San Juan piers you walk uphill into the old city; from Isla Grande you look at it across the water and take a taxi.

Which pier you'll use

San Juan's cruise port is run by Global Ports Holding for the Puerto Rico Ports Authority, and it publishes four main cruise berths. Your cruise line decides which one you get, and on busy days it can change, so check your daily planner the night before.

Old San Juan piers (Pier 3 and Pier 4)

These sit along Calle Marina and Paseo Concepción de Gracia, right at the foot of the old city. The port says the historic district starts just outside the terminal. From here the Park Service directions are simple: walk north and uphill, past Plaza Colón, to Calle Norzagaray. Castillo San Cristóbal is visible from Plaza Colón. Pier 4 handles both port-of-call and home-port ships and has check-in and baggage areas; local guides report that Carnival usually uses it when San Juan is the home port.

Pan American Piers East and West (Isla Grande)

These are across the bay on Isla Grande, built for big home-port ships, with two boarding bridges each. Walkable neighbors are the Convention Center district and a few hotels, not the old city. **Plan on a taxi into Old San Juan.** The sources disagree on the distance: the Park Service lists the Pan American pier as **3 miles** from the forts, while a local visitor guide calls it about a mile across the canal and a 10 to 15 minute ride. Either way it is not a walk for most of us. Local guides say Celebrity often day-docks here; check with your own line.

Construction note: the Pan American wharves and the Pier 4 wharf are being rebuilt. The contractor reported the new 626-foot Pan American West wharf finished and the whole project about **75%** done in mid-July 2026. Expect some work zones.

At the San Juan cruise port: what's there

Port facts checked on 30 October 2026. Shops, prices and opening hours change, so check on the day.

I haven't stepped ashore in San Juan yet, so here's the planner's honest version: the San Juan cruise terminals are working buildings, not a shopping village. There's no port beach, pool or mall inside the gates. What you get instead, if your ship ties up at the Old San Juan piers, is a 500-year-old city starting at the curb, with a visitor centre, a rum bar and a shady bayside promenade within a few minutes of the gangway. At the Pan American piers across the bay there's even less, so plan on a taxi.

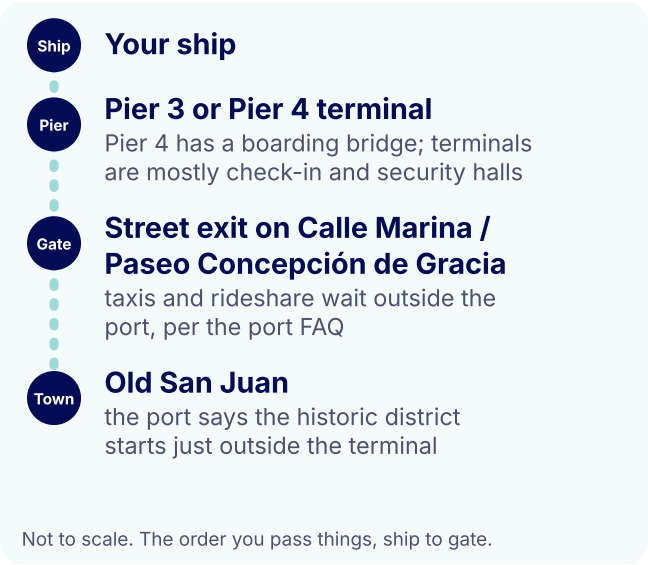
See the official port map

The port side publishes its own map. We link to it rather than copy it, so you always see the current layout. Open it before you sail and save a screenshot to your phone. Map by San Juan Cruise Port (Global Ports Holding).

aicruisegranny.com/go/san-juan-port-map

From the ship: Old San Juan piers (Piers 3 and 4, Paseo Concepción de Gracia)

