



## Fact sheet

# Culebrita Lighthouse

### Location

Isla Culebrita is a small island located on the eastern side of the Culebra archipelago, next to Cayo Botella. It is only accessible by boat and is part of the Culebra National Wildlife Refuge (USFWS). It's the easternmost point of the Puerto Rican archipelago and because of it, Culebrita greets the rising sun every morning.

### Historical background

Source: Fundación de Culebra  
<https://fundacionculebra.wordpress.com>

The Culebrita Lighthouse was built by the Spanish Crown between 1882 and 1886, to establish control of its territory and reinforce its defenses against British and Danish invasions. It was built on top of this small island because it features the highest point of the Culebra archipelago. Construction was extremely expensive and difficult due to its location, which was and still is remote and uninhabited, making it necessary to transport water, food, materials and workers.

### Architecture & ownership

The Culebrita Lighthouse is very peculiar due to its placement and unique E-shaped floor plan. This design was unique among the lighthouses of the Caribbean and featured luxurious materials imported from the US and Europe. Its dome, now lost, was made with double layers of copper and the wind vane of its lightning rod was made of solid bronze. Many of its original Genovese marble tiles can still be found onsite. After the Spanish American War of 1898, the lighthouse passed on to US hands and was mainly used as an observation point by its Navy up until 1975.

The Culebrita Lighthouse became part of the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. The Municipality of Culebra attained property transfer of the lighthouse and its surrounding land in 2003, planning rehabilitation work that later had to be halted due to high construction costs. Now, 12 years later, it hopes to recover this fragment of its history with Para la Naturaleza.

### Current state

The lighthouse is currently in a state of disrepair. Hurricanes have destroyed its roofs and windows. Although its walls seem fairly intact to the naked eye, they are at risk to crumbling down because corrosion of its bricks and the presence of deep cracks along its structural arches. The staircase leading to the dome area is almost completely decayed by rust and the passing of time. The lens that

once shone light 12 miles across the passage between Culebra, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands, has been irreversibly damaged by weathering. The dome that once crowned the lighthouse shared the same fate, being ripped off and dragged downhill by hurricane winds only to later disappear, possibly due to theft.

The paths that once led to the lighthouse are in dire need of clearing and maintenance for the safety of its visitors, the structure itself and the ecosystems in the area.

### Partnership for its rehabilitation

In January 2015, the Culebra Municipality and the Para la Naturaleza unit of the Puerto Rico Conservation Trust signed an agreement to rehabilitate the lighthouse. Under it, the municipality will hold the title fee while awarding the Trust a 20-year usufruct over the 4.46 acres that make up the building's footprint and surrounding lands.

Para la Naturaleza will develop a plan in collaboration with the Culebra Municipality in order to rehabilitate the Lighthouse following historic preservation standards. It will also be managing its lands to protect and showcase the structure and the natural area surrounding it. The priority of the initial rehabilitation phase is to stabilize the ruins as to avoid further deterioration and to prevent the structure from collapsing. Paths will also be cleared and maintained.

Additionally, Para la Naturaleza will be designing a conceptual plan with insights from the community and the municipality, framed by the vision of turning the Culebrita Lighthouse into a visitor center complete with an array of educational offerings, opportunities for volunteerism and scientific research that can showcase the site's historic and ecological richness.

### About Para la Naturaleza

Para la Naturaleza is a nonprofit unit of the Conservation Trust of Puerto Rico. Its goal is to integrate society at large in the conservation of natural ecosystems, in order to increase the amount of protected lands in Puerto Rico, from the actual 8 percent, to 33 percent by the year 2033. Para la Naturaleza seeks to provide each person and each community with transformative experiences that can inspire and motivate concrete actions for nature, such as doing volunteer work, donating money and land, or establishing conservation easements. The unit groups all of the Trust's educational programming, volunteer and Citizen Science events, and all fundraising initiatives of the organization. Para la Naturaleza also manages all visitor centers and natural areas protected by the Trust, including Hacienda Buena Vista in Ponce, Hacienda La Esperanza in Manatí and Cabezas de San Juan in Fajardo, among others.