

Christmas in the Canaries

What happens when you swap a cold, dark December in the UK to follow the Christmas star in search of sun? **Russell Higham** finds out

There's something quite amusing about lying by the pool – Aperol Spritz in one hand, Ambre Solaire in the other – watching the sun's golden rays glittering over the sea, as the opening bars of Bing Crosby's *White Christmas* gently drift from the bar of a five-star hotel.

I've never really liked spending "the most wonderful time of the year" at home. I'm happy for those who do but, for me, the clichéd traditions and enforced festivities (not to mention the weather) have often prompted me to head for sunnier climes over the festive period.

I'm not the only one, either: Heathrow had its busiest December in 2024, with a 21% increase in people flying on Christmas Day itself, among millions of people travelling abroad over the Christmas

period – with the Canary Islands one of the most popular sunny spots, alongside mainland Spain, Portugal, Turkey and Dubai. Some travel to avoid painful reminders of loved ones who are no longer there, while others go to escape the terrible TV and piles of washing-up.

I traded turkey dinners and soap opera specials for lobster thermidor and a week spent working on my tan in Costa Adeje. Known as Tenerife's most upmarket resort, it offers the widest choice of high-end accommodation, fine dining and designer shopping on the island.

SPLASH OUT

One thing to bear in mind if it's your client's first Christmas abroad, especially if they're spending it alone: go as premium as you possibly can. Being wined, dined and

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Isidore Dorn

DESTINATIONS

FESTIVE BREAKS | CHRISTMAS IN TENERIFE



CLOCKWISE FROM BOTTOM LEFT: Pools and sunset view at Joia El Mirador by Iberostar; Mount Teide; festive decorations in Garachico, Tenerife; the island's Santa Cruz church **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Christmas market in Puerto de Santiago, Tenerife **PICTURES:** Shutterstock/RossHelen, Cristian M Balate; Alejandro Clavo, foto-select; Russell Higham



pampered in the sun by the staff of a five-star hotel has a way of helping to dispel any pangs of yuletide homesickness. And the hotels in Costa Adeje don't come much more upmarket than the Joia El Mirador by Iberostar.

Set in tropical gardens on the southwest coast of Tenerife, the most popular Canary Island for British travellers, the all-suite Mirador has the dream-like feel of a Moorish palace with three elegant restaurants and a top-flight spa attached. Somehow, the warm ocean breeze blowing through my private terrace and into the bedroom, gently fluttering the ivory-white muslin drapes of my four-poster bed, quite took my mind off the fact that, back in England, it was 2C, raining and dark by 4pm.

The Mirador is adult-only, providing a silent night as well as tranquil days by the hotel's multiple pools, some of which are heated – not that it's necessary when Tenerife temperatures in December regularly reach the high 20s.

FESTIVE FLOURISHES

There are still festive touches to be found, though, with Christmas trees and subtle decorations tastefully dotted around the hotel. There's a special programme of events available for those who want to party with other travellers or, if a holy night is more what

clients are after, the friendly staff can offer directions to one of the nearby churches for Christmas services.

There are three golf courses within easy reach of the Joia El Mirador, but the Mirador is also the perfect base for active travellers keen to explore Tenerife's famous hiking trails. The lush, green landscape in the north of the island tends to be favoured by dedicated hikers, but the volcanic, desert-like south boasts Teide National Park, home to Spain's highest mountain, with some attractive walking of its own. Operators such as Ramble Worldwide offer hiking holidays led by local guides or there are self-guided routes available from online resources such as walkingtenerife.co.uk.

One of those is the Geranium Walk, a six-mile path winding its way past 12 distinctly different beaches to the popular and budget-friendly resort of Los Cristianos. Costa Adeje sits close to the northern tip of this promenade. Exiting the hotel directly onto Playa del Duque (considered one of Tenerife's finest beaches) and turning left onto the Geranium Walk will take you south to Los Cristianos, via Tenerife's heady nightlife capital, Playa de las Américas (an hour's walk, or 15 minutes by taxi).

