

# Gran Canaria



Gran Canaria is the third-largest island in the Canaries archipelago but accounts for almost half the population. It lives up to its cliché as a continent in miniature, with a dramatic variation of terrain, ranging from the green and leafy north to the mountainous interior and desert south. This is a rare Canary Island where you feel that there are still secret places to explore.

To glean a sense of this impenetrable quality, head to the centre where the sheer drama of the mountains more resembles the Tibetan highlands than a relatively small island. Alas, all too frequently, the perception of Gran Canaria is one of mass beach-front tourism, with few visitors ever discovering the riches of the natural hinterland. Considering this diversity in landscape, the good news is that, with your own wheels, you can get a reasonable look at the entire island in just three days or so, while the trip is equally feasible, if more time-consuming, by bus.

The flip side to all that bucolic mountainous terrain is a rugged coastline interspersed with white sandy beaches and, more famously (and depressingly), a garish tiara of purpose-built holiday resorts. Fortunately, there's no need to hang around. For active travellers Gran Canaria can keep the adrenaline pumping, with scope for hiking, horse trekking and water sports. Culture vultures can be similarly satiated by the museums, churches and historic towns, as well as by getting under the skin of the colourful, cosmopolitan capital of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Ponder the pastel-painted buildings in lovely **Agüimes** (p76), an aesthetically restored 15th-century village
- Drink in the incredible views at **Cruz de Tejeda** (p78), positioned at the very centre of the island
- Get dug into lunch at a cave restaurant in the dramatic **Barranco de Guayadeque** (p76) ravine
- Hop on a boat ride at **Puerto de Mogán** (p89), with its bridges, waterways and picturesque harbour
- Wander the ancient streets of **Vegueta** (p68), a fascinating capital-city *barrio*



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 928

■ POPULATION: 802,498

■ AREA: 1560 SQ KM

## ITINERARY 1

### KIDS' GRAN CANARIA

Gran Canaria is a kiddie wonderland with plenty of natural, manufactured or theme-parked stuff to do. The beaches are the most obvious attraction, and those in the southern resorts come complete with all variety of boat rides. In Puerto Rico you can go dolphin spotting with **Spirit of the Sea** (1; p89). Further west in **Taurito** (2; p89), the whole place resembles a family-themed park with several pools (and pool tables) plus all variety of amusements geared towards kids and accommodating grown-ups. Theme parks are prolific in these parts, particularly around **Playa del Inglés** (3; p83), where you can choose from camel rides, zoos, water parks, Wild West shows and a few more things besides. On a more highbrow note, even the most museum-jaded tot cannot fail to be impressed by the model galleons at the **Casa/Museo de Colón** (4; p68), in Las Palmas, with its colourful Columbus history. For a more hands-on, how-the-hell-does-it-work experience, tag after the school trips at the superb **Museo Elder de la Ciencia y la Tecnología** (5; p71) science museum, also in the island's capital.

0 ————— 10 km  
0 ————— 6 miles



ATLANTIC  
OCEAN

## ITINERARY 2

### GRAN CANARIA OUTDOORS

This island offers some fabulous activities, ranging from strolling through fragrant pine forests to adrenalin-charged mountain biking and diving. Lace up those trainers and inhale the sea breezes on Las Palmas' lovely 3km *paseo marítimo* (seaside promenade), hugging the golden sands of the **Playa de las Canteras (1; p71)**. For a lofty experience, head for **Roque Nublo (2; p78)** a four-million-year-old rock that is the remains of an ancient volcano. You can hike the circuit, or park nearer the peak, which cuts the puffing and panting to around half the time. (Rock climbing is also popular here, with several routes of varying levels of difficulty). Aside from these, Gran Canaria has 32 protected natural areas and is cobwebbed with paths and signposted trails.

Water sports are the athletic biggie on the island, particularly windsurfing, with Gran Canaria considered one of the top international destinations for surfing the breeze. A suitably blustery beach is **Pozo Izquierdo (3; p85)**. Diving, sailing and deep-sea fishing are also widely available, particularly in the southern resorts. Check the activity sections in the respective destinations. Kite boarders may want to consider ferrying over to Fuerteventura and **Playa de Sotavento de Jandía (4; p113)** with its 22km of white sand and perfect leeward winds for this rapidly growing sport.

Cycling the interior of Gran Canaria can be challenging; this is hilly terrain. Pedal power can be more fun when you are sweating it out (or competing!) with others; a whizzo choice for organising tours is **Free Motion (5; p86)** in Playa del Inglés.

0 60 km  
0 40 miles





## INFORMATION

### Books & Maps

An excellent map is *Gran Canaria*, published by Distrimapas Telstar, containing accurate city maps of Las Palmas, Maspalomas, Playa del Inglés and various other towns.

Michelin map No 220 *Gran Canaria* can be found in souvenir and bookshops throughout the island.

Discovery Walking Guides produces two titles for hikers: *Gran Canaria Mountains Walking Guide* and *Gran Canaria South & Mountains Walking Guide*, both written by DA Brawn.

*Landscapes of Gran Canaria* by Noel Rochford includes walks, car tours and picnic sites.

### Newspapers

The most widely read local newspapers on Gran Canaria and the two most eastern is-

lands are *Canarias 7* and *La Provincia* ([www.laprovincia.es](http://www.laprovincia.es)).

Of the English-language weeklies, *Island Connections* – on sale at newsagents but available free from most tourist offices – is the most widely distributed. Another freebie is *Round Town News* (RTN), a fortnightly paper with plenty of what's-on information.

## ACCOMMODATION

Las Palmas and the southern coastal resorts have plenty of accommodation, although many hotels in the latter tend to get block-booked by tour companies. Among the top recommendations is Hotel Madrid (p72) in the old part of Las Palmas and the most delightful budget choice on the island. Only marginally more expensive, but exuding wheelbarrows full of rustic elegance, the Hotel Rural Casa de los Camel-

## DOGS, BIRDS & PURPLE PROSE

To the ancient Greeks, the fabled islands beyond the Pillars of Hercules (today's Straits of Gibraltar) were known as the Atlantes, after the daughters of Atlas whom Hercules supposedly visited. Long thought to be filled with fruit trees, the islands were also often referred to as the Garden of Hesperides.

The Romans, who apparently never set foot on the islands, knew them as the *Insulae Fortunatae* (Fortunate Isles). The Spaniards, when they set about conquering them in the 15th century, also began by calling them the *Islas Afortunadas*.

Juba II, the North African king who informed Pliny the Elder about the islands, referred to them as the *Insulae Purpuriae* (Purple Isles), due to the purple dyes extracted from the orchid lichens on Fuerteventura and Lanzarote. The Guanches (the islands' original inhabitants) had their own names for the islands, including Gomera (La Gomera) and Hero (El Hierro), which are basically preserved to this day.

Why Canaria? One improbable tale tells of a Latin couple, Cranus and Crana, who, while out adventuring, bumped into what is now Gran Canaria (as you do) and liked it so much they stayed. They dubbed the island Cranaria, later simplified to Canaria.

Another theory suggests the name was inspired by the trilling canary birds, thought by some to be native to the islands. However, most ornithologists claim the bird took the name from the islands rather than vice versa.

Others reckon the name came from the Latin word for dog (*canus*) because members of Juba's expedition discovered what they considered unusually large dogs. Still others held that the natives of the island were dog eaters!

Unsurprisingly, probably none of these fanciful solutions is near the mark. A more plausible theory claims that the people of Canaria, who arrived several hundred years before Christ, were in fact Berbers of the Canarii tribe living in Morocco. The tribal name was simply applied to the island and later accepted by Pliny. How Canaria came to be Gran (Big) has a couple of predictably feeble explanations: either because the islanders put up a big fight while resisting conquest, or the island was thought to be the biggest in the archipelago.

Equally unclear is at precisely what point the islands came to be known collectively as Las Islas Canarias, although this probably came with the completion of the Spanish conquest of the islands at the end of the 15th century.

## PLAIN SAILING

In the 1880s, when Puerto de la Luz (Las Palmas) was developing as a port, merchant and passenger ships had to moor some way from the docks. A quasi-rowing boat—cum-yacht was developed to ferry people and goods from ship to shore.

Like any business, these little *botes* (boats) suffered both busy and slack times. During the latter, their captains and crews organised regattas in the port area. This idea, born to ease the boredom of long days before Sudoku, eventually developed into a regular competition, and the tradition continues.

Eighteen of these curious craft remain today and regularly gather for an afternoon's racing on Saturday (usually from 5pm) and Sunday (around noon) from April to October. Crewed by eight to 12 people, each boat represents a district of Las Palmas.

Apart from the odd appearance of the participating vessels, the race itself is delightfully eccentric in that competitors race only *en bolina* (against the wind), but in such a way as to get maximum power from it. The fact that the prevailing wind remains pretty much the same off the east coast of Gran Canaria makes it the ideal spot for such races. The *botes* start at Playa de la Laja, a few kilometres south of the southern suburbs of Las Palmas, and finish at Playa de Alcaravanas.

los (p76) is located in one of the island's prettiest towns. Another gem is Teror, and the warm hospitality at lovely colonial-style Casa Rural Doña Margarita (p80). At the other end of the design scale is the stylishly modern Palm Beach (p87), designed in stunning retro-chic style. Topping the lot for setting, with its surround of palm plantations, Hacienda del Buen Suceso (p80) is just gorgeous.

For something a thousand metaphorical miles from the package-tour resorts, consider renting a *casa rural* (country house). Check the **Acantur** ([www.ecoturismocanarias.com](http://www.ecoturismocanarias.com)) website or contact **Gran Canaria Rural** (☎ 928 46 25 47; [www.grancanariarural.com](http://www.grancanariarural.com)), **AECAN** (☎ 922 24 08 16; [www.aecan.com](http://www.aecan.com)) or **RETUR** (☎ 928 66 16 68; [www.returcanarias.com](http://www.returcanarias.com)). For overall accommodation, log onto [www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation).

## ACTIVITIES

Many visitors come to flop on the beach and relax, but if you're looking for something more active, there is ample potential (see p60). Pozo Izquierdo (p85), on the southeastern coast, has demanding, world-class windsurfing, while Maspalomas (p83) and Playa de las Canteras (p71) are popular for kite boarding and have more gentle waves. **Zoco Boardriding Adventures** ([www.zocoboardriding.com](http://www.zocoboardriding.com)) organises windsurfing and kite-boarding camps for beginners and more experienced enthusiasts.

There are several diving and deep-sea-fishing outfits in the southern resorts, while landlubbers can bike or trek, independently or in a guided group. Details are provided under specific towns.

**Eurotrekking** (☎ 928 14 11 87; [www.trekkingcanarias.com](http://www.trekkingcanarias.com)) also organises excellent half-day hikes twice a week with a minimum of six people.

## Thalassotherapy

This fashionable health treatment, based on warmed-up sea water, is designed to relieve stress and other more physical aches and pains. Whether or not it works (some of its claims for cellulite control seem a little bit dubious), it is still a sensual experience in its own right and often does wonders for skin ailments. There are centres throughout the island, including at the Hotel Puerto de las Nieves (p82), the Hotel Gloria Palace (p85) near Playa del Inglés and at the magnificent Villa del Conde (p87) in Maspalomas.

## FESTIVALS & EVENTS

### February–March

**Carnaval** Celebrated throughout the island, but particularly in Las Palmas. Three to four weeks of madness and fancy dress mark the first rupture with winter in February (the dates move depending on when Lent falls), with the bulk of the action taking place around Parque de Santa Catalina.

**Festival del Sol** (mid-February) A gay and lesbian film festival that takes place in Las Palmas and Playa de Inglés simultaneously.

## June

**Fiesta de San Juan** (23 June) Las Palmas festival to honour the city's patron saint. Cultural events are staged across the city, while fireworks and concerts take place on Playa de las Canteras.

**Corpus Christi** This feast with movable dates takes place around June and is marked by the laying out of extraordinary floral 'carpets' in some of Las Palmas' historic old streets.

## August

**Fiesta de la Rama** (around 4 August) Takes place in Agaete, with origins that lie in an obscure Guanche rain dance. Nowadays, locals accompanied by marching bands parade into town brandishing tree branches and then get down to the serious business of having a good time.

## September

**Fiesta de la Virgen del Pino** (first week of September) The Virgin is the patron of the island and Teror is the religious capital. The festival is not only a big event in Teror, it's the most important religious feast day on the island's calendar.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### Air

Along with the two airports on Tenerife, Gran Canaria's **Gando airport** (☎ 928 57 91 30), 16km south of Las Palmas, is the biggie in the islands. From here, there are connections to all other islands, as well as regular flights to mainland Spain and beyond.

**Binter Canarias** (☎ 902 39 13 92; www.binternet.com) flies between Gran Canaria and Tenerife Norte (30 minutes, five daily), Tenerife Sur (30 minutes, twice daily), La Palma (50 minutes, three daily), El Hierro (45 minutes, two daily), La Gomera (40 minutes, twice daily), Fuerteventura (35 minutes, 11 daily) and Lanzarote (40 minutes, nine daily).

**Islas Airways** (☎ 902 47 74 78; www.islasairways.com) has flights to Fuerteventura (35 minutes, two daily) and Tenerife Norte (35 minutes, two daily).

**Iberia** (www.iberia.com) has six flights daily to Madrid, while **Spanair** (www.spanair.com) has three and **Air Europa** (www.aireuropa.com) has five. Iberia and Spanair fly daily to Barcelona.

At the airport, there's a tourist office on the ground floor (open whenever flights arrive), car-rental offices, a post office, a

### TARJETA INSULAR

If you're bussing around the island, buy a **Tarjeta Insular** (€15) island-wide discount card instead of forking out for individual tickets. Insert your card into the machine, tell the driver your destination and he will stamp your card, saving you at least 20%. Cards are on sale at bus stations and from many newsagents and *estancos* (tobacconists).

**pharmacy** (🏪 until 10pm) and money-changing facilities (including a Western Union representative). Disabled access is good.

### Boat

Ferries and jetfoils link Gran Canaria with Tenerife, Lanzarote and Fuerteventura, using Las Palmas and Agaete ports. See the Getting There & Away sections under each port for more details and p260 for details of the ferry to/from Cádiz (mainland Spain).

## GETTING AROUND

### To/From the Airport

Taxis and buses service the airport and cover the whole island. See individual town listings for further details.

### Bus

Blue, turquoise or green **Global** (☎ 902 38 11 10; www.globalsu.net in Spanish) buses provide the island with a network of routes, although the service to many rural areas is pretty thin. In Las Palmas, yellow municipal buses provide an efficient citywide service.

### Car

Car rental is abundant and can work out very economical if you book in advance. All the usual international companies have representation at the airport. An excellent choice is **Cicar** (Map p66; ☎ 928 27 72 13; Calle Nicolas Estevanez 18, Las Palmas; www.cicar.com), with offices throughout Gran Canaria and cars from €35 a day.

### Taxi

Taxis are plentiful, especially in Las Palmas and tourist resorts. Fares are more than reasonable for local trips, but soon clock up if you're travelling longer distances.

# LAS PALMAS DE GRAN CANARIA

pop 376,953

Las Palmas has a mainland-Spain feel, spiced up with an eclectic mix of other cultures, including African, Chinese, and Indian, plus the presence of container-ship crews and the flotsam and jetsam that tend to drift around port cities. It's an intriguing place with the sunny languor and energy you would normally associate with the Mediterranean or North Africa. The hooting taxis, bustling shopping districts, chatty bars and thriving port all give off the energy of a city: Spain's seventh largest.

