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# THE WEEK

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## This week's dream: Soaking up San Juan's hipster phase

San Juan is beginning to percolate, said David Amsden in *Condé Nast Traveler*. Not long ago, Puerto Rico's capital was the kind of vacation destination where "you put up with mediocre food and ignore the local culture in exchange for a lounge chair facing the ocean." But in part because steep tax breaks for investment income are bringing in wealthy young Americans from the mainland, neighborhoods that once were best avoided now welcome after-dark exploration. In short, the city might well remind you of Brooklyn circa 1999—"scrappy but sophisticated," briefly occupying "that sweet transitional spot" where it is "still possible to feel part of a secret, part of something new and indisputably thrilling."

I had only been in San Juan a few hours recently when I happened upon my first happy surprise. Jose Enrique is one of the city's most celebrated young chefs, but the easiest way to find his eponymous res-



Hunting for adventure in Condado

taurant on a mostly deserted street in the Santurce district is simply to look for the attractive young people gathered outside, waiting for tables with cocktails in hand. The group I dined with on stools at the bar "soon felt like old friends." Not far away, on Calle Loíza, I passed a "whiskey pizzeria" and a small-plates restaurant operating out of a bright-yellow shipping

container, and every venue was "teeming with people." One formerly vacant lot was hosting outdoor film screenings.

Neighborhood after neighborhood seemed to be undergoing a similar transition. Puerta de Tierra, once a high-crime area, has emerged as the city's first art and design district. The old auto-repair zone, Tras Talleres, now feels like "the street-art capital of the Caribbean, with intricate graffiti covering every other building." One sunny day after a particularly long night of hot-spot-hopping, a friend took me to an old-school restaurant for a lunch of fried steak and plantains. Once again, "I could have been in Brooklyn, with one notable exception: Less than a mile away I was able to find a nearly empty stretch of beach, where, in the shade of a palm tree, I happily passed out."

At the Olive Boutique Hotel in the Condado district ([oliveboutiquehotel.com](http://oliveboutiquehotel.com)), doubles start at \$149.

### Hotel of the week



A touch of SoHo serenity

#### The Broome

New York City

At SoHo's newest boutique hotel, visitors are greeted by a "particularly French je ne sais quoi," said Matt Chaban in the *New York Daily News*. Though the building's façade is pure 19th-century Gotham and all the furnishings are American-made, the four French proprietors can't help evoking the charm and elegance of Paris. Guest rooms are small but comfortable, there's a café and wine bar downstairs, and every room opens onto a "breathtaking" four-story courtyard ringed with iron railings. At times, that courtyard is so sunny and peaceful, it feels like "a passport to Provence." [theroomnyc.com](http://theroomnyc.com); doubles from \$323

### Getting the flavor of...

#### Blackbeard's island refuge

Even tourist crowds haven't destroyed the "refreshingly unpretentious" atmosphere of North Carolina's Ocracoke Island, said Diane Daniel in *The Boston Globe*. When I visited last fall, the island's mile-square village still felt like an isolated fishing settlement and I happened upon locals who still spoke Ocracoke's signature brogue. But even when summer day-trippers pour in by ferry, there's always room at the beach, because this southernmost strip of the Outer Banks features 16 miles of undeveloped national seashore. Rent a bike or golf cart—it's "the perfect place for poking around." While pedaling back from an 1823 lighthouse one day, I happened upon a sandy lane lined with 19th-century homes, then headed to Springer's Point Preserve to watch the sun set. The pirate Blackbeard was killed in a bloody battle just off the point, and it wasn't at all hard to imagine why he'd anchor in the pretty location.

#### A late-night bath at Big Sur

Four decades after I first enjoyed a post-midnight soak in one of the hot springs in Big Sur, Calif., the experience "has lost none of its capacity to inspire," said Thomas J. Lueck in *The New York Times*. Guests of the Esalen Institute can enjoy seven cliffside baths between workshops on yoga or Eastern religions, but the famous countercultural center has long opened the baths late at night for other visitors. Reservations and a \$25 fee are required, and from Monterey, it's an "insanely twisting" 90-minute drive to reach Esalen for the 1 a.m. starting time. Clothing is optional once the 20 nightly visitors step out of the changing rooms and start finding their way toward the baths, but even faces are "obscured by darkness and steam," and self-consciousness is generally overwhelmed by "sheer wonder" at the setting. Our small group fell silent quickly as we soaked, listening to the churning ocean below and watching a full moon rise above the Pacific.

### Last-minute travel deals

#### Off-season Colorado

Enjoy hiking, biking, golfing, and more in Colorado's beautiful Vail Valley. Through May 31, doubles at the Westin Riverfront Resort & Spa start at \$161 a night, or 65 percent off peak-season rates. Book by April 30. [westinriverfrontbeavercreek.com](http://westinriverfrontbeavercreek.com)

#### Discover Colombia

Book an all-inclusive, 11-day tour of Colombia before April 24 and save up to \$800 per couple. The trip that departs on Sept. 13 starts at \$2,099 and includes stays in Bogotá, Medellín, the Coffee Triangle, and Cartagena. [smartours.com](http://smartours.com)

#### A cabin on the Pacific coast

Through June 15, enjoy third nights free on Washington's Pacific coastline at the Iron Springs Resort, a rustic resort at Copalis Beach that offers guided clam digs. The resort's recently updated cabins start at \$149 a night. [ironspringsresort.com](http://ironspringsresort.com)