



Getting a Puerto Rican Driver's Licence

Nice to Know – May 2006

By: Jodie Cable-Treadwell

I had been told that one needs a PR drivers licence to drive here (even US citizens) and that you have 3 months in which to obtain one. Now, like many of you, it wasn't high on my priority list of things to do. However, after hearing a few horror stories about local police confiscating vehicles and that some insurance companies won't pay out claims where the driver doesn't have a PR licence, I wanted to know more.

So, after many calls to the Department of Transport, being passed around, cut off or the phone simply not answered I was losing the will to be a good resident. That's when Newcomer member Rhonda Scaiano volunteered to take myself and fellow member Kathryn Lovell, us there – having just gone through the process herself. The Department is on the east end of road 848 in Carolina (I believe there is one in Bayamon too). It is easy to miss with very little signage, but it's in the same complex as Direct TV and is sort of behind Toys 'r' Us.

There are a few steps to the process:

1. Take originals and copies of your birth certificate, passport (with I94 immigration card) and drivers licence to Janet Alicea (you can take your partners too). She will submit them to the Department of Homeland Security (for verification) and contact you in 20-30 days. While you are there, ask Alicea for an application form and an update of the fines (which will be in the written test). You also need the rules book (from Dept. of Transport or Walgreens - in English) but make sure it is the most recent edition. Alicea will advise you what tax stamps and photos you will need to bring for the written test. You can get the tax stamps from the Department or you can one-stop-shop the stamps, photos and doctors examination from one of the places around the Department (you'll see the signs).

2. When Alicea calls you (20-30 days), you can sit the written test. You will need your completed application, tax stamps and photos.

3. Providing you pass, you can make an appointment (on the same day) to take the drivers test in approx. 2 weeks.

Now, I must say, this process is for licence holders from Canada, Australia and the UK. It may be different for other countries. I have heard that USA licences can simply be swapped for a PR one. However, it would pay to check it out.

Kathryn and I are up to step 2 now, having just got the call from Alicea. I will give you an update in the next edition of Coqui Courier.

Department of Transport – Drivers Licence

Contact: Janet Alicea 787-701 3343

Mon-Fri 7:30-11:00am and 1:00- 3:00pm

Part 2 – June 2008

I have had lots of interest and a few calls from NC members who read my last article on getting a Puerto Rican drivers licence and wanted to offer their experiences.....

Fellow member, Donald Padgett, called me to advise that he recently renewed his Puerto Rican licence and had great success. He used an agent who, for just \$35, organised everything - filled in the application, took and developed the 4 photos, gave the required physical (by a doctor) and even included the tax stamp! He said the whole process took 20 minutes and he had a brand-new Puerto Rican drivers licence. The hardest part was finding the place. They are called Expresso Photo Medico. They speak excellent English, accept payment by ATH, MasterCard and Visa (I assume cash too). Tel: 787-257 8690. They are right in front of Direct TV in Carolina (where the Department of Transport is) in a gas station. If your licence has been revoked they promise to get it back for you and they do passports too.

Donald thinks that Florida and New York are the only 2 states that Puerto Rico will accept a licence from for a straight swap. He had a US Virgin Islands licence which he couldn't swap.

He also said that the toughest part of the process is the application. First of all it is in Spanish and there was over 100 people in line to get the application form.

For more information, call Donald on 787-722 4541.

Catalina Garay (787-731 0910) also called me to advise that the driving test is pretty hard. Her son failed a number of times before they got a driving instructor – which she highly recommends. Apparently, the instructor can also assist with the application, photos, tax stamp, doctors physical etc too. She is happy to recommend the instructor they used. For more information, call Catalina.



Vehicle Registration / DTOP / Marbete

Nice to Know – January 2008

By: Izara Mosby

I'm back again after spending three glorious weeks in Ireland renewing our Visa's, and enjoying ceol agus craic [fun & music, a good Irish time] with our families and friends. The flight home was a great eye opener to make me realize I will not travel on my own again with two small children. From the moment we left our home in San Juan, everything went wrong, flight from San Juan to New York been delayed three hours therefore we missed our connection to Ireland and ended up going through London and then having to deal with an extra flight, an extra 12 hours travel, two very tired and cranky children and a very stressed mummy!!!!

Anyway, I decided to do a little investigation this month on the "Marbete" as mine is up for renewal the end of January. The Marbete is the sticker on the windscreen (windshield) of your car. For a lot of Expats if you are lucky enough to have two cars from your husband's employer then you probably won't have to deal with this, but for the rest of us, we're on our own.....

So, what happens? Well every car in Puerto Rico has to have this Marbete sticker to drive on the roads under PR law, which is evidence that the road tax is paid. And it's issued by the DTOP (DEPARTAMENTO DE TRANSPORTACION Y OBRAS PUBLICAS) for all cars 2 years of age and older.

When we bought our Jeep here two years ago, the dealer made all the arrangements for the "marbete". Last year, I received all the documentation in the mail and had to go to the nearest Banco Popular to pay the fee of \$184 and this renewed it for a further year. However, this year I have to attend one of the numerous inspection centers to have the car inspected prior to renewing the Marbete. A neighbour of mine uses the Apollo Texaco Servicentro Ave. Apollo Esq. Mercury in Guaynabo (telephone no 787-720-7945 and 787-720-9729) which is very close to us, so that's where I'll probably have my car inspected. Assuming the vehicle is in good order, it should just be the basic inspection fee of approx \$11, but any items needed to bring the car up to standard will be charged at the usual cost. Following the inspection is the various paperwork and fee of approx \$184 (depending on vehicle and value) in order to get the new Marbete sticker for a further 12 months.

Actually, that all sounds kinda simple, and from what I've been told, it is actually something here in PR that is simple (don't even ask about the trouble to have the equivalent for a car sticker in Ireland.....you'll send my stress levels back to post home leave levels!!!!).

There are numerous other locations to have this done, including Tropicool Servicentro Los Maestros, Ave. Luis Muñoz Sufrent 462 Urb. Los Maestros Río Piedras, and the other is Tropicool Servicentro Los Maestros, 676 138 Ave Winston Churchill. Alternatively you can look up www.tropicoolautoservice.com or email them at info@tropicoolautoservice.com or speak to my neighbour Tito, who may offer to take the car for you and bring it back

"taxed and waxed", all for the price of a Cuba Libre, a six pack of Heineken and a spicy bowl of Chicken Vindaloo.

It's advisable to call in advance as I have been advised they do not accept credit cards or cheques, so take enough cash!!!!

Outstanding traffic violation fines have to be paid before your "Marbete" will be renewed. It is possible to do this at some of the inspection centers, but anyone with a less than clean (and even less than informed other half) may want to pay your dues to avoid embarrassing moments with the Marbete process.

Finally a word of warning before you go to renew your Marbete.....don't leave your renewal until the end of the month. It's kind of a popular time (after pay day) so you just know that the queues will be a mile long!



Insurance Claims - Stories & Advice

Nice to Know – December 2007 & January 2008

By: Yolanda Pagan

Part I

Tomas and I had the dubious experience of filing 7 insurance claims in the first year of living in Puerto Rico. The first 3 claims were for hidden damages on our 1st car, a Toyota Corolla that was going to be transferred financially to us when it was stolen. The next 2 were for a bad leak in our bedroom closet while we were traveling for 2 months in the States, and the last 2 were for our new RAV4. All claims had positive outcomes, though we hadn't expected such a thorough education in insurance.

General Advice

Like many people, I set up my home and car insurance with a broker, asked a few questions and when I got my policies, I resolved to delve into them at a future time, which has yet to occur. I have this advice for anyone who has to claim damages to their property here in Puerto Rico. Become familiar with your policy and/or get a really good agent/broker who advises you well and when it comes time to claim be mentally and emotionally prepared to:

1. Act quickly, call your insurer and ask what you need to do. There are clauses in your policies that can penalize/exempt you for delaying.
2. Gather your proof of damages: police reports, buy appropriate Government Collection Agencies stamps/Colecturia stamps for the police reports (in case of car accidents/stolen cars), pictures, eyewitness or expert statements, estimates for repairs, etc.
3. Be persistent/follow up with the insurance company, police department, and anyone else that is involved. Keep track of whom you've spoken to and the date you spoke to that person and what they said. The next time you call, be prepared to say you've called umpteen times and were promised so and so, as sweetly and empathetically as possible, to get people to help you. I followed up with the condo's insurance broker for almost 4 months, before I received a check I could deposit. The police report for the RAV4 accident was not ready for almost a month and Tomas went to the police department about 6 times before it was ready. I am referring to the tracking sheet I created during the insurance claim process for my condo, to write this article.
4. Keep Calm and Focus on Positive Outcomes.

Car Insurance Claims for Hidden Damages

For the car that was stolen, once all the major repairs had been done, under the previous owner's directions and insurance, we noticed some things that had not been caught in the first major overhaul. We learned that one could keep going back to the insurer to file for those "hidden damages". In our case, all 3 claims were honored. But each time something was discovered, we had to run to the Toyota repair shop in Caguas, wait while we got an estimate to then

go to the insurance company and wait to see our adjuster to submit the new claim and then wait again while our adjuster reviewed the claim and agreed to pay us. Then we had to take the car back to Toyota to do the repair. Each time we left the car at Toyota for an estimate and repair, we were left without a car. Ask your insurance broker/agent if your policy will provide you with a replacement car when your car is in the shop. It's worth it to pay extra for this. Our current policy has such a provision, and as you know, it is great to have a set of wheels in Puerto Rico.