Vegueta, the oldest quarter and declared a Unesco World Heritage site in 1990, is both atmospheric and fashionable; many of the best bars and restaurants are here. At

the other end of town, the sweeping arc of Playa de las Canteras is a lot cleaner than many city beaches and provides you with the tantalising possibility of having a plunge in between your sightseeing and shopping. Above all, Las Palmas is an authentic Spanish working city that doesn't warrant its somewhat seedy image. Sure, like any port, there are areas where you wouldn't walk at night with an expensive camera slung round your neck but, overall, you should feel perfectly safe here and the city is well-deserving of at least a couple of days of exploration.

## HISTORY

Although Jean de Béthencourt's partner in mischief, Gadifer de la Salle, sailed past here in 1403, it wasn't until 1478 that Europeans actually landed in the area. That year Juan Rejón and his troops set up camp just south of La Isleta, naming it Real de las Palmas. As the conquest continued, the original military

## FOOD & DRINK

Local cuisine is renowned for making use of every part of the *cochino* (pig). That cute, curly tail, or *templero*, was traditionally hung from the kitchen doorway to be periodically dipped into the cooking pot as a stock. A typical tapa here, generally accompanied by the traditional rum aperitif, is *caracajas* (pieces of fried pork liver doused in a spicy sauce). Goat is also popular, along with rabbit and veal, while seafood is, naturally enough, always a good bet – this is an island, after all. Try the much-prized *vieja* (parrot fish), a member of the sea-bream family, plus, if it's included on the menu, the local crustacean *santorra*, which is similar in appearance to the common lobster but has a distinctive rich (some would say, gourmet) flavour.

Goats' cheese is produced on several islands, though one of the best known soft cheeses, Gran Canaria's *queso de flor*, is made from a combination of cows' and sheep's milk. The cheese, which is produced exclusively in the northern Guía area, is then infused with the aroma of flowers from the *cardo alcausí* thistle. Another scrumptious winner is the similarly tasting *pastor* cheese, produced in the Arucas region.

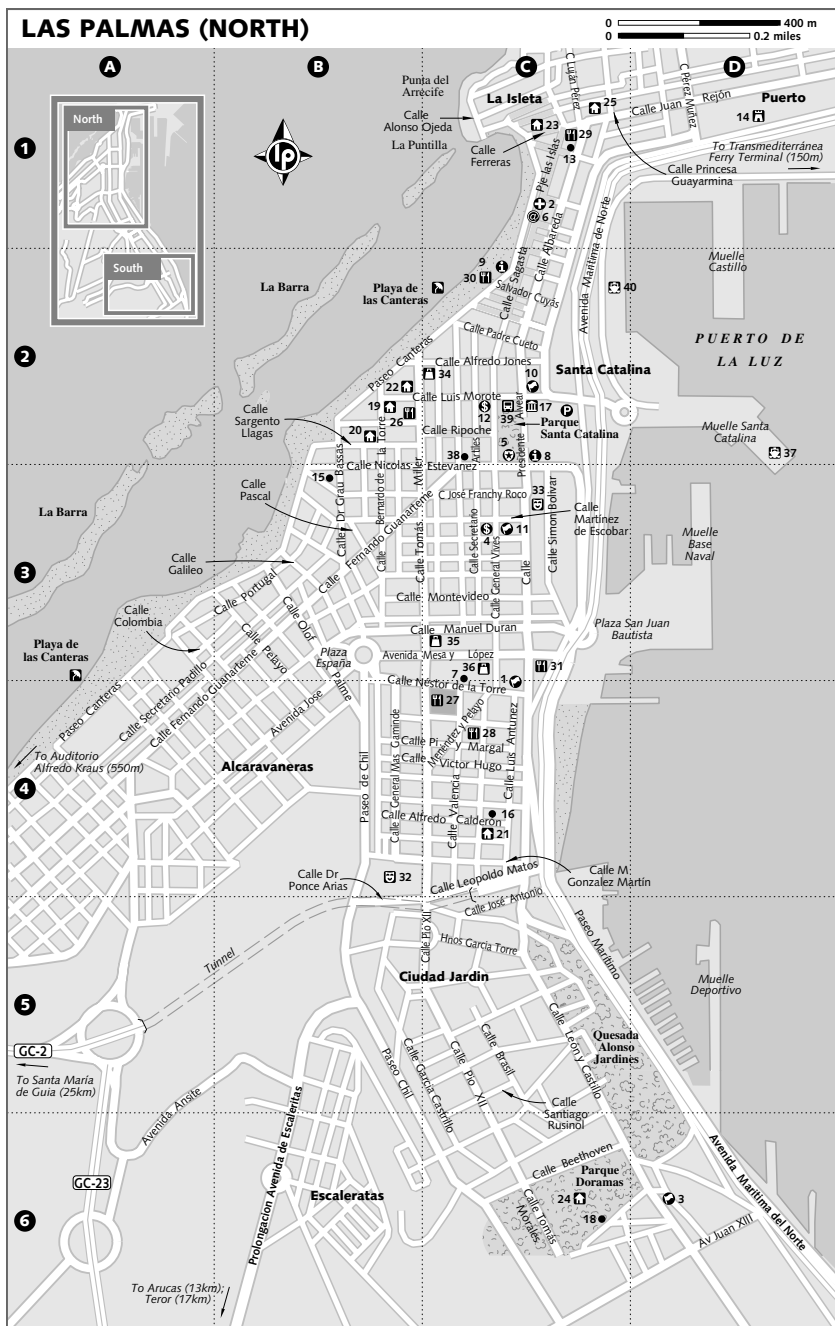
The towns and villages are the scene of some interesting small markets, most of which sell local cheeses, cold meats and bakery goods, as well as local souvenirs and trinkets. They make for an easy-going morning away from the bustle of the resorts. Markets generally last from 9am to 2pm and include the following:





- **Puerto de Mogán** (Friday) One of the most touristy.
- **San Fernando** (Wednesday and Saturday)
- **Arguineguin** (Tuesday and Thursday)
- **Teror and Vega de San Mateo** (Saturday and Sunday)
- **San Bartolomé de Tirajana** (Sunday)

Among the outstanding Gran Canaria wines is the fruity Del Monte, a perfect, if tiddly, accompaniment to meat dishes with an alcohol content over 11.5%. Aside from *ron miel* (honey rum), which is more liqueur than rum, try the banana-based *cobana*, also produced in Gran Canaria.

¡Salud!





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camp expanded into the *barrio* (district) of San Antonio Abad, later known as Vegueta.

By the time Christopher Columbus sailed by on his way to the Americas in 1492, the busy little hub of the old town had already been traced out. Everybody likes to claim a hero for their very own and the Gran Canarian version of history has it that Columbus briefly stopped here for repairs before pushing on to La Gomera.

Las Palmas grew quickly as a commercial centre and, in recognition of its importance, the seat of the bishopric of the Canary Islands was transferred here from Lanzarote in the mid16th century.

The city, along with the rest of the archipelago, benefited greatly from the Spanish conquest of Latin America and subsequent transatlantic trade. But, inevitably, the islands became a favourite target for pirates and buccaneers. In 1595 Sir Francis Drake raided Las Palmas with particular gusto. Four years later a still more determined band of Dutch adventurers reduced much of the town to ruins.

In 1821, Santa Cruz de Tenerife was declared capital of the single new Spanish province of Las Islas Canarias. This left the great and good of Las Palmas disgruntled but redress was some time in coming.

The fortunes of the port city fluctuated with those of the islands as a whole, as boom followed bust in a chain of cash-crop cycles. However, towards the end of the 19th century Las Palmas began to prosper, due to the growing British presence in the city.

The Miller and Swanston trading families were already well established by the time Sir Alfred Lewis Jones set up the Grand Canary Coaling Company in Las Palmas. The city

flourished as a crucial refuelling stop for transatlantic shipping, which continued until just before the outbreak of WWII, when coal-fired ships gradually made way for more modern vessels.

It was the British who introduced the first water mains, electricity company and telephone exchange in the early 20th century. The city's prosperity had become such that Madrid could no longer resist calls for the islands to be divided into two provinces. Las Palmas thus became capital of Gran Canaria, Fuerteventura and Lanzarote in 1927.

It was from Las Palmas that Franco launched the coup in July 1936 that sparked the Spanish Civil War.

Since the 1960s tourism boom, Las Palmas has grown from a middling port city of 70,000 to a bustling metropolis of close to 400,000 people. And, while it shares the status of regional capital evenly with Santa Cruz de Tenerife, there is no doubt that Las Palmas packs the bigger punch in terms of influence and size.

## ORIENTATION

Las Palmas stretches from the historical centre in the south, centred on the Vegueta and Triana districts, up a series of long boulevards towards bustling Santa Catalina and the port, Puerto de la Luz – a good 3km. From there, it continues up to what was once an islet off the island, still called La Isleta.

The most interesting sights are concentrated in Vegueta, while the heavier, more international action is around Santa Catalina. The bulk of the hotels are here, close to the 3km-long golden sands of Playa de las Canteras, plus the bars, shops and port.

## Maps

El Corte Inglés (p75) department store produces a good city map, which is readily available at hotels. For bus routes, pick up the local public-transport map, *Guaguas Municipales* (yellow cover), available at tourist offices, which also produce their own city map.

## INFORMATION

### Bookshops

**Librería del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria** (Map p70; ☎ 928 38 15 39; Calle Travieso 15) Stocks lots of titles about the Canary Islands. Most are in Spanish but there are a few shelves of English guides (including Lonely Planet) and similar.

### Emergency

**Police station** (Map p66; ☎ 928 44 64 00; Parque Santa Catalina) Just west of the tourist office.

### Internet Access

**Teleminutos** (Map p66; ☎ 928 22 30 22; Paseo Canteras 66; per hr €2; ☎ 10am-10pm)

### Laundry

There are loads of laundries where you can leave a pile of washing and collect it the next day.

**Tintorería Avenida** (Map p66; ☎ 928 24 42 67; Calle Nestor de la Torre; per load around €6; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9-11am Sat) Near Plaza de España.

### Medical Services

**Inter Clinic** (Map p66; ☎ 928 27 88 26; Calle Sagasta 62) A 24-hour clinic with an ambulance service and multilingual practitioners, including dentists and surgeons, and is savvy on the international insurance front.

### Money

**Office Services** (Map p66; Calle Martínez de Escobar 5) Represents Western Union and also has an office at the airport.

**Viajes Insular** (Map p66; ☎ 928 22 79 50; Calle Luis Morote 9) Represents American Express.

### Post

**Main post office** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 21 15; Avenida Primero Mayo 62)

### Tourist Information

**Bus station information office** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 83 35; Estación San Telmo, Parque San Telmo; ☎ 6.30am-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 7.30am-1pm Sat & Sun) Great for island-wide transport and general info.

**Main tourist office** (Map p70; ☎ 928 21 96 00; Calle León y Castillo 17; ☎ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri) Has island-wide information.

**Tourist information kiosk** (Map p70; Parque San Telmo; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-3pm Sat)

**Tourist information kiosk** (Map p66; Playa de las Canteras; ☎ 10am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat)

**Tourist information kiosk** (Map p66; Parque Santa Catalina; ☎ 9am-2pm Mon-Fri)

**Tourist office** (Map p66; Pueblo Canario, Ciudad Jardin; ☎ 9am-2.30pm Mon-Fri)

## DANGERS & ANNOYANCES

Las Palmas is the largest city in the islands, as well as a major port, so it does have a mildly seamy side, particularly around the docks. That said, it has clearly had a scrub-up of late and there is no reason for you to feel particularly threatened, provided you take the standard city precautions and don't stand in dark alleys late at night waving maps and money. Similarly, don't leave anything of value in your car, especially a rental.

Parque San Telmo and Parque Santa Catalina are safe enough in daylight, though you can expect a fair quota of down-and-outs, which increases after dark. If hookers with attitude hanging around in doorways are your type of scene, head for Calle Molinos de Viento, a block west of Calle León y Castillo. Otherwise, it's best to avoid this louche zone.

## SIGHTS

### Vegueta & Triana

This is the most historic and architecturally rich city district. Take the time to stroll the streets, ducking into the atmospheric bars and restaurants along the way (see p73).

### CASA/MUSEO DE COLÓN

This **museum** (Map p70; ☎ 928 31 23 73; Calle Colón 1; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) is a superb example of Canarian architecture, built around two balconied patios, complete with fountains, palm trees and parrots. The exterior is a work of art itself, with some showy *plateresque* (silversmithlike) elements combined with traditional heavy wooden balconies.

Although called Columbus' House (it's possible he stopped here to present his credentials to the governor in 1492), most of what you see dates from the time this was the opulent residence of Las Palmas' early governors.

The museum's four sections include fascinating accounts of Columbus' voyages, the Canary Islands role as a staging post for transatlantic shipping, pre-Columbian America and the city of Las Palmas. Don't miss the model galleon on the ground floor. Upstairs is an art gallery with some striking canvases from the Hispanic-Flemish school.

### CATEDRAL DE SANTA ANA & MUSEO DIOCESANO

The city's brooding, grey **cathedral** (Map p70; ☎ 928 33 14 30; Calle Obispo Codina 13; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) was begun in the early 15th century, soon after the Spanish conquest, but took 350 years to complete. The neoclassical façade contrasts with the interior, which is a fine example of what some art historians have denominated Atlantic Gothic. The retablo above the high altar comes from Catalunya (mainland Spain) and the exquisite lamp hanging before the altar was made in Genoa (Italy). The cathedral also displays several paintings by Juan de Miranda, the islands' most respected 18th-century artist.

The **Museo Diocesano** (Map p70; ☎ 928 31 49 89; Calle Espíritu Santo 20; admission €3; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat) is set on two levels around the Patio de los Naranjos, once home to The Inquisition. It contains a fairly standard collection of religious art and memorabilia, including centuries-old manuscripts, wooden sculptures and other ornaments.

You can also access the cathedral's **tower** (admission €1.50; ☎ 10am-4.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1.30pm Sat) if you fancy a stunning and wide-ranging view of the surrounds from the city to the coast.

### IGLESIA DE SAN ANTONIO ABAD

Just behind the Casa/Museo de Colón, heading towards the waterfront, this small **church** (Map p70; Plaza San Antonio Abad 4) of modest Romanesque-Canarian design is where, according to tradition, Columbus prayed for divine help before sailing for the Americas.

### MUSEO CANARIO

The island's main **museum** (Map p70; ☎ 928 33 68 00; www.elmuseocanario.com; Calle Dr Verneau 2; adult/under 12/concession €3/free/1.20; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 2pm Sat & Sun) chronicles Gran Canaria's pre-conquest history. It claims the heady boast of having the largest collection of Cro-Magnon skulls in the world. There are also several mummies, plus a collection of pottery and

other Guanche implements from across the island. The gift shop stocks some excellent children's educational material.

### CENTRO ATLÁNTICO DE ARTE MODERNO

The city's main **museum of modern art** (CAAM; Map p70; ☎ 902 31 18 24; www.caam.net; Calle Balcones 11; admission free; ☎ 10am-9pm Tue-Sat, to 2pm Sun) hosts some superb temporary exhibitions, while its permanent collection focuses on 20th-century art from both Canarian and international artists. The museum is housed in a tastefully rejuvenated 18th-century building, which is flooded with natural light. Local artists include Eduardo Gregorio, Santiago Santana and César Manrique.

