Christmas in Puerto Rico is the longest Christmas and revolves mainly around the spirit of giving and merry making.

Puerto Rican yuletide traditions have their roots from the Spanish colonial era. The Misa de Gallo, for example, is a pre-dawn mass celebrated during the nine days preceding Christmas. On Christmas Eve, the final Christmas mass is celebrated with much ceremony, color and lights. The midnight mass on Christmas Eve with its rituals dates back to the period when mass was still said in Latin.

It is also customary for Boricua families to sit down to a feast on Christmas Eve after the Christmas Eve mass. Called the Noche Buena, the feast is in part a thanksgiving for the blessings of the year past, as well as a prayerful feast for a prosperous year to come.

But Christmas doesn’t end on Christmas Day. There are Los Reyes Magos to celebrate!

The evening of January 5th is known as The eve of Los Reyes (much like Christmas eve). There are parties and parrandas everywhere. That night our children find shoe boxes and add grass for the camels to eat and a wish list for Los Reyes. In the morning the boxes are full of gifts, many don’t even fit in the shoe boxes of course. It is a whole new Christmas-like day again.

But the holidays don’t stop there. There are the ‘octavas’ and ‘octavitas’. Festivities begin on January 9th (after the last of the Kings days) and last for eight days. Originally these were more religious in nature and were used to glorify the Reyes and the Christ child. Coplas were dedicated to the magi. Copa: "Se fueron los Reyes con mucha alegría, vienen las octavas - Dios nos de salud para celebrarlas."

Octavitas began right after the Octavas and were eight more days of continued adoration. These were a prelude to la Cuaresma (lent).

Feliz Día de Reyes!

Siempre Boricua, Ivonne Figueroa

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He is widely known as Ed Vega. His novels have been bestsellers and he has taught others the basics of writing. Ed was born in 1936 in Ponce and he died in 2008 in Brooklyn, New York. Edgardo's novel gained great reviews. Recommended books are: No Matter How Much You Promise to Cook or Pay the Rent You Blew It Cauze Bill Bailey Ain't Never Coming Home Again, and Blood Fugues. He wrote with a Spanglish form that no one since has been able to master. Much respect and honor belongs to Edgardo Vega Yunqué.

Poet, dramaturg, essayist and writer... Tapia is considered to be the father of Puerto Rican literature and as the person who has contributed the most to the cultural advancement of Puerto Rico's literature.

Born: November 12, 1826, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Died: July 19, 1882, San Juan, Puerto Rico.


Piri Thomas

Combining poetry, documentary and drama, this film explores the life and work of Piri Thomas, 75-year-old Afro-Cuban-Puerto Rican poet and author. His 1967 autobiographical novel "Down These Mean Streets" was groundbreaking in its bilingual style, realistic portrayal of youth, imprisonment, and the search for racial identity.

There are three Puerto Rico's you need to learn about; the old, the new and the natural. Learn about our little terruño. Subscribe to EL BORICUA, a monthly cultural publication for Puerto Ricans.

http://www.elboricua.com/subscribenow.html
Rosario Ferré

Dr. Rosario Ferré (born September 28, 1938) is a Puerto Rican writer, poet and essayist. Her father, Luis A. Ferré, was the third elected Governor of Puerto Rico, and the founding father of the New Progressive Party. When her mother, Lorenza Ramírez de Arellano, died in 1970 during her father's term as Governor, Rosario fulfilled the duties of First Lady until 1972.

Among her published literary essays is "Sitio a Eros", which promoted political and social themes.

Rosario Ferré (birth name: Rosario Ferré Ramírez de Arellano) was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, into one of Puerto Rico's wealthiest families. Her parents were the former First Family of Puerto Rico Luis A. Ferré (Governor) and Lorenza Ramírez de Arellano. She is the niece of the late Sor Isolina Ferré, recipient of the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Ferré received her primary education at Ponce, Puerto Rico. In 1951, she was sent to Wellesley, Massachusetts and attended Dana Hall School. Ferré began writing professionally at age 14, publishing articles in Puerto Rico's newspaper El Nuevo Día.