The insurance company's head mechanic looked over all the repairs that had been done on our stolen Corolla, and gave us a list which showed which missing parts had been replaced with new and old parts. Many important parts were replaced with old parts when the major overhaul was done. A non-Toyota repair shop had done the major overhaul. We didn't like this, and soon after, we traded in the newly overhauled Corolla for a brand new RAV4.

Leak Claim for Contents

With the leak in our master bedroom closet, there were damages to our clothes and shoes (e.g. contents) as well all the walls and minor damages to 2 bathrooms (e.g. structure). Because we live in a condo, the contents are covered by our home insurance, while the structure is covered by the condo's insurance. Both claims were honored.

When we saw the leak we had the upstairs neighbor, the condo's manager, and the condo's plumber come to our apartment to observe damages. The neighbor stopped running her shower after this and both the manager and plumbers signed statements I wrote describing the damages. We provided the following to our home insurance adjuster 5 days after we discovered damages:

1. An inventory of items damaged, without specific values, since we no longer had receipts for the clothes and shoes. The adjuster came to our home to verify items and values to come up with an estimate for the damages.
2. Reason for damages: broken pipe in our upstairs neighbor's bathroom verified with the plumber and manager's written statement.
3. 15 pictures of all the places and things with damages: The pictures showed closet walls covered with fungus and buckling, and clothes and shoes covered with fungus. The pictures were really disgusting looking and convincing as proof. The adjuster had a chance to walk into the closet, look at it and smell it.

We were made an offer by the insurer shortly after the adjuster came, which we accepted. We were paid 2 weeks after the claim was submitted, which made us very happy. Our upstairs neighbor felt so bad about the wreck in our apartment due to her broken pipe, she paid the deductible for our contents.

Leak Claim for Structure

Filing for contents was not a straightforward process. In our innocence/ignorance we had thought the structure would be covered by our home insurance coverage, which was not so. Then we were discouraged from applying for coverage by the condo manager's strong opinion that it would be highly unlikely if we were paid. So 3 weeks after discovering the leak, without much hope, we applied to the condo's insurance company for the structural damages. I filled out a one-page form for this company and made an appointment with one of their adjusters. I also asked if we could start repairs and were told that we could, if we had substantiating proof of damages. During this time the opened damaged closet, would provoke me into squawking to Tomas, my husband, *are you trying to kill me?* Tomas was undeterred. He emptied the closet and was able to salvage most of the clothes and shoes. He personally cleaned everything. I am deeply affected by mold and if he had not been willing to this ugly job, I would have paid someone to haul everything to the landfill. Tomas had also started taking down the rotted fungus filled walls. When the condo broker's adjuster finally came, three weeks after this claim was filed, Tomas had gotten the closet down to the wet cinderblocks. The adjuster, a subcontractor for the insurance broker's firm, promised to have his report in to the company within 3 weeks and said our claim was valid. He liked the professional report I had with pictures, the condo manager's and plumber's statements, and repair estimates. He even took the higher of the two estimates we had obtained. He said it more accurately reflected the true costs of repair. Five weeks after this, the condo's insurance broker made an offer for the full amount we claimed minus the condo insurance deductible. We accepted it. The company then proceeded to lose the check. Three months and three weeks after this claim's submittal, I had learned or been driven to use the insurance company's most dreaded statement: I will contact the Insurance Commissioner to complain that you have exceeded the legal 3 month limit you have to resolve a claim. Saying one is going to go to DACO is apparently not an effective phrase. This worked so well that one of the Brokerage company's senior administrators, not only hand-delivered the first lost and cancelled check, but also its replacement, a few days later. The Good News in all this was that Tomas became inspired to redo the closet himself. After tearing the walls down, he rebuilt, finished, and painted them. Then he designed and installed a closet system we love. With the money we saved on repairs, we bought a GE Profile refrigerator (replacing our somewhat functional and very old refrigerator) and a 32" Flatscreen TV (for Tomas' birthday)!!

Part II

Part II, is going to be about claims to RAV4, for an insurance accident and another claim that was denied by condo insurance company, though it did give us a better parking location, where our car is so protected, it is no longer being scratched by delivery trucks. As I write this article, I am waiting for the right passenger bumper on my RAV4 to be replaced and I am driving a Toyota Corolla issued by my insurance company at no additional cost. It took me two days to gather the information for filing, but once I went to the insurance company, a check was surprisingly issued, within half an hour. My fender bender brings our total number of claims to 8 while living in Puerto Rico, in less than two years.

General Advice when there is an Accident

1. Act quickly, call your insurer and ask what you need to do.
2. Gather your proof of damages.
3. Be persistent and follow up.
4. Keep Calm and Focus on Positive Outcomes.

Car Accident Insurance Claims

In the United States it is customary when drivers are in fender benders for them to exchange names, license numbers and insurance information. In Puerto Rico no information need be passed between drivers. Both Tomas & I have been in fender benders, and neither of the drivers that hit us was willing to provide us with insurance or license information. The

police officers involved both concurred with the Puerto Rican drivers, no information need be given. Here is what you are supposed to do if you are in a fender bender:

1. All drivers should leave their cars at the accident site, ideally.
2. Call the police and wait for them to arrive. Program your cell phone with state and municipal police numbers.
3. The police will take a statement from both drivers, insurance information, license numbers, plates, etc.
4. The officer will give you his/her card with a partial accident report number (Numero de Querella).
5. Ask the officer when they will have the full accident report number. Call them to get this number. You need it for your insurance claim.
6. Visit a car repair shop approved by your insurer for an estimate.
7. At the insurance agency, file an accident report damages estimate.
8. The insurance adjuster will take pictures of the car's damaged areas, odometer, and prepare a Mitchell Service report, itemizing their own estimate for repairs. The adjuster will call the repair shop and using the Mitchell Service numbers make them an offer, which is less than the shop's estimate.
9. Once the insurer and shop agree on an amount, the adjuster will issue you a check for the agreed amount minus your deductible.

Do Wait for the Police if Possible

With my fender bender, I did not wait for the police. The other driver—who was driving a large moving truck, which sustained no damages in the accident—agreed to give me his first and last name and cell number. I took his plate number as well. We agreed to file the report later. I didn't have my cell with me and the guy gave me the wrong number. In order to file with the police, I had to file the accident as a hit and run. Had he been at his number, we both would have needed to go to the police together to file the accident report.

Jurisdiction

The site of the accident determines with which police precinct you have to file. I tried filing at two police departments in Hato Rey and I was sent to the police precinct in Bayamon, which had jurisdiction.

How to Recover Your Deductible

Tomas filed for a fender bender and was able to obtain the \$500 deductible from our insurer, because in the accident report issued by the officer, Tomas was exonerated from any fault and the other driver was found negligent. Our insurance company happened to be the other driver's insurance company, as well. Had the driver's insurance company been different, I believe Tomas would have had to file for the deductible with the other driver's company. In order for Tomas to obtain this report, he followed up over weeks and in order "to buy" the report he had to obtain government stamps at a government collection agency (A Colecturia). I believe one is supposed to file with the police within 24 hours of an accident.

Lowering the Deductible

Having only filed once for a minor car accident, in the States, I have always kept my deductibles high on all my property insurance. Here in Puerto Rico shortly after Tomas' accident, we had the experience of nearly being blown out of our lane by a maniac. We drove straight to the insurance agency and we dropped the car deductible from \$500 to \$250, which increased our premiums.

Filing a Car Claim with My Co-op's Insurance Company

Our new RAV4 sustained all kinds of scratches on its two passenger doors, due to the negligence of drivers, which parked next to us, in a service area, which was originally designed for a normal sized tenant's car. After repeated letters to the board and management we filed a claim for damages. The co-op's insurance policy explicitly does not cover damages to private property in public areas, so we were denied this claim. However we received an even better result: the co-op board moved our parking spot to the best spot in the parking lot, where our car is now secure.



Mail Forwarding Service

Nice to Know – December 2007

By: Patti Wehrs

Excerpt from the Illinois Postmaster News, October 2007.

This is the season to remind residential customers about the benefits of the US Postal Service's new service – **Premium Forwarding Service (PFS)**. With **PFS**, snowbirds looking ahead to winter getaways, students heading away to college, individuals caring for family members in other cities, or business executives who are back on the road again can "take their mail, too," when they travel. It's a great alternative to temporary forwarding and hold mail options.

Anyone who is going to be away from home for at least two weeks, or as long as one year, is eligible to sign up for **PFS**. The Postal Service (the carrier/box clerk) takes virtually all of the mail sent to the individual's permanent address and reships it to the temporary address by Priority Mail once a week. The customer pays a one-time enrollment fee of \$10.00, and weekly reshipment fees of \$11.95.

Express Mail and Registered Mail shipments and items requiring a signature or scan are sent ahead separately, immediately upon receipt. Parcel Post, Bound Printed Matter, Media Mail, and Library Mail pieces, as well as pieces with HAZMAT (Hazardous Materials) markings, will be shipped postage due at the same mail class and postage rate under which the item was originally sent.

For complete terms and conditions for PFS, go on line:
<http://www.usps.com/receive/premiumforwarding/termsandconditions.htm>.

Premium Forwarding Service offers a lot of advantages for the customers on the go:

- Their permanent address does not change, and the temporary address is not provided to mailers.
- Customers won't miss important mail while they are away.
- The week's mail goes out the same day every week.

Premium Forwarding Service is a new service that the US Postal Service has filed a request with the Postal Regulatory Commission to make **PFS** a permanent offering, with no increase in prices.

To obtain more information about **Premium Forwarding Service**, you are encouraged to stop by your Post Office or go online to <http://www.usps.com/receive/premiumforwarding/termsandconditions.htm>.

Look for both Sign 615 and Publication 615 in your full-service Post Office lobby.