### GABINETE LITERARIO

This sumptuously ornate **historical building** (Map p70; Plazoleta Cairasco) was the island's first theatre and is a national monument. It's an old-world display of faded elegance, with a gracious interior patio and rooms lined with bookcases crammed with learned-looking volumes. The place now functions as a private club, although the pricey French restaurant (La Galeria) is open to all.

### CALLE MAYOR DE TRIANA

This **street** (Map p70), now pedestrianised, has long been the main shopping street in Las Palmas. In between window shopping, look skyward to enjoy some real architectural gems, including several striking examples of modernism.

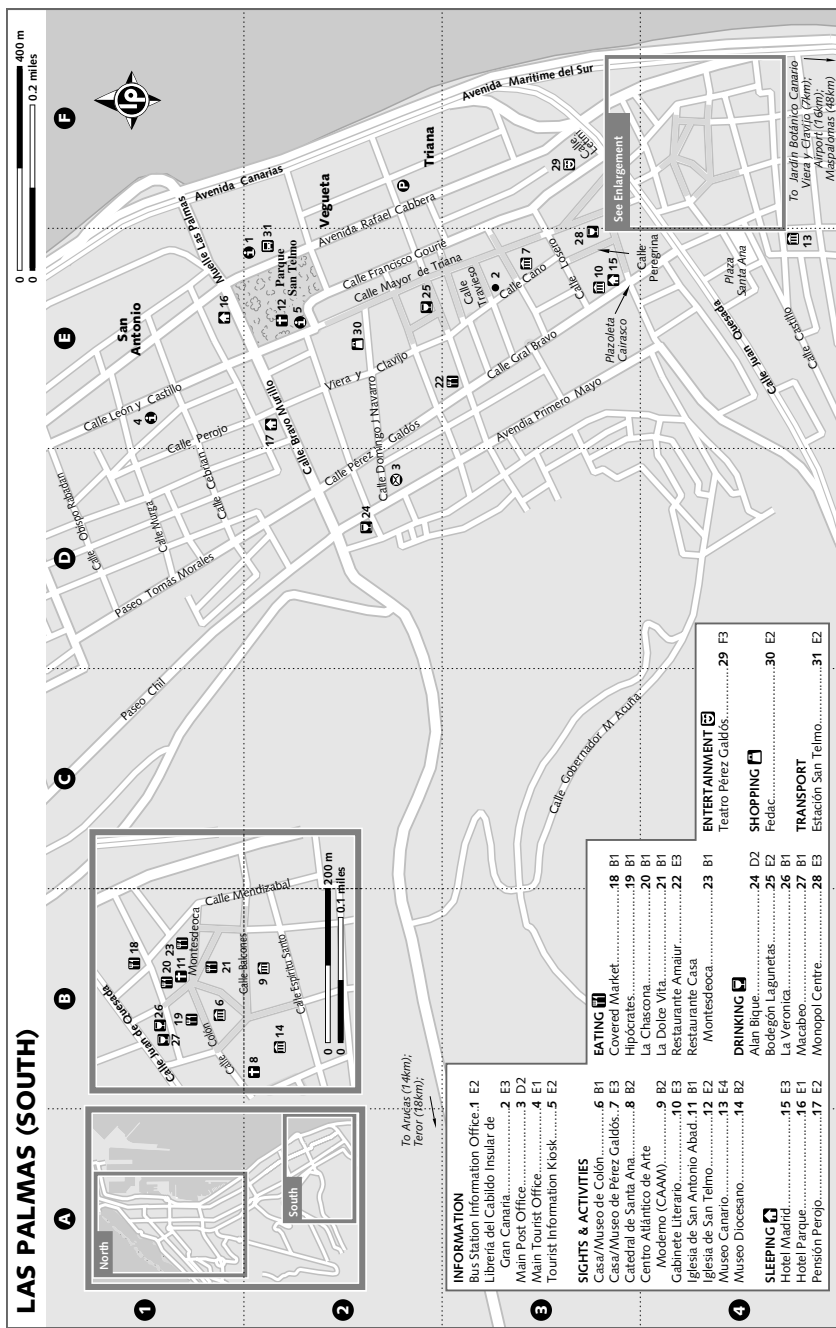
### CASA/MUSEO DE PÉREZ GALDÓS

In 1843 the Canary Islands' most famous writer, Benito Pérez Galdós, was born in this **house** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 69 76; Calle Cano 6; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-5pm Sat, 10am-2pm Sun) in the heart of old Las Palmas. He spent the first 19 years of his life here before moving on to Madrid and literary greatness.

The house contains a reconstruction of the author's study, various personal effects and other objects related to his life. It is a delightful place with a pretty central courtyard. Guided tours take place hourly, but only in Spanish.

### PARQUE SAN TELMO

The **Iglesia de San Telmo** (Map p70), on the southwestern side of the park, was one of the first religious buildings in town. Beside



**LAS PALMAS (SOUTH)**

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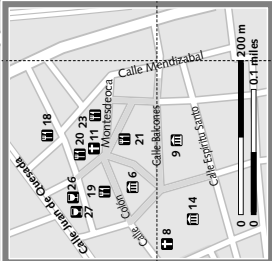
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1

2

To Anápolis (14km);  
Teror (18km);

**INFORMATION**

- Bus Station Information Office...1 E2
- Casa/Museo de Pérez Galdós...7 E3
- Libería del Cabildo Insular de Gran Canaria...2 E3
- Main Post Office...3 D2
- Main Tourist Office...4 E1
- Tourist Information Kiosk...5 E2

**SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES**

- Casa/Museo de Colón...6 B1
- Catedral de Santa Ana...8 B2
- Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno (CAAM)...9 B2
- Gabinete Literario...10 E3
- Iglesia de San Antonio Abad...11 B1
- Iglesia de San Telmo...12 E2
- Museo Canario...13 E4
- Museo Diocesano...14 B2

**EATING & DRINKING**

- Covered Market...18 B1
- Hipócrates...19 B1
- La Chascona...20 B1
- La Dolux Vita...21 B1
- Restaurante Amair...22 E3
- Restaurante Casa Montesdeoca...23 B1

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- Teatro Pérez Galdós...29 F3

**SHOPPING**

- Alan Bique...24 D2
- Boedegon Lagunetas...25 E2
- Fedac...30 E2

**TRANSPORT**

- Micabebes...27 B1
- Monopol Centre...28 E3
- Estación San Telmo...31 E2

**SLEEPING**

- Hotel Madrid...15 E3
- Hotel Parque...16 E1
- Pensión Perfoj...17 E2

**ENTERTAINMENT**

- Teatro Pérez Galdós...29 F3

**SHOPPING**

- Alan Bique...24 D2
- Boedegon Lagunetas...25 E2
- Fedac...30 E2

**TRANSPORT**

- Micabebes...27 B1
- Monopol Centre...28 E3
- Estación San Telmo...31 E2

**See Enlargement**  
To Jardín Botánico Canario Viera y Clavijo (7km); Airport (16km); Maspalomas (48km)

**SLEEPING**  
Hotel Madrid...15 E3  
Hotel Parque...16 E1  
Pensión Perfoj...17 E2

**EATING & DRINKING**  
Covered Market...18 B1  
Hipócrates...19 B1  
La Chascona...20 B1  
La Dolux Vita...21 B1  
Restaurante Amair...22 E3  
Restaurante Casa Montesdeoca...23 B1

**ENTERTAINMENT**  
Teatro Pérez Galdós...29 F3

**SHOPPING**  
Alan Bique...24 D2  
Boedegon Lagunetas...25 E2  
Fedac...30 E2

**TRANSPORT**  
Micabebes...27 B1  
Monopol Centre...28 E3  
Estación San Telmo...31 E2

it is a tourist information kiosk and, in the northwestern corner, a beautiful modernist **kiosk**, which these days functions as an ice-cream stall and open-air *terrazza* (terrace).

### Ciudad Jardín

This leafy, upper-class suburb is an eclectic mix of architectural styles, ranging from British colonial to whitewashed Andalusian. Also here is lovely Parque Doramas with its fine *dragos* (dragon trees; see the boxed text, p42). The park was designed by the British towards the end of the 19th century, when the UK dominated the economic life of Las Palmas.

### PUEBLO CANARIO

Designed by artist Néstor Martín Fernández de la Torre, and built by his brother Miguel, the **Pueblo Canario** (Map p66) borders the gardens of the Parque Doramas. With a restaurant, central plaza, handicraft shops and children's playground, it is designed as a pleasant bit of escapism in a quasitraditional Canarian village.

### MUSEO NÉSTOR

This **art gallery** (Map p70; ☎ 928 24 51 35; Pueblo Canario; adult/student €2/free; 🕒 10am-8pm Tue-Sat, 10.30am-2.30pm Sun) is dedicated to the works of symbolist painter Néstor, who died in 1938, and includes a modest collection of works by fellow Canarian artists.

### Santa Catalina

Santa Catalina is an intriguing mix of city beach, multicultural melting pot, edgy port and business hub. At times you'll feel like you're in the developing world; at other times you're firmly in mainland Spain.

### PLAYA DE LAS CANTERAS

The fine 3km stretch of yellow, sandy **beach** lies a few hundred metres west of the centre, creating a holiday-resort border to the city. There's an attractive *paseo marítimo* (seaside promenade) – the Paseo Canteras – which allows walkers, cyclists, joggers and rollerbladers to cover the entire length of the beach, free from traffic. The whole area hums with the activity of bars, restaurants, nightclubs and shops.

### MUSEO ELDER DE LA CIENCIA Y LA TECNOLOGÍA

This 21st-century **museum of science and technology** (Map p66; ☎ 928 01 18 28; www.museoelder.org; Parque Santa Catalina; adult/under 18yr €3.50/2.50; 🕒 11am-9pm Tue-Sun) is full of things that whirr, clank and hum. It occupies a revamped docks' warehouse to the east of Parque Santa Catalina and is a great space to spend a few hours. Children will be rapt at some of the displays – a space pod, interactive chromakey screen and graphic depiction of a baby's birth – while adults may be equally fascinated by the 'how the internet functions' exhibit.

### CASTILLO DE LA LUZ

Built in the 16th century to ward off pirate attacks, this **castle** (Map p66) is a venue for art exhibitions, but was closed for restoration at the time of research.

### Jardín Botánico Canario Viera y Clavijo

About 9km southwest of the city, just before the village of Tafira Alta, this vast **botanical garden** (Map p61; ☎ 928 35 36 04; admission free; 🕒 9am-6pm) – Spain's largest, encompassing 27 hectares – hosts a broad range of Macronesian flora from all seven Canary Islands, including many species on the verge of extinction.

Buses 301, 302 and 303 all pass by the garden's upper entrance. By car, take the C-811 road from Las Palmas.

## ACTIVITIES

### Surfing

Playa de las Canteras is not the world's greatest surf break but you can catch some good waves, and plenty of locals are out here at the weekend. You'll need your own board.

### Diving

**7 Mares Las Canteras** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 27 86; www.7mares.es; Calle Tenerife 12; 1hr dive €29, 2hr initiation dive €60) has English-speaking diving instructors and offers courses at all levels, plus wreck dives and equipment rental.

**Lavy Sub** (Map p66; ☎ 928 23 25 30; Calle Alfredo Calderón 20) offers similar.

## LANGUAGE COURSES

The **Gran Canaria School of Languages** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 79 71; www.grancanariashool.com; Calle Dr Grau



Bassas 27) offers intensive courses from €127 per week. It has a good reputation and has been in business for more than 40 years. Lodging may also be arranged.

## SLEEPING

The bulk of the accommodation is around Santa Catalina beach and the port.

### Vegueta & Triana

#### BUDGET

**Pensión Perojo** (Map p70; ☎ 928 37 13 87; Calle Perojo 1; s/d without bathroom €17/26) A late-19th-century building with grand old doors and high ceilings, and the scrupulously clean rooms washed in pale peach. The management is young and energetic, and the only downside is its position on an intersection that cops the full brunt of the peak-hour-traffic noise.

**our pick Hotel Madrid** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 06 64; fax 928 38 21 76; Plazoleta Cairasco 4; s/d €30/40, without bathroom €25/30) Thoroughly recommended, this place has almost as much charm as history: General Franco spent the night of 17 July 1936 in room No 3 here (and reputedly left without paying!). The next day he flew to Spain and the rest is history: his dictatorship governed the country for 40 years. Run by a couple of enthusiastic brothers, the interior is a beguiling mix of agreeable tat, priceless antiques and hanging plants. The rooms have an old-world feel with antique bed heads and china; No 1 has great plaza views. The downstairs bar and restaurant is atmospheric and generally crowded, though the menu is clearly geared for tourists and a tad overpriced.

#### MIDRANGE

**Hotel Parque** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 80 00; www.hparque.com; Muelle Las Palmas 2; s/d with breakfast €68/79; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) This six-storey hotel is excellently positioned overlooking the Parque San Telmo, a short stroll from the historic Vegueta and Triana *barrios*. The best views are from the rooftop solarium and breakfast room. Rooms are large but dated, with floral curtains and a predominance of brown furnishings. More colour and style could make this a real winner, but for the moment we'll push the comfort rather than class.

### Ciudad Jardín

#### TOP END

**Hotel Santa Catalina** (Map p66; ☎ 928 24 30 40; www.hotelsantacatalina.com; Calle León y Castillo 227; s/d €139/180;

☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) At the heart of Parque Doramas, this historic hotel is truly magnificent with traditional Canarian balconies, showy turrets and a red-carpetstyle arcaded entrance. The rooms won't disappoint; there are king-size beds, antique bed heads, oriental carpets and plush furnishings. It exudes the class of another era, with its own casino and *hammam* (Turkish bath) and delightful views of either the sea or subtropical gardens.

### Santa Catalina & the Port

#### BUDGET

**Hostal Fallow** (Map p66; ☎ 928 23 48 94; Calle Alfredo Calderón 25; s/d without bathroom €15/18, s/d with bathroom €20/22) A pretty turquoise building with basic clean rooms on a quiet, mainly residential street. Romancing couples be warned, the makeshift bathrooms have separating walls that don't reach the ceiling.

**Aparthotel Las Lanzas** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 55 04; fax 928 26 55 08; Bernardo de la Torre 79; s/d with breakfast €36/45, 2-person apt €50) This place is comfortably homey. The apartments are well kitted-out with a breakfast bar, small fridge and thoughtful extras like a bread board and bottle opener. The bedrooms could do with a few splashes of colour, but the sitting room is pleasant enough, overlooking a quiet pedestrian street.

#### MIDRANGE

**Apartamentos Playa Dorada** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 51 00; fax 928 26 51 04; Calle Luis Morote 69; apt for 1-2 people €60, 3-4 people €75) This place has space, lots of it, from the vast lobby to the apartments, which have enough kitchen cupboards for a family of four. There are plenty of cosy touches like clocks, baby mobiles and a jolly tablecloth. The bedrooms have a spare-room feel, with murals and colourful bedspreeds.

**Hotel Tenesoya** (Map p66; ☎ 928 46 96 08; fax 928 46 02 79; Calle Sagasta 98; s/d/t €60/71/82) The colourful lobby and downstairs sitting area are boldly decorated with a combination of burgundy and canary-yellow colouring accentuated by bright, abstract paintings and fresh flowers. The bedrooms are roomy and light-filled; get your money's worth by going for one with a terrace and sea view.