In her youth, Ferré was an advocate of independence, despite the fact that her father was pro-statehood (and, later, she too became an advocate of statehood.) Upon graduating from high school she went to the United States where she gained her Bachelor of Arts degree in English and French from Manhattanville College. She is a member of Mu Alpha Phi sorority.

Ferré returned to Puerto Rico where in the 1970s she enrolled in the University of Puerto Rico to study for her master's degree. During her time as a student, Ferré began her writing career as the founder, editor and publisher of the journal "Zona de Carga y Descarga" along with her cousin, Olga Nolla.

The journal was devoted to publishing the works of new writers and to promoting the ideas of the independence movement. Among the novelists and short story writers of Puerto Rico to share Ferré's commitment to satire were Ana Lydia Vega and Giannina Braschi.

Ferré also has published poems and written a biography about her father.

Upon earning her master's degree, Ferré enrolled in University of Maryland where she graduated with a PhD in Latin American Literature.

Her doctoral thesis was titled: "La filiación romántica de los cuentos de Julio Cortázar" (The romantic link between the stories of Julio Cortázar).

Mayra Santos-Febres, born 1966 in Carolina, is a Puerto Rican author, poet, novelist and professor of literature. Works include: Sobre piel y papel, orden escapado and more. She completed her undergraduate work at the University of Puerto Rico and holds an M.A. and Ph.D. (1991) from Cornell University. Her work has been translated into French, English, German, and Italian, and is taught in many universities in the United States. Santos-Febres currently teaches at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras Campus. Her more recent publications include a collection of essays called Sobre piel y papel and also a novel about Isabel la Negra titled Nuestra Señora de la Noche (Our Lady of the Night).

Wikipedia

Speaking Puerto Rican . . .

A lo loco - Literally, 'like crazy', or done without much care.

BORICUA . . .

is a powerful word.
It is our history,
it is our cultural affirmation,
it is a declaration,
it is a term of endearment,
it is poetic . . .
. . . . . . . . . .
it is us.
### Cultural Traits

- **January 2, 1851**
  - Manuel Elzaburu, founder of *El Ateneo Puertorriqueño*, is born in San Juan.

- **January 6, 1751**
  - José Campeche, known as the island's first painter, was born in San Juan.

- **January 8, 1912**
  - José Ferrer Cintrón - successful actor and producer, born in San Juan.

- **January 9, 1899**
  - Doña Felisa Rincón de Gautier - Politician, Co-founder of the Partido Popular Democrático and mayor of San Juan for 22 years, is born in Ceiba.

- **January 10, 1973**
  - Félix "Tito" Trinidad - birthday

- **January 11, 1839**
  - Eugenio María de Hostos y Bonilla, born in Mayagüez, an educator who became involved in politics. Hostos became famous throughout all Latino America for his ideologies, and as a thinker, critic, journalist, and sociologist. He lived most of his adult life outside the island. He was a teacher who founded colleges and universities. Hostos died in Santo Domingo on August 11, 1903.

- **January 11, 1842**
  - Salvador Brau Asencio, was a self-taught historian, journalist, poet, and more. Brau was born in Cabo Rojo. In 1903 he was named official historian. He died on November 5th, 1912.

- **January 14, 1508**
  - First school is founded in Caparra

- **January 15th, 1969**
  - Museo del Barrio is established in New York City - Congratulations!

- **January 23, 1493**
  - San Juan Bautista is renamed Puerto Rico

- **January 24, 1522**
  - Iglesia de San José is founded (Oldest church still in use in the Americas)

- **January 24, 1874**
  - Arturo Alfonso Schomburg is born in Santurce. An AfroBorincano who documented achievements and culture of Blacks all over the world. A museum in New York carries his name.

