

Diplomatic Security special agents arrive via ferry in the British Virgin Islands to conduct a passport fraud investigation.



San Juan Noche

SMALL OFFICE PLAYS A BIG LAW ENFORCEMENT ROLE **BY CHRISTOPHER TREMANN**

The smallest of the Greater Antilles, Puerto Rico is an island of contrasts and incredible beauty. It is a territory of the United States, so a tour there is considered a domestic assignment. But with its different language and culture, it can be an exciting, rewarding and culturally enriching experience.

While most Puerto Ricans are proud of their U.S. citizenship, a small but vocal minority has advocated complete independence. Terrorist organizations mounted attacks against military, federal and law enforcement personnel throughout the 1950s and 60s. In the most famous attack, two Puerto Rican nationalists killed a U.S. Secret Service Uniformed Division police

officer in 1952 in a foiled attempt to assassinate President Truman.

In 1999, protests over the U.S. military presence in Puerto Rico came to a head when a civilian guard was killed on the island of Vieques, to the east of Puerto Rico. Vieques, two-thirds of which was owned by the U.S., was used by the Navy as a live-weapons testing ground. The protests received international attention, and in 2003 the Navy left Puerto Rico and Vieques.

In September 2005, agents from the Department of Justice attempted to arrest Filiberto Ojeda Ríos, a former independence leader on the run for nearly two decades. He was killed in a shootout after shooting two federal agents. Puerto Ricans took to the streets in protest for many

weeks. Even as late as last December, anti-American graffiti could be seen scrawled on highway ramps and the sides of buildings.

The only permanent Department of State representation on the island is the San Juan Resident Office, which reports to the Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Miami Field Office. It has both Foreign Service and Civil Service positions: an FS resident agent in charge, three FS special agents and a CS investigative assistant. The office is expanding to include two Puerto Rico police officers as part of the Identity Fraud Task Force.

The SJRO conducts passport and visa fraud investigations and coordinates with foreign consulates in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The office works closely



Above: Puerto Rican police maintain vigilance in historic downtown Old San Juan. Upper right: A cruise ship docks in Old San Juan. Many Caribbean cruises start and end in Puerto Rico. Lower right: Resident Agent in Charge Christopher Tremann and Acting Director of the Police of Puerto Rico Ismael Morales García conduct a press conference concerning the arrest of a fugitive and the creation of the Identity Fraud Task Force.

with the assistant regional security office investigators in embassies in the region, and has jointly worked investigations in the British Virgin Islands and on St. Maarten, Netherlands Antilles. The office also assists the Office of Foreign Missions in Miami to ensure that foreign consulates comply with the Vienna Convention and U.S. law.

Arguably one of the busiest domestic offices in DS, the SJRO created the first task force headed by the bureau on visa and passport fraud. It has hosted conferences on the dangers of identity theft in Puerto Rico and Overseas Security Advisory Council meetings for U.S. businesses located in the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

In addition, SJRO agents have conducted protective details for dozens of foreign dignitaries traveling through the international airport in San Juan, dealt with hundreds of leads for passport fraud investigations and conducted searches, arrests and seizures. During the past two years, agents were involved in more than 100 arrests.

The office attracts singles and families. Singles and couples enjoy the nightlife, numerous events and variety of outdoor activities available. Families can send their children to the English-speaking school run by the Department of Defense at Ft. Buchanan at State Department expense.

Although it is possible to enjoy a tour in Puerto Rico without Spanish, many local government contacts do not speak English, so speaking Spanish makes it far easier to take advantage of Puerto Ricans' legendary hospitality. The Department recently approved positions in Puerto Rico to be language-designated.

Though only 100 miles by 36 miles, Puerto Rico packs a lot of punch for its size. Most of the island is very safe for tourists and residents. The cultural, economic and governmental center is San Juan. With a population of more than 1 million, San Juan has museums, casinos and theaters, as well as colonial architecture and history in Viejo San Juan, the original Spanish capital. With its vibrant nightlife, narrow cobblestone streets and ancient forts, Viejo San Juan transports visitors to another era.

San Juan is a top cruise ship destination and tourists regularly flood the streets during the high season, shopping or simply relaxing in an outdoor café with a mojito or piña colada. Isla Verde, beyond Viejo San Juan, is lined with high-end hotels and casinos, and the beaches are full of friendly locals and tourists from all over.

The western side of Puerto Rico, anchored by the city of Mayagüez, is home to some of the best surfing anywhere in the

United States. In that area are the Caves of Camuy, a beautiful and immense series of caverns carved out of limestone by underground rivers, and the Arecibo Observatory, the largest radio telescope in the world, made famous by such movies as *Contact* and *Goldeneye*.

The eastern side of Puerto Rico is the sailing capital. From the town of Fajardo, one can easily sail to Culebra, the jewel of the Spanish Virgin Islands, or continue eastward to the U.S. Virgin Islands. Located in the mountains in the center of the island is El Yunque National Park, the only tropical forest in the U.S. National Park System.

Puerto Rico has numerous cultural events. On Noche de San Juan (San Juan Night), locals light bonfires on the beach and party until midnight, when they walk backward into the ocean 12 times to symbolize good luck and starting life afresh.

For DS agents, a tour in Puerto Rico offers the opportunity for challenging and rewarding work in a stunning and diverse area. Whether Puerto Rico votes to become a state, remain a territory or become an independent nation, a tour here can be exciting, enjoyable and career-enhancing. ■

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