

BY CHRISTINE CIARMELLO

HOW TO MOVE TO AN ISLAND

Bequia, Vieques, Maui, Tasmania and our
40 picks for your next move

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**HOW TO
MOVE TO AN
ISLAND**

Start a Business

VIEQUES, PUERTO RICO

Marc DeLucia has never heard of Vieques when a friend on the small Puerto Rican island invites him to visit. This is August 1999. Marc is hanging out in Austin, Texas, a college graduate wondering where a degree is about to take him. Like perhaps to a bed and a beach on ... how do you say it, *Vee-eh-kez?* Isn't that the place the Navy is still using as a target range for bombs? "I'm coming," Marc tells his friend.



Marc packs for a weeklong stay. Turns out the obligatory post-graduation trip changes Marc's life. Just not right away. His route to being an outfitter in the Caribbean will take 12 years, with a few turns along the way, and one immediate hitch in reverse.

"That first trip, I had to go back home after three weeks on the island," he says, not specifying if it was his decision or his friend's. "But I had already fallen in love with the place."

Love is often the driving force behind our bold-est decisions, especially as young adults. Marriage. The car we can't afford. A move to an island laden

with leaning palm trees and a sleepy job market. So Marc returns to Texas just long enough to sell some of his stuff and to gather all the cash he has to his name: \$3,000. And then he takes off for Vieques again. This time he knows how to pronounce it, and this time he finds employment at a hotel. Truth is, the early days are not total bliss. Marc is tempted to return to the States after less than a year because of, among other things, his difficulty adjusting to the very island pace that attracted him in the first place. But he sticks it out. Without realizing it, he is slowly becoming an expat.

"What I really liked was riding my bike around the island," says Marc, now 42. "I'd look at the colors of the water and search out new places."

Being outside. Discovering beauty. Yes, the scenery that has been an object of Marc's affection from the start will bear fruit for him. In time.

The job at the hotel (now called Bravo Beach) leads to a position with a start-up, Evamer Cottages, which rents vacation villas on the island's north shore. He decides to get a Vieques resident card, which entitles him to discounts and "first dibs" on the ferry over to Puerto Rico's main island when the ferry is full. (As a resident of Puerto Rico, he can no longer vote in the U.S.

THE MOVER: Marc DeLucia, 42
FROM: Austin, Texas
WHY HE MOVED: A friend invited him to visit the island after college; the natural and tropical surroundings persuaded him to make a move.
MONEY SITUATION: Came to Vieques with \$3,000 and a very loose job commitment.

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Marc bought his first paddle board 12 years after moving to Vieques, not knowing it would spark a business.



There are no traffic lights, leaving the wild horses and the color of the water to make people stop.

His move with only a little cash came after watching his dad lose his pension and earnings.

presidential election, since Puerto Rico is an unincorporated territory and not a state.) And then the path from college to his own business finally opens wide, by accident, in 2012. The impetus is a deal Marc finds on Facebook. One of his friends on Vieques is leaving the island (he was what locals call a “bomb boy,” an expert who comes to defuse bombs left behind by the Navy after its test program was shut down). The friend doesn’t want to pack his expensive stand-up paddle board and posts it at the fire-sale price of \$750.

“I didn’t have the money to buy a boat,” Marc says. “I figured the board would be a way for me to go about a mile out to snorkel on some reefs, and be there in 10 minutes. It also allowed me to see parts of the island I couldn’t otherwise get to.”

The paddle board opens up more than just splendid views. Visitors see Marc on the board and ask if they can give it a try. He realizes that he’s on to something. Six months later, he buys another board and starts leading SUP tours for \$50 per person. It goes so well that in December he buys a third board. By the end of winter he has seven paddle boards and a business he describes as “lucrative.” It helps that Marc is considered a local on an island whose name he once could not pronounce.

Marc admits that his move to Vieques with only a little cash and barely a job opportunity came from a “carpe diem” attitude he adopted while growing up. He watched how his dad had to adjust after being laid off from a job and losing his pension and earnings.

“I figure why wait your whole life for something that might not be a guarantee after all?” Marc says.

You could say he’s living the dream backward. He made the island move before starting a career. He plans to use his profits to buy a nice little house in the States where he can spend summers. In the meantime, though, the little island with wild horses and bad roads will be his meal ticket, his passion and his home. ● **HOW TO DO IT** >

ZACH STOVALL

LESSONS LEARNED

GIVE IT TIME

It takes about a year to get acclimated to a small island. Your mind and body need to shift into the island pace.

ADJUST THE BUDGET

In the Caribbean, calculate your annual income based on eight months of earnings. Business is slow from August to November.

CLAIM VEGETABLES WHEN YOU CAN

Do not take red tomatoes and green lettuce for granted. They show up once in a while at the grocery store, and disappear fast.

FORGET THE CAR

It’s less expensive to buy a used car on the island than to transport your own from the States. Remember, cars get dirty and salty.