- **January 27, 1513**
  - First African slaves brought to Puerto Rico
Sparkling Red Party Punch

1 (12 oz) frozen fruit punch concentrate (I used Hawaiian’s Own Paradise Punch), thawed
½ of 1 (12 oz) frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
2 liters Cherry 7Up
4 cups water
orange slices (optional)
ice

In a large punch bowl, mix together the fruit punch concentrate and orange juice concentrate together.

Slowly pour in the Cherry 7Up and water, mix until completely incorporated.

Add the orange slices (they will float to the top of the punch) and ice cubes. Serve immediately.

Yes, this punch may be spiked

A unos ojos astrales

Si Dios un día
cegara toda fuente de luz,
el universo se alumbraría
con esos ojos que tienes tú.

Pero, si lleno de agrios enojos
por tal blasfemia, tus lindos ojos

Dios te arrancase,
para que el mundo con la alborada
de tus pupilas no se alumbrase:
aunque quisiera, Dios no podría
tender la Noche sobre la Nada . . .

¡porque aún el mundo se alumbraría
con el recuerdo de tu mirada!!

José P. H. (Peache) Hernández

Peache lived from 1892 to 1922. He was a musician and a pharmacist. He died from an illness just before turning 30. Most of his work was lost at sea. Ojos Astrales a poem that many Puerto Ricans know by heart.

Mar violácea, mar serena . . .

Otra vez aquí, en la playa,
vuelvo a soñar mis ensueños,
entre pétalos risueños
de florecillas de maya.

El arpa de la gaviota
me dice un cantar doliente:
y un suspiro es cada nota
porque mi dicha está rota
y está mi adorada ausente.

Mar violácea, mar serena,
no sabes con cuánta pena
me he venido a saludar:
que en mi vida peregrina
cada gozo es una espina
y cada lágrima un mar . . .

José P. H. (Peache) Hernández
# Pupusas

El Salvador

**Ingredients**
- 2 cups masa harina (corn flour)*
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/3 cup cheese, shredded (Mexican blend is fine)
- Oil

**Instructions**

1. Combine the masa, water and salt in a bowl and stir to combine into a dough.
2. Divide the mixture into 6 balls and flatten each one into a 3 inch disk.
3. Place 1 tbsp of shredded cheese in the center of the disk and carefully fold in the edges to enclose the cheese.
4. Flatten the disk, covering the cheese and form into 1/4 inch thick disks (about 5-6 inches across).
5. Heat 2 tbsp of oil in a large saute pan.
6. Add 2-3 pupusas at a time and cook for 4-5 minutes on each side for a total of 8-10 minutes.
7. These may be served warm, as is or topped with sauces, avocados, guacamole, sour cream etc.

*Make sure to buy masa harina (sold at most groceries) which is different from cornmeal

To Freeze: After step 4, place on sheet tray and freeze for 30 minutes or until frozen then transfer to a ziploc bag label and freeze up to 4 months. When ready, defrost in fridge for 24 hours and follow steps 5-6.

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*Elena, born and raised in Puerto Rico to Brazilian and Peruvian parents, lives in Buenos Aires most of the year. She works for a large South American firm and travels throughout Latin America. She comes home to San Juan.

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Tazumal, Chalchuapa, El Salvador

Literally translating as ‘the pyramid (or place) where the victims were burned’, Tazumal offers some of the most significant and best preserved ruins in the whole of Central America. It has been estimated that there were settlements on this site as far back as 5000 B.C. Many artifacts have been discovered here, including a life-size statue of Xipe Totec, a Nahuatl god.
Flan de Queso
So easy and so delicious!

8-oz package cream cheese, softened
6-8 eggs
1 14-oz can sweetened condensed milk

Preheat oven to 350°. Prepare bain-Marie and caramelize the mold.

Pour 1 cup sugar and about ¼ cup water in a 2 cup glass Pyrex measuring cup. Just stir the sugar and water a bit and microwave on high for about 5 minutes until it reaches the right color. When the color is right open the door.

Immediately pour into the flan pan and swirl to cover the bottom. Always let the caramel set before pouring in the custard. Clean the cup using hot water.

