



LIKE A LOCAL

## Weekend in San Juan 2019 F&W Best New Chef Paxx Caraballo Moll shares a highly opinionated guide to the Puerto Rican capital.

**PAXX CARABALLO MOLL HAS BEEN COOKING** in San Juan for some 20 years, carving out a reputation as a champion of the local food movement on the tiny island, as well as supporting and empowering trans and queer chefs. Born on Puerto Rico's west coast, Moll initially landed in the more liberal San Juan to escape home and stayed for the vibrancy of the city, its colorful arts scene and public murals (they attended art school before becoming a chef), and a strong community of friends. In addition to running the kitchen at Jungle BaoBao inside the popular cocktail bar JungleBird, Moll recently opened a second spot, the seafood-focused *Écume*, a beachfront kiosk inside Condado's La Marqueta food hall. —MELANIE HANSCHKE



### BREAKFAST VIBES

"If you're a coffee person, **Café Comu-nión** ([instagram.com/cafecomunion](https://www.instagram.com/cafecomunion)) is THE place. Their co-owner, Abner Roldán, is one of the best baristas on the island—a latte art champion! My favorite brunch spot is **Café Sidibou** ([facebook.com/sidiboupr](https://www.facebook.com/sidiboupr)), a low-key Arab-Dominican-run Mediterranean café that is incredibly soulful. Try the mangú, a Dominican dish of mashed plantains, and the bacalao (salted cod) salad."

### TO MARKET

"**Mercado Agrícola Natural Viejo San Juan** on Saturdays ([facebook.com/mercadosj](https://www.facebook.com/mercadosj)) is the longest running organic produce market in San Juan. They have ladies selling yogurt, rastas opening coconuts, a hippie selling kefir. At **Plaza del Mercado de Río Piedras** in Old San Juan, also on Saturdays, go to the food court for corn doughnuts!"

### SWEET STUFF

"**El Horno de Pane** ([elhornodepane.com](https://www.elhornodepane.com)) makes perfect croissants, pain au chocolat, and brioche, and the monkey bread—oh my god! The best ice cream in San Juan is made by Lorivie Alicea at **Vía Láctea** ([vialacteapr.com](https://www.vialacteapr.com)). She works with local farmers and producers. All her stuff is amazing, and her vegan scoops are a must-try."

### SHOP SMALL, SHOP LOCAL

"I buy so much stuff at **Moni & Coli** ([moniandcoli.com](https://www.moniandcoli.com)), mainly as gifts. They have clothing and jewelry by local designers and the most beautiful feminine necklaces and earrings. I also like **Electroshock** ([instagram.com/electroshockpr](https://www.instagram.com/electroshockpr)), a vintage record and thrift store with unique vinyl, T-shirts, and fashion."

### LOCAL BEACH HANG

"At the beaches of Piñones and Playa Vacía Talega, there are a bunch of food trucks and kiosks. My favorite kiosk is all the way at the end: **Kiosko La Comay** ([kiosko-la-comay.business.site](https://www.kiosko-la-comay.business.site)). Park the car, order a ton of food, and take it to the sand. I get conch, octopus, crab, and rice. Plus, they'll crack open a coconut and pour rum into it for you. I take all the people I love there!"

### BEST BREWS

"I love beer, and **Ocean Lab Brewing Co.** ([oceanlabbrewery.com](https://www.oceanlabbrewery.com)), inside the Vivo Beach Club, is one of my favorite breweries—I would love to collaborate with them. They do an SJU San Juan Lager in the style of a Helles that's really crushable. I also like the Blonde Ale that's exclusively available in Puerto Rico, nowhere else!"

### EXTRA EXTRA FANCY

"If you want old-school fine dining, **Bodegas Compostela** ([facebook.com/bodegascompostela](https://www.facebook.com/bodegascompostela)) has been doing it right for 30 years. It's a true gem, a traditional Spanish restaurant with a solid wine cellar. Since they're open on Mondays, this is where you go as a chef, in your best Sunday clothes, and you roll out happy and buzzed."

### DESSERT DESTINATION

"**Paulina Escanes** ([paulinaescanes.com](https://www.paulinaescanes.com)) is a Mexican chef who runs a restaurant of the same name. It's a women-operated neighborhood place that has a real vibe. The restaurant also has a bakery, and she is a genius with pastry. Her Pay de Limón (lemon pie) is stunning. It has a cornmeal crust, lemon curd, and meringue."

"We have a saying about the beaches on the west coast: West is best! Those beaches have more of a chill, surf vibe."



### SECRET SPOT!

"There's an abandoned hotel on the coast of the city called **Hotel Normandie**—rumor has it that it's haunted. An unnamed beach behind the hotel is my favorite in San Juan; the water is as calm as a pool. The other best beaches are on the west side of Puerto Rico, near Mayagüez, where I'm from."

### HOP ON THE BUS

F&W DEPUTY EDITOR MELANIE HANSCHKE GETS A TASTE OF HOW SAN JUAN'S RESIDENTS LIKE TO WEEKEND.



After a winding climb through mountains dense with plantain forests, our bus pulls into **El Rancho de Don Nando** ([facebook.com/ranchodonando](https://www.facebook.com/ranchodonando)), a roadside restaurant where we are greeted by a sign declaring that we've arrived in paradise. It is filled with two of my favorite things: pork and plants. The former comes in juicy pairs of pink longaniza—fresh sausage made with garlic and spices grilled over wood. The latter are a new addition.

When the pandemic hit, owner Héctor Hernán Lopez, known as "Nando," pivoted his 40-year-old family business. Today, he sells potted plants alongside roughly 1,000 pounds of pork every Friday to Sunday.

Lopez's restaurant is located on a popular *chinchorro*, or bar-hopping route, in the Naranjito district, 45 minutes south of San Juan. The city's locals blow off steam on the weekend by renting a *chinchorro* bus and hopping from one place to the next. Many have live music, and most offer amenities for families.

The *chinchorros* run from roadside stalls serving pig on a spit and beer to polished fine diners with manicured gardens, wine cellars, and cocktail programs. **Calichi Gastrobar** ([calichigastrobar.com](https://www.calichigastrobar.com)) is perched high on a mountain overlooking Naranjito. Find a respite from pork with a refreshing grouper ceviche served with coconut arepas, and order the candied papaya in a spiced syrup with fresh cheese for dessert.

At **Asador San Miguel** ([asadorpr.com](https://www.asadorpr.com)), leave room after Rey Santa's creative meat dishes for his fat-washed smoked brisket old-fashioned, taken by the firepit in the magical garden.

Close out the day with music at **El Limbo Bar & BBQ** ([ellimbobar.com](https://www.ellimbobar.com)), where a refreshing passion fruit mojito is the right accompaniment to a local band playing folk music.

### GETTING THERE

**Chinchorro Bus** ([facebook.com/chinchorrobus](https://www.facebook.com/chinchorrobus)), **La Chiva** ([lachivachinchorroespr.com](https://www.lachivachinchorroespr.com)), and **Puerto Rico Party Bus** ([prpartybus.com](https://www.prpartybus.com)).