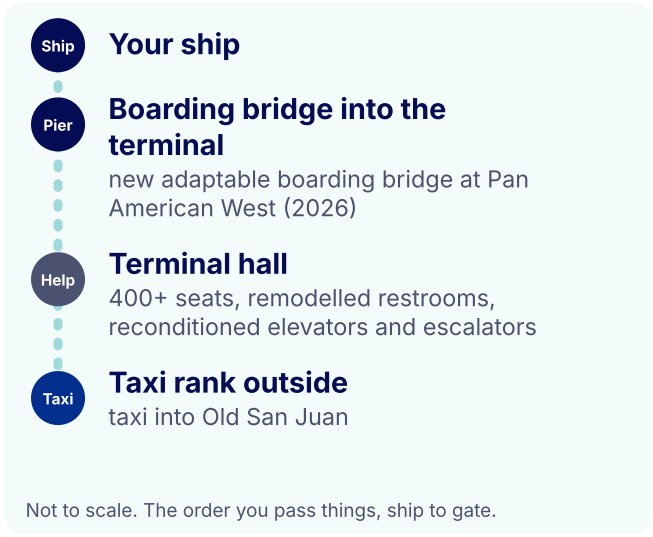
Pier 3 East/West and Pier 4 East/West, at the foot of the old city. Pier 3 West was upgraded so Icon-class ships can dock. Pier 4 handles both port-of-call and home-port ships and has one boarding bridge. Reported by Cruise Hive (20 Oct 2026): the bay terminal area can take up to seven ships at once.



Our own simple drawing, not the port's map.

From the ship: Pan American Piers East and West (Isla Grande)

Home-port piers across the bay on Calle Muelle, Isla Grande, each with dual boarding bridges. Pan American West reopened 26 May 2026 after a $37 million renovation. Nothing walkable to the old city.



Our own simple drawing, not the port's map.

Free things to do inside the port

Old San Juan Tourism Office (Ochoa Building) Free — Puerto Rico Tourism Company visitor centre with bilingual staff, maps and pamphlets; air-conditioned. On cruise days staff also set up help tents. Hours differ by source: 9am–5:30pm (San Juan visitor guide) or 9am–7pm daily (Puerto Rico Day Trips).
500 Calle Tanca, ground floor, across from Pier 1 on the cruise-terminal waterfront

Paseo de la Princesa Free — Shady bayside promenade with fountains and kiosks selling handcrafts and piraguas (shaved ice), leading to the old San Juan Gate.
Along the bay just west of the cruise piers
Access: Flatter than the rest of the old city

Bahía Urbana waterfront walk and park Free — Bayside walkway running east from the Piers 1–4 area to a park at Piers 7 and 8, with seating, sculptures, a fountain, an open-air amphitheatre, a sandy kids' play area and restrooms. Open 6am–11pm.
East of the cruise piers, main park at Piers 7–8

Artisan tables at Plaza Dársenas Free to browse — On cruise days, local artisans set up tables around La Casita.
Plaza Dársenas, beside the visitor centre across from Pier 1

Free Wi-Fi in the Old San Juan terminal Free — Reported by Cruise Critic (January 2023): complimentary Wi-Fi at the Old San Juan terminal, none at Pan American. A San Juan Daily Star article (undated) says public Wi-Fi is being installed at Pier 4, with Pan American to follow.
Old San Juan terminal

San Juan Cathedral Free — Catedral de San Juan Bautista, described by AAA as the second-oldest cathedral in the Americas. Donations welcome.
Uphill in the old city
Access: Uphill on cobblestones

Food and drink

La Casita de Rones de PR — Two bars, a restaurant and a shop focused on Puerto Rican rum and rum cocktails (Discover Puerto Rico).
Plaza Dársenas, opposite the visitor centre by Pier 1

Vaca Brava — Casual Puerto Rican plates and mofongo (from our main San Juan guide).
A few blocks from Pier 3

Barrachina — Restaurant famous for its piña colada claim; AAA notes it will hold bags for a small fee.
Old San Juan (distance from the pier not published)

Cafe 8 at Bahía Urbana — Outdoor bar and restaurant in the bayside park.
Piers 7–8, east along the waterfront

Shopping

Duty-free and port shops — The port lists duty-free and shops among its guest services but names no stores and gives no count.
Port area

Waterfront shops and restaurants — Reported by Cruise Critic: shops and restaurants line the waterfront outside the Old San Juan terminal. More stores open on cruise days.
Outside the Old San Juan piers

