

Gran Canaria

GENERAL INFORMATION The Canary Islands are made up of 7 small islands scattered over a 300 mile area in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. The closest land mass is the coast of Africa (Sahara Desert) which lies 115 kilometers due East of Fuerteventura, the Eastern most island of the chain.

Although the culture is predominantly Spanish, the strategic geological location and excellent year round climate, make the islands a popular tourist destination for English, German, and Scandinavian vacationers. The islands are volcanic in origin and contain a great diversity of landscapes from desert to garden, dunes to forest, and fertile valleys to high mountains. Visitors from all over the world come to share the diversity in the four national parks located in the Canary Islands.

Gran Canaria is the third largest island with an area of approximately 600 sq. miles. Almost circular in shape, the island's profile is a classic volcanic cone, reaching a height of nearly 2,000 meters above sea level. The mountainous character brings rise to dramatic climate and landscape changes with a beautiful coastline ranging from awe-inspiring cliffs to some of the most beautiful beaches in the Canary Island chain.

Las Palmas, with a population of approximately 400,000, is the largest city in the Canaries. Being the provincial capital, it is a major commercial and historical center, as well as a vital sea port. Up to a thousand ships a month arrive at the port to take on fuel and unload cargo. The port is not of particular interest to tourists and it is recommended visitors to the Island explore the beautiful landscape of the interior and coastline.

HISTORY Since classical antiquity, the Canary Islands have been a land of legends. The existence of the Canaries can be traced back to famous Greek authors such as Homer, Plato and Plutarch. These imaginary islands were known as the Fortunate Islands and remained only a myth and a mystery until after the middle ages.
It is believed the first inhabitants, the Guanches, arrived in the 1st or 2nd century B.C. They were a white skinned, blue eyed, blonde haired race related to North Africa's Cro-Magnon man. The Guanches were cave dwellers who like the ancient Egyptians, carefully embalmed their dead, presumably for a ceremonial passage to the next world.
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With the Canaries being the world's most westerly charted point, the islands became the last stopping point for the explorations of Christopher Columbus before venturing into the unknown. For the next several centuries, the islands became a bridge between the Old and New World.

In the 17th – 19th centuries, the Canaries experienced economic ups and downs due to their dependence on various crops. Sugar became the first staple crop but profits declined with the arrival of cheaper sugar form the West Indies. Grapes became the main crop producing a sweet white wine called Malmsey which retains worldwide recognition.





In the mid-19th century the Canaries were given free port status which lowered duties and trade barriers. Las Palmas and Tenerife became two of the world's busiest ports. With the introduction of the banana crop as a major export and the increasing growth of tourism, the Canaries continue to have a stable economic base.

PLACES OF INTEREST

Playa de las Canteras is a 2-3 miles stretch of Golden Sand Beach in the heart of the city.

Pueblo Canario (Canary Village), a typical Canarian village, is a good place to soak up the culture of Gran Canaria as you shop for handicrafts and enjoy displays of dancing and singing. You can also visit the exotic art museum of Nestor de las Torre, the local artist who designed the village.

Vegueta, the oldest area of the city, is a nice place to learn the history of the island as you wonder the old streets and alleyways.

Casa de Colon (The House of Christopher Columbus), formerly the residence of the island's first governor, was used by Christopher Columbus on at least 3 different occasions. It is now a museum contain-

ing navigational instruments, charts, weapons, and other items which are characteristic of the period.

Cathedral de Santa Ana represents the Gothic and neo-Classic architecture of the time. Although opening times are very erratic, for a few euros, you may be able to see the treasury with exhibits of ancient religious art and jewelry.

Museo Canario contains the islands most important collection from Guanche times.

Beyond Las Palmas

? Playa del Ingles and Maspalomas are two of the most 2&3 famous beach areas on the island. There are a number of high rise hotels, shopping malls and fast food restaurant in the area.

Cruz de Tajeda (Cross of Tejeda) is one of the most popular 4 scenic vistas on the island at 4,800 ft. The spectacular panoramic view includes two famous rock formations that were once worshipped by the Guanches; Roque Nublo (5,961 ft) and Roque Bentaiga. You will also find a famous Parador (state run restaurant) for refreshments.

Caldera de Bandama, a volcanic crater, is one of the islands natural wonders. The Crater is almost 1 km across and reaches a depth of 650 ft.

SHORE EXCURSIONS To make the most of your visit to Gran Canary, we suggest you take one of our organized Shore Excursions.

LOCAL CUSTOMS Bargaining: is acceptable in some stores.

Tipping: All prices on a menu include tax and a service charge. It is customary however to leave a tip of 5% - 10% if you are happy with the food and service. Taxi drivers should be tipped approximately 10%.

Local Cuisine: Paella is the Spanish national dish, a combination of seafood, chicken, and vegetable mixed together in a saffron-flavored rice. Tapas is another cuisine unique to this culture. Tapa is a small portion of food usually served in a bar to encourage you to keep drinking.

Drink Specialties: The Canaries are famous for "Malmsey" wine made from the volcanic soil. These wines tend to be very sweet. Sangria is also a popular drink throughout Spain. Bottle water is recommended.

SHOPPING FACILITIES Stores are generally open from 9:00 am - 1:00 pm and 4:00 pm - 8:00 pm.

In 1852 the Canary Islands were declared a duty-free zone in order to stimulate trade and growth. The Canaries remain duty free to this day and goods are imported without restrictions from all over the world. With a lower luxury tax, you may find some bargains but not as many as one would expect. The items with a slightly lower luxury tax are similar to what one would find in a duty free shop at the airport - cameras, calculator, watches, perfume, jewelry, leather goods, spirits and tobacco.

The most celebrated local handicraft is embroidery. You will find excellent and detailed needlework on bedspreads, towels, napkins and tablecloths.

Most stores accept credit cards.

LOCAL CURRENCY The unit of currency in this port of call is the euro. There are 8 euro coins denominated in 2 and 1 euros, along with 50, 20, 10, 5, 2, and 1 cent pieces. Every euro coin carries a common European face. On the obverse, each Member State decorates the coins with their own motifs. No matter which motif is on the coins they can be used anywhere inside the Member States. There are 7 euro notes. In different colors and sizes, they are denominated in 500, 200, 100, 50, 20, 10, and 5 euros. The notes are uniform throughout the euro area; unlike coins, they have no national side. All euro notes are legal tender in all countries of the euro area.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES The Post Office is located at Calle 1 de Mayo.

There is a calling station at the Santa Catalina pier, a short walk from the ship.

There are local phones within a 5 minute walk from the ship. Coins or a calling card is required. You can dial internationally from any public telephone if you have a calling card with one of the companies listed

- below. Simply dial the access code and give the operator your card number. AT&T: 900.99.0011 MCI: 800.099.357 TOURIST INFORMATION The Tourist Information Office is located in Las Palmas, Casa del Turismo opposite Santa Catalina Park.
- TRANSPORTATION Taxis are available at the port. It is advisable to negotiate a fare before departing.
- There is a local bus system, but it is not designed for tourists. There are infrequent timetables to locations outside the city.
- USEFUL WORDS AND PHRASES
- Good Morning Buenos Dias
- Good Afternoon Buenas Tardes
- Good Day Buen Dia
- How Much Cuanto es
- You're Welcome De Nada
- Thank You Gracias
- Where is the bathroom Donde esta el cuarto de baño