

Tourist Accused of Setting Businesses on Fire in Puerto Rico Faces Imminent Charges

Prosecutors in Puerto Rico prepare to file charges against a tourist suspected of setting fires in Cabo Rojo, causing \$500,000 in damages and displacing workers and tourists.

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The Mayagüez Prosecutor's Office in Puerto Rico is preparing to file charges in absentia against a tourist suspected of setting fire to four businesses on January 2 in Cabo Rojo's El Combate sector, a small coastal town in the southwest part of the island. The fires, which caused significant damage, have left merchants and the community seeking answers and justice.

Lieutenant Miguel Rivera Sepúlveda of the Police Bureau's Mayagüez Explosives Division stated that the case could be presented to the Mayagüez Court as soon as this week or next. Rivera Sepúlveda emphasized the importance of gathering solid evidence to ensure the case progresses,

including forensic evidence from the crime scene and the suspect's address in the United States. He urged the suspect, who fled Puerto Rico after the incident, to return and face justice. "She should face up to the authorities," he stated.

The incident severely damaged four establishments: Marinera Restaurant, Marea Restaurant Bar, Artesanías Juavia, and Luichy's Seaside Hotel. Angel Luis Marrero, owner of Luichy's, estimated the damages to his business alone at \$500,000. Merchants have turned to fundraising efforts, including GoFundMe accounts, to rebuild and recover.

Cabo Rojo Mayor Jorge A. Morales Wiscovitch described the situation as "regrettable" and underscored the importance of these businesses, which provide employment and serve as attractions for locals and tourists. "This tourist...destroyed those businesses and took away the jobs of several people," Morales Wiscovitch said, adding that the suspect also endangered lives by setting the fires.

Authorities are working diligently to build a case. Rivera Sepúlveda confirmed collaboration with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF), which has assisted with evidence collection and technical support. While the suspect's identity has not been officially disclosed by law enforcement, her employer, HLK, identified her as Danielle Bertothy, a Missouri resident, after being contacted by Puerto Rican Councilwoman Daniela Velázquez.

According to El Nuevodia, Velázquez, representing St. Louis, stated on Radio Isla 1320 AM that local Missouri police have not yet been contacted by Puerto Rican authorities. "It is truly a sad case, and it is unacceptable that she was able to return," she remarked.

A Cabo Rojo Municipal Police officer involved in removing the suspect from the scene is under internal investigation and has been temporarily removed from duty. Mayor Morales Wiscovitch ordered an "exhaustive investigation" into the officer's actions, which could yield results within days. The mayor acknowledged public frustration over videos of the incident circulating online, saying, "If we also have to...apply the police regulations to one or another of the police officers, then we will do so."

The suspect was initially escorted to her nearby Airbnb after merchants requested her removal from the premises. However, after she returned to the businesses, the police intervened again, locking the gate to her lodging and waiting for the merchants to secure their establishments. Despite these measures, the fire was set approximately an hour later.

Morales Wiscovitch pledged to work with the Economic Development Bank and local merchants to provide assistance. "Any help we can give to the businesses, we will do so," he affirmed, noting the critical role these establishments play in the community.

The investigation continues, with officials determined to bring the suspect to justice. "We are corroborating information to file charges," Rivera Sepúlveda said, reiterating the commitment to ensuring the case does not go unpunished.