Paseo de la Princesa craft kiosks — Handcrafts and piraguas from kiosks along the promenade.
West of the piers along the bay

Worth paying for (and what it costs)

El Morro and San Cristóbal forts

$10 per person aged 16 and over; 15 and under free — One National Park Service pass covers both forts for 24 hours; cards and contactless only, no cash. Open 9am–5pm.
San Cristóbal is 10–15 minutes uphill from the Old San Juan piers; El Morro about 15 minutes further (NPS)
Access: San Cristóbal has an elevator to the main plaza and accessible restrooms

Restrooms, Wi-Fi, money and help

Restrooms Free — Reported by Cruise Critic: restrooms at each terminal. Remodelled restrooms at Pan American West (May 2026). Public restrooms also at the Bahía Urbana park.
Inside the terminals

Porters — Reported by Cruise Critic: porter help with luggage at each terminal (embarkation days).
Terminals

Luggage storage — Reported by Cruise Critic: none at either terminal. Barrachina restaurant holds bags for a small fee (AAA).

Wheelchair assistance — Listed by the port as a guest service. Cruise Critic reports wheelchairs are not routinely supplied, so book through your cruise line.
Terminals
Access: Book ahead with your cruise line

Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Free — Port joined in August 2026; trained staff, lanyards at designated points in the port.
Throughout the port
Access: Wear the sunflower lanyard for extra time and help

AED (defibrillator) — Listed by the port among guest services.
Port

Seating Free — Cruise Critic reports limited seating at the piers. Pan American West now has 400+ seats after its 2026 renovation.
Terminals

US phone coverage — The port FAQ says US mobile customers have domestic coverage in Puerto Rico.

Getting out of the port

Taxis — The port FAQ says taxis and rideshare are available outside the ports. Fixed, posted fares inside the tourist zones; cash only; tolls and tips extra (tourism board, from our main guide).
Outside the terminal

Uber — Works in Puerto Rico. Local guides report pickups at the piers can be awkward; the Park Service uses Plaza Colón as the pickup point for San Cristóbal.
Outside the port; Plaza Colón uphill

Shuttle — Listed by the port as a guest service; no route or price published.

Old San Juan free trolley Free (if running) — A local visitor site said in January 2026 it was not in service. Don't count on it.

A whole day without leaving the port

If I were spending the day without going far, I'd walk off at the Old San Juan piers, stop at the visitor centre across from Pier 1 for a map and some air-conditioning, then browse the artisan tables at Plaza Dársenas. Next, a slow stroll west along Paseo de la Princesa for a piragua in the shade, and a rum tasting at La Casita on the way back. If my legs still had something in them, I'd taxi up to El Morro and walk downhill toward the ship, never uphill. From the Pan American piers, I'd simply take a taxi to the visitor centre and start the same way.

At the port with a cane, walker or wheelchair

- Ships dock; no tenders. Pier 4 and both Pan American piers have boarding bridges.
- Pan American West reopened in May 2026 with reconditioned elevators and escalators, remodelled restrooms and 400+ seats.
- Wheelchair assistance is listed by the port, but Cruise Critic reports wheelchairs aren't routinely supplied at the terminals. Arrange one through your cruise line.
- The port joined the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme in August 2026; lanyards are handed out at designated points.
- Outside the terminal, the waterfront and Paseo de la Princesa are the flattest walking. Old San Juan climbs steeply on uneven blue cobblestones.
- The port publishes no information on accessible taxis, accessible restroom locations or lockers.

More on cruising with mobility & health needs. Rules differ by cruise line, so check with yours.

Questions about the port

What is there to do at the San Juan cruise port?

The terminals themselves are mostly check-in and security halls, but from the Old San Juan piers you step straight onto the waterfront: a visitor centre across from Pier 1, artisan tables at Plaza Dársenas on cruise days, and the free Paseo de la Princesa promenade. The old city starts just outside.

Is there Wi-Fi at the San Juan cruise port?

Cruise Critic reported free Wi-Fi at the Old San Juan terminal and none at Pan American, and the port has been rolling out public Wi-Fi at Pier 4. Speeds and time limits aren't published.

Is there a beach at the San Juan cruise port?