PFS is available only to and from domestic addresses, not including APOs, FPOs and other destinations requiring a Customs Declaration such as ZIP Code 969.

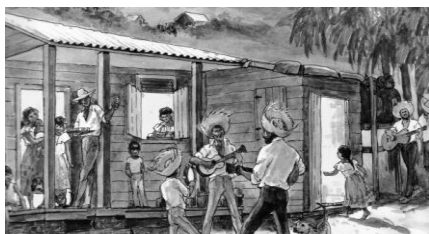
Great for Snowbirds & those on the road again!



A Puerto Rican Christmas

Nice to Know – December 2007

By: Jodie Cable-Treadwell



It's Christmas, we live in PR (some of our children were even born here!) so let's explore the local Navidad spirit.

Navidad is the best of Puerto Rican culture. Nowhere else is Christmas celebrated like in Borinquen. Navidad is the time of tradition, aguinaldos, décimas, y de ser jíbaro Puertorriqueño.

Christmas celebrations in Puerto Rico begin very early in December and do not stop on December 25th. The celebrations can continue into the middle of January if you consider the "octavas and octavitas". The big Christmas celebrations are; December 24 - Nochebuena; December 25 - Navidad; December 31 - Despedida de Año; and the biggest and most important of all for the children, of course, el Día de Reyes (Three Kings Day) on January 6th.

What makes our Christmas different? First, most "Ricans" pretend to be jíbaros (or claim to be from el campo) during the holidays. We have a "pava" (traditional straw-hat) in storage just for Christmas.

Puerto Ricans are known for their unforgettable "parrandas or trullas navideñas". A parranda is when a small group of friends gathers together to "asaltar" or surprise another friend. It's the Puerto Rican version of Christmas caroling. Most parranderos play some sort of instrument, either guitarras, tamboriles, güiro maracas, or palitos. And they all sing. A parranda tends to be more secular than religious however many of the traditional aguinaldos (Puerto Rican Christmas songs) retain the holiday spirit. The parranderos arrive at the destination and then very quietly gather by the front door. At a signal all start playing their instruments and singing. The parrandas usually begin after 10pm in order to surprise and wake the sleeping friend. The parranderos are invited in and refreshments, music and dance follow. Of course we don't surprise unsuspecting victims. The parranderos are given plenty of "hints" before hand by the homeowner that he is ready to receive a parranda. The party goes on for an hour or two then everyone, including the owners of the house, leave to parrandear some more. The group grows as they offer their parranda at several houses during that night. At the last house probably around 3 or 4 in the morning the homeowner offers the traditional chicken soup or asopao de pollo. The party is over at dawn.

Part of the holiday festivities includes cooking a pig on a spit. Most Puerto Ricans will feel their Christmas was a little incomplete if they did not get to participate or enjoy an old

fashioned lechón asao. Cooking the pig is a big event. The pig is purchased and prepared a couple of days ahead. On the "big day" the pig is mounted on a stick and put to cook as early as 4 in the morning. At least two people must be on "watch" with the pig to turn it and make sure all goes well. Friends and relatives begin arriving later in the morning (this is an all day party.) While the pig roasts there is lots of holiday music. Older women will be in the kitchen cooking side dishes that will accompany the lechón. Children will be playing tag and getting in trouble. Guests bring traditional holiday desserts.

Traditional Puerto Rican Christmas foods such as pasteles, lechón asado, arroz con dulce, tembleque, and coquito give Puerto Ricans a separate identity from the rest of the world. Before Puerto Rican traditions became influenced by American culture Christmas Day was a joyful day and some gifts were received at some houses, but it was not from San Nicolás. Santa couldn't make it to the tropics in his hot wool suit with cap and reindeer. Our holiday gifts used to be from Los Reyes Magos.

A traditional Año Viejo, New Year's Eve, celebration is spent with lots of family and friends. But before the party begins Puerto Ricans spend the entire day cleaning the house, yard, cars, and even sweeping the street. Why? It is believed that whatever the condition in which the New Year finds our property, that is how our property will stay for the rest of the year. Out with the old and in with the new. And also pass out baggies with 12 grapes that people need to start eating when there are 12 seconds to the New Year. Those who can eat them by Midnight will have good luck that year. Other Puerto Rican traditions include: After all the hugs and kisses are over have someone recite the poem (see www.elboricua.com) or listen to a recording. Serve bacalaitos because it's an inexpensive and real Puerto Rican party food. Toast the year with Cidra.

Our Reyes celebration begins on the eve of Three Kings Day. On the evening of January 5th Puerto Rican children go outside with scissors and shoe boxes to cut grass for the camels to eat. The grass goes into shoe boxes and the boxes are placed under the beds of parents, grandparents, godparents, uncles, aunts, etc. Some time during the night Los Reyes come and while their camels eat the grass Los Reyes fill the shoe boxes to overflowing with gifts, and sweets, and many wonderful things.

Puerto Ricans traditionally continued to celebrate Las Navidades until after Los Reyes. Celebrations began early in December and continued until almost February - with the Octavas, right after Los Reyes, and then the Octavitas. Make sure your children experience an old fashioned parranda. And don't forget to celebrate Los Reyes. It makes unforgettable memories.

From: www.elboricua.com

Navidad Menu

Traditional Puerto Rican Christmas menu. Source: www.elboricua.com

Pernil Al Horno (roast pork shoulder)

- 5 lbs. pork shoulder - picnic cut (with fat)
- 7 garlic cloves (crushed & chopped)
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- ½ teaspoon crushed oregano
- 1½ tablespoons olive oil
- 1½ teaspoon salt
- 1 sm packet Sazon Goya



Method – Seasoning: combine garlic, salt, pepper, oregano, Sazon, and olive oil. Wash the meat and pat dry. Cut the fat away from the meat keeping in one piece and keeping it connected enough so that you can access the meat. Season the side of the fat that goes over the meat (the top should only have salt). Cut very deep slits all over the meat and press in the seasoning. Put the fat back over the meat and sprinkle it with salt. Refrigerate the shoulder, covered with plastic wrap, for 24 hours. Let the meat get back into room temperature before cooking. (About one hour). Place the meat in a deep pan (min 2" – there will be a lot of grease) with the fat side up. The fat will make nice crunchy "cueritos." **Do NOT** cover with foil. Preheat oven to 400°F for at least 30 minutes. Cook for one hour, then reduce to 300°F for about 4 hours - **DO NOT TURN MEAT**. When the meat is done, prick it on the side with a fork to see if it shreds (if using a meat thermometer - cook to 185°F). If the "cuerito is not crispy, raise to 400°F and cook another 15 minutes or so. Remove from oven and let it rest on the counter for 20-30 minutes. Remove the cuerito completely and set aside. Carve the meat and then cut the cuerito into pieces and place over the meat. **Grill instructions** - In the summer we cook our pernil outside on the grill (to prevent the house from heating up). Follow all the instructions above. Put your pernil in a deep pan. But do cover with foil to prevent burning the meat - this means no cueritos. Put the pan on the grill. Cook a bit longer than if using the oven. Cook on high for the first half hour and then on low heat. Keep your eye on it.

Another traditional Navidad meat is Lechón en la Varita (or Lechón Asado) which is a whole pig cooked outdoors on a stick. The recipe is too long to feature here. Go to www.elboricua.com for full instructions.

Arroz Con Gandulez

- 2 cups short grain rice (rinsed) - long grain also works
- 4-5 cups of hot water - appx.
- ½ cup ready made sofrito
- 16 ounce can of gandules (cooked green pigeon peas)
- 2 tablespoons of alcaparrado (cappars and olives mixed together)
- 1 packet of Sazon with achiote
- 1 can tomato sauce
- 3 tablespoons of oil
- Salt & pepper to taste

Method - In a medium size pot add the oil, tomato sauce, alcaparrado, sofrito and sazón. Cook over medium heat for 4 minutes. Add all other ingredients, and enough water to cover the rice 1" above the rice line. Season and mix to taste. Bring to a boil and cook over high heat until most of the water is absorbed. Once the water has been absorbed, stir gently from bottom to top - once or twice only, cover and turn the heat down to low. Cook for 30

minutes or until the rice is tender. Stirring the rice after it has begun cooking may cause it to get sticky or "amogollao."

Mofongo

This is a side dish. It makes about 3 medium size balls.

- 1 small pack Tostones (buy frozen from supermarket)
- 1 tablespoon crushed garlic
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- ½ lb. chicharrón or cooked bacon (crumbled)
- Vegetable oil for frying

Method - Mix together the garlic olive oil and chicharrón or bacon. Mash the tostones (never use a food processor), adding the garlic mixture. Add salt if needed. Form into balls. Served warm.

Other Side Dishes – Pasteles, Tostones

Recipes for all of these can be found at www.elboricua.com, but honestly, the frozen ones in the supermarket are just fine.

Arroz con Dulce / Arroz con Coco (candied coconut rice)

- 1½ cups rice
- 4¼ cups coconut milk
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 3 cinnamon sticks
- 2 ounces ginger
- 6 whole cloves
- Pinch of nutmeg-optional
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup raisins
- ¾ cup coconut milk (reserve to use at the end)

Method - Wash rice and soak in plenty of water to cover for 2 hours. Combine the coconut milk, salt, cinnamon, ginger, cloves and nutmeg in a medium size pot. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to moderate, cover and boil for 15 minutes. Drain rice thoroughly and add to pot. Mix and bring to a boil over moderate heat. Reduce heat to low and cook until rice is completely dry, without stirring. Add the sugar and raisins, stir, and bring to a boil over moderate heat. Reduce heat to low and cook for another 15 minutes, without stirring. Add reserved ¾ cup coconut milk and stir. Turn heat to moderate and boil for about 30 minutes, or until rice dries again. In this cooking period, turn rice over occasionally and scrape bottom of pot. Remove spices. Spoon rice into a flat serving platter. Allow to cool at room temperature. This is served cold.