Mix cream cheese first until smooth, with an electric mixer. Add eggs and mix then the rest of the ingredients. Blend smooth but do not over mix. Pour custard into caramelized mold, cover with foil, and sit in the baño de María. Then pour hot water into the baño and into the oven for 1 to 1½ hours until done and knife comes clean.

*Anna, born in Bayamón and raised in Aibonito, is a Recipe Tester for EL BORICUA and is also a professional Chef. She lives in California with her husband, Joe and their three children.
**Garbanzos guisados**
Quick and easy version . . .

2 tablespoons olive oil  
5 tablespoons sofrito  
1 teaspoon crushed garlic  
1/8 cup chopped ham  
1 teaspoon sliced olives  
1/2 cup tomato sauce  
1/2 can boiled potatoes (canned potatoes)  
2 cans garbanzo beans  
salt and pepper to taste  
1/2 cup water

In a skillet heat olive oil and cook sofrito and garlic over medium heat for a few minutes. Add the ham and cook for about 5 minutes or so. Add the rest of the ingredients, bring to a boil and then simmer for another 15 minutes or so.

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**Farina**

2 cups milk  
1/3 cup farina (Cream of Wheat)  
1 tbsp. butter (optional)  
1 tbsp. sugar (optional)  
1 dash salt

Pour milk into 1 quart saucepan, add salt, butter and sugar, stir and bring to a boil over medium heat. Pour Farina (Cream of Wheat) slowly into boiling mixture. Stir constantly until boiling resumes. Cover the pan and turn off heat. Spoon into bowls.

---

**MOLLETE de Chinas**
Orange Marmalade Muffin

Puerto Ricans love oranges, they grow wild and are found everywhere on the island.

4 cups flour  
1/2 cup sugar  
2 tablespoons baking powder  
1/2 cup shortening  
2 cups orange marmalade  
1 cup orange juice  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
2 whole eggs, beaten

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Sift together flour, sugar, and baking powder. Place in a mixing bowl. Use a pastry cutter to mix in shortening.

Mix marmalade, orange juice, and vanilla in a small bowl. Pour into dry ingredients.

Beat eggs and pour into the bowl. Mix all ingredients together gently, using fewer than 10 large strokes.

In a small bowl, mix topping ingredients.

Fill muffin pans with batter. Sprinkle 1 heaping teaspoon of topping ingredients over each muffin.

Bake for 20 to 22 minutes until done. Remove from pan and cool on wire rack. Eat warm or at room temperature.

This easy recipe takes 20 minutes to prepare.
**Nuestra Cocina Criolla**

---

**Pan de Agua**

1 pack of active yeast  
1 tbsp. of sugar  
2 cups of warm water  
1 tbsp. of salt  
5 cups of flour  
3 tsp. of corn flour (fine)  
2 tbsp. of egg whites  
2 tbsp. of cold water

In a bowl, mix the yeast, sugar and warm water and cover for about 20 minutes.

Mix the salt and the flour and cup by cup add to the yeast.

Knead for about 10 minutes or when it stops being sticky and form into a big ball. (You can add 1 more tablespoon of flour if needed.)

Spread some butter all around a big bowl and place the ball in the bowl.

Cover it well and let it rise for 1 to 1/2 hours.

On a working area, sprinkle flour (cover your hands with flour too) and put the ball on the surface on top of the flour.

Knead the bread to form two long loaves of bread.

Sprinkle some corn flour on top of a baking board and place the two loaves of bread. (You may use an aluminum mold but grease it well.)

Mix the cold water and eggs whites well and set aside.

Make 2 to 3 long slashes on top of the loaves with a sharp knife and with a brush, spread some of the egg white mix on top of the loaves. The slash will make the bread moist.

Place the 2 loaves of bread into a cold oven.

Now, turn the oven on to 400º F and let it bake for 35 minutes.

When they are golden, take them out of the oven and . . .