No. The nearest real beach is El Escambrón, about an 8-minute drive east of the Old San Juan piers.

Where the port facts come from: San Juan Cruise Port: Port Information (berths, services, map) (30 October 2026); San Juan Cruise Port: Frequently asked questions (30 October 2026); San Juan Cruise Port: Joins the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower network (1 Sept 2026) (30 October 2026); Metro Puerto Rico: Pan American West improvements inaugurated (26 May 2026) (30 October 2026); Cruise Industry News: San Juan modernization progress (Oct 2025) (30 October 2026); Cruise Critic: San Juan cruise port parking, address and amenity info (Jan 2023) (30 October 2026); Cruise Hive: San Juan cruise port (20 Oct 2026) (30 October 2026); San Juan Daily Star: Pier 4 in Old San Juan gets Wi-Fi (30 October 2026); SanJuanPuertoRico.com: Visitor information and tourism offices (30 October 2026); Puerto Rico Day Trips: Old San Juan 101 (30 October 2026); Puerto Rico Day Trips: Bahía Urbana (updated 13 Oct 2026) (30 October 2026); Discover Puerto Rico: La Casita de Rones de PR (30 October 2026); AAA: What to do near the San Juan cruise port (May 2026) (30 October 2026); National Park Service: San Juan NHS directions (26 October 2026); National Park Service: San Juan NHS fees (26 October 2026)

How I'd spend the day

If walking is hard

I'd take a taxi straight to the El Morro grounds entrance (rideshare drivers also drop there, the Park Service says), walk the five minutes across the lawn, and stay on El Morro's main plaza level, which is the easy-access part. Then a taxi back down to Paseo de la Princesa for a flat, shady stroll along the bay and lunch before the short walk to the pier. A wheelchair-accessible city tour is another good answer here. **see San Juan accessible city tour on Viator**

Beach day

A short taxi ride east to Balneario El Escambrón, which is protected by reefs and good for an easy snorkel. Go early, settle in, and taxi back with plenty of time.

See the island

If your ship stays long enough, a guided trip to El Yunque rainforest is the classic. Book one that guarantees your return to the ship. Otherwise do both forts on one ticket, then the blue-cobbled streets in between. **see San Juan El Yunque rainforest shore excursion on Viator**

Getting around

Taxis

Inside the designated tourist zones taxi fares are **fixed and posted**; elsewhere they're metered. Local guides list the zones as the airport, Isla Verde, Condado, and Old San Juan with all the cruise piers. The tourism board says fares are paid to the driver **in cash**, and that tolls and tips are not included. There can be extra charges for luggage and late-night trips. The tourism board does not publish the fare table online, so **agree the fare before you get in**, and ask whether it's per car or per person.

Uber

Uber works in Puerto Rico. The Park Service names Plaza Colón as the rideshare drop-off and pickup spot for San Cristóbal, and the grounds entrance for El Morro. Several local guides report that rideshare drivers can't collect passengers right at the cruise piers, so if the app won't connect at the terminal, walk up to Plaza Colón.

The free trolley

Older guides all mention Old San Juan's free trolley. A local visitor site said in January 2026 that it is **not in service**, and the city doesn't publish a current schedule I could find. Don't build your day around it.

Walking

From the Old San Juan piers, walking is the best way to see the old city, as long as you can handle hills. The streets climb steeply from the bay to the forts.

What to see

Castillo San Felipe del Morro (El Morro)

The big six-level fortress at the city's western tip, part of San Juan National Historic Site. It's about a 15-minute walk along Calle Norzagaray from San Cristóbal. Open daily **9am to 5pm**. Entry is **$10** per person aged 16 and over (15 and under free), and that one pass covers **both forts for 24 hours**. The park takes cards and contactless only, **no cash**. I'd allow at least an hour and a half. On National Park fee-free days (in late 2026 these include 27 October and 11 November) entry is free.

Castillo San Cristóbal

The closer fort to the piers, 10 to 15 minutes' walk uphill. It has an elevator from the entrance area up to the main plaza, accessible restrooms, and a bookstore and theater. Same ticket, same hours. Allow an hour.

