

Paradise founded

A new resort in Fuerteventura is a step up for the island's luxury all-inclusive offering, writes **Maria Mellor**

There's debate about where the name Fuerteventura comes from. Some believe it's derived from the Spanish words 'fuerte' and 'vientos', meaning 'strong winds'. As I stand shakily on a windsurfing board, I'm inclined to believe the more likely option that 'ventura' translates directly from the Spanish for 'fortunate'.

A light breeze sends me gliding along the seafront and I'm grateful conditions are so calm – anything stronger would have me struggling to stay up at all.

As someone not known for my prowess in watersports, I might never have chosen to windsurf if it weren't for the fact the experience was included as part of a stay at the new Paradisus by Meliá Fuerteventura. I'm at the resort's grand opening – the brand's third Canary Islands property – and ready to test out everything on offer.

MOVING UP

Meliá has spent €32 million transforming its 361-room property on Fuerteventura's south coast into a five-star

resort. The nearest town is Costa Calma – a 40-minute walk beyond the sand dunes – so clients will feel as if they've been dropped into an otherworldly oasis.

The resort's sand and warm-white colour scheme offers a calm canvas for the breathtaking views: volcanic hills that rose from the sea more than 200 million years ago and can be sighted from all vantage points, including my ocean-view room. They seem to glow in the morning sun and are backlit in an explosion of pink, blue and orange at sunset.

All-inclusives might have a reputation for discouraging exploration, but this resort has been designed to bring the culture of Fuerteventura to its guests. Local goat's cheese and sea salt awaits as you enter the room, and guests are also provided with a list of cultural experiences and workshops to sample during their stay for a true taste of the island. I sign up for a basket-weaving workshop with Maria, who deftly shows how to fold palm leaves into hats, bags and bookmarks, part of a centuries-long Canarian tradition. ➤

PICTURE: Ricardo Lopez

DESTINATIONS

WINTER SUN | FUERTEVENTURA



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: One of Paradisus by Meliá's four pools; the Ginger Grand Café & Lobby Bar; the lagoon and coastline

PICTURES: Ricard Lopez; Celestino González Méndez



UPSELL A *stay*

To experience the ultimate in what Paradisus by Meliá has to offer, guests can upgrade their stay to The Reserve to gain access to premium, adult-only spaces, including a sapphire-blue swimming pool with a private bar. They will also enjoy an exclusive check-in via The Reserve lounge, plus an all-day self-service selection of food and drink. A concierge can arrange on-resort restaurant bookings and spa treatments and also assist with organising excursions. Reserve Premium Ocean Front Rooms start at £515 per night.

melia.com



My windsurfing experience was also tied to the history of the island. René Egli, founder of the watersports school directly outside the hotel, created the Wingfoil and Windsurfing World Cup in 1986 – and it is now held every year in these very waters.

Our instructor, Chris, explains it's the destination's year-round good weather that makes it the perfect place to get out on a board.

The windsurfing beach is mere steps from the hotel, while there is also a lagoon that fills up twice a month, depending on the phases of the moon, with water staying for about a week at a time.

I ask when the water is next due to come in and am told "midday". I look at my watch, feeling dubious as it is already 10am and I see nothing but a dry, sandy expanse. Yet by the time the windsurfing class is finished, seawater is flowing into the basin.

ALL AT SEA

The next day, I wade through calf-deep water to get to the spit of sand on the other side, spending a couple of hours basking in the sunshine and feeling at peace with the sound of water lapping on both sides.

A shower stands at the top of the beach steps to avoid bringing sand into the hotel's four pools, including what I'm told is Europe's largest heated saltwater pool. The salt adds enough buoyancy that I can float in a reclining position – no need for a lilo here. It also provides great resistance against the floating weights I use for an aquagym class led by teacher Guila, who calls out "faster!" in six

languages while a Europop remix of 1980s classic *Total Eclipse of the Heart* keeps us to the beat.

In the interest of research, I test out what's on offer at each of Paradisus's seven bars and restaurants. Although I enjoy the grilled fish and *croquetas* at Kanna Beach Club, I become a repeat eater at The Shack – an informal poolside bar offering a wide-ranging cuisine, with piña colodas, tacos and salmon poke bowls.

TASTING TIMES

Fresh seafood becomes a running theme. Germán Ortega, the chef of Michelin-starred restaurant La Aquarela in Gran Canaria, has crafted the menu at Mahos, an adult-only dining room offering an inventive tasting menu. I go for the seafood option and delight in being served plump octopus with tomato and avocado, parrotfish – the catch of the day – served with a mussel sauce and the Canarian staple carb of salted wrinkled potatoes. To finish, I tuck into caramelised local pineapple with coconut ice cream.

With a full belly, I go for a Sky Walk, a stargazing activity included in the resort's complimentary activities programme. Heading to an outlook over the ocean at the back of the hotel, I'm delighted to find reclined deckchairs, comfy pillows and candlelight, so I can stare upwards as long as I want without getting a stiff neck.

I see a shooting star; not just a white streak that disappears in an instant, but a flash of blue then red, burning long enough for me to point it out to others. My wish? That every all-inclusive holiday I take from now on will be as magical and immersive as this one. **TW**

BOOK IT

EasyJet holidays sells seven nights' all-inclusive at the Paradisus by Meliá Fuerteventura from £1,465 per person, based on two sharing. Includes 23kg luggage, transfers and flights from Gatwick on February 26. easyjet.com/holidays