

# How new things to do in Puerto Rico

By Joshua David Stein, Departures  
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*Puerto Rico is unique among the Caribbean islands: wealthier, more urbane, more developed.*

(CNN) -- Melvin Martínez, a burly, soft-spoken 35-year-old painter, stands in the center of his studio in San Juan's Santurce neighborhood. A fleck of silver glitter is stuck to his neck, another twinkles from his brow.

Martínez is one of the stars of Puerto Rico's burgeoning arts scene and the winner of the prestigious Castellón Painting Prize. His canvases are brash, textural tornadoes of newspaper, paint, scraps of magazines and barrels worth of glitter.

"I'm inspired by the movement of Santurce," he says, referring to the epicenter of San Juan's cultural renaissance, "by the chaos and the structure."

There's a lot of movement to be inspired by. From this low-lying warren of streets, with its bustling colonial farmers' market called La Placita, an exuberant creative energy has radiated outward touching the entire island. And a brilliant crop of artists, designers, chefs and entrepreneurs are now emerging and, with them, a reconfigured national landscape.

Puerto Rico now boasts world-class hotels like the St. Regis Bahia Beach (for all service details, see "Where to Stay in Puerto Rico," below), which opened in 2010 on a former coconut plantation, the W Retreat & Spa, on Vieques, an island once used for bomb tests, and an upcoming Ritz-Carlton Reserve, opening December 2012. There used to be only a few worthy golf courses, including one built by the U.S. Air Force for Dwight Eisenhower around 1940, but now they are legion, among them the Royal Isabela, undoubtedly one of the finest courses in the hemisphere.