Another traditional dessert is the flan. Recipes on www.elboricua.com. (*Costco also does a great one!* – CC Ed)

Traditional Navidad Drinks (my favourite! – CC Ed)

Coquito - Combine 30 oz coconut milk, 14 oz condensed milk, 1 cup white rum, ½ cup of water, pinch of salt and ½ tsp cinnamon in a blender. Refrigerate in a bottle (it will thicken) and serve in small glassware.

Piña Colada - Combine 4 oz. coconut cream, 8 oz. white Puerto Rican rum, 12 oz. unsweetened pineapple juice and 3 cups of ice in a blender. Garnish with pineapple and maraschino cherries. Finish with **Café con Leche** (coffee with milk).

Note: Serve your traditional Puerto Rican holiday meal on a table decorated or covered with banana leaves (you can get these in the vegetable section of most supermarkets).





Dengue Fever

Nice to Know – September & November 2007

Nice to Know – September 2007

By: Izara Mosby

So, when people ask me what I think about Puerto Rico, I always reply the same. “Great, with the exception of the traffic and the mosquitoes”.

The traffic is pretty synonymous of any capital city, so just set of 10 minutes early and be patient. But the mosquitoes are something I’ll never get used to.

Coming from Ireland, I’m pretty much as white as can be; white as a candle in fact, and for some reason, mosquitoes just love me. I can sit outside with my husband with mosquito coils, Canola-oil lanterns, “Off” bug repellent spray, garden foggers and everything else on the market to keep the little blighters at bay, but they just munch away at me, having their daily meals at my expense. (My husband doesn’t even see them, never mind get nibbled). And this may sound weird, but fortunately the worst I get is a bout of uncontrollable itching, unsightly scabs (from itching) and every now and then I have a personal fit where I swear uncontrollably that if I ever meet Mother Nature, I’m gonna bite the living daylights out of her for inventing such a species. (I know, I know, no one ever said life was fair!!!).

So, what’s the thing that can make us unfortunate? Well, right here, right now, the thing we need to be careful about is the dreaded Dengue.

Yep, that’s right, Dengue. I’m sure you’ve all heard about it but how much do we really know? Read on and find out.

Dengue Fever and Dengue hemorrhagic fever are acute febrile (fever) diseases found in the tropics with a similar geographic spread as malaria. Often it starts with a sudden fever, severe headaches, muscle and joint pains, and a bright red rash which can cover most of the body. Additional symptoms include gastritis, abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Sometimes, milder cases of Dengue occur, and these can often be misdiagnosed as the common cold, flu or other viral infection. Usually lasting about a week, the ‘victim’s’ blood platelet count will drop, and basically (s)he will be out of action completely. One friend of mine who contracted Dengue said that every inch of his body just ached and ached, even his eyelids!!!

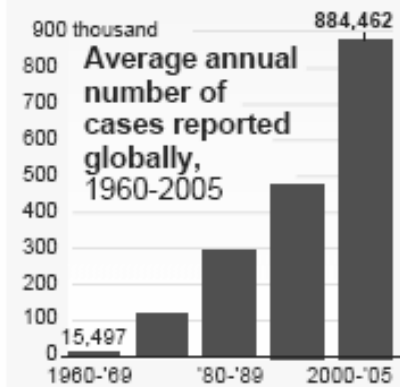
In extreme cases (and then you **really** need to make an appointment with Mamma Nature...and make it **quick**), Dengue Shock Syndrome can occur, and this has an increased mortality rate.

Just to give you an idea of how widespread it is in this part of the world, here are a few statistics from 2005, courtesy of the World Health Organization:-

Country or Sub-region	Cases of D & DHFb reported				Deaths	Population x 1,000
	Clinical	Incidence Rate	Lab. Confirmed	Incidence Rate		
Argentina	34	0.09	34	0.09	0	37,448
Brazil	203,789	118.1	--	0	43	172,559
Colombia	30,475	149.92	9,301	45.75	47	20,328
Costa Rica	37,798	1,165.17	--	0	2	3,244
Dominican Republic	2,860	33.67	903	10.63	18	8,495
Puerto Rico	5,701	144.26	--	0	7	3,952
Uruguay	0	0	0	0	0	3,385
Venezuela	42,198	171.31	--	0	4	24,632
USA	--	0	--	0	--	1,200
Barbados	320	119.4	--	0	--	268
Belize	380	164.5	--	0	0	231
Bermuda	2	3.17	0	0	0	63
Haiti	--	0	1	0.32	--	308
Jamaica	46	1.77	9	0.35	--	2,598
Trinidad & Tobago	411	31.62	--	0	0	1,300

Alarming rise

Global cases of dengue fever have nearly doubled in the past 10 years. Mosquito-borne transmission increases during rainy seasons.



SOURCE: World Health Organization AP

For Puerto Rico, the World Health Organization cites the following:-

“In 1993, the Dengue Control Program established an active surveillance system. In a 1994 epidemic outbreak of dengue, 24,252 suspected cases were reported and 5,390 cases were laboratory confirmed, 3 of them fatal. In 1995, 2,046 cases of dengue were confirmed by laboratory testing; in 1996, 1,804 cases were confirmed. The presence of dengue-3 virus has not been detected since 1977. In recent outbreaks, serotypes 1, 2, and 4 have been identified”

But only last week (8 August 2007), MSNBN reported:-

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico - Puerto Rican health authorities warned Wednesday that the potentially deadly disease dengue fever was reaching epidemic proportions and called for a territory-wide campaign to eliminate breeding grounds of disease-carrying mosquitoes.

Enid Garcia-Rivera, the U.S. territory's secretary of health and epidemiology, said 2,343 confirmed cases of dengue had been reported since the beginning of the year, more than double the number of cases reported in the same period last year and the most since the dengue epidemic of 1994.

While no deaths have yet been confirmed, the disease is spreading rapidly, with more than 300 cases reported last week alone. Because milder forms can be mistaken for common illnesses like influenza, many victims may not seek medical attention, and the true number of infections could be five to 10 times greater, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said."

And to put this in perspective, Epidemics in other parts of the world in 2005 resulted in high death tolls; 1,099 in Indonesia, 280 in the Philippines, and 58 deaths in Thailand.

As you've probably guessed, there's no commercially available vaccine available for dengue. However, Thai researchers are testing a dengue fever vaccine on 3,000 – 5,000 human volunteers and some other 'potentials' are entering Phase I and II testing. But in the meantime, we're on our own!!! That leaves us with preventative measures and control mechanisms, including:-

Mosquito Control

- Public Spraying
- Application of larvicides to standing water
- Eradication of standing water (have a good look around your and your neighbor's garden for things like flower pot trays, rain puddles etc....and empty them!)
- Sterilization programs for mosquitoes.....don't laugh, Oxford University in the UK have recently reported promising results in rendering the Aedes mosquito pest sterile

Personal Protection

- Mosquito nets
- Mosquito screens for doors and windows
- Electronic bug killer (the blue lamp and zapping electronic charge)
- Mosquito repellents containing NNDB or DEET
-and my favorite, a new gizmo that looks like a miniature tennis racket that actually puts a few volt up the little blighter's behinds

So, however tasty you are to mosquitoes, be afraid, be very afraid. These little guys are non-discriminating and will have a good old suck quicker than you can say DEET.

Asi que, buen provecho, Sr Mosquitoe.

Nice to Know – November 2007

By: Barbara Pecce and Donna Puizina

This came from the Rotary Club of San Juan. As Dengue is rampant in PR at the moment, Donna and Barbara thought our members could use the information.

This message is courtesy of Jose G. Rigau Parez, MD, MPH

The ABC's of Dengue

A There are four signs for alarm and any one could indicate an emergency situation in which a patient should be brought for medical attention or re-evaluated if already hospitalized.

1. Intense and persistent stomach pain
2. Persistent vomiting
3. Abrupt change from fever to hypothermia (cold body) with sweating and chills.
4. Change in mood, as much sleepy as combative

B - Low blood pressure is what kills to most of the fatal victims of dengue and not their platelets. The main phenomenon in severe dengue severe is that the blood leaves the capillaries (leaving the abdomen and lung area) and the patient loses pressure in the arteries. The circulation becomes poor and the patient can go into shock. It is necessary to always be aware of the patient's blood pressure and to recognize if he needs intravenous liquids quickly and in abundance.

C - The chronology of dengue is a constant and therefore allows for the prediction of worsening and improvement of the patient. The majority of patients feel worse between the third and fifth day of the disease. For the specific patient, the best marker is the fall of the fever (under 38°C), because the seriousness occurs (in the small proportion of the patients that are serious) in the 24 hours Before or After the fever falls. During this time, if the patient feels much worse, or develops swelling (usually around the eyes) or manifests any bleeding, he or she should go to the closest health centre. When the patient no longer has a fever, it is necessary to continue monitoring for 24 hours to be sure that they are out of danger. The return of the appetite and the beginning of itching/rash are indications of the end of the acute disease.

Do Not take Anti-inflammatory Aspirin nor steroid medicines, because they can interfere with the function of platelets in coagulation.

Avoid mosquito bites?" kill mosquitoes at home, work and school and use repellent.

Eliminate breeding grounds for mosquito larva especially in standing water that is relatively clean such as buckets, planters, cans, inactive swimming pools, ceiling drains that are clogged, buried water meters and trash barrels, or anything else that gathers water and leaves and does not dry daily.



