

## Ponce Could Be Puerto Rico's Next Big Destination

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While San Juan has long been Puerto Rico's undisputed tourism hub, the island's efforts to ramp up tourism development have meant a look at new destinations for growth.

That's what has taken developers to Ponce, the second-most-populous city beyond San Juan, which is now home to what is arguably the most exciting new development concept in all of Puerto Rico.

It's called Ponce Paradise, and the new "megaproject" design aims to create a "world-class medical and tourism destination," according to AG&T, a development advisory firm which has been tapped along with Douglas Elliman's Oceanfront International Group to lead sales and marketing for the project.

The concept, designed by Michael Winstanley Architects and Land Design, will be a full-fledged destination within Ponce.

That will include a "town center," a marina, a university medical center, a "wellness community," an agricultural farm-to-table component, a large hotel and a "wellness community," among other features.

The project will be located a short distance from Ponce's Mercadita International Airport, east of the Rafael Cordero Santiago Port of the Americas.

In all, the destination would total 900 acres and could mean as much as \$1 billion in total investment, according to some estimates.

"Ponce Paradise is undoubtedly a grand and lofty vision that will necessitate the input from community, government, and other key stakeholders alike. We understand this is a long process but one that together can lead to the creation of a once in a lifetime iconic development," AGT's Adam Greenfader told Caribbean Journal.

According to AGT, the "eco-friendly" project would leave 60 percent of the site intact, with a "sustainable" design that would work to "help maximize Ponce's already-existing 21st-century infrastructure airport, port and convention center."

The move would create new energy for what is effectively Puerto Rico's second city, a cultural, artistic and historic hub that has long been in the shadow of the capital, which is about an hour away by car.

The new megaproject would complement a small but robust tourism offering, one that includes the Melia Century Hotel, the oldest hotel in Puerto Rico, the home of Puerto Rico's most popular rum, Don Q, and a the Art Museum of Ponce, often billed as the largest art museum in all of the Caribbean.

While the concept is very much in its early stages, Ponce Paradise has the potential to become a game-changing project for a Caribbean destination that is very much in need of a few of them.

"The potential of Ponce Paradise is one that cherishes the past, respects the present, and paves the way for a new future," Greenfader said. "Together we have created some initial development concepts for a world class medical and tourism destination. Ponce Paradise is undoubtedly a grand and lofty vision that will necessitate the input from community, government, and other key stakeholders alike. We understand this is a long process but one that together can lead to the creation of a once in a lifetime iconic development."

