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Hotel Palacio Provincial Review

By Katherine Rodeghier

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Leaving the heat of sunny Old San Juan at my back, I entered the cool, marble-floored lobby of one of the city's newest boutique hotels and immediately felt refreshed. To my right and left, Hotel Palacio Provincial's canary yellow arched galleries lined its twin courtyards, hallmarks of its Spanish Colonial architecture. A grand central staircase

hinted at its past as a government building now transformed into luxury lodgings in the heart of Puerto Rico's oldest quarter.



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For most of its 200-year existence, the structure served as a center of diplomacy, housing the island's Provincial Council and later the offices of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Commerce. Throughout the second half of the 20th century, it housed Puerto Rico's Department of State, now located next door. Designed during the Historicist/Enlightenment Period, the building was intended to be a large public symbol, a visual icon of the Spanish crown with a grand exterior and richly appointed interior.



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Although the building has its roots in the early 19th century, the hotel successfully marries antiquity with a modern, cosmopolitan style. I saw evidence of this union when I stepped into my guestroom and was greeted by a minimalist, contemporary décor in neutral colors with a pop of red accents. The beam ceiling stretched 14 feet high and 12-foot-tall windows opened onto Juliet balconies. The modern bathroom had a large, walk-in shower. A coffeemaker was stocked with premium Alto Grande coffee and a smart TV allowed me to catch up on the latest news and entertainment.



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A sister to the El Convento hotel in a former nunnery around the corner, Palacio Provincial is one of the L.V.X. collection of Preferred Hotels & Resorts. Guests must be at least age 18 years old to stay in its 43 guestrooms and suites. Rates range from \$269 to \$519. The presidential suite is named for the Infanta Eulalia of Spain, the youngest and last surviving child of Queen Isabella II. She visited the building in 1893 on her way to Chicago for the World's Columbian Exhibition marking the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus's landing in the New World. A controversial celebrity in her day, she was known for her progressive views on politics, the independence of women and the equality of classes.



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Palacio Provincial is just a half block from Plaza de Armes in the heart of Old San Juan. From its rooftop pool and terrace, I had a view of the dome of the 16th-century San Juan Cathedral next door. Sunset Rosé drinks are served on the terrace three evenings a week. Guests who want to exercise during their stay can use the fitness room and the hotel's complimentary bicycles. A bright, welcoming library works as an air-conditioned meeting spot or a place to relax with a book or play a game of chess. The Calligraphy Board Room offers 750 square feet of event space.



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The open-air Consular Restaurant & Bar is open daily from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., with brunch served on Saturday and Sunday from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. A pizza oven provides a casual meal by the bar where the drinks menu features signature cocktails. At dinner, I enjoyed a watermelon mojito with a plate of shrimp croquettes followed by snapper in a lemongrass-ginger broth accompanied by celery mash. Other mains on the dinner menu include octopus, steak and chicken along with three vegan dishes.

Hotel Palacio Provincial

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