All You Need to Know About Hurricanes

Nice to Know – October 2007

By: Izara Mosby

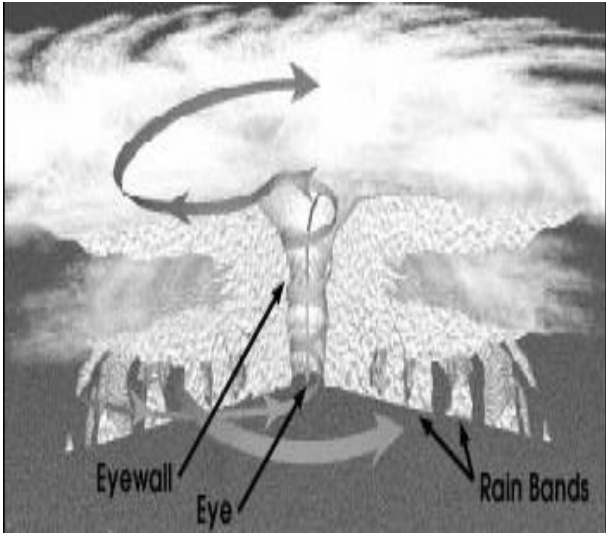
First of all, apologies for the title of this article, as it's a little misleading. I could write 1,000 pages and it still wouldn't be "all you need to know", but with the little space we have in Coqui Courier, and with my limited knowledge, this is the best I have to offer.

So, unless you're from Mars or just arrived in the Caribbean, you're bound to know a bit about hurricanes, but how much do we really know? Let's start first with the fundamentals, si?

A hurricane is the name given to a tropical cyclone in the North Atlantic or North East Pacific region (in North West Pacific, the term is Typhoon), which is a storm system of low pressure centre and thunderstorms that produce strong winds and rain. The tropical cyclone feeds on the heat released when moist air rises and the water vapour it contains subsequently condenses. A cyclic mechanism is created around the 'eye' of the hurricane. The eye itself is an area of relative calm, surrounded by the eyewall 10-50 miles wide which is where the strongest winds and thunderstorms circulate around the eye.



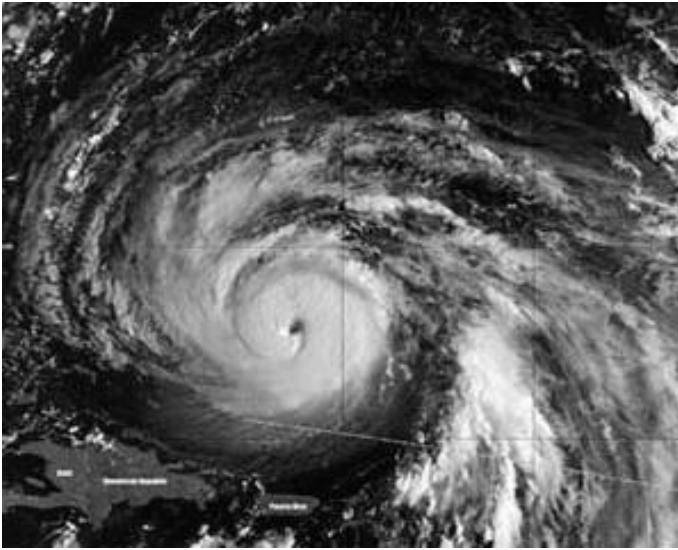
In summary, this is the difference.



Many of the hurricanes that hit the Caribbean start deep in the Atlantic as tropical depressions, but when entering the warm waters of the Caribbean, gather speed quickly. Being seasonal, the Caribbean Hurricane season officially commences on 1st June, and ends on the 30th November, with September statistically being the peak of the hurricane season.

All hurricanes start as something small, a tropical depression, changing into a tropical storm, then hurricane itself. But within the hurricane range, we have different categories, 1 through 5, with Category 5 being the most prolific.

Category	Max sustained wind speed'
Tropical Depression	Winds less than 38 mph (<33 kt or <62 km/hr) associated with clouds and thunderstorms. No eye and typically not having the spiral shape
Tropical Storm	Winds 39-73 mph (34-63 kt or 62-117 km/hr). Distinctive cyclone shape developing but no eye yet
Hurricane Category 1	Winds 74-95 mph (64-82 kt or 119-153 km/hr). Storm surge generally 4-5 ft above normal. No real damage to building structures
Hurricane Category 2	Winds 96-110 mph (83-95 kt or 154-177 km/hr). Storm surge generally 6-8 feet above normal. Some roofing material, door, and window damage of buildings
Hurricane Category 3	Winds 111-130 mph (96-113 kt or 178-209 km/hr). Storm surge generally 9-12 ft above normal. Some structural damage to small residences and utility buildings with a minor amount of curtain wall failures.
Hurricane Category 4	Winds 131-155 mph (114-135 kt or 210-249 km/hr). Storm surge generally 13-18 ft above normal. More extensive curtain wall failures with some complete roof structure failures on small residences. Shrubs, trees, and all signs are blown down
Hurricane Category 5	Winds greater than 155 mph (135 kt or 249 km/hr). Storm surge generally greater than 18 ft above normal. Complete roof failure on many residences and industrial buildings. Some complete building failures with small utility buildings blown over or away



As I mentioned at the start of this article, I could write a 1,000 pages and there'd still be more to add.

So, if you're serious about keeping safe as and when we experience our next storm, go out there, research, plan and prepare now.

Leave it to the last minute and run the risk of being caught short.

There's lots of literature on the internet, so try there for a start.

www.redcross.org/services/disaster/0,1082,0_587_,00.html

www.nhc.noaa.gov/HAW2/english/disaster_prevention.shtml

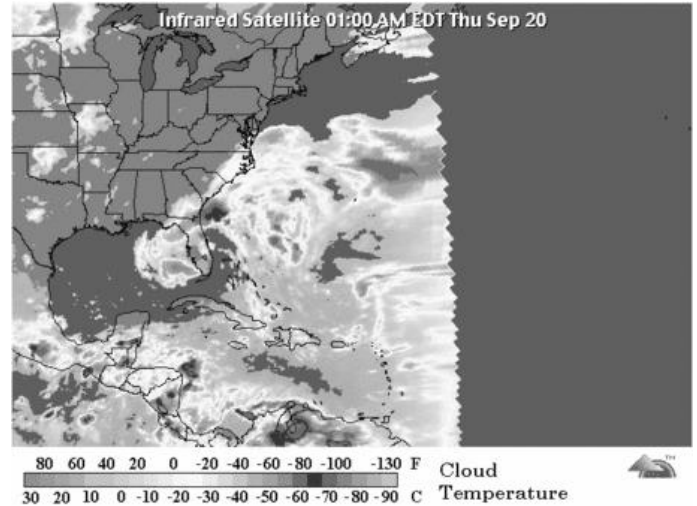
www.neighborhoodlink.com/article/Community/Hurricanes/

www.goflorida.about.com/od/floridaweathe1/a/hurricane_prep.htm

www.southcom.mil/hurricaneprep/

So what does all this mean? Well, if we get hit by a major storm, we need to be prepared. Here are some tips to guide you through the process.

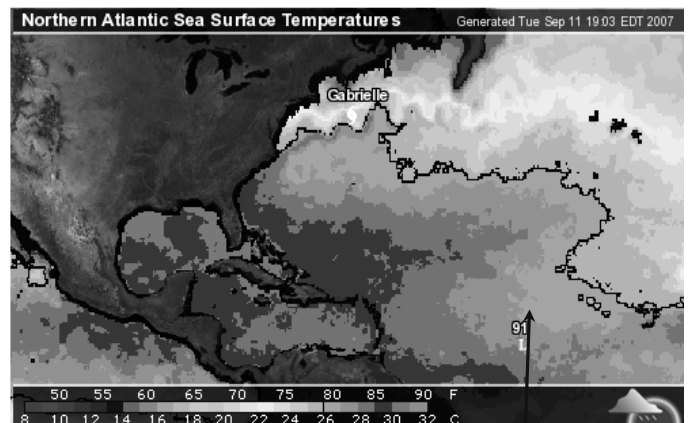
- Have a family plan, write it down, and make sure all of your family know what to do
- Keep up to date with the storm status. It can change direction and speed at any time, so what may be relatively harmless one minute, could be heading right for us the next.
- Prepare your home. Install storm shutters, trim trees etc of excess foliage (minimizing wind effect), clear your surrounding area of things that can blow away, such as garden furniture (bring indoors, or lock in a secure place)
- Talk with your neighbours. Help them with their preparations and they may help you. Personally we don't have a generator, but have an agreement to run an extension cord to our neighbours to keep our essentials running, such as refrigerator and light.....in return of a large bottle of Don Q !!!
- Store your valuables in a watertight secure container. Examples are birth certificates, passports, insurance documents etc.
- Prepare a Disaster Supply Kit (include at LEAST the following:-
 - Canned food and non-electric can opener. Dried food also a good idea, but make sure additional water is available
 - At least three gallons of water per person (min 1 gallon per person per day, for 3 to 7 days minimum)
 - Protective clothing, rainwear, and bedding or sleeping bags.
 - Battery-powered radio, flashlight, and extra batteries.
 - Special items for infants, elderly, or disabled family members.
 - Written instructions on how to turn off electricity, gas and water if authorities advise you to do so. (Remember, you'll need a professional to turn them back on.)
 - Cash, including small bills (ATMs may be out for some time)
 - Fully charged cell phone (spare charged battery if possible)
 - Games and toys to keep you and your family occupied for a long time period
- Make sure your car is full of gas in case of evacuation from your current location or gas shortages post hurricane.



