

Bioluminescent Bay

The Bioluminescent Bay of Vieques is a precious natural wonder whose waters are home to billions of photosynthetic plankton called dinoflagellates .

The dinoflagellates of Vieques emit a harmless blue glow when they are disturbed by the movement of a passing swimmer, or even a fish swimming by. You can sometimes witness this phenomenon in the ocean when the temperature and salinity are right, but because the environment in the bio bays is perfect for dinoflagellates, their population is in the billions, all the time.

Which makes for an amazingly beautiful light show on dark, moonless nights.

There are several eco-tour companies offering regular evening trips to the bioluminescent bays of Vieques. Most involve getting wet, so be prepared with a swimsuit and a towel. We opted to go with Blue Caribe Kayaks , located at Esperanza.

After meeting in Esperanza, and a short ride in the back of the truck to Bio Bay, we unloaded our kayaks and launched from a break in the mangrove surrounding the bay. It was very dark but we had many flashlights and the guides were helpful in getting and keeping everyone organized.

It's a bit eerie paddling a kayak in the dark on a strange body of water, but it was also a lot of fun. That's part of the adventure of the experience. The water is warm and comfortable and the guide has a glow rod that we could all see from quite a distance.

We paddled around the center of the bay following the guide as he gave us a natural history lesson about the bay.

At different points in the voyage, some of us got into the water and swam around flapping our arms like angel's wings to see what ethereal designs we could create with our microscopic glow-in-the-dark "paint". The effect was beautiful to see, and especially bright on a moonless night. Bluish green trails followed every movement, from an arm waving to a swimmer's kick.

Unfortunately, you can't really capture the full effect on film. Maybe on a very sensitive digital camera—which I personally have not tested. Some interesting photos exist which have been enhanced to simulate the effect, I'm told, including the one accompanying this article.

After an hour or so of paddling and swimming, it was time to head back, load up the kayaks and drive back to Esperanza. As we all rode in the truck, we shared stories of our experiences with each other and talked of other things we had done while in Vieques and were planning to do. It was nice to make some new friends and a real treat to have seen the ethereal beauty of such a rare and unusual phenomenon as the dinoflagellates of Bioluminescent Bay.