About the Island of Vieques

Vieques Island, or La Isla Nina — Little Girl Island — located only 8 miles off the eastern tip of the island of Puerto Rico, remains the less-visited secret of the Caribbean. Immense beaches stretch for miles around beautifully curved bays, calling to the beachcomber in all. In the busy winter season, savvy tourists from the snowbound US and around the world make their way to this uncrowded island paradise to enjoy the slow pace of the Vieques lifestyle. But a visit here during the hotter summer months is not to be dismissed quite so easily. One person's heat is another's comfort zone—adding up to a less crowded island vacation. Why else would Puerto Rican's take their vacations during August on Vieques? What secrets do they know of the island that we do not?

{mosgoogle}Vieques is about 21 miles long and about 5 miles at it's widest point. It stretches from West to East between the main island of Puerto Rico and St. Thomas. The first known inhabitants of the island were Taino Indians who are believed to have come from South America. The arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1493 began a long history of failed colonization attempts which finally ended in 1843. It was occupied by the English for part of its history and also was known as a hideout for pirates. Under the Spanish, the construction of Fortin Conde Mirasol began in 1845 to protect the island, but was used as both a barracks and a jail, but the exterior fortifications were never finished. During that time there was much strife between the Spaniards and the Indians and other ethnic groups who were coerced as slave labor to harvest gold from the land and then eventually cash crops like sugar cane and ginger. As a result, modern Puerto Rico is a mix of hispanic, african and european ethnic cultures.

The United States invaded Vieques in 1898 during the Spanish-American War leading to a military and corporate presence in Puerto Rico that exists to this day. The Navy occupied the islands of Vieques and Culebra, both of which became important military strongholds in the region. Vieques served as a munitions storage (on the west side) and a bombing range (on the east). Military exercises ceased in 2003 during which the Navy left and the island was returned to Puerto Rico.

As a result of this latter part of its history, Vieques island has remained largely undeveloped and is undergoing a careful period of planned development to insure it retains its natural beauty while creating an infrastructure to provide jobs for its residents and develop its tourism industry.

Vieques provides a diverse experience for visitors who want to feel like they've wandered off from the beaten trail of other more developed islands in the Caribbean.