And two good storm tracking web sites I found are:-

www.nhc.noaa.gov

www.weatherunderground.com



Invest 91, heading NW
with a wind speed of
40MPH

Things can get tough so get prepared early, get secure, and pull out your favorite Wilbur Smith book that's been sat on your shelf for a year waiting to be read, lay back and relax.....Monsoon could be a good choice!

Hurricane Hints – Being prepared

Nice to Know – July 2006

Article By: Jodie Cable-Treadwell

Hurricane season officially started 1 June. We have already seen some activity, & the busiest months are still ahead of us. The most important thing that you can do is to be informed & prepared. The following information was taken from the National Hurricane Center Website (www.nhc.noaa.gov).

EVACUATING

One of the most important decisions you will have to make is "Should I Evacuate?" **If you are asked to evacuate, you should do so without delay.** But unless you live in a coastal or low-lying area, an area that floods frequently, it is unlikely that emergency managers will ask you to evacuate. That means that it is important for you & your family to **have a plan** that makes you as safe as possible in your home.

DISASTER PREVENTION

1. Develop a Family Disaster Plan

- Discuss hazards that could affect your family. Know your home's vulnerability to storm surge, flooding & wind.
- Locate a safe room or the safest areas in your home for each hurricane hazard. In certain circumstances the safest areas may not be your home but within your community.
- Determine escape routes from your home & places to meet.
- Have an out-of-state friend as a family contact, so all your family members have a single point of contact.
- Make a plan now for what to do with your pets if you need to evacuate.
- Post emergency phone numbers by your phones & make sure your children know how & when to call 911.
- Check your insurance coverage - flood damage is not usually covered by homeowners insurance. National Flood Insurance Program
- Stock non-perishable emergency supplies & a Disaster Supply Kit.
- Use a NOAA weather radio. Remember to replace its battery every 6 months, as you do with your smoke detectors.
- Take First Aid & CPR classes.

2. Create a Disaster Supply Kit

- **Water** - at least 1 gallon daily per person for 3 to 7 days
- **Food** - at least enough for 3 to 7 days, non-perishable packaged or canned food & juices, foods for infants or the elderly, snack foods, non-electric can opener, cooking tools / fuel, paper plates / plastic utensils.
- **Blankets / Pillows, etc.**
- **Clothing** - seasonal / rain gear/ sturdy shoes
- **First Aid Kit / Medicines / Prescription Drugs**
- **Special Items** - for babies & the elderly
- **Toiletries / Hygiene items / Moisture wipes**
- **Flashlight / Batteries**
- **Radio** - Battery operated & NOAA weather radio
- **Telephones** - Fully charged cell phone with extra battery & a traditional (not cordless) telephone set
- **Cash (with some small bills) & Credit Cards** - Banks & ATMs may not be available for extended periods
- **Keys**
- **Toys, Books & Games**
- **Important documents** - in a waterproof container/ watertight resealable plastic bag - insurance, medical records, bank account details, social security card, etc.
- **Tool Set** - keep with you during the storm
- **Vehicle fuel tanks filled**

- **Pet care items** - proper identification / immunization records / medications, ample supply of food & water, a carrier or cage, muzzle & leash

3. Have a Place to Go

- Develop a family hurricane preparedness plan before an actual storm threatens your area. If your family hurricane preparedness plan includes evacuation to a safer location for any of the reasons specified with in this web site, then it is important to consider the following points:
 - If ordered to evacuate, do not wait or delay your departure.
 - If possible, leave before local officials issue an evacuation order for your area. Even a slight delay in starting your evacuation will result in significantly longer travel times as traffic congestion worsens.
 - Select an evacuation destination that is nearest to your home, preferably in the same county, or at least minimize the distance over which you must travel in order to reach your intended shelter location.
 - In choosing your destination, keep in mind that the hotels & other sheltering options in most inland metropolitan areas are likely to be filled very quickly in a large, multi-county hurricane evacuation event.
 - If you decide to evacuate to another county or region, be prepared to wait in traffic.
 - The large number of people in this state who must evacuate during a hurricane will probably cause massive delays & major congestion along most designated evacuation routes; the larger the storm, the greater the probability of traffic jams & extended travel times.
 - If possible, make arrangements to stay with the friend or relative who resides closest to your home & who will not have to evacuate. Discuss with your intended host the details of your family evacuation plan well before the beginning of the hurricane season.
 - If a hotel or motel is your final intended destination during an evacuation, make reservations before you leave. Most hotel & motels will fill quickly once evacuations begin. The longer you wait to make reservations, even if an official evacuation order has not been issued for your area or county, the less likely you are to find hotel/motel room vacancies, especially along interstate highways & in major metropolitan areas.
 - If you are unable to stay with friends or family & no hotels/motels rooms are available, then as a last resort go to a shelter.
 - Remember, shelters are not designed for comfort & do not usually accept pets. Bring your disaster supply kit with you to the shelter. Find Pet-Friendly hotels & motels.
 - Make sure that you fill up your car with gas, before you leave.

4. Retrofit Your Home

The most important precaution you can take to reduce damage to your home & property is to protect the areas where wind can enter. According to recent wind technology research, it's important to strengthen the exterior of your house so wind & debris do not tear large openings in it. You can do this by protecting & reinforcing these five critical areas: Roof – Straps – Shutters – Doors, Garage Doors.

Note: info on roofs & straps not necessary for PR concrete houses so I omitted it - Ed

A great time to start securing - or retrofitting - your house is when you are making other improvements or adding an addition. Remember: building codes reflect the lessons experts have learned from past catastrophes. Contact the local building code official to find out requirements.

Shutters - One of the best ways to protect a home from damage in wind storms is to install *impact-resistant shutters* over all large windows & glass doors. Not only do they protect doors & windows from wind-borne objects, but they can reduce damage caused by sudden pressure changes when a window or door is broken.

The easiest designs are those that simply cover the opening with a structural panel such as plywood. In past hurricanes, many homeowners

upon returning have noticed their temporary plywood shutters blown off because they were not adequately fastened. If you have a wood-frame house, use adequate fasteners to attach the panels over the openings when a hurricane approaches. Have these temporary shutters stored & ready to use since building supply stores generally sell out of these materials quickly during a hurricane warning. If your home is made with concrete blocks, however, you will have to install anchoring devices well in advance.

If your residence has permanent shutters, evaluate their effectiveness. Manufacturers are responsible for testing their shutters up to the standards necessary to resist wind forces & wind-borne debris. Some shutters are very flexible, especially those that roll up. If struck by a rigid piece of debris, shutters may bend & break the window. To determine whether your shutter can resist this impact, gently lean against it & see if it yields. You can also inspect your shutters to see if they are properly attached to the house & will not fly off during a storm by inspecting the shutter connectors for obvious excessive wear or missing connectors. Ask the shutter manufacturer for proper installation criteria.

Doors - Your home has either double or single entry doors. If they are solid wood or hollow metal they probably can resist wind pressures & hurricane debris. However, if you are not sure whether they are strong enough, take these precautions:

- Install head & foot bolts on the inactive door of double-entry doors.
- Make sure your doors have at least three hinges & a dead bolt security lock with a minimum one inch bolt throw length.
- Since double entry doors fail when their surface bolts break at the header trim or threshold, check the connections at both places. Be sure the surface bolt extends into the door header & through the threshold into the subfloor.

Garage Doors – Because of their width, double-wide garage doors are more susceptible to wind damage than single doors. Unless you have a tested hurricane-resistant door, the wind may force it out of the roller track. This occurs because the door deflects too much under excessive wind pressure & fails.

- Check with your local government building official for code requirements for garage doors in your area.
- Check with your local building supplier or garage door retailer for to a retrofit kit for your garage door.

You should probably reinforce your double-wide garage door at its weakest points. This involves installing horizontal and/or vertical bracing onto each panel, using wood or light gauge metal girds bolted to the door mullions. You may also need heavier hinges & stronger end & vertical supports for your door.

If you decide to retrofit your garage door with a kit that allows you to operate the door after it is installed, make sure the door is balanced by lowering it about halfway & letting go. If the door goes up or down, the

springs will need adjusting. *Note: Since the springs are dangerous, only a professional should adjust them.*

If you are unable to retrofit your garage door with a kit specifically designed for your door, you can purchase garage door retrofit kits to withstand hurricane winds at your local building supply store. Also, check to see if the supplier can do the installation.

Flood Insurance - The National Flood Insurance Program, is a pre-disaster flood mitigation & insurance protection program designed to reduce the escalating cost of disasters. The National Flood Insurance Program makes federally backed flood insurance available to residents & business owners. Flood damage is not usually covered by homeowners insurance. Do not make assumptions. Check your policy.

5. Have a Pet Plan

Before The Disaster

- Make sure that your pets are current on their vaccinations. Pet shelters may require proof of vaccines.
- Have a current photograph.
- Keep a collar with identification on your pet & have a leash on hand for control.
- Have a properly-sized pet carrier for each animal (large enough for the animal to stand & turn around in).
- Plan your evacuation strategy. Specialized pet shelters, animal control shelters, veterinary clinics & friends & relatives out of harm's way are ALL potential refuges for your pet during a disaster.
- If you plan to shelter your pet - work it into your evacuation route planning.

During The Disaster

- Animals brought to a pet shelter are required to have: Proper identification collar & rabies tag, proper identification on all belongings, a carrier or cage, a leash, an ample supply of food, water (& bowls), any medications, specific care instructions & news papers/trash bags for clean-up.
- Bring pets indoor well in advance of a storm - reassure them & remain calm.
- Pet shelters will be filled on first come, first served basis. Call ahead & determine availability.

