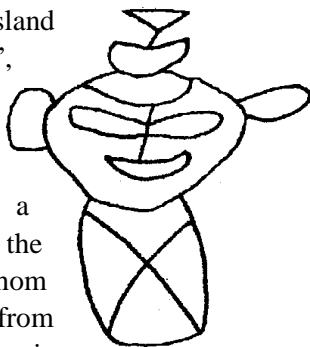


Did you know that El Yunque is one of the oldest forest reserves in the Western Hemisphere?

The history of the El Yunque National Forest is extremely rich. The Taino Indians, who inhabited the island and called it “Borikén”, believed that the cloud capped peaks in the Luquillo mountains, which they called “Yuké”, were a sacred place occupied by the good spirit “Yokahú” to whom they prayed for protection from the bad spirit



“Juracán” (hurricane). From the Taino word “Yuké” the Spanish colonizers derived “El Yunque” to refer to these mountains. The petroglyphs (stone writings) that have been discovered on river rocks within the forest, provide mute evidence of the Taino who prevailed on the island for over a thousand years.

In 1876 while Puerto Rico was ruled by Spain, Alfonso XII designated 12,000 cuerdas (cuerda = .97 acre) of land in the Luquillo mountains to be a forest reserve, making El Yunque one of the oldest forest reserves in the Western Hemisphere. At the end of the Spanish-American War in 1898 the Spanish crown lands were ceded to the United States government and subsequently, in 1903 the reserve was retained by order of President Theodore Roosevelt and named the Luquillo Forest Reserve (later Luquillo National Forest) making it the only tropical rain forest in the U. S. National Forest system.

...Where is El Yunque

The El Yunque National Forest is located in the Luquillo mountains, approximately 25 miles (40 kilometers) from the Metropolitan San Juan Area. It encompasses over 28,000 acres of land (11,500 hectares), making it the largest public land area in Puerto Rico and the only forest administered by the USDA Forest Service on the Island.

Elevation, Precipitation and Temperature

Scenic mountains and exuberant vegetation are only some of the characteristics of this tropical forest. Its elevation varies between 330 to 3,530 feet (100 to 1,075 meters) above sea level.

El Toro.....	3,533'
El Yunque Peak.....	3,496'
East Peak.....	3,446'
El Cacique.....	3,346'
Los Picachos.....	3,175'
Mount Britton.....	3,075'
La Mina.....	3,055'

Rain is usually a daily occurrence, with an average of 200 inches (500 centimeters) a year in the higher peaks. Rain showers tend to be short but intense. It usually rains most during spring and autumn.

The average daily temperatures are 77.9°F (25.5°C) in the lower parts of the forest, and 65.3°F (18.5°C) on the regions over 3,280 feet (1,000 meters) above sea level.

Flora

Even though the El Yunque National Forest is the smallest forest in the National Forest System, it is also the most diverse. In it are over 240 species of native trees of which 23 are found only in El Yunque, and 47 are introduced. Also 88 species of rare trees, 50 species of native orchids and over 150 species of ferns are found in the forest.

The forest is divided into 4 forest types:

The **Tabonuco Forest** is found between 100 to 2,000 (30 to 610 meters) feet above sea level. The trees here reach a height of over 120 feet (37 meters) and the dominant species are the Tabonuco and the Ausubo. Other common trees here are the Trumpet Wood (Yagrumo), Guaraguao, Laurel Sabino and the giant tree ferns.

The **Palo Colorado Forest** is found between 1,970 to 2,950 feet (600 to 900 meters) above sea level in valleys and slopes. Common tree species found here are the Caimitillo and the Palo Colorado.

The **Sierra Palm Forest** is found in higher elevations over 1,958 feet (600 meters) in the flood areas near rivers and creeks, as well as in steep terrain. Because of its unique ability, the dominant species is the Sierra Palm.

The **Cloud Forest** is found in areas that are 2,500 feet (762 meters) or more above sea level. Due to almost constant rain and cloud cover combined with strong winds, trees and plants found in this part of the forest are stunted, seldom growing over 15 feet (4.5 meters) in height. For this reason this area is also known as the “Dwarf Forest”. Common trees found in this part of the forest include: Nemooca, Roble de Sierra, Limoncillo, Guayabota, and Camasey.

Fauna

The forest fauna is comprised of reptiles, amphibians, and birds. Eight (8) species of the Anolis lizard are found here as well as 13 of the 16 species of “coqui” existing on the Island, and over 50 species of birds, including the endangered Puerto Rican Parrot. Native mammals are represented by 11 species of bats. There are also fish, shrimp and other aquatic species. Snakes are rare in the area; the largest is the Puerto Rican Boa which can grow to 90 inches (2.25 meters). It is important to note that the Forest is a wildlife refuge and hunting is not allowed.

Interpretation and Recreation

El Yunque offers the visitor opportunities for passive recreation and interpretive services oriented toward the discovery of the history, biodiversity, and management of the Forest. Guided tours of the forest trails are offered by interpreters through the “Rent-a-Ranger” and “Forest Adventure Tours” programs.

For those visitors who come to spend the day in a natural environment, El Yunque also offers a variety of sites to visit and enjoy:

Observation Sites:

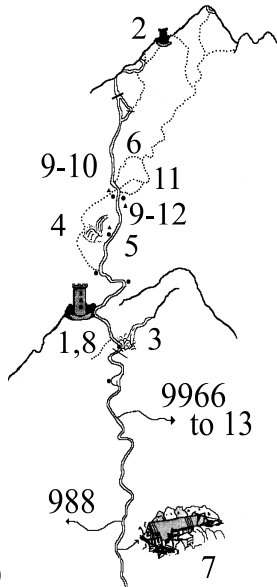
- 1) Yokahú Tower
- 2) Mount Britton Tower
- 3) La Coca Falls
- 4) LaMinaFalls
- 5) Juan Diego
- 6) Baño de Oro y Baño Grande

Visitor Centers:

- 7) El Portal Rain Forest Center
- 8) Yokahú Tower
- 9) Palo Colorado

Picnic Areas:

- 10) Palo Colorado
- 11) Caimitillo
- 12) Palma de Sierra
- 13) Quebrada Grande (El Verde)



Some Helpful Hints:

- * Hiking is probably the best way to experience the Forest in its many different forms. Numerous trails provide access to the Forest, from the lowest valleys to the highest peaks.
- * The climate is generally pleasant, but due to frequent showers, rain gear and adequate shoes for walking the slippery trails are recommended.
- * If you plan to spend the day or walk the trails, use insect repellent and carry drinking water with you.
- * Wildflowers, trees, shrubs, ferns, and mosses are part of the living forest to be seen and enjoyed, not picked and destroyed.

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