

Cuartel de Ballajá Barracks: On its Way to Restoration

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SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — The restoration of the Cuartel de Ballajá Barracks, an Old San Juan landmark, is currently in progress with the help of more than \$17.5 million in FEMA grants.

Built between 1854 and 1864 by the Spanish monarchy to house members of the military, the building remains an important part of the island's cultural heritage, drawing thousands of visitors every year. It now includes the Museo de las Américas, which has exhibitions about the American continent with an emphasis on Puerto Rican culture. It also houses several educational and cultural organizations.

One project the FEMA funds will repair at Cuartel de Ballajá is the Jardín Mirador Ballajá, a majestic rooftop garden with 67,000 plants, a custom designed hydroponic green wall and viewing platforms. This area suffered the most during Hurricane María.

The garden and green wall will have a diversity of climate-resistant plants and the walking trails made of recycled plastic bricks will remain, as well as observation posts. The roof will have 678 solar panels that will generate around 50 percent of the energy needed to power building operations.

The building will be more storm resilient. The institution plans to replace damaged floor tiles with water resistant ones, purchase protective cases for audiovisual projection equipment and install wood and glass shutters specific to historic preservation requirements.



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The institution previously completed repairs to the electrical, computer and security systems, sealed the roof to prevent leaks and installed new solar panels. The institution also repaired the 3D projection equipment and purchased four cooling towers for the main air conditioning system that provides moisture control, which is vital to preserve historic archives and documents in San Juan’s humidity.

Architect Carlos A. Rubio Cancela, director for the Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office, said he expects repairs to be finalized by the end of 2020.

“This has been a learning process for all of us. Our goal is to have a stronger self-sustainable building. This is an important cultural landmark for visitors and locals to connect with our culture and heritage,” said the architect.

For pictures, access:

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/176378>

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/176377>

<https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/images/176376>

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