

## A Year After Maria, Puerto Rico's Tourism Industry Wants to Welcome Back Visitors

**Those in the tourism industry say that Puerto Ricans have worked with great resilience along with first responders to make the island inviting again to travelers**

By [Sofía Cerda Campero](#)

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Discover Puerto Rico

A few days after Hurricane Maria made landfall, a group of people stranded in Punta Santiago, a Puerto Rican neighborhood in the eastern coastal town of Humacao, wrote a giant sign in chalk: "S.O.S Necesitamos Agua/Comida" (S.O.S we need water/food). The picture captured from above went viral.

In an effort to promote progress and tourism in August, the residents Punta Santiago wrote a new sign on the street where they once pleaded for aid, "Bienvenidos" (welcome).

It was only a year ago that Maria devastated Puerto Rico, becoming the worst disaster ever recorded on the island. Recovery after the deadly storm has been slow for many, but those in the tourism industry say that Puerto

Ricans have worked with great resilience along with first responders to make the island inviting again to travelers.

## Las Vegas Shooting Survivors Gather in Nev. One Year Later



Survivors and family members gathered for a concert in Nevada to honor the 58 victims of the Las Vegas mass shooting on Oct. 1, 2017.

(Published Sunday, Sept. 30, 2018)

"We are open and ready," said Clarissa Jiménez, the president and CEO of the Puerto Rico Hotel and Tourism Association. In response to what Jiménez described as "a monster" that destroyed the entire island, she said "the best way to help Puerto Rico fully recover is by visiting it."

Before Maria, tourism had grown to an estimated 8.4 percent of GDP in 2017 and was projected to rise to 10.7 percent by 2027, according to the World Travel & Tourism Council. Hurricane Maria battered the industry: hotels and restaurants were destroyed and entire areas cut off from the rest of the island due to impassable roads. Despite the damage, tourism now represents 10 percent of GDP and still employs over 70,000 people of the more than 3 million who live there.

"We really rolled up our sleeves," said Jiménez, "but we were fortunate to get help from all over."

- [North Korea Says Peace Declaration Not a Bargaining Chip](#)

She said tourism is back after beginning to restabilize in the early this year.

"Our [golf] greens are greener than ever and our beautiful beaches are as perfect as they were before the hurricane," Jiménez said.

Pamela Martínez, 30, has visited the island from Mexico several times before Maria and returned in July. She noticed a big difference from past trips in Isla Verde, the beachfront area on the border of San Juan where she was staying.

## Sen. Flake Calls For Delay on Kavanaugh Floor Vote



Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.) on Friday called for a one-week delay of a full Senate vote on the Supreme Court nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, to allow time for an FBI investigation of accusations against [Kavanaugh](#).

(Published Friday, Sept. 28, 2018)

"None of the places I visited were closed," said Martínez, "but I did see a lot of the vegetation destroyed and the street lights were not working. Also power was off for long hours."

Kenneth Rivera-Robles, president of the Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, said that the government hired the nonprofit marketing group Discover Puerto Rico to change the perception people have of Puerto Rico in the wake of the storm.

"People tend to think we are not ready when in fact if you visit the island today you will get the whole experience," Rivera-Robles said. "Tourism is vital to our economy."

