San Juan National Historic Site is administered by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The site includes the Spanish-built forts of El Morro, San Cristobal, and El Cahuelo, and the city walls. Information about services to the public can be obtained in the offices of San Cristobal and El Morro. A superintendent, whose address is Box 712, Old San Juan, P.R. 00902, is in immediate charge of the site.

The peak of development in the fortifications came after 1765 when the Spanish crown declared San Juan a defense station of "first order." Two Irishmen who held Spanish military commissions—Marshall Alejandro O'Reilly and Engineer Thomas O'Daly—transformed the defenses into one of the most powerful strongholds in the Americas. By the end of the century, the forts and walls mounted more than 450 guns, and encircled more than 200 acres of land. The town itself occupied only about 62 acres. When the British, under Sir Ralph Abercromby, laid siege to San Juan in 1797, the formidable land defenses proved to be impregnable.

During the 1800's, while San Juan defenses were being refined, the Spanish colonies in the New World gained independence. Only Cuba and Puerto Rico remained as the remnants of Spain's former mighty empire in the New World. When a revolution in Cuba precipitated the Spanish-American War, San Juan defenses were bombarded on May 12, 1898, by the flotilla of Adm. William Sampson. Fortunately, there was no great damage, nor any further military action in the city. Two months later the United States forces landed on the southern coasts of Puerto Rico, but an armistice had been signed before they reached San Juan. Spain's four-century rule of the island came to an end when the defenses of San Juan were turned over peacefully to the United States on October 18, 1898. A new chapter in the history of the island began.

DEFENSES DEPRIMERA MAGNITUD El punto culminante de desarrollo en las fortificaciones de San Juan ocurrió hacia 1765 cuando, por real orden, Puerto Rico se convirtió en plaza fuerte de "primer orden." Dos irlandeses al servicio de España, el Mariscal Alejandro O'Reilly y el ingeniero militar Tomás O'Daly transformaron las defensas en una de las plazas fuertes más poderosas de las Américas. A fines del siglo, los fuertes y murallas contaban con más de 450 cañones y cubrían un área de más de 200 acres. La ciudad en sí ocupaba cerca de 62 acres. Cuando los ingleses asediaron a San Juan en 1797 bajo el comando de Ralph Abercromby—las formidables defensas terrestres de la ciudad probaron ser inexpugnables.

EL FIN DE UNA ÉPOCA Durante el siglo siguiente, mientras se renovaban las defensas, las colonias hispanoamericanas ganaron su independencia. Solamente Cuba y Puerto Rico permanecieron como las últimas vestigias del imperio español en el Nuevo Mundo. Cuando una revolución en Cuba precipitó la Guerra Hispanoamericana, las defensas de San Juan fueron bombardeadas el 12 de mayo 1898 por la flotilla del Almirante William Sampson. No hubo grandes daños, ni otra acción de guerra en la ciudad. Dos meses más tarde las fuerzas de los Estados Unidos desembarcaron por la costa sur de Puerto Rico, pero el armisticio se firmó antes de que llegaran a la capital. El cuarto centenario del reino español de la isla terminó el 18 de octubre de 1898, cuando las defensas de San Juan fueron entregadas pacíficamente a los Estados Unidos. Comenzaba un nuevo capítulo en la historia de la isla.
They arrived in San Juan in 1589 and approved the El Morro site for building a strong fort. Antonelli laid out a
work (so-called because the wall resembled the horns of a bull) that stretched from north to south across the promon-
tory to protect the headland against land attack. Four hundred laborers began work in 1591, and the work was slowly
readied with walls of limestone and "tapieria," a mixture of earth, rock, and lime. For the first time El Morro began to
take on the form of a citadel.

DRAKE AND CUMBERLAND While these defenses were being built, belligerent English sea captains paid frequent
visits. Then, in 1595, Drake, the famous English corsair, arrived at the entrance of the harbor and attempted to seize a
cargo of gold and silver that lay in La Fortaleza awaiting transport to Spain. In spite of his audacity, he was repelled and forced to withdraw by heavy casualties. Three years later the Earl of Cumberland marched on the city from the mainland and
successively burned El Morro. After a brief occupation an
epidemic of dysentery forced the Earl to abandon his plan of
placing here a permanent British station in the West Indies.

The Spaniards, who had evacuated the city, immediately re-
turned to strengthen and expand the defenses.

THE DUTCH BURN SAN JUAN After several years of active activity, the strengthened fortifications were put to the
test by the rising commercial and naval power of the Dutch
in the Caribbean. In 1625, a Dutch fleet under Gen. Bowdoin
Hendrick forced the harbor, captured San Juan, and laid siege
to the landbridge of El Morro. The defenders, however, offered
sufficient resistance and finally drove off the invaders. After sel-
ning away, the Dutch sacked and burned the city.

This disaster had already been forewarned and burned, Havana, and in the
following years Spain suffered numerous other losses on the
Mainland, and the defensive works at Santo Domingo, Cartagena, and St. Augustine.