---

**Sopón de lentejas**  
Lentil soup

1 tbsp  
3.5 oz chorizo, thinly sliced (Spanish chorizo)  
1 onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup)  
1 carrot, finely chopped (about ½ cup)  
½ green bell pepper, finely chopped (about ½ cup)  
1 tbsp minced garlic  
2 packets powdered chicken bouillon mixed with 2 qts water  
6 oz tomato sauce  
1 lb lentils, rinsed  
1 packet Sazón Goya with Coriander and Annatto  
1 Bay Leaf  
Adobo All-Purpose Seasoning with Pepper, to taste  
2 cups cooked Long Grain Rice

1. Heat oil in medium stockpot over medium-high heat, add chorizo; cook until golden brown on both sides, about 5 minutes. Transfer chorizo to plate; set aside.

2. Add onions, carrots and peppers to pot. Cook vegetables, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 7 minutes; add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds more.

3. Add chicken bouillon mixture, tomato sauce, lentils, sazon and bay leaf; bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium-low; cover pot. Simmer until lentils are tender, stirring occasionally about 40 minutes. Stir in reserved chorizo; season with adobo. Serve with rice.

*Note, in Puerto Rico we use Spanish chorizo. It is solid like a sausage. Mexican chorizo has a different consistency – it is crumbly. Use Spanish chorizo.*
If you grew up in a Puerto Rican household you probably thought Menudo were the first great boy band. This is where the Ricky Martin got his start, and the adorable quintet released about a billion albums spanning many generations. “En San Juan Me Enamore” is just one example of their brilliance.

Luis Guzmán (born October 22, 1956) is a Puerto Rican actor who is known for his character work. For much of Guzmán’s career, he has played character roles largely as sidekicks, thugs, or policemen.

**Coquito**

What is EL Coquito doing at the culturally invigorating Museo Del Barrio in New York City’s Harlem?

Coquito is a traditionally Puerto Rican holiday drink and one might say even delicacy. The drink is made with rum, coconut, nutmeg, cinnamon, condensed milk, and some other secret goodies that many Puerto Ricans will not share. Coquito is synonymous with **Navidad**.

Every year since the early 2000’s El Museo Del Barrio has been holding a coquito tasting contest. The event is free and held every November just before the Christmas season begins. The affair is always crowded, fun, and tasty!

Founder of the completion Debbie Quiñones began the event in her own living room. What started out as a Christmas party became a coquito contest, after an elderly friend who made Coquito for her sadly passed-away. In addition, her recipe went with her to heaven. Ms. Quiñones feared that the Coquito would be lost forever in her celebrations. The guests began making their own and the idea was born.

The museum embraced the unique tradition and it has been a popular event ever since. It is competitive and everyone wants to take home the trophy. The museum just held its 14th Coquito contest celebration. Ms. Quiñones believes that the contest is an embodiment of culture and an opportunity for Puerto Rican’s to share their pride, even if they don’t share all their Coquito secrets.

For many Puerto Ricans coquito is a sweet memory. It is a tradition that comes with **perril, pasteles, and rice and beans.** Many recipes of the traditional drink come passed down from **abuelas** long departed but certainly not forgotten.

One participant at one of the events and two year in a row winner (2008-2009), Ms. Graziani of Pennsylvania said, that the drink was “perfection in a glass.”

Many believe the drink represents home, a connection to our roots and our pride. Coquito, like so much of Puerto Rico’s richness, culture, and tradition, is respected not just by Puerto Ricans but the world. **Salud!**

*Betty is a literacy teacher in Harlem and writes children’s books. She is publishing her first, “La Despeinada” in late spring. Betty lives with her two children Natasha and Xavier in Brooklyn, New York.*

---

*(Image of Luis Guzmán)*

* Luis Guzmán (born October 22, 1956) is a Puerto Rican actor who is known for his character work. For much of Guzmán’s career, he has played character roles largely as sidekicks, thugs, or policemen.

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*(Image of Betty)*

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