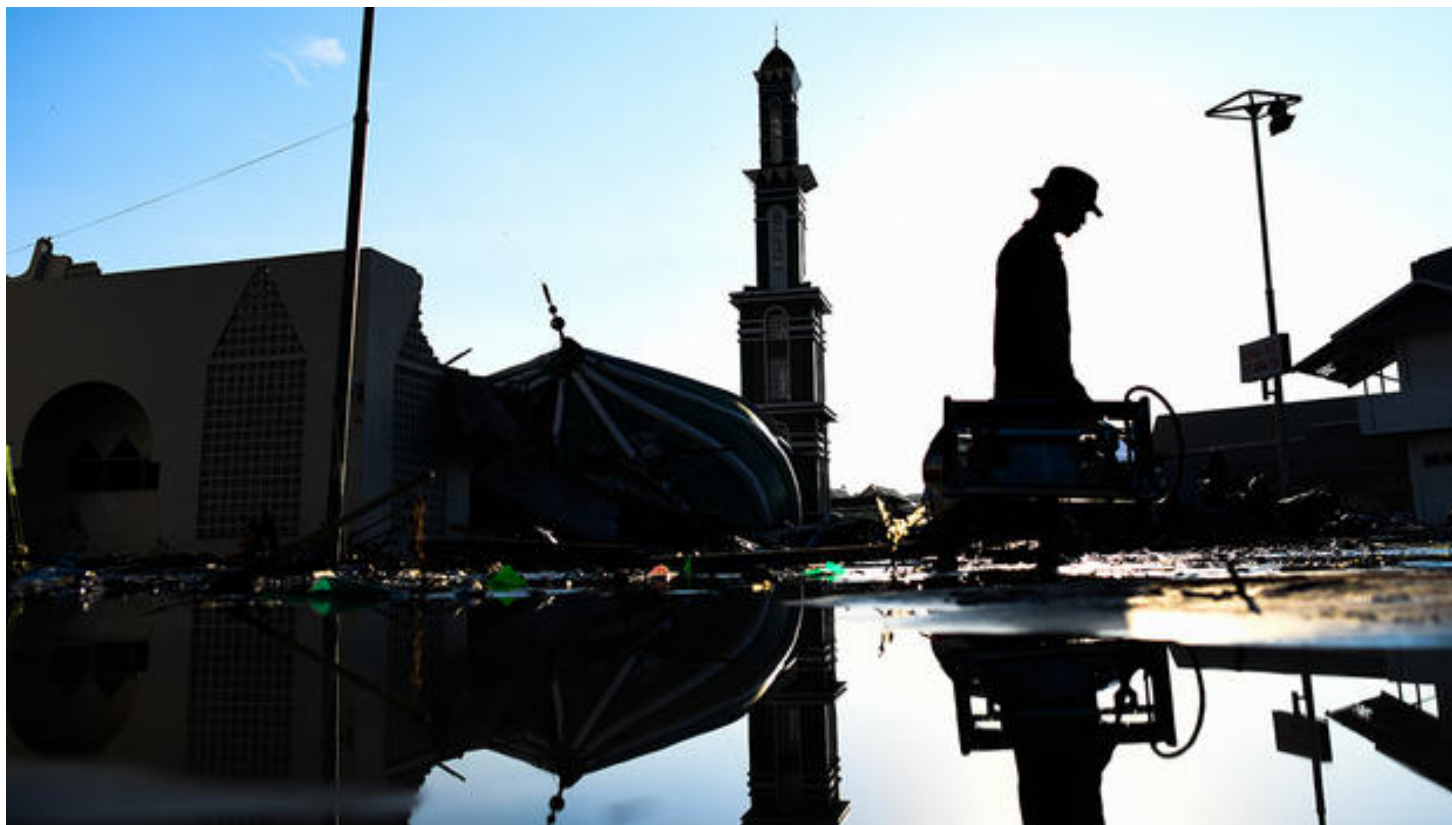
- [\*\*Desperation Explodes in Indonesia as Quake Toll Passes 1.2K\*\*](#)

Jennifer Rosa, vice president for communications for Discover Puerto Rico, explained how the welcome sign in Costa Santiago was a turning point to show recovery efforts. Discover Puerto Rico invited people to use the hashtag #covertheprocess on social media to show the changes. "The future of too many people relies on tourism," she said.

Leah Chandler, chief of marketing office for Discover Puerto Rico, added that "it's time to change the narrative."

In [an alliance with Google](#), they have created a photo archive of what different attractions looked like after Maria in comparison to now.

## [\*\*Top News Photos: Deadly Indonesia Earthquake\*\*](#)



Jewel Samad/Getty Images

“All of the attractions are open and running perfectly. These are all pictures taken after Maria,” Chandler said.