**Hotel Concorde** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 27 50; www.hotelconcorde.org; Calle Tomás Miller 85; s/d €115/157; ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎ ☎) Constantly being updated, this is one of the city's time-tested hotels, dating back to the '60s and popular with German guests. The rooms have panoramic sea views,

with quality marble-and-honey-coloured timber fittings. There's a rooftop pool.

#### TOP END

**Hotel Imperial Playa** (Map p66; ☎ 928 46 88 54; www.nh-hoteles.com; Calle Ferreras 1; s/d €125/175; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿 🚰) The lobby here sets the tone with its black tubular lamps, chocolate-brown paintwork, sage green sofas and chairs and a magnificently quirky version of Velázquez' *Las Meninas* executed in colourful tiles. The rooms are perfectly coordinated with their striped navy blue-and-white curtains and fabrics coupled with cool, pale parquet floors. The terraces overlook the harbour.

#### EATING

The choice of restaurants in Las Palmas reflects its stylish big-city feel. For the most atmosphere, head to the Vegueta and Triana *barrios*. If you are after Asian cuisine, there are plenty of Japanese and Chinese restaurants (and supermarkets) around Calle Valencia, southwest of Plaza España.

#### Vegueta & Triana

**La Dolce Vita** (Map p70; ☎ 928 31 04 63; Calle Agustín Millares 5; mains €5-10; ☺ closed Sun; V) The home-made pasta here is the real thing and the décor is fun, with Italian film posters papering the walls.

**Hipócrates** (Map p70; ☎ 928 31 11 71; Calle Colón 4; mains €6-9; ☺ closed Mon; V) Across from Casa/Museo de Colón, in an old cottage, this charming vegetarian restaurant has a generous €9 *menu del día*, sparkling green-and-white décor and a small patio, complete with a bubbling fountain. All the vegetarian mainstays are here, including seitan kebabs, vegetarian lasagne and imaginative salads.

**La Chascona** (Map p70; ☎ 928 33 34 35; Calle Pelota 15; mains €7-10; V) This restaurant has the lot: cutting-edge design, innovative food, young, fashionable staff and even super-stylish loos. Try the healthy *cazuelita de verduras saltadas* (a casserole of briskly steamed vegetables), made with market-fresh veg seasoned to perfection.

**Restaurante Amaiur** (Map p70; ☎ 928 37 07 17; Calle Pérez Galdós 2; mains €12-17; ☺ closed Mon) Next to a 19th-century palace, this special-occasion place is of similar vintage with elegant dining rooms, parquet floors and high ceil-

ings. Dishes like peppers stuffed with codfish, monkfish with prawns, and caviar should placate the most discerning gourmet.

**Restaurante Casa Montesdeoca** (Map p70; ☎ 928 33 34 66; Calle Montesdeoca 10; mains €14-18; ☺ closed Sun) A romantic restaurant set in an exquisite 16th-century house. Dine in the gorgeous, leafy patio with its traditional wooden balconies and sunny, yellow walls. Any of the meat or seafood dishes can be recommended.

#### Santa Catalina & the Port

**ourpick** **Natural Burguer** (Map p66; ☎ 928 29 78 67; Avenida Mesa y López 3; mains €2.50-2.75; V) South of Santa Catalina, this eco-McDonald's burger joint is justifiably popular with budget-seekers and students. Veggie burgers with a choice of toppings are on the menu, as well as the regular beef burgers (although you are penalised with a white bun rather than wholemeal). Extras include watercress salad, corn on the cob and *papas del abuelo* (thick-cut potato chips). Go all out with a papaya-and-guava juice on the side.

**Mesón Condado** (Map p66; ☎ 928 46 94 43; Calle Ferreras 22; mains €5-15) This better-than-decent, middle-of-the-road (décor-wise) restaurant serves up a combination of Galician food from northwestern Spain, Canarian fare and more mainstream Spanish dishes. A very satisfying *menú del día* (set menu) will set you back a piffing €6 or so.

**Casa Pablo** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 81 58; Calle Tomás Miller 73; mains €9-41; ☺ closed Mon; P) A grand old restaurant with a knight in armour lord-ing it over the front door. Plenty of Spanish celebrity pics adorn the walls to leave you in no doubt that this is *the* place to come in Las Palmas for solid traditional cuisine. You can be a lightweight with an excellent tapas menu if you prefer.

**El Olivo** (Map p66; ☎ 928 24 49 08; Calle Pi y Margal 10; mains €12-16; ☺ closed Sun) This stylish restaurant is well worth seeking out. There are just four tables in the tiny dining room, which has a minimalist green-and-yellow décor. Think pyramids, drizzle and *nouvelle* taste sensations. Reservations essential.

**Molinet** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 30 19; Paseo Canteras 6; mains €13-15) Italian-owned, the wine-red-and-black interior is as original as the menu, which includes ostrich with a muscatel sauce. Or go for a home-style dish like fresh pasta topped with *porcini* mushrooms. There are outside tables overlooking the beach.



## Self-Catering

For the freshest and cheapest produce check out the covered markets: the best are located between Calles Barcelona and Néstor de la Torre (Map p66) and on the corner of Calle Mendizabal and Calle Juan de Quesada (Map p70) in Vegueta.

## DRINKING

### Bars & Pubs

There is no shortage of watering holes in Las Palmas. There are popular *terrazas* on Plaza España (Map p66) and lining Parque Santa Catalina (Map p66), and both are good for a day or dusk drink. The Vegueta area, with its low-key ambience, is the most fashionable place for a night-time tippie.

**Macabeo** (Map p70; ☎ 928 32 17 28; Calle La Pelota 15) This place oozes atmosphere and style with its cavernous interior decorated with intriguing childlike drawings and shelves of dusty bottles. A second, smaller bar with dim lighting and stone walls is perfect for locked-eyes-over-cocktails time.

**La Veronica** (Map p70; ☎ 928 33 34 35; Calle La Pelota 18; ☹ closed Sun) The sort of place you would go to before swishing off for a night at the opera. It's sophisticated and stylish, with natural stone, arty giant photos and an interesting, iridescent emerald-green light behind the bar, which sounds awful but somehow works.

**Bodegón Lagunetas** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 30 94; Calle Constantino 16) One of several tapas bars on this street, this one also has a restaurant. Hang out in the bar with a *caña* (beer) and enjoy the fascinating sepia-photo exhibition of late-19th-century Las Palmas.

**Alan Bique** (Map p70; Avenida Primero Mayo 57; ☎ 9pm-3am Tue-Sat) Easy to miss, so look for the Mahou beer sign. This place has a chill-out setting and attracts effortlessly stylish regulars.

One great entertainment space is the **Monopol Centre** (Map p70; La Plazuela), which has a cinema, *terrazas*, bars and small clubs. Our favourite is the Lounge Bar, which doesn't get going until after midnight, but has funky DJ sounds and a spacey, industrial vibe.

## ENTERTAINMENT

### Late-Night Bars & Discos

The late-night bars and discos are mostly in the area around Santa Catalina beach and Puerto de la Luz. Drinks cost around €5.

**Pacha** (Map p66; ☎ 928 27 16 84; Calle Simón Bolívar 3; ☎ 11pm-5.30am) Part of the Pacha empire and

a super-cool place to see and be seen, the club attracts a slightly more mature crowd than the usual bump-and-grind discos.

### Live Music

You can enjoy free performances of Canarian folk music in the Pueblo Canario (p71) every Sunday morning from about 11.30am.

### Classical Music & Opera

**Auditorio Alfredo Kraus** (Map p66; ☎ 928 49 17 70; www.auditorio-alfredokraus.com; Avenida Príncipe de Asturias) A spectacular auditorium, designed by the Catalan architect Óscar Tusquets, and striking in its geometric modernity. Constructed partly of volcanic rock, with a huge window with broad ocean views, it is the dominant feature of the southern end of Playa de las Canteras. This is one of the venues for the annual summer **Jazz Festival** (www.canariasjazz.com).

### Theatre

**Teatro Pérez Galdós** (Map p70; ☎ 928 36 15 09; www.teatroperezgaldos.es; Calle Letini 1) has some theatrical performances and more frequent music recitals.

### Casino las Palmas

If you feel like a flutter, don the glad rags, grab your passport and head for the **casino** (Map p66; ☎ 928 23 39 08; www.casinolaspalmas.com; ☎ 8pm-4am) within the city's prestigious Hotel Santa Catalina (p72), built in 1904 in the heart of Parque Doramas.

### Football

The **Union Deportiva de Las Palmas** (UD; www.udlaspalmas.net in Spanish) is Gran Canaria's premier football team. To see it in action, join the throng heading for the 20,000-seat **Estadio Insular** (Map p66; ☎ 928 24 09 10; Calle Pio XII).

## SHOPPING

**Fedac** (Foundation for Ethnography & the Development of Canarian Handicrafts; Map p70; ☎ 928 36 96 61; Calle Domingo J Navarro 7) Head to this government-sponsored, nonprofit store for handicrafts, including pottery, baskets and leather work.

**Boxes & Cigars** (Map p66; ☎ 928 41 16 50; Calle Tomás Miller 80) If it's cigars you're after, this place has a dazzling range on offer, with the boxes just about as attractive as the smokes.

The long-time traditional shoppers' street is Calle Mayor de Triana (Map p70), which is as interesting for its architecture as its idio-

syncratic shops. Other recommended shopping strips include Calle Cano, Calle Viera y Clavijo and the surrounding streets.

Las Palmas' super-chic shoppers' hang-out is Avenida Mesa y López (Map p66). Here you'll find the mammoth department store **El Corte Inglés** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 30 00; Avenida Mesa y López 15 & 18), as well as numerous shops and boutiques. Nearby, around Parque Santa Catalina, there are plenty of cheap electronic-goods and discount shops with great deals on cameras, watches, computer equipment and mobile phones.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY

### To/From the Airport

Bus 60 runs between the airport and Estación San Telmo (Map p70) twice hourly between 7am and 7pm and hourly thereafter (€1.90, 25 minutes), continuing onto Santa Catalina (€2.40, 35 minutes). A taxi between the airport and central Las Palmas costs about €20.

### Boat

For details of the weekly ferry to/from Cádiz (mainland Spain), see p260.

The quickest way to Santa Cruz de Tenerife is by **Acciona-Trasmediterránea** (Map p66; ☎ 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.com) ferry (€51, one hour 20 minutes), which departs at least twice daily.

For a bus/ferry combination to Santa Cruz de Tenerife with Fred Olsen, see p82. The Fred Olsen bus (Map p66) for Agaete leaves from Parque Santa Catalina.

Trasmediterránea ferries (€40, seven hours, three weekly) serve Puerto del Rosario on Fuerteventura, while a Friday service (from €47, five hours) heads for Arrecife on Lanzarote at 8am.

**Naviera Armas** (Map p66; ☎ 928 26 77 00; www.navieraarmas.com) has a daily ferry (€42, 3¼ hours) at 7.10am (2pm on Sunday) to Morro Jable on Fuerteventura, 12 weekly (€24, two hours, 45 minutes) to Santa Cruz de Tenerife, two weekly (€32, 6½ hours) to Puerto del Rosario and a daily ferry (€40, 7¼ hours) to Arrecife at 11.50pm.

### Bus

**Estación San Telmo** (Map p70; ☎ 902 38 11 10; www.glo.balsu.net in Spanish; Parque San Telmo) is located at the northern end of the Vegueta district and can provide an island-wide schedule.

Buses 30 and 44 (€5.50, about 50 minutes) go express to Maspalomas, buses 91 and 1

(€7.50, two hours) to Puerto de Mogán, buses 12 and 80 (€1.10, about 20 minutes) to Telde and buses 103 and 105 (€2.50, one hour) to Santa María de Guía and Gáldar. There are frequent services to all these destinations.

The night-owl bus 5 links the capital and Maspalomas. It leaves on the hour, from 8pm to 3am, from Estación San Telmo station in Las Palmas, and on the half-hour, from 9.30pm to 4.30am, from Maspalomas. If you plan to travel much outside Las Palmas, economise with a Tarjeta Insular (see the boxed text, p64).

### Car

There are many car rental firms at the airport, at the jetfoil terminal and scattered across the Santa Catalina district.

## GETTING AROUND

### Bus

Yellow buses serve the metropolitan area. Pick up a route map from the tourist office, kiosks or the bus station.

The Tarjeta Insular (see the boxed text, p64) also works on urban routes, saving around 30%. A standard single ticket, bought on the bus, costs €1.

Yellow buses 1, 12, 13 and 15 all run from Triana northwards as far as the port and the northern end of Playa de las Canteras, calling by the bus station and Parque Santa Catalina.

For €8.50 (free for children under four) you can buy a ticket giving you unlimited hop-on-hop-off travel for one day on the **Guagua Turística** (Tourist Bus; ☎ 928 30 58 00; www.guaguas.com). It departs from Parque Santa Catalina irregularly 12 times daily and is an excellent way of getting an initial overview of the city.

### Car

Driving in Las Palmas is a pain, with the normal big-city rush-hour traffic jams and a baffling one-way street system. Most of the centre operates meter parking. Otherwise, there are several private car parks, where you pay around €2 per hour.

### Taxi

If you need a **taxi** (☎ 928 46 00 00, 928 46 56 66, 928 46 22 12), you can call, flag one down or head for one of the plentiful taxi stands across the city.

## AROUND LAS PALMAS

Charming as Las Palmas is, it is still a noisy and chaotic city. Thankfully, if you are seeking some more mellow surroundings, you won't have far to travel.

Starting from Las Palmas, an enjoyable one-day circuit heads first south and then cuts inland to take in the mountainous Tejeda region before swinging northeast back towards the capital.

### TELDE

pop 104,900

Telde is the island's second city and, although generally bypassed by tourists, the historic centre has all the cobblestone charm of Vegueta, once you look beyond the gloomy industrial surroundings. The city was founded before the Spanish conquest, by monks from Mallorca seeking to set up a bishopric in the Fortunate Isles, and is known for its production of string instruments, above all the *triple* (a kind of ukulele) – the islands' musical emblem.

The **tourist office** (☎ 928 13 90 55; Calle León y Castillo 2; ☹ 8am–3pm Mon–Fri) is just off Plaza de San Juan.

Among the grand old houses of the San Juan area is the 15th-century **Basilica de San Juan**. You can't miss the gloriously kitsch 16th-century altarpiece, all gilt and gold, with a Crucifixion at its heart. The Christ figure is made from a corn-based plaster (nothing to do with toes!) by Tarasco Indians in Mexico.

The **Museo León y Castillo** (Calle León y Castillo 43; admission free; ☹ 8am–2pm Mon–Fri) is devoted to the city's most famous resident, a late-19th-century politician. The building, his former home, is lovely but the exhibits may fail to thrill.

More interesting for most is the short walk to the **Iglesia de San Francisco**. From the Plaza San Juan, take cobbled Calle Inés Chanida west as it runs alongside an old aqueduct with orange and banana groves below. In the church, note the three polychrome stone altars on the northernmost of the twin naves and the fine *artesonado* (coffered ceiling).

Buses 12, 80 and 86 (€1.35, about 20 minutes, every 20 minutes) run to/from Las Palmas.

### INGENIO & AGÜIMES

A short bus ride south of Telde brings you to the towns of Ingenio and Agüimes, separated from each other by the Barranco de Guayadeque (below). Ingenio is best known for its ceramics but, otherwise, is a plain Jane compared to its neighbour.