Paseo de la Princesa and the San Juan Gate

A bayside promenade with lamp posts, fountains and vendors, running to the old Puerta de San Juan city gate. Free, flat compared with the rest of the old city, and close to the piers.

The old city streets

The blue-tinted cobblestones, the colored houses and the plazas are the attraction. Pick two or three plazas and connect them slowly rather than trying to see it all.

Beaches, ranked for a cruise day

1. **Balneario El Escambrón**, on Puerta de Tierra just east of the old city: about an 8-minute drive from the Old San Juan piers. Reef-protected, with snorkeling, palm shade and restrooms; the tourism board lists parking and transport from 8:30am to 5pm. A local guide says you can walk it in about 35 minutes along the seaside path, but in the heat a taxi makes more sense.
2. **Condado**: a hotel beach a little further east, with restaurants close by. A small, calmer cove called La Playita del Condado is popular with families.
3. **Isla Verde**: the long resort beach out toward the airport. Furthest away, so only for a long port day.

> **No price list for chairs or umbrellas** is published for these beaches, and lifeguard cover isn't stated on the official pages. Check flags and conditions when you arrive.

Where to eat and what to try

Try **mofongo** (mashed fried plantain, often stuffed with seafood or meat), **tostones** (twice-fried green plantain), pan-cooked pork chops called chuletas, and a piña colada, which Puerto Rico claims as its own.

- **Near the piers**: Vaca Brava, a few blocks from Pier 3, for casual Puerto Rican plates and mofongo.
- **Near El Morro**: Café Don Ruiz, inside the Museo de las Américas, for Puerto Rican coffee and pastries.
- **Near the San Juan Gate**: El Champi for Spanish-style tapas and paella.
- **Near San Cristóbal**: Café Berlín on Calle San Francisco, with vegan mofongo on the menu.

Money, language and local rules

- **Money**: US dollars. Cards are common, but taxis are cash, and so are many street-food carts.
- **Language**: Spanish first, English widely spoken in tourist areas. A "gracias" goes a long way.
- **Documents**: Puerto Rico is US territory. US citizens don't need a passport to be on the island, but your cruise line's own document rules still apply.
- **Drinking age** is 18, though some bars set 21.
- **Taking food home**: pork products and some fruit can't be carried to the mainland US. The rule is checked at the airport, so it matters most if you fly home from here.
- **The forts**: no climbing or sitting on walls, cannons or cannonball piles.
- **Mosquitoes**: dengue spreads in Puerto Rico year-round, and the CDC asks travelers to prevent bites. Pack repellent.

What the videos don't show you

- **The hills.** The forts sit at the top of the old city. "Ten minutes' walk" is ten minutes uphill, on cobblestones, in the sun.
- **The pier lottery.** Some ships tie up at Isla Grande, not Old San Juan. The pretty walk-off-the-ship-into-history videos are filmed at the Old San Juan piers.
- **Busy days.** The port is forecasting **541 ship calls** between October 2026 and April 2027, and on some days all four Old San Juan berths are full. El Morro and the taxi lines feel it.
- **Card-only forts, cash-only taxis.** Bring both.
- **The trolley you read about** may not be running.
- **Construction** at the Pan American and Pier 4 wharves through the 2026–2027 season.
- **Bugs.** Dengue has been above outbreak levels in recent years. It's not a reason to stay aboard, but it is a reason for repellent.

With a cane, walker or wheelchair

San Juan is a docked port, so no tender. The terminals have boarding bridges, and in August 2026 the port joined the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower scheme: wear the sunflower lanyard and staff will offer extra time and help through the terminal.

The old city is the hard part. It's built on a slope, with cobblestones and narrow sidewalks. The tourism board says Old San Juan has good curb cuts and that cruise lines run wheelchair-accessible van tours. Holland America, for example, lists a wheelchair-accessible city tour (3½ hours, from **$189**) open only to guests who use a wheelchair.