Heading right, however, offers an infinitely more tranquil stroll northward, along the ➤

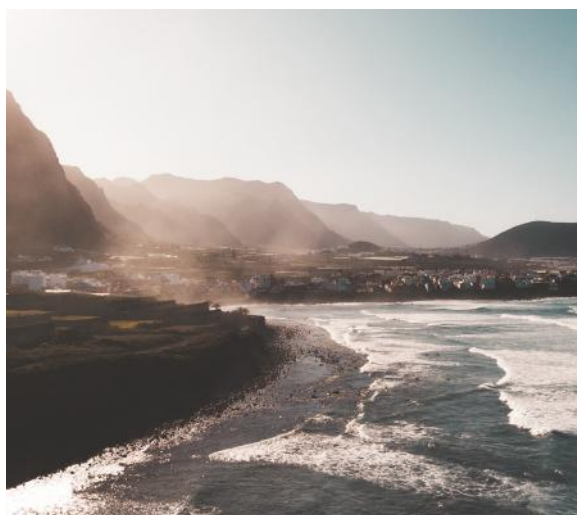


Joia El Mirador by Iberostar

offers 125 elegant suites in a secluded beachfront position in Costa Adeje's 'Golden Mile' area, packed with shops and cafes. The

resort features three restaurants plus a lounge bar and a snack bar, a lagoon-style outdoor pool, lavish indoor spa, fitness suite and even a squash court. For a premium experience, guests can upgrade to one of the Star Prestige La Balconada suites, enjoying access to an exclusive solarium and pool, complimentary snacks and premium drinks in their very own open bar, as well as a butler and concierge service. Either way, VIP treatment from attentive and friendly staff is a Christmas gift to everyone staying at the Mirador. iberostar.com





TOP: Joia El Mirador by Iberostar ABOVE: La Caleta

PICTURE: Shutterstock/Rytis Media

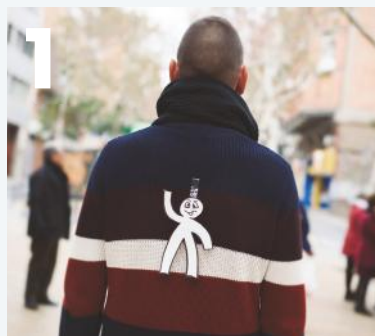
less populated part of the shore. I passed bikini-clad locals meditating and practising yoga on stony beaches to arrive, 20 minutes later, at the charming fishing village of La Caleta. Here, the laid-back atmosphere and pretty cottages, waterfront bars and cafes invite visitors to linger at one of the quaint little restaurants serving fresh seafood brought up from the craggy rocks below.

If clients stay long enough for La Caleta's 500-year-old San Sebastián Festival on January 20, they'll see horses being bathed and blessed on the beach by local priests. For me, on a balmy late December afternoon, it was the perfect place to just pull up a chair, soak up the rays and relax with a book.

Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* seemed timely but rather incongruous in the 27C heat, so I returned to the Mirador for Christmas Eve drinks with some of the new friends I'd met at one of the hotel's fitness classes that morning.

We laughed as a local singer's rendition of *Let it Snow* rang out from the cocktail bar below. Somewhere else right then, possibly even in the UK, flakes might well have been falling. But here in the Mirador's outdoor hot tub, clinking champagne flutes in the sun, *Walking on Sunshine* seemed a far more fitting tune for Christmas in the Canaries. **TV**

5 CANARIAN CHRISTMAS TRADITIONS



1 December 28 marks Holy Innocents' Day, which is a little like April Fool's Day. Locals play pranks, including sticking a paper doll to another person's back – ideally without them noticing.



2 On New Year's Eve, Canarians eat 12 grapes at midnight to ring in the new year. If clients can stay on a little longer, they'll witness the extravagant Three Kings Parade (pictured), which takes place across the Canary Islands on January 5.



3 The beach of Las Canteras, in the heart of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, plays host to a huge nativity scene sculpted from sand by local and international artists. The sculpture can rise to five metres and use 2,000 tons of sand.



4 Food forms a crucial part of Christmas in the Canary Islands. Clients can taste sugar-dusted *truchas* pastries (pictured), made with sweet potato and almonds, *bienmesabe* (egg-based almond dessert), *frangollo* corn pudding and roasted goat.



5 In Lanzarote, clients can witness the time-honoured Rancho de Pascua – a festive ritual dating from the 16th century – in the village of Teguise on Christmas Eve. Musicians gather in the main church to sing about the birth of Jesus, while children dressed as angels and shepherds look on.

BOOK IT

EasyJet holidays offers seven nights at the Joia El Mirador by Iberostar for £3,033 per person, including breakfast and 23kg luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick departing December 20. easyjet.com/holidays