As a defensive measure, Don Juan de Tejeda and the military
engineer Juan Baston Antonelli were sent to the Caribbean to plan
and strengthen the Spanish defenses.

THE SEARCH FOR RICHES Attracted by gold, Juan
Ponce de Leon began the colonization of Puerto Rico with
the establishment of the first settlement, Caparra, about 1508.
This was a small village situated not far from the southern
part of the harbor of San Juan. Soon, however, it became
evident that the location of Caparra was neither suitable nor
advantageous for commerce. In 1521, the same year that
Ponce de Leon was mortally wounded in the conquest of
Florida, the village was moved to the present coast line of
San Juan.

Although the colonists found some gold in the rivers and
a limited commerce developed in sugar, coffee, and other products, Puerto Rico never produced much wealth. But the
island was important to Spain for other reasons. During the first 50 years after the discovery of the island in
1492, Spain built a number of forts along the coasts of Puerto Rico to carry the new riches across the sea, two convoys left San Juan each year, entering the Caribbean near Puerto Rico. One took on Mexican silver and Philippine merchandise at Vera Cruz, while the other loaded pearls at Cartagena and Peruvian
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San Juan was always a city heretic and its inhabitants acted on the example of its rich history. The simplicity and sobriety of its edifices and monuments contrast with the splendor of its treasures, libraries, and the decorative arts of courtyards and palaces that define the antique public colony that it seeks to enrich.

A century later one of its guns fired the first shot of the Spanish-American War in Puerto Rico. Five aspects more outstanding of the city are the castles and fortresses, ecclesiastical and religious shrines. But the city's most impressive features are the old houses and fortifications, which both provided defense and restricted its growth. Now part of the National Historic Site, they include the castles of El Morro and San Cristóbal, the Casco Viejo, and part of the city walls.

EL MORRO CASTLE. The pierced batteries of El Morro rise more than 140 feet above the sea and command the harbor entrance. Originally named San Felipe del Morro, the fort honored King Philip III of Spain. (This word "morro" means headland or promontory.) On the landward side a broad granite ramp leads to the bridge that crosses the deep moat surrounding the walls. Inside, the castle has all the appearances of a living shadow. Barracks, stables, supply and storage rooms, dungeons, a chapel, an armory, and offices—all bombproof against the explosives of past centuries. A network of ramps and stairs gave the defenders quick access to the ramparts.

The Morro is the oldest and most strategic of the castles that El Morro was supported by a system of massive works which provided defense in depth. The fort's mission was to defend the city from land attacks and, secondary, to protect the north coast. These works were started around 1645 as part of the project to surround the city with walls. An unexpected English land attack in 1598 and the burning of the city by the Dutch in 1625 showed the need for defenses to the east, south, and west. By 1678 San Cristóbal had reached its full size, but the eastern wall remained unfinished. The fort that we see today was finished between 1768 and 1782. During the British siege of 1797, San Cristóbal's powerful artillery masterfully controlled the eastern approaches to the city.

El CASTELEJO. This small fort was built opposite El Morro in the port to prevent hostile landings on the western side of the harbor. Though originally constructed of wood (1610), it had a critical defensive role in the Dutch attack of 1625. It burned during the siege, but the Spaniards rebuilt it of masonry in the 1640's.

San Juan, founded in 1512, stands on the western end of an isthmus that is bordered on the north by the Atlantic and on the south and west by a river and graceful bay. On the eastern side, historic San Antonio Bridge joins the isthmus to the mainland of Puerto Rico.

The city shows its best side from the harbor. Because of the terrain's natural slope, the complex of buildings takes the form of great amphitheater framed by a forbidding ring of walls and castles. A combination of old houses and modern buildings impact variety to the cityscape and gives San Juan its colorful and picturesque character. It is a city with a proud and rich heritage, tempered by ancient calamities of pirate attacks, earthquakes, and hurricanes.

The face of colonial Spain, undisturbed by modern innovations, can still be seen in the streets of San Juan—cobblestone paving, narrow patios and courtyards, overhanging balconies, and religious shrines. But the city's most impressive features are the old houses and fortifications, which both provided defense and restricted its growth. Now part of the National Historic Site, they include the castles of El Morro and San Cristóbal, the Casco Viejo, and part of the city walls.

SAN CRISTÓBAL. This powerful fortress dominates every corner of the old city. A masterpiece of 18th-century military engineering, San Cristóbal was supported by a system of massive works which provided defense in depth. The fort's mission was to defend the city from land attacks and, secondary, to protect the north coast. These works were started around 1645 as part of the project to surround the city with walls. An unexpected English land attack in 1598 and the burning of the city by the Dutch in 1625 showed the need for defenses to the east, south, and west. By 1678 San Cristóbal had reached its full size, but the eastern wall remained unfinished. The fort that we see today was finished between 1768 and 1782. During the British siege of 1797, San Cristóbal's powerful artillery masterfully controlled the eastern approaches to the city. A century later one of its guns fired the first shot of the Spanish-American War in Puerto Rico.