The historic centre of Agüimes is one of the most perfectly restored and prettiest on the island; so much so that the mega-luxury hotel Villa del Conde (p87) in Maspalomas is a pastiche of the old town centre. Agüimes' helpful **tourist office** (☎ 928 12 41 83; www.aguimes.es; Plaza de San Antón 1; ☹ Mon–Fri 8am–3pm) has plenty of local information.

### Sights

The pedestrian streets are lined with superb examples of vernacular Canarian architecture; they surround shady Plaza del Rosario. The **Iglesia de San Sebastián** (☹ 9.30am–12.30pm & 5–7pm Tue, Thu, Sat & Sun), with its dome of 12 large windows (symbolising the 12 apostles), is considered one of the best examples of Canarian neoclassicism. The **Centro de Interpretación** (Plaza de San Antón 1; ☹ Mon–Fri 8am–3pm) shares the tourist-office building and has well-documented exhibits on the evolution of the town's urban structure through the centuries.

### Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Rural Casa de los Camellos** (☎ 928 78 50 53; www.hecansa.com; Calle Progreso 12; s/d €51/70) A lovely place that doubles as a catering school, so the restaurant (in a former camel stable) is worth staying in for. The rooms are elegant yet rustic, with antiques and wooden beams and balconies.

**El Populacho** (☎ 928 78 41 51; Plaza de Rosario 17; tapas €2.50; ☹) On the corner of the main square, this atmospheric tapas bar is housed in a former grocer's shop (1933), as depicted in the lively murals that cover the walls.

### Getting There & Around

A number of buses connect the two towns with Telde and Las Palmas. From Agüimes, bus 22 (€1.10, 20 minutes, hourly) heads southeast to Arinaga, a popular coastal swimming spot even though it lacks a real beach.

### BARRANCO DE GUAYADEQUE

The Barranco de Guayadeque (Guayadeque Ravine) rises up into central Gran Canaria in

a majestic sweep of crumpled ridges. For most of the year, the vegetation here is lush and green; if you can, visit in early spring when the almond trees are in blossom and the landscape is stunningly verdant and beautiful. At the entrance of the *barranco*, the **Centro de Interpretación** (☎ 928 78 37 99; admission €2.40; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sat, 10am-6pm Sun) is built into a cave and includes exhibits and explanations on the original inhabitants, including a mummy found in a local cave in the 19th century.

Around 4km from here, watch for the inhabited caves with their quirky exteriors, and stop for a drink at **Bar Guayadeque** (☎ 928 17 22 12; Cueva Bermeja 23), housed in a cave next door to a tiny underground chapel. Continuing on, there is a picnic ground for self-caterers or a couple of evocative cave restaurants, including the excellent **El Centro** (☎ 928 17 21 45; mains €4-9) with its warren of dining rooms reaching deep into the cave. Try the *carne de cerdo frita con alioli de la casa* (fried pork with homemade garlic mayonnaise), which won first prize in a local culinary contest. This is a superb area for walking – continue until the road peters out by Restaurante Tagoror, from where there are a couple of trails and stunning views that stretch right to the sea.

## TEMISAS

If you're driving, you can take a back road that weaves around the mountains from Agüimes to Santa Lucía de Tirajana. As the road approaches the tiny village of Temisas, set on a natural balcony, note the terracing up each side of the centre and incised into the valleys below. These terraces were worked until relatively recently. Then came mass tourism along with less-gruelling, better-paid work.

The impressive setting for Temisas, with its backdrop of impenetrable cliffs, has views across a ravine that falls away down to the sea. The village itself is sleepy and atmospheric, with original stone houses and cottages.

## SANTA LUCÍA DE TIRAJANA

This village has a similarly attractive position to Temisas, positioned in the upper reaches of a palm-filled valley with gleaming white houses blinkered by traditional wooden shutters. It is also home to an extraordinary museum.

Don't be put off by the gaudy leaflets at the tourist office, the **Castillo de la Fortaleza** (☎ 928

79 80 07; admission €2), located on the main street at the entrance to the village, is well worth a stop. The miniature castle with its grey stone turrets was built around 50 years ago, not for tourism purposes but as a folly, as well as the home of local archaeologist, writer, artist and collector Vicente Sanchez Araña, who died in 1997, aged 77. The museum has 16 rooms that reflect the eclectic interests and energy of this veritable Renaissance man. The most impressive room houses a well-labelled (in several languages) archaeological display of Guanche artefacts found in nearby caves. These include a tiny carved female idol; a Guanche symbol and one of only two in the world (the other is exhibited in a museum in France). Another room displays ancient armaments, including a 16th-century crossbow, while still another concentrates on local botany. Upstairs there is an art gallery with some particularly impressive watercolours by Canarian artists. This labour of love is well worth the modest admission price.

Bus 34 (€2.60, 40 minutes, seven daily) connects Santa Lucía with San Bartolomé de Tirajana and El Doctoral.

## SAN BARTOLOMÉ DE TIRAJANA

pop 3620 / elevation 850m

San Bartolomé has no notable sights, but the views out over the Tirajana valley are stunning and the town makes a good base for hiking and exploring the surrounding mountainous countryside – along with the endearing Germans and their hiking sticks. If you're planning a visit, make it on Sunday morning when there's a lively farmers' market.

**La Hacienda del Molino** (☎ 928 12 73 44; www.lahaciendadelmolino.com; Calle Los Naranjos 2; d from €80) is run by an enthusiastic young couple. The bar, restaurant and rooms have a warm, vernacular look with lots of wood and stone. There is also a restored mill where you can see how *gofio* is made and a more-up-to-date sitting room complete with plasma TV and plush white sofas and chairs.

German owned **Aldiana** (☎ 928 12 30 00; www.aldiana.de; Calle Oficial Mayor Jose Rubio s/n; s/d €65/130; ☎ ☎ ☎) has a mildly bizarre African-hunting-lodge look with its zebra-striped upholstery and mounted animal heads on the wall. The rooms are more mainstream luxurious, however, with four-poster bed, spa and DVD and video player – plus a spa and fitness centre. Located on a bluff above the town, there are

spectacular views of San Bartolomé cupped by soaring mountains.

## FATAGA

A 7km detour south from San Bartolomé brings you to the charming hamlet of Fataga, sitting squat on a small knoll humbled by lofty cliffs to the west. Its cobbled lanes are a joy to roam, especially as there are at least three bodegas in this vine-growing centre – all are well signposted but, less happily, all have sporadic opening hours.

About 1.5km north of the village, parts of **El Molino del Agua** (☎ 928 17 23 03; Carretera Fataga; s/d with breakfast €40/52) hacienda date back to the 16th century. Hidden among a grove of around 1000 palm trees, the accommodation is in simply furnished stone cabins with wicker chairs on the terraces and painterly views of orchards and distant mountains. The restaurant (mains from €7) has tables under the orange trees and a reasonable Canarian menu. The new owners have plans to introduce more activities, including hiking, and to restore the nearby namesake mill to full working order.

Located on the main road, **Bar Restaurante La Albericoque** (☎ 928 79 86 56; Calle Nestor Álamo 4; mains €5-7) has good local and international fare, including veal in breadcrumbs and filled jacket potatoes. The main draw, however, is the outside terrace with its wall-to-wall mountain views.

Bus 18 (€2.85, 50 minutes, four times daily) from Maspalomas to San Bartolomé stops here.

## TEJEDA & AROUND

pop 2347 / elevation 1050m

Tejeda is 33km north of San Bartolomé, along a road that twists its way through splendidly rugged scenery of looming cliffs and deep gorges. It is a lovely hill village with a handsome church and steep, winding streets lined with balconied houses.

The gastronomic highlight in town is **Dulcería Nublo Tejeda** (☎ 928 66 60 30; Calle Hernández Guerra 15), a sublime pastry shop with delicious local treats freshly baked on the premises. Try the chestnut-and-almond cakes coated in chocolate and take home a jar of delicious *biñmesabe* (almond-and-honey spread).

If you want to stay in the area, the quaintly named Fonda de la Tea hotel and restaurant was on the verge of opening when

we visited; it is located on the main street, east of the church.

## Cruz de Tejeda

The greenish-grey stone cross from which this spot takes its name marks the centre of Gran Canaria and its historic *camino reales* (king's highways), along which it is still possible to cross the entire island. The site is usually swarming with tourists, hence the souvenir stalls and donkey rides.

From the lookouts here you can contemplate the island's greatest natural wonders: to the west is the sacred mountain Roque Bentayga (below) and, in clear weather, the towering pyramid of Teide on Tenerife; to the southeast, the island's highest peak, Pozo de las Nieves (opposite), and the extraordinary emblem of the island Roque Nublo (1803m), which as often as not is enveloped in cloud. Dropping away to the northeast is Vega de San Mateo (opposite).

Walking here doesn't present any great challenges, but take water, dress warmly and leave the Jimmy Choos at home. Generally, you'll follow well-paved and signposted paths that snake their way around rock formations often obscured by cloud. The half-hour walk from Cruz de Tejeda to Roque Nublo is especially recommended. You can get information and tips from Hotel El Refugio (below).

**Hotel Rural El Refugio** (☎ 928 66 65 13; www.hotelruralelrefugio.com; Cruz de Tejeda s/n; s/d €60/74;   ) is a cheery hotel that makes a great base for a few days' walking. It has rustic, comfortable rooms and a restaurant and bar that do a brisk business with sightseers.

Bus 305 (€3.20, two hours, five daily) from Las Palmas (via Santa Brígida and Vega de San Mateo) passes by on its way to Tejeda. From Tejeda you're better off with a bike or car, although bus 18 connects it to Las Palmas.

## Roque Bentayga

A few kilometres west of Tejeda village rises the Roque Bentayga (1404m). It's signposted but you will need your own transport. Around the Roque and surroundings there are various reminders of the Guanche presence here – from rock inscriptions to granaries and a sacred ritual site.

## Pozo de las Nieves

Those with their own wheels can drive 15km southeast of Tejeda to this, the highest peak on the island at 1949m. Follow the signs for Los Pechos and keep an eye on the military communications post that sits atop the rise. On a clear day the views are breathtaking. Due southwest of here stands the distinctive Roque Nublo.

## VEGA DE SAN MATEO

Descending from the barren, chilly heights of Tejeda, the landscape shifts and changes and, as you approach San Mateo, the sweeping *vega* (plain) becomes a gently undulating sea of green. As with most of the northern strip of the island (especially the northeast), the area is busily cultivated and agriculturally rich, as well as an important vine-growing region.

This area is densely populated; most of the island's population lives in the north. The town is memorable mainly for its dramatic setting, along with the farmers' market held every Saturday and Sunday behind the bus station (just follow the shopping baskets). If you are here in September, try to come on the 21st for the *romería* (pilgrimage) and celebrations of the patron saint, St Matthew.

Bus 303 (€2, 30 minutes) comes up from Las Palmas every 30 minutes.

## SANTA BRÍGIDA & CALDERA DE BANDAMA

En route to Las Palmas, the next town of any note is Santa Brígida, about 9km east of Vega de San Mateo. A rather drab place, it's lifted by a pretty park and narrow, tree-lined streets at its heart. There are sweeping views from the parish church over fields and palm groves to the central mountains. Stop at the **Casa del Vino** (☎ 928 64 42 45; Calle Calvo Sotelo 26; admission free; ☎ 10am-6pm Tue-Fri, to 3pm Sat & Sun) with its modest display of wine-making implements, plus the more entertaining option of tasting (and purchasing) local wines.

Back on the road to Las Palmas, after 4km, there's a turn-off for the **Caldera de Bandama**, one of the largest extinct volcanic craters on the island, 1km in diameter, with superb views. Close by is **La Atalaya**, the prime pottery-producing village on the island, where you can buy lovely ceramics, then stress about transporting them home.

Bus 311 (€1.25, 30 minutes) leaves virtually hourly from Las Palmas to the village of Bandama, passing through La Atalaya, which takes you close to the crater.

## THE NORTH

As on most of the islands, Gran Canaria's fertile north presents a gently shifting picture from its rugged, mountainous interior and the southern beach resorts and dunes. Dramatic ravines, intensively tilled fields and terraces and forests of pine trees covered with mossy lichen typify the landscape as you wind along twisting roads and past myriad villages and hamlets. Only as you reach the west does the green give way to a more austere, although no less captivating, landscape: the west coast is the most dramatic on the island.

## TEROR

pop 1095 / elevation 543m

In spite of its name, Teror, 22km southwest of Las Palmas, does anything but inspire fear. The central Plaza Nuestra Señora del Pino and Calle Real are lined with picturesque old houses with leaning walls and wooden balconies. The only jarring building is the new and modern Auditorio de Teror, just west of the basilica. Aesthetics aside, it has admirably provided the town with a new cultural venue. There's a farmers' market in the plaza on Saturday mornings with stalls selling wheels of local goat's cheese (ask for a taste). The Sunday market is larger and more commercial.

One of the loveliest houses is the 17th-century **Casa de los Patronos de la Virgen** (Plaza Nuestra Señora del Pino 3; admission €3; ☎ 11am-6pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm Sun). Pleasantly musty, this house is devoted to preserving 18th-century life and is full of intriguing odds and ends, mostly from the Las Palmas family who used it as a second home.

Dominating the square is the **Basílica de la Virgen del Pino** (☎ 8am-noon & 2-6pm), a neo-classical 18th-century church, and home to Gran Canaria's patron saint. According to legend, the Virgin was spied atop a pine tree in the nearby forest in the 15th century, which turned Teror into a quasi-Fatima pilgrimage site. The church interior, a lavishly gilt-laden affair, sees the enthroned



Virgen de la Nieve illuminated in her place of honour at the heart of a lavishly ornate altarpiece, surrounded by angels. It's a pity about the piped religious music, but the sign to turn off your mobile phone is spot on, stating that 'you don't need a mobile to talk to God'.

## Sleeping & Eating

**Casa Rural Doña Margarita** (☎ 928 35 00 00; www.mar garitacasarural.com; Calle Padre Cueto 4; 2-/4-person apt €75/120) A beautifully restored, colonial-style 18th-century house run by lovely Queta and her husband in her late grandmother's home. There are three large and homey apartments with fully equipped kitchens, pleasant bedrooms and large sitting-cum-dining rooms with wooden beams and stone walls. There is a minimum three days' stay.

**El Rincón de Magüi** (☎ 928 63 04 54; Calle Diputación 6; mains €6-12) Very popular pizzeria and restaurant with outside tables, plus a brick-clad dining room decorated with ceramic plates and photos of well-fed celeb diners like former Spanish PM Aznar.

## Getting There & Away

Buses 216, 220 and 229 (€1.90, 30 minutes, hourly) connect with Las Palmas and buses 215 and 235 (€2.15, 20 minutes, hourly) with Arucas.

## ARUCAS

pop 33,800

Nicknamed the 'pearl of Gran Canaria', Arucas is a great day out from Las Palmas. It is a handsome, compact town with pedestrian streets lined with elegant historic buildings. The **tourist office** (☎ 928 62 31 36; municipal gardens; ☎ 8am-4pm Mon-Fri) can assist with accommodation.

## Sights

The extraordinary, neo-Gothic **Iglesia de San Juan** (☎ 9.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-7.15pm) stands sullen watch over the bright white houses of Arucas in a striking display of disproportion. The church has a Sagrada Familia (Gaudi) look with its elaborate pointed spires and was, fittingly, designed by a Catalan architect. Construction started in 1906 on the site of a former *ermita* (chapel) and was completed 70 years later. Within, a fine 16th-century Italian Crucifixion hangs above the altar; the wooden Cristo Yacente (Reclining Christ) is similarly

impressive, together with three magnificent rose windows.

