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Exploring the Volcanic Islands of the Canaries with Windstar Cruises

Article and photography by Parm Parmar

These Canary Islands emerged from volcanic activity in the Atlantic Ocean 20 million years ago and were discovered by Europeans in the 1500s. They boast a unique allure with their fragrant pine forests, captivating volcanoes, lunar-like landscape, sandy coves, expansive dunes reminiscent of the Sahara, and coastal resorts.

When I boarded Windstar's Star Pride, my exhaustion and jetlag vanished. I'm not sure whether it was the sun's warmth or the staff's warm welcome, but my spirit lifted. I couldn't wait to set sail on our eight-day cruise through the Canary Islands to Lisbon.

The Windstar Star Pride is renowned not just for its exceptional service and optimal size but also for its unique experiences. From its appealing destinations like Italy, Croatia, Iceland, and Tahiti to the extraordinary service and offshore excursions, guests choose Windstar repeatedly for their cruise experience.

The Canary Islands

The Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago off the northwest coast of Africa, are renowned for their diverse landscapes, ranging from volcanic peaks to lush forests and pristine beaches. With a mild, subtropical climate, they attract visitors year-round for outdoor adventures and relaxation.

One of the many advantages of cruising on a small ship is that lesser-known destination ports are accessible.

Whether on the ship or prior to boarding, you can book various excursions to each island or explore independently. The tours are impressively well organized and led by knowledgeable guides.

Lanzarote's Alien Landscape

Like many of its sister islands, Lanzarote, our first port stop, is filled with volcanoes, lava fields, and rocks, with volcanic ash often used for farming. It's quite the alien landscape. My excursion, Wonders of Lanzarote, was the right choice. We arrived in the stunning Valley of Haria. Known as



the "village of a thousand palms," it is renowned for its beautiful architecture and popularity as a holiday destination. It's a charming place, and I can see why it's popular with hikers.

We went further afield to Lanzaloe Park in Órzola, its one of Europe's largest organic aloe farms. After a tour of the farm, we tried some of the skin creams made with this plant; aloe's healing properties go beyond just sunburn lotion.

Our final stop was Jameos del Agua, located inside a volcanic tunnel, featuring a restaurant, concert hall, and cafés within the tunnels. This spot is not to be missed because the caves are jaw-droppingly beautiful.

Whale Watching San Sebastian de la Gomera

Our adventure in San Sebastian de la Gomera began as we hopped onto a small boat to go Whale watching. The island's rugged beauty was breathtaking as we ventured out into the open sea. Minutes turned into an hour as I eagerly scanned the horizon with my fellow guests, the boat rocking with the waves. Just as our excitement reached its peak, a cry of joy from fellow passengers alerted us to the sighting of a whale spout in the distance. Soon, a pod of pilot whales emerged, gliding gracefully through the water. It's a short excursion and also a great way to see the rocky island from the water.

Otherworldly Teide National Park, Tenerife

Santa Cruz, Tenerife, our second port of call, is one of the Canary Islands' most popular tourist destinations. It's highly walkable but busy with both locals and tourists. A visit to the La Recova de Santa Cruz, with its fresh fish, fruits, bakeries, and restaurants, is a must. I splurged on some silver jewelry there.

In the afternoon, I joined an excursion to Teide National Park, passing through diverse micro-climates and the clouds of Corona Forestal Natural Park and La Orotava. Teide National Park, the largest in the Canary Islands, offers breathtaking landscapes dominated by Mount Teide, which rises to 3,718 meters. I marvelled at

Los Roques de García, the park's most famous rock formations. Mount Teide features volcanoes, craters, chimneys, and lava streams, creating a remarkable panorama. The park is renowned for sunsets and stargazing. Our tour included a magnificent sunset after a delectable 3-course dinner with wine at Restaurant Papillon.

Funchal Madeira

City Highlights and Cable Car (Portugal)

We explored Funchal, our final port of call, before heading to Lisbon, the vibrant capital of Madeira. It has stunning coastal views, lush gardens, and rich history. Our adventure began with a stroll through the historic Old Town, where we admired the colourful painted doors and quaint cobblestone streets. Walking through the bustling Mercado dos Lavradores, a lively market showcasing the island's freshest produce, flowers, and local crafts. The highlight of my day was the exhilarating cable car ride to Monte, offering breathtaking panoramic views of the city and the Atlantic Ocean. Brave souls, not me, jumped on the unforgettable toboggan ride down the steep streets, a unique and thrilling experience.

Windstar's Star Pride

My Home Away From Home

The Star Pride has expanded its guest room capacity from 212 to 312 passengers, adding 50 new cabins and suites. New Owner's Suites were also introduced mid-ship with step-out balconies.

My suite, an original-style cabin, featured a luxurious new bathroom with two sinks, glassed-in showers, and some with bathtubs. Robes, slippers, L'Occitane toiletries and numerous USB power outlets were provided. Upgrades include energy-efficient engines and eco-friendly wastewater treatment systems, enhancing the ship's sustainable cruising capabilities. Windstar Cruises is dedicated to environmental responsibility, continually improving its impact.

Eating well on Windstar is a Given

Eating well on Windstar cruises begins with Amphora Restaurant, the ship's main dining venue, it offers a varied dinner menu with items curated by James Beard Foundation-

trained chefs. The menu changes daily, offering a variety of dishes from different cuisines. One night, my table dined on a stew of seafood in a cream sauce with fingerling potatoes, and another night, I had a perfectly roasted rack of lamb with chimichurri sauce.

At the rear of the ship, the Veranda serves breakfast and lunch with indoor and outdoor seating. In the evening, the outdoor area transforms into Candles, a 30-seat steak and seafood restaurant. The last night on the cruise, dining at Candles was a perfect spot for a Surf and Turf dinner with delicious sides of broccolini, creamed cauliflower, and onion rings cooked to perfection. I won't go into the deserts, I still remember their taste.

Love Spanish Cuisine? Then Cuadro 44, led by Michelin-starred chef Anthony Sasso, features dishes like Paella Croquetas and Catalan Salad. Save room for desserts such as Crema Catalan. StarGrill offers breakfast until 8 a.m. and daily lunch options, including roasted chicken and grilled salmon. Take advantage of the made-to-order Cheeseburger and soft-serve ice cream station. The Yacht Club Café is a cozy lounge with the best coffee on the ship, along with sandwiches and pastries. Most Windstar voyages offer an outdoor barbecue and dance party by the pool (warmer climes), offering fantastic food and a lively atmosphere.

The Pool, Gym and Spa

On sea days, I enjoyed the gym, trying to burn off some delicious foods imbibed on the voyage. The spa offers complimentary access to a thermal suite with a sauna, steam room, showers, and heated loungers. My fellow passengers raved about the spa, but I decided to hit up the shopping on board.

The pool deck featured a terraced layout with a hot tub at the top, an infinity pool in the middle, and cascading pools below, perfect for sunbathing. ■

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