Pet Disaster Supply Kit

- Proper identification including immunization records
- Ample supply of food & water
- A carrier or cage
- Medications
- Muzzle, collar & leash



Flying to Caribbean Islands

Nice to Know – August 2008

By: Deborah Waterhouse

Direct flights from San Juan to the Caribbean Islands

As time goes on and the expat assignment in Puerto Rico comes to a close, people tend to cram in their final trips to make sure they have seen enough of the Caribbean, knowing the next time you are here could be a few years down the line. With some of the islands only reachable with a connecting flight via Miami, how many islands can you visit direct from San Juan Airport? Here are a few tips.

Air Sunshine

www.airsunshine.com

Tel – 888 879 8900

Depart San Juan International Airport (SJU)

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: St Thomas, St Croix, Vieques, Tortola and Virgin Gorda

American Airlines/ American Eagle

www.aa.com

Tel – 800 433 7300

Depart San Juan International Airport (SJU)

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: Dominican Republic, St Thomas, St Croix, St Martin, St Kitts, St Lucia and many more...

(Sign up to American Airlines NetSaavers and receive information on last minute deals from San Juan)

Cape Air

www.flycapeair.com

Tel – 800 352 0714

Depart San Juan International Airport (SJU) or Ponce

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: St Thomas, St Croix, Vieques, Tortola

Isla Nena Air

www.isla-vieques.com

Tel – 877 812 5144

Depart San Juan International Airport (SJU) or Fajardo

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: Culebra, Vieques

Liat

www.liatairline.com

Tel – 888 844 5428

Depart San Juan International Airport (SJU)

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: Antigua, Dominica, St Vincent

Seaborne Airlines

www.seaborneairlines.com

Tel – 888 359 8687

Depart Old San Juan (Seaplane)

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: St Thomas, St Croix

Vieques Air Link

www.vieques-island.com

Tel – 888 901 9247

Depart San Juan International Airport (SJU) or Isla Grande or Fajardo

Direct Flights available to the following destinations: Vieques

Alternatively, take a cruise, www.cruise.com can show you all options available for a given date. They will also contact the cruise company directly with any special requests or group bookings.

www.tripadvisor.com is a great review website which gives you reviews on hotels/villas/bed and breakfasts anywhere in the world. Just type in the destination and check out the top 10 hotels and more which are rated by holidaymakers like us.





Daycare Centres & Pre-Schools

Nice to Know – July 2008

By: Deborah Waterhouse

Crayolas

C/Principal #6, Sector Los Baez, Ave. Las Cumbres, Guaynabo
• T: 787-789 0160 • www.crayolas.net

Admission: Infants+ • Days: 1+ • Time: 6.30am–6pm •
Teacher/Child ratio: 1/4 (at 18 months)

Set up 2 years ago by a Puerto Rican lady and her 2 friends, this relatively small center has grown to accommodate around 50 kids. The school is very well organized, teachers are friendly and the children's daily routines are well structured. Parents drop off/collect their child at the entrance leaving the kids in a secure environment and less interruptions. The flexibility of this center makes it a great choice for parents who plan to leave their child for 2 days a week and up. Although this school is relatively small, it has a large Newcomer following and good feedback. Recommended to parents living in and around the Guaynabo area.

Happy Faces

Ave. Winston Churchill 267/269, El Senorial, Rio Piedras
T: 787–292 6960 • Admission: Infants+ • Days: 5 • Time:
6.30am–6.30pm • Teacher/Child ratio: 1/8

Recommended for parents located in Rio Piedras/Montehiedra and East Guaynabo. It has separate buildings for toddlers and pre-kinder. The administrators/teachers are all very friendly and constantly maintaining this modern building. The toddlers make use of a covered terrace for outdoor activities and there is a big day area and a separate area for sleeping. Happy Faces recommend bringing your child 5 days a week as this gives them a solid routine but it's the parent's choice on how long the child stays there (3 hours or 8 hours).

Mammolina Centro Creativo Pre-school

Carr Alejandrino Km1.0 Bo Frailes Llanos, Guaynabo
T: 787–287 7030

Admission: 2 years • Days: 5 • Time: 7am–12pm/1pm/3pm •
Teacher/Child ratio: 1/10

This Montessori pre-school accepts children 2-5 years. The lessons are very well organized and follow more of a school program. The children wear uniforms and classes are in Spanish with 1 hour of English per day. There is a nice play area with swings and slides. The teachers are very helpful and caring. As with most schools, it is closed for summer but a summer camp is available. Depending on vacancies, the pre-school may accept new children during the course of the year.

Parkville Kids

California St, S-42, Parkville, Guaynabo • Tel 787–287 7162
Admission: Infants+ • Days: 5 • Time: 7am–11.30am/2.30pm •
Teacher/Child ratio: 1/5

This daycare/pre-school was established 11 years ago. The teachers have been with the school for an average of 6 years. Children stay in a class for 12 months before moving up. During the day the children sing, learn about colors, numbers etc and read stories. The school takes children up to Pre Kinder and then they move on to the neighboring Parkville school. Reasonably sized play area. It is recommended that

children do attend 5 days a week as they do projects during the week which link on from one day to the next. Highly recommended for children who have siblings attending Parkville School.

Preescolar San Juan Evangelista

Church Hill J-5 Urb, Torrimar, Guaynabo • T: 787-781 5325
www.pesje.org • Admission: 18 months+ • (in August) • Days:
5 • Time: 7am–6pm • Teacher/Child ratio: 1/8

Situated in the Urbanization Torrimar, this school is very quiet, well maintained and spacious. It has a good reputation and the teachers are very friendly and take pride in their school. As it is an evangelical school, religion is taught but not overdone and the outdoor play-areas are great. The parent can choose to collect their child at different times from 11.30am/2pm/3.30pm and 6pm (price varying accordingly). Highly recommended to parents in the Guaynabo area.

Teachertime

Centro de Guaynabo, J9 Ave. San Patricio, Guaynabo
T: 787–749 9608 OR

Centro de Bayamon, Calle 8 I-37 Ext. Hermanas Davila,
Bayamon • T: 787–288 1161

Admission: Infants+ • Days: 3-5 • Time: 7am–6.30pm •
Teacher/Child ratio: 1/7

This school incorporates nicely sized classrooms with a big play area. During the day the children have an interesting and complete program for learning and playing and on Fridays the parents are invited to come by and read a book to the children in the class. There is a camera in every room and in the outside area for the administrators to observe. The parents can plan to leave their child for 3-5 days a week however there is no reduction in monthly fee as the child's place is secured for the week. Highly recommended.

Parent Participation Preschool (PPP)

Carr 177 Km 3.4 Camino, Alejandrino, Guaynabo • T: 787–272
0537 • www.ppppr.org • English Speaking • from 2 years+

Peekaboo

Urb. Villa Caparra, Calle A # 54, Guaynabo
T: 787–774 1299 • W: www.peekaboodaycarepr.com OR
Urb. Parkville, Esq. Méjico, Calle Harding V-1, Guaynabo
T: 787–731 3322

My Learning Center

Plaza del Mar Shopping Centre, Carr. 693 Int. 690
Bo. Brenas Vega Alta, PR 00692 • Tel - 787 - 9085565
www.mylearningcenter1.net • Director: Beatriz Ruiz

The centre has been open about a year. Since I work, Grayson attends full-time but they do have part-time options available as well. They teach in English but also speak to the kids in Spanish, so Grayson speaks both languages consistently. We could not be happier with the centre and the teachers. It is a very nurturing environment and Grayson can't wait to go there every day...even bringing his shoes to me on weekend mornings and saying "school".



Three Kings Day (Tres Reyes)

Nice to Know – December 2006

By: Izara Mosby

So, what's all this "Three Kings Day" all about?



Coming from a good Catholic family in Ireland, I thought I was quite knowledgeable on Christ, the Bible and all other things related to Christmas and Nativity; but having never heard of Three Kings day before, obviously not.

Let's start with some basics; the Twelve days of Christmas start on.....erm.....actually, they start on Christmas day. They end on the 6th of January which is the Feast of the Epiphany, "The Adoration of the Magi" or "The Manifestation of God"...also known as "Three Kings Day"

According to an old legend based on a Bible story, it marks the day when the Three Kings (wise men / Magi) of Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar, found Jesus and presented him with gold, frankincense and myrrh (bonus points for anyone who has a clue what frankincense or myrrh is), having followed a bright star they saw on the night that Christ was born to Bethlehem.

Historically, "Three Kings Day" comes with its own traditions, rituals and symbols. In different parts of the world, including Spain, Bavaria, Austria and Mexico, Carolers move from house to house often dressed as Kings while holding a large star; Christmas Trees may be taken down and in some areas is burnt in a big bonfire. But for Children this is often just another great day for gifts/toys. Let's be honest, when a child is presented with the opportunity to celebrate Epiphany or play with a new Xbox, it doesn't take a genius to work out which will be the winner.

In Puerto Rico, preparations for The Adoration of the Magi are made the night before where children collect grass, place it in a shoebox and place it under their beds for the camels (sound a bit like putting a bowl of carrots outside the front door on Christmas Eve for Rudolph). The kids then go to bed and in the morning of the 6th January, they receive gifts to represent how Jesus received the gold, frankincense and myrrh (double bonus points this time for details) from those nice guys Caspar, Melchior and Balthasar.

The day is obviously marked as a public holiday, and most Puerto Rican households have a large dinner with typical dishes of roast pig, seasoned rice with pigeon peas, marcillaas (blood sausage), pastels (a tamale made with meat) and either plantain or yucca. The traditional drink during the Christmas period is Coquito and can be purchased in most supermarkets. If unavailable, a six pack of Heineken would not be refused!!!!