From the church, walk down Calle Gourié to lovely Calle León y Castillo, flanked by colourful colonial-style buildings. Turn right into Plaza Constitución, home of the late-19th-century modernist **ayuntamiento** (town hall), which was being restored at the time of research. Opposite are the gracious **municipal gardens**, laid out in French style with fountains, pavilions, sculptures and magnificent dragon palm trees. The gardens house the **Municipal Museum** (☎ 928 60 11 74; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat), which has a permanent exhibition by Canarian painters and sculptors, plus temporary shows.

Calle Heredad flanks the gardens on the southern side of the plaza, dominated by the neoclassical **Heredad de Aguas de Arucas y Fargas** building, completed in 1908.

More to the taste of many visitors is the **Destilerías Arehucas** (Arehucas Rum Distillery; ☎ 928 93 29 00; www.arehucas.com; ☎ 10am-2pm Mon-Fri). Free guided visits, culminating in a tippie, take place during opening hours.

Northwest of town, on the road to Bañaderos, the **Jardín de las Hespérides** (Jardín de la Marquésa; admission adult/under 18yr €6/3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Sat) botanical garden is owned by the Marquésa de Arucas (along with the Hacienda del Buen Suceso; see below). Lushly planted with more than 2500 different plants, trees and cacti, there are ponds, places to sit and a greenhouse with banana trees. The admission fee includes a detailed guide identifying the plants on display.

## Sleeping & Eating

**our pick** **Hacienda del Buen Suceso** (☎ 928 62 29 45; www.haciendabuensuceso.com; Carretera de Arucas a Bañaderos; s/d €105/150; (P) (♿) (♿)) Set among lush banana plantations about 1.5km west of town. This aesthetically renovated country estate dates back to 1572; the oldest in the Canary Islands. The rooms are rustic yet elegant, with lashings of white linen, beamed ceilings and parquet floors. The spa is luxuriously marbled and the whole place has an ambience of utter tranquillity. The restaurant (mains from €8) dishes up exquisitely prepared traditional dishes that change according to what is in season.

**La Bodega de Arucas** (☎ 928 60 17 69; Calle Párroco Cárdenas 5; mains from €6; (V)) The most stylish

place in town with its trendy cocktail bar, complete with music videos and chic dining space aloft. The menu includes lots of healthy salads and a decadent caramel tart (as a reward).

### Getting There & Away

Buses 205 and 206 (€1.90, 25 minutes) provide an hourly service to/from Las Palmas, while bus 215 (€1.05, 15 minutes) runs hourly to Teror.

### AROUND ARUCAS

If you have wheels (preferably four), take the steep, well-signposted route to **La Montaña de Arucas**, 2.5km north of town. From here there's a splendid panorama of Las Palmas, the northern coast of the island, orchards, banana groves and, less happily, hectare upon hectare of plastic greenhouses. The restaurant here, **El Meson de la Montaña** (☎ 928 60 14 75; mains from €7), has fabulous views and is touristy but good. Solid choices include onion pie with cured ham, and fillet steak with truffles. Vegetarians have slim pickings, aside from lavish salads and a fine apple cake.

### MOYA

pop 8300 / elevation 490m

The spectacular 13km drive between Arucas and Moya hugs the flank of the mountain, providing gee-whiz views of the northern coast. Moya is an unpretentious working town with some traditional Canarian architecture, including the lovely **Casa/Museo Tomás Morales** (☎ 928 62 02 17; admission free; 🕒 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, 10am-2pm & 5-8pm Sat), opposite the 16th-century church on Plaza de la Candelaria, with its stunning views of the *barranco* (ravine). Once home to the Canarian poet, who died in 1922, aged just 37, the museum includes a music room with a 170-year-old clavichord, a small hall used for classical concerts and a pretty walled garden with grapefruit trees and cacti.

Buses 116 and 117 (€2, one hour, 15 daily) run to/from Las Palmas.

### SANTA MARÍA DE GUÍA

pop 8430

Just off the main C-810 highway, 25km west of Las Palmas, Santa María de Guía (or just Guía) was temporarily home to the French composer Camille Saint-Saëns (1835-1921), who used to tickle the ivories in the town's 17th-century neoclassical church.

In the 18th century, the town and surrounding area were devastated by a plague of locusts. To rid themselves of this blight, the locals implored the Virgin Mary for help. This remains a tradition and on the third Sunday of September the townsfolk celebrate *La Rama de las Marías* by dancing their way to the doors of the church to make offerings of fruits. The town is also known for its *queso de flor* (flower cheese).

Buses 103 and 105 (€2.30, 50 minutes) pass by roughly every half-hour on their way from Las Palmas.

### GÁLDAR

pop 22,763 / elevation 124m

One of the most important archaeological finds on the islands is the **Cueva Pintada** (Painted Cave), near the Agaete exit of town. The walls bear deteriorating designs, in red, black and white, left behind by the Guanches. The surrounding area, which includes remains of a Guanche settlement, contains the **Cueva Pintada Museum & Archaeological Park** (☎ 928 89 57 46; adult/child €6/3.90; 🕒 9.30am-8pm Tue-Sat, 11am-8pm Sun). You can only visit by calling ahead to book.

A couple of kilometres away, at Playa del Agujero, is the **Necrópolis de Gáldar**. Mummies, objects used in Guanche funeral rites and domestic items have been discovered among these tombs. The area has, however, been fenced off and seems likely to stay that way.

Gáldar's **tourist office** (☎ 928 89 58 55; Edificio Heredad de Agua, Plaza Heredamientos s/n; 🕒 8am-2.30pm Mon-Fri) has plenty of brochures on the area.

Buses 103 and 105 (€2.50, one hour) head east for Las Palmas roughly every half-hour. Southbound, buses 101, 102 and 103 (€1.10, 20 minutes, hourly) link Gáldar with Agaete and Puerto de las Nieves.

### AGAETE & PUERTO DE LAS NIEVES

pop 5640

The town of Agaete, 10km southwest of Gáldar, is a relaxing small place with a handful of seafood restaurants and some low-key sights. Nearby, Puerto de las Nieves was the island's principal port until the 19th century and is now the terminal for the ferry to Santa Cruz de Tenerife. It's nothing to go overboard about, and the beaches are small, black and pebbly, but the buildings, with their brilliant blue trim against dazzling white stucco, look as though they have been transplanted from



some Greek island. There are also several unpretentious and good seafood restaurants by the port, mainly frequented by locals in the know.

Just in from the beach is the **Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Concepción**. Built in 1874, it is strikingly Mediterranean in style. Inside are two parts of a 16th-century Flemish triptych by Joos van Cleve. The centre panel is preserved in the nearby chapel, **Ermita de las Nieves**.

Around Agaete the coast takes on a sterner countenance than further north. From the jetty you can see the stump of the **Dedo de Dios** (God's Finger), a basalt monolithic rock that was a serious tourist attraction until it took a tumble in a 2005 hurricane. Take a look at the photos outside its namesake restaurant (below).

## Sleeping & Eating

**Hotel Puerto de las Nieves** (☎ 928 88 62 56; Avenida Alcalde José de Armas s/n; s/d €63/98; P ♿ ♻️) This hotel has an old-fashioned lobby but superb large, modern rooms washed in pale peach with parquet and tile floors. Choose between large rooms with sofas and chairs or smaller ones with large terraces with sun-bed space. There is a classy Thalassotherapy centre with all the treatments, including an intriguing-sounding chakra stone massage.

**Restaurante el Cápita** (☎ 928 55 41 42; Calle Nuestra Señora de las Nieves 37; mains €5-12) A slightly smarter proposition, with a reasonable €6 *menú del día*. The fresh fish dishes can't be faulted, though the service may see you twiddling your thumbs when it's crowded.

**Restaurante Las Nasas** (☎ 928 89 86 50; Calle Nuestra Señora de las Nieves 7 s/n; mains €7-9; ☒ closed Tue) There's a great atmosphere in this former warehouse with its old-fashioned black-and-white interior, jolly model boats, high ceilings and a small walled terrace overlooking the ocean. It's also usually the busiest along this seafood strip; a good sign.

**Cofradía de Pescadores** (☎ 928 88 62 50; Muelle Puerto de las Nieves; mains €7-10) Next to the port, with an outdoor terrace, you can dine on catch-of-the-day along with the fishermen – and there's no better recommendation than that. Try the speciality, *fritura de pescado* (lightly fried seafood), or one of 30 *tapas para picar* (to taste).

**Restaurante Dedo de Dios** (☎ 928 89 85 81; Carretera Puerto de las Nieves s/n; mains €7.50-9; ☒ closed Tue) A cavernous restaurant hung with ferns in a lovely old building overlooking the beach

and the rocky remains of the poor old Dedo. It fills up with large, boisterous families at weekends and has a vast menu of mainly fish and seafood dishes.

## Getting There & Away

Bus 103 (€3.60, 1¼ hours) links the town and port with Las Palmas at least hourly. Bus 101 (€3.20, 50 minutes, four daily) heads south for Aldea de San Nicolás.

**Fred Olsen** (☎ 928 55 40 05; www.fredolsen.es) operates eight fast ferries (adult/under 12 years/12 to 26 years €40/20/31) a day from Puerto de las Nieves for the hour-long trip to Santa Cruz de Tenerife. There is a free bus connection to Las Palmas (Parque Santa Catalina). Returning, the bus leaves Las Palmas 1½ hours before the ferry is due to depart.

## ALDEA DE SAN NICOLÁS

Usually known as San Nicolás de Tolentino, this rather scruffy town has little to excite the senses – it's the sort of place you only hang around in because the arse has fallen out of your car. The lure here is the travelling, not the arriving. The road between Agaete and San Nicolás takes you on a magnificent cliff-side journey. If you head southwest in the late afternoon, the setting sun provides a soft-light display, marking out each successive ridge in an ever-darker shadowy mantle. There are numerous lookouts along the way to take in the rugged views.

The approach from Mogán and the south (see North of Puerto de Mogán, p91), though lacking the seascapes, is almost as awesome.

Bus 38 (€3.20, one hour, five daily) runs between Puerto de Mogán and Aldea de San Nicolás. Bus 101 (€3.40, 50 minutes, four daily) runs between Agaete and San Nicolás.

## AROUND ALDEA DE SAN NICOLÁS

Heading north out of town, take a detour to **Puerto de la Aldea**, with its small harbour, couple of seafood restaurants and, for self-caterers, the shady **Parque Ruben Día** with its stone tables and benches set under the pine trees. After your blow-out meal of bread, cheese and *cerveza* (beer), take a stroll along the promenade and check out the small black stony beach.

Also just out of town, in the hamlet of Artejévez, is the well-signposted **Cactualdea** (☎ 928 78 90 57; admission adult/under 18yr €6/3), which claims to be the largest cactus park in Europe, with over 1200 species of the prickly plant, plus a replica Guanches' cave. Expect

the usual insipid theme-park eating options; take a picnic if you can.

## ARTENARA

A back road climbs eastwards up the valley from Aldea de San Nicolás to the hilltop village of Artenara, from where you are close to Tejeda. The sparsely populated countryside of bare ridges and rugged hills is dotted with **troglo-dyte caves**, some still inhabited.

Bus 220 (€4.20, two hours) runs hourly from Las Palmas. No buses connect the village with Aldea de San Nicolás.

# PLAYA DEL INGLÉS & MASPALOMAS

pop around 40,000

This is Gran Canaria's most famous holiday resort and a sun-splashed party place for a mainly northern-European crowd. That said, during the day (and out of season) it has a more upmarket appearance than you may expect. This is not Benidorm, or even Los Cristianos in Tenerife. In the centre you are more likely to stumble across expensive hotels or smart apartment blocks than Dot-and-Alf-style English pubs. On the downside, there is virtually nothing that is even halfway Spanish here; everything is tourist driven and the only languages you'll need are German or English. The town plan is also undeniably soulless, with the neatly traced boulevards and roundabouts betraying all the town-design spontaneity of a five-year plan.

At night, most of the action takes place in and around the Yumbo Centrum, with the leather handbags and wallets in the stores replaced by leather gear in steamy gay bars. The vaguely wholesome, bustling family atmosphere evaporates as the discos (both straight and gay) swing until dawn, barrels and bottles are drained by the dozen in bars, and the drag shows, saunas and sex shops all do a roaring trade.

The only natural items of genuine interest are the impressive dunes of Maspalomas, also home to some of Gran Canaria's most luxurious hotels and the island's largest golf course. The dunes fold back from the beach and cover 400 hectares, and their inland heart has been declared a nature reserve with restricted access.

## ORIENTATION

The Playa del Inglés is next to the centre of the triangle-shaped urban area, while to the southwest are the beaches and dunes of Maspalomas. East of Playa del Inglés the resort continues, but thins out in the areas known as Veril and San Agustín. The main shopping centres are north of the centre in San Fernando and Bellavista.

There are bus stops all over the resort, including a couple beside Yumbo.

## INFORMATION

### Emergency

**Local police** (☎ 928 14 15 72; Plaza de la Constitución 2) Near the dunes of Maspalomas.

### Internet Access

**Free Motion** (☎ 928 77 74 79; www.free-motion.net; Hotel Sandy Beach, Avenida Alferoces Provisionales s/n; per 30min €2; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sun)

### Laundry

**Laundrette** (Lot 411, 4th fl, Yumbo Centrum; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Fri, to 1pm Sat) Drop your washing off and collect it the next day.

### Medical Services

The resort is swarming with clinics, their business no doubt enhanced by shattering hangovers and third-degree sunburn.

**24-hour clinic** (☎ 928 76 12 92; cnr Avenida España & Avenida EE UU) Multilingual clinic opposite the tourist office.

### Money

**Viajes Insular** (☎ 928 76 05 00; Avenida Moya 14; ☎ closed Sun) Represents American Express.

### Post

**Post office** (Avenida Tirajana)

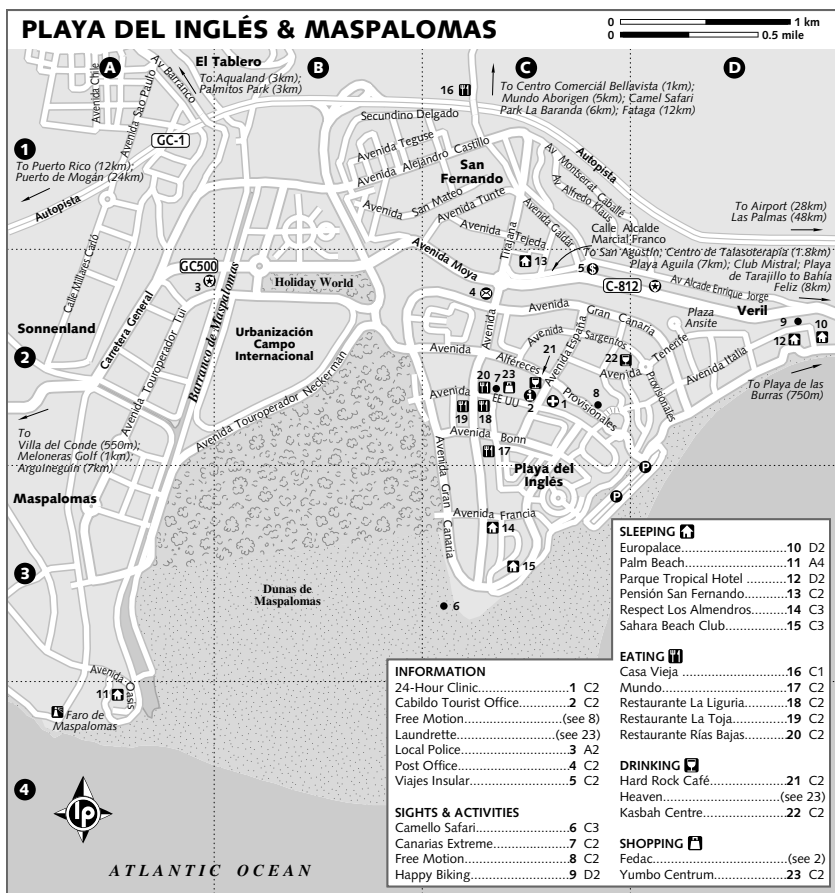
### Tourist Information

**Cabildo tourist office** (☎ 928 77 15 50; www.gran-canaria.com; cnr Avenida España & Avenida EE UU; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-8pm Jul-Sep, 9am-9pm Mon-Fri & 9am-1pm Sat Oct-Jun) Just outside the Yumbo Centrum, with maps, helpful staff and public toilets.

## SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

### Dunas de Maspalomas

In 1994 these fabulous **dunes** were designated a national park. The best view of them is from the bottom of Avenida Tirajana. Stroll through the arches of the Hotel Riu Palacé Maspalomas to the balcony, which is



surrounded by a botanical garden displaying many shrubs and plants endemic to the Canaries. There is a small information office here with sporadic opening hours. Although the dunes look too pristine to blight with footprints, you *can* walk on the sand, but do respect the signs and keep to the designated trails. Alternatively, you can go the full Sahara and opt for a camel trip with **Camello Safari** (☎ 928 76 07 81; adult/under 12yr €30/15; ☎ 9am-4.30pm).

### Theme Parks

There's a multitude of theme parks with brochures and advertising everywhere.

**Palmitos Park** (☎ 928 14 02 76; www.aspro-ocio.es; adult/under 12yr €17/12; ☎ 9.30am-6pm) is a few

kilometres north of the resort area, this is a subtropical oasis crammed with exotic flora and 1500 species of birds, along with an aquarium, orchid exhibit, reptile house, petting farm and animals such as wallabies and orang-utans. Buses run here regularly from various stops in Playa del Inglés, Puerto Rico and Maspalomas.

**Mundo Aborigen** (☎ 928 17 22 95; Carretera Playa del Inglés-Fataga; adult/under 12yr €10/5; ☎ 9am-6pm) is located 6km along the road north to Fataga, where around 100 model Guanches stand in various ancient poses designed to give you an idea of what life was like here before the conquistadors turned up to build theme parks. Take bus 18 from San Fernando or San Bartolomé.

An enormous water park, **Aqualand** (☎ 928 14 05 25; www.aqualand.es; Carretera Palmitos Park; adult/under 18yr €20/14; ☎ 10am-5pm Oct-Jun, to 6pm Jul-Sep) boasts its own surf beach with seven types of waves and miles of rides and slides. Take bus 45 or 70 to get here from Playa del Inglés or Puerto Rico respectively.

After the water rides and Guanches, how about a trip to the Orient? **Camel Safari Park La Baranda** (☎ 928 79 86 80; Carretera Playa del Inglés-Fataga; 1hr ride €25; ☎ 9am-6pm) has 70 camels and is located in a lush property with palms and avocado and citrus trees and also has a restaurant, bar and small zoo.

## Diving

**Dive Academy Gran Canaria** (☎ 928 73 61 96; www.diveacademy-grancanaria.com; Calle La Lajilla s/n, Arguineguín; initiation dives from €46, advanced open water 5 dives €270) has a free minibus to pick up plungers from their hotels and take them to the dive academy, due west of town. Both boat and shore dives are available.

## Swimming

For many, the only energy left after partying at night will be for getting down to the beach and collapsing for the day. Beaches, from east to west, are Playa de las Burras, Playa del Inglés and Playa de Maspalomas. They all link up to form the one beach.

## Surfing & Windsurfing

Although surfing is possible here (the best waves tend to break off the western end of Maspalomas by the lighthouse), this is not

mind-blowing surfing territory. Windsurfers are better off heading east, beyond the resorts to Bahía Feliz, Playa Aguila and, best of all, **Pozo Izquierdo**, which is for experienced windsurfers. **Club Mistral** (☎ 928 15 71 58; www.club-mistral.com; Carretera General del Sur, km 47, Playa de Tarajalillo; 6hr beginner's windsurfing course €120), in Bahía Feliz, rents boogie boards, surfboards, ocean kayaks and windsurfing boards and equipment. It also organises windsurf safaris.

In Playa Aguila, world windsurfing champion Bjorn Dunkerbeck runs the **Dunkerbeck Windsurfing Center** (☎ 928 76 29 78; www.dunkerbeck-windsurfing.com) with several courses available, including a 10-hour initiation course for €190.

## Thalassotherapy

**Centro de Talasoterapia** (☎ 928 76 56 89; www.hotelgloriapalace.com; Hotel Gloria Palace, Calle Las Margaritas s/n) is Europe's largest Thalassotherapy centre, occupying a huge complex attached to Hotel Gloria Palace, and is nothing short of breathtaking. Fabulous sea-water treatments leave your skin as smooth as a baby's bum and your mind as light as a feather. A day's dunking and use of the various appliances costs from €50.

## Golf

Don those plaid Bermudas and head off to **Meloneras Golf** (☎ 928 14 53 09; www.lopesanhr.com; Costa Meloneras; green fees plus buggy €100-120), which opened late 2006, in between Maspalomas and the harbour of Pasito Blanco, in an area earmarked for yet another luxury development.

### IT'S A GAY OLD LIFE

Gran Canaria is the gay honey-pot of the Canaries, and Playa del Inglés is Europe's winter escape playground. There are several hotels and apartment blocks that cater towards gay and lesbian guests. One of the classiest, close to the dunes, is **Respect Los Almendros** (☎ +00 44 20 74 28 37; www.respect-holidays.co.uk; Avenida Francia 3; ☎) – book through the UK company. The bungalows are set in lush, landscaped gardens and facilities include a gym, spa, bar and restaurant.

A seemingly endless string of bars, discos and clubs are crammed into the Yumbo Centrum (p88), which is predominantly a gay scene, although this doesn't stop small numbers of lesbians and straights from wading in. Little happens before midnight. From then until about 3am the bars on the 4th level of the Yumbo Centrum bear the brunt of the fun, after which the nightclubs on the 2nd level take over.

At dawn, people stagger out for some rest. Some make for the beach at Maspalomas, across the dunes, which are themselves a busy gay cruising area.

For more information about gay clubs, events, accommodation and personal classifieds, check the following websites www.colectivogama.com (in Spanish), www.gaymap.info and www.grancanariagay.com.

## Cycling

**Happy Biking** (☎ 928 76 68 32; www.happy-biking.com in German; Hotel Continental, Avenida Italia 2; bike hire per day from €7; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat); now there's a nice name! Happy Biking rents out a range of cycles and also organises cycle tours, mostly quite gentle, which start at €30, including bike hire, transport and a picnic.

The slickly run **Free Motion** (☎ 928 77 74 79; www.free-motion.net; Hotel Sandy Beach, Avenida Alféreces Provisionales s/n; bike hire per day from €9, tours per day from €45; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-6pm Sun) also offers a range of tours for small groups and has bikes and quads for rental.

## Horse Riding

Another happy (and unrelated) lot is **Happy Horse** (☎ 679 86 70 57; www.happy-horse.org; 3hr trek €54), with horse treks in the hinterland southeast of town. Pick up from your hotel is included in the price.

## Kayaking

If you are looking for a watery pursuit more adrenalin-boosting than a glass-bottom boat, check out **Canarias Extreme** (☎ 606 58 01 03; www.canariasextreme.com; Avenida EE UU 43; kayak tours per day €75), which organises single- and double-kayak tours all around the coast.

## Walking

Away from the coast you find a complete contrast to the beaches: untamed countryside with a dramatic variance in terrain, ranging from rocky and wild to gently undulating hills.

Free Motion (above) has a choice of four hiking trips: Roque Nublo, Green North, Lake Tour and the daunting-sounding Summit Tour; all priced at around €45. The company will arrange transport to/from various resorts on the coast, including Puerto Rico and Puerto de Mogán for a small fee. Happy Biking (above) offers gentler day walks from €40, including pick up from your hotel.

To enjoy an exhilarating (and free) 5km walk, simply follow the promenade that extends eastwards from Playa del Inglés. The path follows a track that is sometimes at shore level and sometimes above it.

## SLEEPING

There are more than 500 hotels, apartment blocks and bungalows in Playa del Inglés and Maspalomas; in peak periods many are full to

bursting. Consider booking a package outside Spain; you may save considerably more than what a tour operator offers. Travel agents in Britain, Ireland, Germany and the Netherlands brim with deals and last-minute offers.

If you're going it alone, it's almost impossible to assess where you should head. You get, in reasonable measure, what you pay for. In shoulder to high season you are unlikely to find an apartment (which is generally cheaper than a hotel) for less than €60 for two people.

All we can do is give some indicative places and prices. With no taxi fare in the urban area above €8 – and taxis rolling through the night – consider taking a place away from the beach, even away from Playa del Inglés itself.

If you haven't reserved in advance, pick up an accommodation list and town map from one of the tourist offices and let your fingers do the walking. Many apartments don't have anyone in permanent attendance so it's often useless to simply turn up with hope in your heart.

## Budget

A true budget scene doesn't exist in these parts.

**Pensión San Fernando** (☎ 928 76 39 06; Calle La Palma 16; d without bathroom €18) There's precisely one *penión* (guesthouse) in town and, if you can get in, it's tidy, if spartan, and located in a quieter part of town.

## Midrange

The bulk of apartments and hotels will fall into this category but remember, they're usually booked by tour operators.

**Sahara Beach Club** (☎ 928 76 07 76; www.sahara-beach-club.com; Avenida de Alemania 53; bungalows from €54; ☎ ☎) This low-rise complex overlooks the dunes and has a tranquil, homey atmosphere with well-equipped bungalows and lovely gardens. There are private terraces with small lawns and rose bushes. The minimum stay is four days; most guests stay for several weeks.

**Europalace** (☎ 928 77 41 81; reservas\_europalace@hotmail.com; Calle Hamburgo 12; d with half-board from €70; ☎) One of the best situations in town, across from the beach. If you don't feel like sharing the sand, don't worry, this giant concrete honeycomb of a place has three pools on various levels, plus all the extras you could possibly want – except tranquillity, that is.

**Parque Tropical Hotel** (☎ 928 77 40 12; Avenida Italia 1; s/d/tr €75/125/175; ☎ ☎ ☎) A real gem in this sea of generic high-rise hotels. Dating

## STREETSCAPES

In Maspalomas the street names are re-vealing – Avenida del Touroperador Saga Tours, Avenida del Touroperador Alpitours, Neckermann, Tui, Thomson and so on and so on. No plain old streets (*calles*) either – all avenues, no matter how small.

back to the '60s, this hotel has a traditional Canarian look with wooden balconies, white stucco exterior and lush, mature gardens set amid small pools and fountains. The rooms have an Andalusian feel, with terracotta tiles, dark-wood fittings and beams combined with soothing pastel-coloured paintwork.

## Top End

The premier top-end establishments are out by the dunes in Maspalomas.

**ourpick Villa del Conde** (☎ 928 56 32 00; www.lopesanhr.com; Mar Mediterráneo 7; s/d/ste €102/132/234; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿 🚰 🚰) One of the latest luxury hotels to open here, Villa del Conde is modelled on the historic centre of the town of Agüimes (p76), including its neoclassical church, which has been emulated (complete with bell tower, central dome and peeling-plaster effect) as the hotel's main lobby. The rooms are set in the 'village houses', which are centred around a main plaza, complete with bandstand and terrace restaurant. It could be like Disneyland, but the architecture is executed so tastefully that it somehow works. Facilities include six pools, several restaurants and bars, a mini club and a Thalassotherapy spa. There's a minimum one-week stay in July and August.

**Palm Beach** (☎ 928 72 10 32; www.seaside-hotels.com; Avenida Oasis s/n; d from €185; P ♻️ 🚰 🚿 🚰 🚰) This hotel has recently been refurbished by international interior designer Alberto Pinto in a retro-chic style. Despite a mildly unprepossessing exterior, step within and it is a riot of colour and exciting modern design. In the main hall, the striped sofas are topped off with bright, colour-coordinated cushions, with massive abstracts on the walls, white tubular lamps and glass bowls of green apples. Get the picture? The rooms are all different and similarly snazzy.

## EATING

The resort is predictably swarming with restaurants, with the normal mix of Chinese

buffets, Argentinean grills, bland international and that increasingly rare breed – authentic Spanish.

**Restaurante La Liguria** (☎ 928 76 03 36; Avenida Tirajana 24; pizza €6-9, pasta €5.50-10; (V)) Serving up a better class of pizza than the cardboard-base norm, the flamboyant Genoese owner also whips up tasty pasta dishes, including a vegetarian choice. Sit outside on the attractive terrace, thankfully separated from the main road by shrubs and trees.

**Casa Vieja** (☎ 928 76 90 10; Calle El Lomo 139, Carretera de Fataga; mains €7-18; (🍷) 1pm-midnight) Just north of the GC-1 motorway, along the road to Fataga, this restaurant is run with passion. The 'Old House' has a real *campo* (countryside) feel. Plants festoon the low roof, canaries trill and the menu is unwaveringly authentic; try the grilled meat. There is live traditional music most weekends.

**Restaurante La Toja** (☎ 928 76 11 96; Edificio Barbados II, Avenida Tirajana 17; mains €8-13; (🍷) closed Sun lunch) A quality establishment blending the best of cuisines from France and Galicia. Try the veal in Marsala wine or troubling-sounding elephant's ear with chips (actually a thin fillet of steak). The prices are reasonable given the fancy atmosphere and food.

**Mundo** (☎ 928 76 10 63; Apartamentos Tenesor, Avenida Tirajana s/n; mains €12-15; (🍷) closed Mon; (V)) An oasis of fashionable sophistication, Mundo opened in 2005 and has seriously raised the culinary game in these parts. Think American diner-meets-Japanese, with a spruce-minimalist dining room with retro black-and-white tiles and cherry-red chairs. Try the black pasta with king prawns if it's on the menu.

**Restaurante Rías Bajas** (☎ 928 76 40 33; cnr Avenida Tirajana & Avenida EE UU; mains €13-27) Within stumbling distance of the Yumbo Centrum, the tank of tentacle-waving crustaceans at the entrance gives it all away: the fish and seafood dishes here have an island-wide reputation. There's a sister restaurant in Urbanisation Meloneras in Maspalomas.

## Self-Catering

Three large supermarkets, including the economical Mercadona, are situated in the Centro Comercial Bellavista, just beyond San Fernando, to the north of town.

## DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

The Yumbo Centrum transforms into a pulsating clubbers' heaven at night – and the



aptly named Heaven (an offshoot of the London club) is the flashiest and best of the gay discos here. There are straight and gay places in the centre and you could stagger around Yumbo Centrum – as many do – for weeks and not sample all the nightlife options. The Kasbah Centre is another buoyant nightlife hot spot for party animals.

