

## Puerto Rico, January 29, 2010

San Juan, Puerto Rico was another quick winter escape weekend for us. While it rained half of the 3-day weekend, from time to time the sun peaked through the clouds. Throughout the four days, the temperature never dropped below 70, which was 60 degrees above the average temperature in Minnesota for the previous two months. It was great to walk around outside without a heavy jacket and enjoying the colorful flowers and bright green trees and bushes.



The highlight of the trip was the half-day tour to the El Yunque (pronounced June-key) Rainforest. From San Juan to the eastern end of the Island took an hour's drive, mostly on freeways. In the El Yunque National Park, a very winding, narrow road rose from sea level to three thousand feet. The base gets about 75 inches of rain per year while the top enjoys 250 inches of rain water, about an inch each day. No wonder a cloud typically crowns the mountain top.

Puerto Rico in most ways looks and feels like a Hawaiian island, but El Yunque is the only rainforest in the United States. The national park that surrounds it, is one of the largest in the USA. El Yunque also serves as the unique home to hundreds of species of plants, birds, and other living creatures. Most famous is the tiny **coqui tree frog** about the size of a dime that produces a loud croak. The male croak can be heard a half mile away. While the coqui originated in Puerto Rico, it has spread to a few other places.



In Hawaii it has been declared an invasive species.

Another unique creature is the deadly African snail which hangs out, as you can see in the photo on the left, on beds of damp moss. We also found them on tree trunks. As you can see in the photo, the rainforest sprouts an elegant tree with a moss-covered, round trunk. It's called the candlewood tree, and historically provided the natives with canoes. Also,

plentiful were clumps of fat bamboo stalks and the most giant elephant ears we have ever seen. As you can see in the photo on the very last page, these humongous leaves glistened in the rain. Natives and vegans cook the roots of these majestic plants.



A special flower growing in the trees about half way up the mountain were **African Tulip** flowers. In this photo you can see how they cluster in the trees.

Along the road hundreds of **impatiens**, grow wild. As they are a favorite annual flower in the northern Midwest that costs at least a dollar per plant, we felt envious. Apparently, in this part of the country they have discovered their medicinal value.



The sector of the city with the greatest charm is the **Old San Juan**. Unfortunately, everybody, both tourists and locals, wants to drive there. The congestion is so great that on weekends tourist buses no longer go there as traffic is worse than a crawl. It does not help that some cobblestone roads and buildings are under construction, due to an attempt to have the 7-square block

district declared a World Heritage Site. Already, some of the forts and other buildings have been recognized for their historical value. In the photo here you see one of the docks adjacent to the old town and near where the cruise ships dock.

Puerto Rican food is a delight. They depend heavily upon roots and plantains. This pictured dish is called a mofongo because several different types of roots and plantains are mashed and shaped like a bowl. The bowl is filled with any type of meat or vegetable with whatever flavorful sauce desired. This dish, called arroz con gandules, was filled was filled with a tasty chicken stew before we ate it.





**Nancy taking nap by the sea**



**Fern Fiddleheads in Rainforest**



On the palm tree on the left, the open roots have a bright red color. Indigenous people still get some of their nutrition from these roots. The picture was taken in the dense forest in the rain.

On the right is La Coca Falls in the upper half of the Rain Forest. Nearby were several giant African Tulip trees.



**Palm tree seeds up close**



**A Few fresh fern Fiddleheads**



**Street Chess Playing in the Plaza**



**Sidewalk Jazz Drum Group**



**Reggae Musician Touring Rainforest**



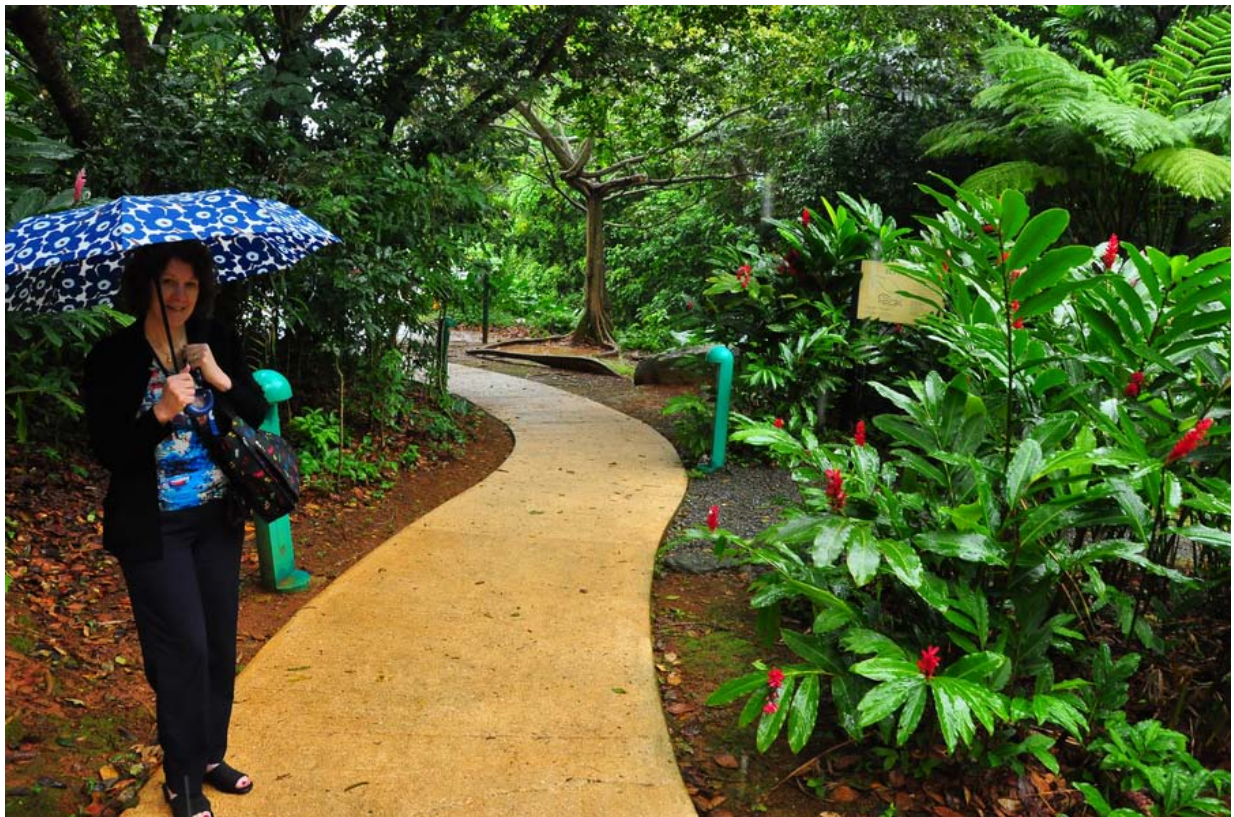
**Mardi Gras Masks to Scare Evil Spirits**



**Relaxing in the Palms**



**Old San Juan Fort & Traffic**





**Giant Elephant Ears Plant in Raining Rainforest fa**