Neighbours can form **asaltors** (this is a group of people, which visit from house to house usually beginning at 3am on the eve of the Epiphany (5th Jan) and lasting a few hours and ending up having breakfast in one of the houses. Music is played with instruments called palitos, banbereta and guiros. If you manage to witness or take part in this, you are both lucky and probably not fit for work the following day!!!!

Entonces, it all sounds rather fun, and a good way to remember the true meaning of Christmas, as opposed to the Westernized stereotype Christmas containing Santa, Rudolph, James Bond movies on TV and Slade playing "so here it is Merry Christmas, everybody's having fun" on one of those Christmas compilation CDs.

Strangely enough, in Ireland we also celebrate the 6th January, but it's known simply as "Little Women's Christmas" or "Nollaig na mBean". This is a tradition where all women, young, old, single and married all dress up and have a good night out. It is also a tradition that all Christmas trees are taken down. It is still very popular in Cork (where I come from) and as my husband will be very happy to hear, it's the day when the men in the household take on the duties of the household and give their wives a day off. Bars and restaurants have almost 100% clientele of women on this night, and children usually buy gifts for their mother and grandmothers as it is seen like a "Mother's Day" to thank their Mothers for hard work during the Christmas period.

So, whether it's "Merry Christmas", "Feliz Navidad", or "Nollaig Shona duit" (Gaelic), have a great time and enjoy whatever Christmas and Three Kings means to you.

More PR Christmas Traditions

Puerto Rico's Christmas season is long and exuberant, starting in early December and lasting until Three Kings Day on Jan. 6. Christmas trees are popular, and truckloads of them are imported from the United States and Canada.

The season combines delicious food, great music and festive merrymaking. Typical dishes are roast pig, seasoned rice with pigeon peas and **pasteles**, a kind of tamale made with meat and either plantain or yucca. Friends often form **parrandas**, a more rambunctious group than typical Christmas carolers. Lively music is sung —usually to **bongo**, **guitar** and **güiro** accompaniment —as the group goes to a friend's house, eats and drinks, and then moves on to the home of another friend. The cycle repeats itself, usually until the wee hours of the morning. Christmas Eve is a more solemn occasion spent at home with family. Children typically receive their gifts on Three Kings Day.

Source: <http://www.enjoypuertorico.com/holidaysfest.shtml>



Passports

Nice to Know – November & December 2006
By: Izara Mosby

Part 1

My husband and I woke early at 6am on a nice Puerto Rican Saturday morning for a trip down to Ponce to apply for a passport for our son Kai, who was born here two months earlier. We chose Ponce as opposed to San Juan due to a recommendation from a Puerto Rican colleague who had recently made the trip herself and advised how efficient the process was. Also, with Ponce, you don't need to make an appointment, just show up, and being open on a Saturday was a definite bonus. The trip from San Juan to Ponce took a little over an hour. We arrived 30 minutes ahead of opening time. Already there were 20 or so people ahead of us, and the usual PR 'first come first served' list was handed to us by a kind guy who realized we were clearly ducks out of water. We stuck out names down and wondered around the rest of the mall (all 20 shops) wasting time until opening time. At 8:30 prompt, the official came out of the office and handed out nice glossy application forms, identical to the ones we had previously printed from the internet. He explained in Spanish that the forms MUST be completed in English. By 9am, we were inside, had handed over all the forms, photos and fees (see below) and the guy in the cubicle started making copies of all the relevant paperwork. Unfortunately, when it came to the photos, he called a halt, explaining (quite justifiably) that even though the photo had been taken at an 'approved' passport photography studio, it wasn't suitable. The problem was that to take Kai's photo, they had to sit him in a special chair, and although it was a white chair on a white background, it didn't comply with the US passport photo requirements of a single clear background. Panic momentarily hit in, but fortunately, to the guys behind the counter, this was quite a regular occurrence. He told us not to worry and to drive just down the road to Sears where they had a photo studio, and re-take the photos. In the meantime, he assured us he had everything else he needed and told us just to come straight back to him with the correct photo and he's finalize the application. 30 minutes later, with new photos in hand, we returned to the passport office, handed over the photo, and we were told that the passport would be fedex'd to us with 14 days (we chose the expedited version, having paid an extra \$60). We were on our way back to San Juan by 10am, not bad going in my opinion. Kai's shiny new passport arrived the following week (sooner than expected) and we were now set for overseas travel. Here are some specific details to help you with your passport application:-

Contact Details

Oficina de Servicios: Area Sur 4900, Calle Condado Hoyas 153, Ponce, PR 00717-1324 • Telephone: 787-843-6494
Opening Hours: Tuesday-Saturday 8:30am-3:00pm
The website for the most up to date passport information can be found on www.travel.state.gov/passport.com.

Passport Requirements

- Proof of citizenship
- Proof of identity
- Two recent colour photographs
- Appropriate fees - under 16 years old \$97 (\$55 processing fee, \$30 application fee and a security surcharge of \$12). Over 16 years old \$82 (\$40 processing fee, \$30 application fee and a security surcharge of \$12).
- Fee to expedite (14 days) - \$60.

Passport Background

The passport photograph must be a white background and have specific sizing for the head within the photo. Sears and Walgreens are 'passport approved', but be careful with the child seats...it MUST be a single white background.

Special requirements for children's passports

As directed by public law 106-113 and 22 CFR 51.27

- Both parents of the child must be present if the child is under 14 years of age
- Evidence of the child's US citizenship
- Evidence of the child's relationship to parents/guardian
- Parent/guardian identification
- If one parent appears the following must be submitted
 - Second parents notarized written statement consenting to passport insurance for the child
 - Primary evidence of sole authority to apply or
 - A written statement (made under penalty of perjury) explaining the second parent's unavailability
- As directed by regulation 22 CFR 51.21 and 51.27, each minor child applying for a passport must appear in person.

Part 2

(Emailed to me by a NC member, whose name I didn't get – Ed)

We recently had to obtain a US passport for our new addition Stella. As an alternative to the drive to Ponce, I thought I'd share our experience. It might be a little easier, especially for people who live in Dorado as we do. We simply went to the Dorado Post Office. They take appointments and when I made the appointment for our daughter, we could go as early as the next day. It is one stop shopping because you purchase money orders and have the pictures taken right on sight. The entire process took thirty minutes including driving and parking at the Grande next door. I haven't investigated which other Post Offices in Puerto Rico offer passport services but I'm certain if the tiny Dorado office has the service there must be others as well. Last year we went through the nightmare of attempting to get a passport at the office in Plaza Las Americas (without success) for our son. When our relocation people told us about obtaining the passport at the post office AND it actually worked out, we thought it was the best kept secret in Puerto Rico.



Birth Registration in PR

Nice to Know – October 2006

By: Izara Mosby

Almost 2 years ago, our family moved to Puerto Rico with my husband's work. My husband being English, myself Irish, and our beautiful daughter, now aged 3, a mix of both nationalities. Being Expats, we weren't even considering a 2nd child, but you know how it goes...we ended up with a beautiful little boy on 4th May this year – Kai Stuart Mosby.

It was a pretty apprehensive time, me not speaking much Spanish, and hearing horror 'tales'. Well, I can honestly say, my birthing experience at Ashford Hospital (Condado) was fine. The Gyny was there before, during and after, giving care equal to or better than what I received back home during my first birth. The care post birth was equally excellent, including security (double tagging of the baby and proximity sensors strapped to the child to prevent him from being removed from the limits of the ward).

At the hospital, prior to being released, we were given a birth form which served as evidence that the child had actually been born and instructions that the Child's birth had to be registered within Ten days at one of the child registering centers. Unfortunately (due to health complications) we missed the Ten day deadline so, as a precaution, we organized a letter from the Pediatrician (as evidence for his time in the hospital) and then popped down to the Registro Demografico to finally register the birth.

With us, we took the following:-

- The original birth form from the hospital (note, this must be signed by both the Pediatrician and the OB Gyny at the hospital)
- The letter from the Pediatrician explaining the circumstances that Kai had been re-admitted to hospital twice shortly after birth
- Both my Husband's and my Passport
- Both my Husband's and my Driving license
- Our marriage certificate
- Fee (cash worked for us, as we weren't sure if checks would be accepted)

We'd been pre-advised by some friends that it had to be either the Father or Mother who registered the birth, and only one parent is fine providing that all the relevant paperwork is with you.

I arrived at the Registro Demografico on the 20th June (a Tuesday.....apparently Mondays and Friday's are the busy days, so try to do mid week) at approx 9am. Within 40 minutes, I'd been seen by the official, handed over both the paperwork and fees, received my receipt and was out the door on the way home ready for Kai's mid morning feed. The paperwork all seemed in order, and I was advised that the birth certificates would be mailed to me within a week.

Four days later, the birth certificates arrived by post. We'd ordered the maximum of spare copies (9 is only allowed in a 12 month period), and we planned to distribute them amongst

family, as we're not sure how easy it will be for us in say 20 yrs time to try and coordinated 'copies' from wherever we are living then. I'm sure the small cost up front will save us countless grief in future.

Info on the Registro Demografico:

Tel: 787-767 9120

Address: Departamento De Salud, Calle Quisqueya Núm. 171, Hato Rey, PO Box 11854, San Juan, PR 00910

Hours: Mon to Fri, 8am to noon (please verify by phoning in advance)

There is also another place to register births, which is in Guaynabo, and you can get details from the internet. I guess it's a matter of convenience, so choose which is closer and more convenient to you, but remember, get the paperwork straight, and things will hopefully go as smooth as they did for me.

Without realizing, the forms provided at the Registro Demografico also served to arrange for his Social Security number and Immunization card. All in all, pretty efficient.

Next job, his passport.