

A view from the Antequera Trail to Antequera Beach on Tenerife, Canary Islands.

# EXPLORING THE CANARY ISLANDS

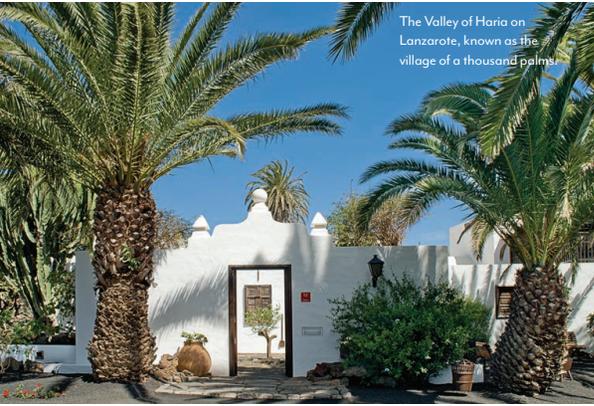
SHAPED BY POWERFUL VOLCANIC FORCES MORE THAN 20 MILLION YEARS AGO, THE CANARY ISLANDS RISE DRAMATICALLY FROM THE ATLANTIC OCEAN OFFERING A LANDSCAPE LIKE NO OTHER BY PARM PARMAR

FIRST TOUCHED BY EUROPEAN EXPLORERS IN THE 1500s, these islands captivate travellers with their incredible diversity. The Canary Islands, a Spanish archipelago off the northwest coast of Africa, include seven main islands: Tenerife, Fuerteventura, Gran Canaria, Lanzarote, La Palma, La Gomera, and El Hierro. Each island boasts unique charm, from fragrant pine forests and awe-inspiring volcanoes to terrains that feel as otherworldly as the moon. Add world-class wines and pristine beaches, and it's easy to see why this remarkable destination beckoned me. >>

TRAVEL



Famara Beach, Lanzarote.



The Valley of Haria on Lanzarote, known as the village of a thousand palms.



Laja del sol trail, Lanzarote.

The island of Lanzarote is a paradise for hikers with diverse and rugged terrain dotted with volcanoes, lava fields and craggy rocks.

#### LANZAROTE: A JOURNEY THROUGH OTHERWORLDLY LANDSCAPES

On tour of Lanzarote one is easily captivated by its otherworldly landscape. The island is a paradise for hikers with its rugged terrain dotted with volcanoes, lava fields, and craggy rocks. Volcanic ash blankets much of the land and is cleverly used by locals to cultivate crops. Lanzarote is also known for its local wine, made from Malvasia grapes.

Exploring Lanzarote is an excellent choice among the islands, with one of the highlights being a visit to the picturesque Valley of Haria. Affectionately known as the “village of a thousand palms,” palm trees and mountain views frame the village. Haria is renowned not only for its stunning architecture, but also for being a peaceful vacation retreat. While in the area visitors can embark on one of the island’s most popular hiking routes, El Bosquecillo. This easy three-hour walk offers breathtaking viewpoints and landscapes.

Venturing further north, a visit to Lanzaloe Park in Órzola, offers a peek into the operation of one of Europe’s largest organic aloe farms. A guided tour of the farm includes an opportunity to sample various skincare products made from aloe, and an opportunity to discover its healing properties that extend well beyond treating sunburns.

A trip to Lanzarote would only be complete with a visit to the stunning Jameos del Agua, a cultural gem nestled within a volcanic grotto and underground lagoon. Designed by visionary architect César Manrique, this extraordinary site feels genuinely otherworldly. >>

### How’s the weather?

The Canary Islands are known for long, sunny days with few temperature fluctuations. The islands are one of the regions in Europe with the most hours of sunlight—more than 3,000 annually—with the geographical location offering long days full of sunshine all year round. In winter, the sun rises at 7:30 a.m. and sets at 6:30 p.m.; in summer the sun rises at 7 a.m. and sets at 8:30 p.m.



The road to Teide, Tenerife.

Clockwise from top left: The Seagulls Beach, Tenerife; the Teide Canyons, Tenerife; kayaking around Los Gigantes, Tenerife and the Rosary, Tenerife.



San Sebastian, La Gomera.



Garajonay National Park, Cedar Forest, La Gomera.



### TENERIFE: UNCOVERING THE ISLAND BEYOND ITS BEACHES

Tenerife is one of the most vibrant and popular islands in the Canary Islands. Begin by exploring the lively city of Santa Cruz, a bustling destination filled with locals and tourists. This walkable city offers many restaurants, shops, and historical attractions. Visiting La Recova de Santa Cruz, a busy market where fresh fish, fruits, and baked goods are sold alongside handmade crafts and jewellery, I couldn't resist picking up some silver jewellery as a keepsake of my visit.

After soaking in the city's energy take some time to join a tour to venture into the natural wonders of Teide National Park, home to Spain's highest peak.

The journey took us through lush Canarian pine forests before arriving at the majestic Mount Teide, towering 3,718 metres above sea level, making it the third highest volcano in the world. The park's volcanic landscapes are breathtaking, offering a sense of awe at every turn.

As we continued exploring Mount Teide, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, we uncovered more fascinating features, including craters, lava streams, and unique rock formations. The panoramic views make this area perfect for watching sunsets or stargazing under clear skies.

One of the park's highlights is the Ucanca Valley, where the rugged terrain feels almost extraterrestrial. The famous Roque de García,

towering volcanic rock formations, further contribute to the alien atmosphere.

To end the excursion, we indulged in Tenerife's traditional Barraquito coffee at Restaurant Papillon. This drink is a blend of sweet milk, espresso, Tia Maria, and cream—the perfect treat after a day of exploration.

### BENEATH THE WAVES: WHALE WATCHING IN LA GOMERA

La Gomera, one of the smaller Canary Islands, is yet another hiker's paradise with its deep ravines, lush valleys, and ancient laurel forests, particularly in Garajonay National Park, another UNESCO World Heritage Site. The island's coastal waters are rich with marine life, also making it an ideal location for whale and dolphin watching.

Our adventure in San Sebastian de la Gomera began when we boarded a small boat for a whale-watching excursion. The island's rugged beauty was breathtaking as we ventured into the open sea. Minutes turned into an hour as we eagerly scanned the horizon with the boat rocking gently with the waves. Just as our anticipation peaked, a joyful shout announced the sighting of a distant whale spout. Soon after, a pod of pilot whales appeared, gliding gracefully through the water. This short excursion was exhilarating and an excellent way to take in the island's rocky coastline from the sea.

Unlike its busier neighbours, La Gomera is a

serene oasis, retaining a quiet, unspoiled charm.

The Canary Islands present a unique blend of volcanic wonder, vibrant culture, and unparalleled natural beauty. This extraordinary mix will excite and inspire any traveller, beckoning them to explore these captivating islands. **✎**

## How to get there

There are no direct flights from Canadian gateways to the Canary Islands, you can connect through many European airports.

## Island-hopping

If you plan to visit multiple islands, a good way to explore is on a small ship cruise such as Windstar Cruises. One of the main advantages of cruising on a small ship is the ability to access lesser-known ports of call, and you can book excellent excursions on each island. The tours are impressively organized by Windstar and led by knowledgeable local guides, ensuring a rich and informative experience. The Canary Islands have grappled with over tourism, which has made securing accommodations challenging. However, with a small ship cruise, you can return to your comfortable lodging each evening, confident that you've explored the islands respectfully and sustainably.