



## **Newsletter 1**

January 2020

Hello YASC volunteers,

¡Bienvenidos a Puerto Rico! Welcome to Puerto Rico! Thank you very much for joining us in the first YASC trip to Puerto Rico. This inaugural trip includes 53 volunteers of diverse ages and backgrounds, with Yale alumni, their friends and family. We're planning a fun and educational trip as well as a meaningful volunteer experience. Now more than ever, Puerto Rico needs our support.

You may have heard of the earthquakes currently hitting south of the Island. San Juan has experienced minimal disruption but our ground partners at INE and Vamonos Tours continue to monitor the situation. Here's the latest update from our travel logistics partner:

<https://www.vamonostours.com/blog/>

YASC is not set up as a disaster relief organization. If you'd like to support local organizations serving those in the affected areas, here is some information:

<https://www.charitynavigator.org/index.cfm?bay=content.view&cpid=5356>

Volunteer safety is our paramount concern. As of today, the trip is on. However, given the unpredictable nature of earthquakes, I strongly encourage the purchase of trip cancellation insurance.

This is the first of a number of newsletters designed to provide pertinent, relevant information for our trip. Please take the time to read them, before you get on the flight!

## **YASC TEAM**

The YASC Puerto Rico 2020 team is comprised by: Elena Labrada MD '86, volunteer trip producer, João Aleixo, Director of Yale Alumni Service Programs, Bernardo Benetti, Vamonos Tours and Instituto Nueva Escuela, our NGO on the island. We have all been working to provide the best volunteer experience for you.

I'm a full time Child, Adolescent and Adult Psychiatrist in private practice in Menlo Park, California. This will be my 5<sup>th</sup> YASC trip. I've been to Ghana, India, Cuba and Cape Town, serving as a volunteer and/or team leader on different trips. But this trip is much more personal. I was born and raised in San Juan. And even though I have not lived full time on the island since 1982, it's still the place I consider home. Most Puerto Ricans in the diaspora feel the same way. That's the impact this little island has on her inhabitants. I hope you get to feel the warmth, vibrancy and resilience of Puerto Rico.



Elena



João

## PROJECTS

Most of you have been assigned to your first choice. Team leaders will be reaching out to you very soon. I'm very grateful to the following volunteers who've agreed to serve as team leaders: Ed Weiss '92 MD (Athletics), Santiago Villazon '88, '92 MD (Construction), Judy Crawford '76 (Education) and Rosalia Burke '92 (Public Health). Please respond to their emails. Each team will be responsible for developing their own service program, based on the requests received from our host schools. Team leaders have been advised of current needs but those may continue evolving as we get more details from the schools. Public schools are now closed until 1/22/20 to allow inspections following the recent earthquakes.



## TRAVEL

It's time to start booking your flights to Puerto Rico. Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport serves the metro area in San Juan. You're responsible for booking all your airfare and travel arrangements as they are not included in your YASC registration fee. You are expected to arrive Saturday March 7, 2020; the program ends Sunday March 15, 2020. Once you have your flights set, please forward the information to [Francheska@vamonostours.com](mailto:Francheska@vamonostours.com).

The [Verdanza Hotel](#) will serve as home base for the week. The hotel is less than 10 minutes from the airport. There are plenty of transportation options to get you there including taxis and Uber. Check in is at 3pm, but if you arrive earlier, the Verdanza can hold your bags and you can use the hotel pool or walk a block to the beach. Our group rate will be honored 3 days before and after our program. To book additional nights please contact Bernardo Benetti [bernardo@vamonostours.com](mailto:bernardo@vamonostours.com).

## **TRAVEL HEALTH**

No specific vaccines or travel advisories are in place for Puerto Rico. Always check with your primary care doctor for particular concerns. I also recommend taking a look at the CDC travel website, full of valuable information. <https://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/destinations/traveler/none/puerto-rico>

## **TRAVEL WITH A MINOR**

As a US territory, all US travel regulations apply.

## **VISAS**

No visas or passports are needed if you're a US citizen. All you need to travel to Puerto Rico from the mainland is a TSA compliant ID. For most of you, this will be your driver's license. Please check with your embassy for entry requirements if you hold a foreign passport.

## **WEATHER**

Puerto Rico has a tropical climate. Expect moderate to high humidity and heat. The sun shines more brightly, so make sure you bring plenty of sunscreen and a hat. San Juan in March sees temperatures ranging from 75° - 85°. Rain is common in the tropics. It's not uncommon to experience showers for an hour and then bright sun again.

## **SIM CARDS**

All major US cellphone carriers have either their own network or roaming agreements on the island. Your cellphone should work as if you are on the mainland. You should not be billed for roaming.



## **To Do's List**

Please send João your release form and current photo, if you've not done so already.

Book your flights and send the arrival information to [Francheska@vamonostours.com](mailto:Francheska@vamonostours.com)

Purchase trip insurance.

Respond to your team leader promptly.

Feel free to contact me with questions or concerns. I can be reached at [elenascpr2020@gmail.com](mailto:elenascpr2020@gmail.com)

Until our next newsletter,

Elena Labrada MD

Yale '86

[elenascpr2020@gmail.com](mailto:elenascpr2020@gmail.com)

Trip Producer