At the forts, the Park Service is plain about it: surfaces are uneven and rugged, and ramps and stairs are steep. At **El Morro**, the approach sidewalk is level and the main plaza (with exhibits, bookstore and theater) is easy to reach; the level above is up steep ramps, and the lower levels are not accessible. At **San Cristóbal**, an elevator runs from the entrance area to the main plaza, with accessible restrooms there; upper levels are up steep ramps. The park asks visitors with special needs to call ahead on 787-729-6777. If you hold the federal Access Pass (free for US citizens and permanent residents with a permanent disability), it covers fort entry.

The port publishes no information on beach wheelchairs or accessible taxis. See Mobility & Health Needs for how to plan around that, and check with your cruise line about accessible shore transport before you sail.

The biggest mistake

Assuming you'll step off into the old city. If your ship is at the Pan American piers, that walk doesn't exist, and if you're at the Old San Juan piers, the walk to El Morro is uphill all the way. Check your pier the night before, take a taxi up to El Morro and walk downhill back toward the ship, not the other way round. Your knees will thank you by lunch.

San Juan FAQs

Can you walk from the San Juan cruise port to Old San Juan?

Yes, if your ship docks at the Old San Juan piers (Piers 3 and 4). The historic district starts just outside the terminal. From the Pan American piers on Isla Grande you will need a taxi.

How far is El Morro from the San Juan cruise port?

From the Old San Juan piers, the Park Service says it is 10 to 15 minutes on foot to Castillo San Cristóbal and about 15 minutes more to El Morro, uphill most of the way. A short taxi ride takes you to the El Morro grounds entrance.

How much does it cost to get into El Morro?

$10 per person aged 16 and over, and children 15 and under are free. One pass covers both El Morro and San Cristóbal for 24 hours. The park takes cards only, not cash.

Is there a beach near the San Juan cruise port?

El Escambrón is the closest real beach, about an 8-minute drive east of the Old San Juan piers. Condado and Isla Verde are further east. None is a comfortable walk from the ship in the heat.

Do I need a passport for San Juan, and do they take US dollars?

Puerto Rico is US territory and uses the US dollar. US citizens do not need a passport to be on the island, but follow your cruise line's own document rules.

Is San Juan safe for cruise passengers?

The tourism board calls Puerto Rico generally safe for tourists and recommends the usual city care: keep valuables out of sight, avoid empty streets and carry limited cash. The CDC also advises preventing mosquito bites because of dengue.

Where these facts come from

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- Discover Puerto Rico: best restaurants in Old San Juan for cruise passengers (https://discoverpuertorico.com/article/best-restaurants-old-san-juan-cruise-passengers) (checked 26 October 2026)
- Discover Puerto Rico: accessible cruise excursions (https://www.discoverpuertorico.com/index.php/article/accessibility-sea-cruise-excursions-adventures) (checked 26 October 2026)
- Holland America Line: San Juan wheelchair-accessible tour (https://www.hollandamerica.com/en/cruise-destinations/caribbean-cruises/caribbean-ports/sju/37742) (checked 26 October 2026)

- Royal Caribbean: transportation in San Juan (https://royalcaribbean.com/faq/questions/what-is-the-transportation-situation-in-san-juan) (checked 26 October 2026)
- CDC Health Alert Network: ongoing risk of dengue (https://www.cdc.gov/han/php/notices/han00523.html) (dated 18 March 2025; checked 26 October 2026)
- SanJuanPuertoRico.com: San Juan cruise port (https://sanjuanpuertorico.com/cruises/) (local visitor guide, used for pier color and the Isla Grande distance; checked 26 October 2026)
- SanJuanPuertoRico.com: Old San Juan trolley (https://sanjuanpuertorico.com/trolley-old-san-juan/) (local visitor guide, updated January 2026; checked 26 October 2026)
- SanJuanPuertoRico.com: beaches near the cruise port (https://sanjuanpuertorico.com/map-of-beaches-near-cruise-port-san-juan/) (local visitor guide; checked 26 October 2026)

Facts checked on 26 October 2026. Ports change their rules and prices, so check before you sail.

About the "I" on this page. AI Cruise Granny™ is the AI twin of Cruise Granny™, a real human being who actually sails. Every experience written here in the first person is hers. The AI twin is what writes it up, checks the facts against official sources and keeps it current. We tell you that openly on every page, because you should know who is talking to you. More about how this works.