Ease into your evening with a cocktail at the nearby **Hard Rock Café** (☎ 928 76 78 14; Avenida Alféreces Provisionales 29; ☎ 11am-late) with its standard red Cadillac, elegant terrace and fancy cocktails.

Check the online party guide at [www.maspalomas-tonight.com](http://www.maspalomas-tonight.com) for a virtual club and disco tour.

## SHOPPING

About the only interruption to the hectares of apartments, hotels, restaurants and bars comes in the form of the shopping centres. In them you can buy everything from children's wear to electronics. A good tip is to keep on looking, despite the enormous temptation to buy everything as soon as you see it – you may well save even more money if you shop around.

**Yumbo Centrum** ([www.cc-yumbo.com](http://www.cc-yumbo.com); Avenida EE UU; ☎ 24hr) There are more than 200 businesses in this four-level commercial centre. You can buy shoes, leather goods, perfume and anything else you fancy, tax-free, although the quality should be checked. There are also supermarkets on the premises.

**Fedac** (☎ 928 77 24 45; Centro Insular del Turismo, cnr Avenida España & Avenida EE UU; ☎ 10am-2pm & 4-7.30pm Mon-Fri) If you're after local handicrafts, visit

the small Fedac shop located with the Cabildo tourist office. Fedac is a government-sponsored nonprofit store, with prices and quality that are a good standard by which to measure those of products sold elsewhere. You'll also get a guarantee with your purchase.

## GETTING THERE & AWAY To/From the Airport

Bus 66 (€3.30, one hour, hourly) runs to/from Gando airport until about 9.15pm. For a taxi, budget for about €30 for Playa del Inglés and €35 for Maspalomas.

## Bus

Buses link regularly with points along the coast, westwards as far as Puerto de Mogán and eastwards to Las Palmas. For Las Palmas (€5.50, about 50 minutes), take bus 5 (night bus), 30 or 44 (nonstop). Pick up *horarios* (timetables) at the tourist office – one for the south of the island and one for the north.

## GETTING AROUND Bus

**Global** (☎ 902 38 11 10; [www.globalsu.net](http://www.globalsu.net) in Spanish) runs buses to many of the theme parks listed earlier. The fare for a standard run within town is €1. If you plan to travel out of town, a Tarjeta Insular (see the boxed text, p64) is a good investment.

## Car

If you must take your car down to the beach, there's a large paying car park beside Playa del Inglés. Street parking costs a reasonable

## DETOUR

If you want more space on the sand, there are several choice beaches on the coast-hugging GC-500 road, west of Playa del Inglés. Follow the signs to the town hospital and Puerto de Mogán from the centre (top of Avenida Tirajana), passing Holiday World on your left. The road climbs past palm plantations and the new golf course, Meloneras Golf (p85). At Km7 watch for the **Pasito Bea** sign, turning left on the rough approach that leads to a small black sandy cove secluded by rocks, which is mixed nude and clothed. After a quick dip, continue along the road, which winds around arid hills and, after 1.2km, comes to **Playa de Carpinteras**. Follow the track east of the main beach here, park on the cliffs and you will discover an idyllic, little-known (until now!) broad arc of sand with shallow water backed by sloping dunes. You can clamber around the rocks due east of here to reach the beach, which again is mixed nude and clothed. The third beach worth recommending is at Km 9.2. **Playa de Triana** is a black pebbly beach, with parking on the main road; note that you will be expected to wear your togs here!

Follow the road a further 4km to a roundabout, where it rejoins the GC-1 heading towards the vastly more commercial beaches of Puerto Rico and beyond.

€0.50 for 30 minutes up to €3 for four hours (between 10am and 9pm).

### Taxi

You can call a **taxi** (☎ 928 76 67 67), and taxi stands abound and are reliable. From Playa del Inglés, no destination within the urban area costs more than €8.

## AROUND PLAYA DEL INGLÉS & MASPALOMAS

### PUERTO RICO & ARGUINEGUÍN

While Maspalomas has redeeming features, in the shape of its natural dunes and superbly unnatural nightlife, its resort cousins further west are a good example of how greedy developers can destroy a coastline that shares a similar setting to Italy's Amalfi coast. Around every corner it seems there is yet another resort surrounded by steep banks of apartment blocks stretching into the hinterland. How some of these poor tourists get to the beach is a puzzle; crossing the main road is hazardous enough, and then it can be a long walk – especially if you have to return for your sunblock!

Parts of the port area of Arguineguín still remain true to its roots as a small, active fishing settlement, but it's a nondescript town with a couple of rather scrubby beaches. If you are here at lunchtime, check out the **Cofradía de Pescadores** (☎ 928 15 09 63; mains from €7; ☒ closed Wed & Sep), which, despite the plastic tablecloths and disarming six-language menu, buys its catch of the day direct from the fishing boats. Arguineguín is also home to a well-respected diving school (see p85).

Puerto Rico is a good example of appalling town planning; the original fishing village has all but disappeared under a sea of concrete, with the apartment blocks stacked up like stadium seats against the mountains. The beach is pleasant but certainly not large enough to cater to the number of beds here. The only escape is the multitude of boat trips that depart from the harbour, including the dolphin-spotting **Spirit of the Sea** (☎ 928 56 22 29; www.dolphin-whale.com; adult/under 12yr €22/12.50), offering two-hour trips in glass-bottom catamarans. A percentage of your ticket price goes towards marine

research and conservation. **Linesa Salmon** (☎ 649 91 93 83; return €10) offers similar, with eight hourly services on a glass-bottom ferry to/from Puerto de Mogán from 10am and 5pm and eastwards to Arguineguín from 9.30am to 4.30pm. It also runs a daily two-hour dolphin-spotting trip for the same price as the ferry, departing from Puerto Rico at 10.30am.

The resorts further west, including Playa del Cura, Playa del Tauro and **Taurito**, are of a similar ilk. At least the latter has made an effort to gear itself to families with a vast landscaped lido with lagoon-style pools, tennis courts, minigolf, gym equipment, bars and sun beds. The waters here are flat, smooth as glass and safe for swimming.

Buses connect Puerto Rico and Arguineguín with Maspalomas and Playa del Inglés (€1.60, 30 minutes) and with Puerto de Mogán (€1.25, 15 minutes) and Las Palmas (€6.15, 1 hour 50 minutes), roughly every half-hour.

### PUERTO DE MOGÁN

After Taurito, a couple of kilometres of rugged coastline recall what this whole southern stretch of the island must have been like 40 years ago, before mass tourism descended on the Canaries.

Finally you round a bend; below you is a smallish crescent of sandy beach and next to it, a busy little yacht harbour and fishing port. Puerto de Mogán, although now largely given over to the tourist trade, is light years from its garish counterparts to the east. Thankfully, even the recent construction inland is more aesthetically pleasing, including the luxury new Hotel Cordial Mogán Playa (p90).

Although its nickname, 'Venice of the Canaries', may be a tad of an exaggeration, the architecture and bridged waterways are as pretty as a chocolate box and the whole place exudes an air of opulence and charm. In the heart of the port, low-rise apartments have wrought-iron balconies, brightly coloured trim and are covered in dazzling bougainvillea.

On the downside, the place gets packed with envious tourists from the other resorts during the day, particularly on Friday morning when a street market takes over most of the town. Stalls sell the usual overpriced belts, bags and shell jewellery and, if you are staying here, it's a good day to leave.



## LOCAL VOICES

For diving instructor Jerry O'Connor, being six foot under is nothing new; he comes from a family of well-known undertakers in Ireland's County Cork.

'Did you hear the one about the two Paddies who opened the dive centre Canary Diving Adventures (below) in Gran Canaria without knowing a word of Spanish?' he quips. 'Well, here it is!' The centre opened nearly 10 years ago and is one of the longest-established under the same owners on the island. It is also one of the few to have gained PADI 5 Star Gold Palm Resort status.

So, what's so special about diving here?

The warm waters are fed by the Gulf Stream, which means there is a fabulous range of marine life, with more than 553 species of fish. We can also offer a shore dive to the El Cabron Reserve created with the aim of controlling overfishing, and terrific with shoals of different species of fish, and an extensive reef system. Plus there are two shipwrecks near here, including the *Alagranza*, which was sunk about 15 years ago and has become home to large shoals of barracuda and yellow snapper.

'Diving is also year-round in Gran Canaria and it's really noticeable how people are starting to want to get involved with sports and activities here, rather than just sit on the beach and sunbathe all day.'

Who are your typical divers?

'It varies. During the winter our customers are considerably more 'mature', whereas in the summer the clientele is far younger'

So you're happy here?

'I love it. Gran Canaria has so much variety in its landscape, the climate is superb and the people are as friendly as the Irish! I wouldn't want to live anywhere else.'

## Sights & Activities

Tucked among the restaurants and bars on Calle Los Pescadores, the simple **Ermita de San Fernando** church dates back to 1955. You can take a peek inside during Mass at 6pm on Tuesday and Saturday.

Puerto de Mogán is the main centre for diving on Gran Canaria, with caves and wrecks just offshore. **Atlantik Diving** (☎ 689 35 20 49; www.clubdemar.com; Hotel Club de Mar, Playa de Mogán s/n; single dive with full equipment €40) offers courses at all levels, from a Discover Scuba experience (three hours, €90) to Dive Master (minimum 20 days, €570).

**Canary Diving Adventures** (☎ 928 56 54 28; www.canary-diving.com; Hotel Taurito Princess, Playa de Taurito) is run by a couple of Irish brothers, (see the boxed text, above). It offers guided boat dives (from €30), four-hour (and longer) PADI certification courses from €360 and one-day beginner courses for €75.

**Submarine Adventure** (☎ 928 56 51 08; adult/under 12yr €28/14) has a yellow submarine that submerges for 40 minutes eight times daily – and its owners run a free bus as far as Playa del Inglés to pick up punters. If you're expecting coral and sharks, you'll be disappointed; the submarine scarcely leaves the harbour and the fish you see are less impressive than those in any fish market.

## Sleeping

**Pensión Eva** (☎ 928 56 52 35; Calle Lomo Quiebre 35; s/d without bathroom €20/25) About 750m inland, heading north from town, this excellent-value place has straightforward, light-filled rooms, a spacious rooftop terrace and – best news of all – a communal kitchen with a couple of fridges that makes self-catering (and socialising) a breeze.

**La Venecia de Canarias** (☎ 928 56 56 00; www.lavenciadecanarias.net; Local 328, Urb Puerto de Mogán; 1-/2-bedroom apt €70/105) Right in the thick of the resort's 'Venetian' quarter, with a truly lovely frontage surrounded by terrace bars, this well-managed complex has attractive, if smallish, apartments that sleep between three and five people. There are low-season reductions.

**Hotel Club de Mar** (☎ 928 56 50 66; www.clubdemar.com; Playa de Mogán s/n; d €95, apt from €105; ♿ ♿ ♿) Beside the yacht-filled harbour, this hotel complex has a spa, large, airy doubles, and apartments (between two and four people) with all the trimmings. Bag a room with a terrace overlooking the infinity pool with the beach beyond. The hotel's new Patio Canario restaurant (mains from €7) is good for fish dishes.

**Hotel Cordial Mogán Playa** (☎ 928 72 41 00; www.cordialcanarias.com; d with half-board from €175;

**P** **☎** **📺** **🚿** **♿**) The most recent addition to the town but, happily, the architecture is stunning and low-rise, with the accommodation set around a central lobby, complete with stained-glass dome. Echoing the harbour with waterways and bridges, the public areas are a delight, while the rooms are all earth colours, expensive marble and gold-and-cream striped wallpaper. This is a truly stylish hotel that has succeeded in blending well with the environment. May it be a lesson to them all.

Most of Puerto de Mogán's apartments are rented out by locals; ask for Pepita at the **Supermercado Venencia** (☎ 928 56 55 63; Avenida Castillete Mogán; apt €50; 🕒 8am-8pm), opposite the entrance to the La Venencia de Canarias hotel, who owns a small, well-positioned apartment block that is cheaper than the norm. **Apartmentos Puerto de Mogan** (☎ 928 56 50 66; www.apartmentosmogan.com; around €420 a week), located a street back from the harbour, is another good source. It also arranges rental cars.

## Eating

There are plenty of cafés and restaurants with pleasant *terrazas* offering fresh fish.

**La Cucina** (☎ 639 46 71 14; Calle Corriente 8; pizzas €5-7) Run by Italians, this tiny place is predominantly a takeaway with a couple of outside tables. The pizzas come highly recommended, and there is also a limited range of pasta dishes and salads, plus the obligatory creamy tiramisu.

**Restaurante Cofradía** (☎ 928 56 53 21; Muelle s/n; mains €10-22) This fishing cooperative restaurant is situated in the southwestern corner of the quay. Although the white tablecloths and multilingual menus mean the tourists have arrived, the fish is as fresh as ever. Tuck into a plate of grilled sardines; you'll never open a tin again.

**La Bodeguilla Juananá** (☎ 928 56 50 44; Plaza Mayor s/n; mains €12-20) Tucked into the corner of grandly named Plaza Mayor, in front of the yacht harbour, this restaurant is run with passion. The décor has an African theme and the gastro-flair dishes include daily specials like smoked swordfish served with avocado and a sauce made from the sap of canary palms.

## Getting There & Away

There is no shortage of buses heading east to Puerto Rico and Playa del Inglés (€1.25,

15 minutes). Bus 1 (€7, two hours) departs hourly for Las Palmas. Ferries also run between the port and Puerto Rico (see p89).

## NORTH OF PUERTO DE MOGÁN

Just as Puerto de Mogán is a relief from the south coast's relentless armies of apartments, bungalows and Guinness on tap, so the GC-200 road north from the port is another leap away from the crowds.

As it ascends gradually up a wide valley towards Mogán, you pass craggy mountains and orchards of avocados, the main crop in these parts. **Mogán** is a relaxed, unspoilt small town in a lovely mountainous setting with several pleasant restaurants and bars and a traditional small church.

**our pick** **El Sirocco B&B** (☎ 928 56 93 01; www.elsirocco.com; Calle San Antonio 8; d €50) is a charming B&B in an 18th-century former schoolhouse, creatively transformed by a German-English couple according to feng shui principles. The rooms are large and boldly colourful (think raspberries and cream), with Andrea's evocative landscape photos on the walls. There are four plant-filled patios and a hearty cooked breakfast is included in the price.

To press on, you have two choices. The GC-200 winds off to the northwest, travelling 26km through some spectacularly craggy mountains to Aldea de San Nicolás (p82), blighted when you get close to town by the sea of plastic greenhouses. Stop for a glass of fresh papaya juice at **Las Cañadas** (☎ 928 17 25 80; www.restaurantelascanadas.com), around 8km from Mogán on your left-hand side. This is an agreeably quirky restaurant and bar with stunning views plus the added appeal of turtles, a chameleon and a small museum with old agricultural equipment, radios and the like. You can also buy local honey and the largest avocados you have ever seen (when in season). The winding road continues through **Los Azulejos**, a colourful rock formation created by different coloured minerals of brilliant greens, yellows and ochres. To avoid a head-on collision, take your photos from the signposted **Fuente de los Azulejos Mirador** lookout.

Alternatively, a minor turn 2.5km north of Mogán heads northeast up to Ayacata, from where you can head to Tejada p78 and the highest peaks on the island.

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