Puerto Rican tourism promoters have made clear, however, that there are still places, including Puerto Rico's mountainous interior, where infrastructure is still weak and more needs to be done.

Tourist-friendly areas that were struggling to recover in the aftermath of Maria, such as Rincón and the island of Culebra, are open to visitors and will benefit from people's visits.

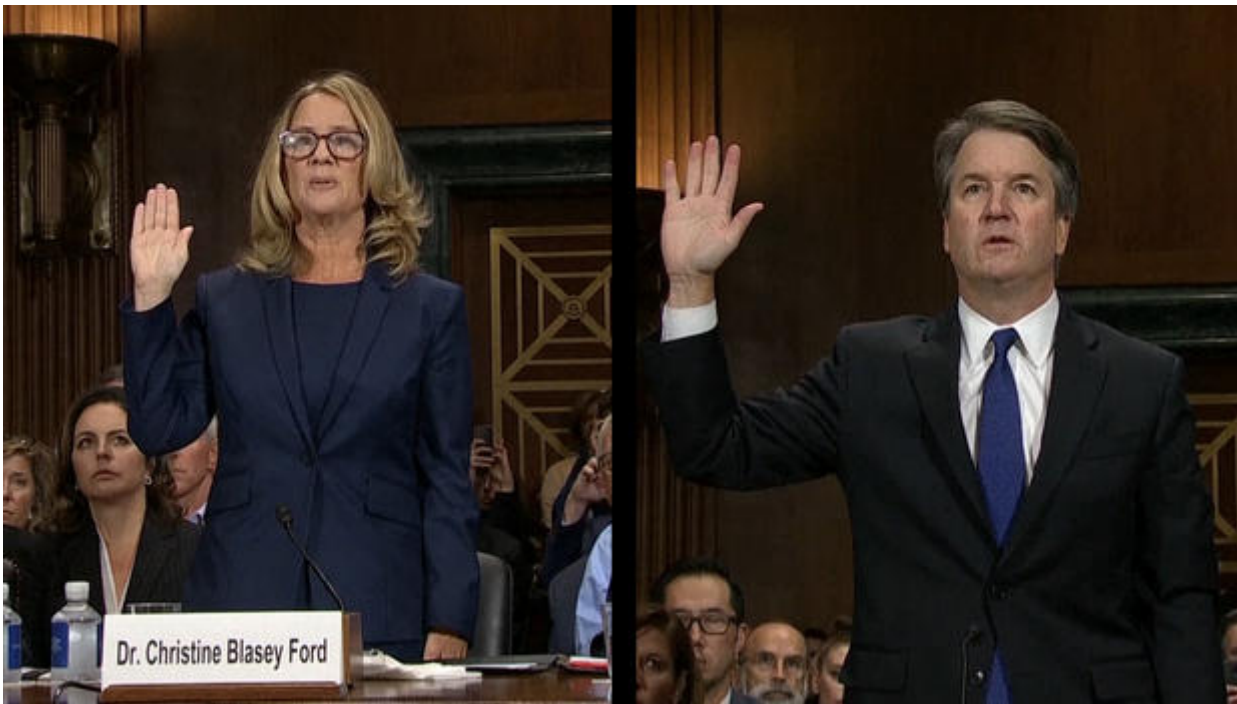
- [Video Court Orders Hospital to Keep Texas Girl, 9, on Life Support](#)

Tourism experts agree that the best way to fix ongoing challenges is by getting people to bring their business.

For all the misery that Maria wrought, it also did bring some new attention to the island.

“Before people couldn't even find Puerto Rico on a map,” Jiménez said. “Now they know where it is, who we are and our relationship with the U.S.”

## Key Moments From the Kavanaugh-Ford Hearing



Judge Brett Kavanaugh and Dr. Christine Blasey Ford testified in front of the Senate Judicial Committee about allegations that Ford was sexually assaulted by Kavanaugh in high school. Here are some of the key moments during the hearing.

(Published Thursday, Sept. 27, 2018)

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