

 PAUSE

 PLAY


PICTURES: SHUTTERSTOCK

FUERTEVENTURA

Pause & Play

Surfing the sand dunes or sitting back on the beach?
There's fun to be had in Fuerteventura, finds Ben Ireland →

Cast your eye out of the window as you're coming in to land in Fuerteventura, and you won't see the sea of multi-storey hotels that you might associate with other tourism hotspots in the Canary Islands.

Sure, the island isn't new to the UK market, but it is perhaps unjustly compared to its bigger, brasher neighbours. That's because they all share year-round sunshine, meaning warm – but often windy – climes for a Christmas or New Year getaway to get your fix of melatonin and escape the winter blues.

But Fuerteventura offers a winter-sun getaway with a difference. Whether you're a family, couple or group of friends, the resort of Corralejo in northern Fuerteventura is an easy-access option for anyone seeking adventure, relaxation or both.

► DUNE DAYS

Pause: One of the reasons there are few built-up hotels in northern Fuerteventura is because of planning restrictions protecting the sand dunes in Corralejo Natural Park. They shift over time, blown by the wind, so man-made windbreaks are a big no-no to protect the area's natural beauty.

That is, except for some much smaller, traditional windbreaks



Rent a kiteboard to surf across the dunes, allowing the wind to whisk you over the soft natural bumps

dotted up and down the coast, built in a ringed variant of the dry-stone walls you may associate more with the Yorkshire Dales. They're perfect for protecting your eyes from the powder-like sand, as you catch some winter rays on the beach and bask in the comfortable 20C-25C temperatures – perfect for paler-skinned Brits.

Play: Sand dunes are not just a place to relax and top up on your tan; they are a hive of activity for those who can't sit still on holiday.

You can rent a kiteboard to surf across the dunes, making the most of that wind as it whisks you over the soft natural bumps and flats in the landscape. Instruction is available at various spots around the coast.

A less vigorous way to enjoy the dunes at speed is to find a bodyboard and slide your way down, either sitting or – for the

braver souls – standing up, as if on a skateboard. And if you can't get hold of a board, you can simply fling yourself down, either by running, or – as demonstrated by many an islander – tumbling down in a less-than-graceful roly-poly. All in the name of good fun.

► ROAD TRIPPIN'

Pause: Access to a rental car opens up so many possibilities in Fuerteventura. From Corralejo, it takes just over half an hour to drive to the sleepy northwestern town of El Cotillo, where you can make your way down to the Tostón Lighthouse for a perfect place to catch a stunning sunset. Be sure to wrap up warm as the winds come gusting in from the Atlantic Ocean, but it's worth the effort as the beautiful sunset makes way for a lovely view of the stars in the clear sky.

Play: The Canary Islands are, of course, the product of volcanoes, and Fuerteventura is no exception. This volcanic history has left it with a stunning terrain accessible through an easily-navigable network of winding roads. You can make your way from the northeast of the island through Betancuria, via the sacred mountain of Tindaya, and onwards to the rocky seafront caves of Ajuy, all in a day's exploring.

There'll be no shortage of spectacular views or places to stop, take it all in and bag that perfect selfie.

Arrive at the sleepy coastal town of Ajuy and you're bound to be impressed by the rock formations, including the Black Cave, fashioned by centuries of thrashing from the fierce waves that even the brave local surfers daren't take on. Its seafront scenery is comparable to that of Australia's Great Ocean Road.

► FEEL FITTER

Play: If road-tripping isn't your bag and you prefer to earn your hard miles, you can ride the shorter, bumpier path to El Cotillo from Corralejo. You'll see 4x4s venture onto the rocky road but it's perfectly doable on a good mountain bike, if your legs can hack the roughly 12-mile off-road route. And remember, it may be a bit harder on the way back as you'll be pedalling into the wind.

Joggers may prefer to go south from Corralejo to the sand dunes, which might trap the odd bike tyre, to get their miles in with a bit of resistance training.

Pause: If you prefer to keep healthy by pampering rather than exercising, then take advantage of the island's numerous spas. Even those not staying at →



→ the Gran Hotel Atlantis Bahía Real can sample the treatments at its Bahía Vital spa. Indulge in a bamboo exfoliation, seaweed detox or steamy menthol rasul bath, which leaves your skin feeling smooth and rejuvenated.

There are massages specifically designed for sports injuries, plus chiropractic, reflexology and deep-tissue options to help with various ailments and leave you feeling ready to see out the rest of the British winter on your return.

► SURFERS' PARADISE

Play: Take a stroll up the Corralejo coast and it won't be long until you see a group of



Indulge in a bamboo exfoliation, seaweed detox or steamy menthol rasul bath to rejuvenate your skin

surfers either lounging on the beach or riding the waves. To get involved, there are plenty of surf schools with instructors, or shops to rent boards and wetsuits if you're already a dab hand. Some of the popular spots produce quite intimidating waves, but →



ABOVE: Dunes at Corralejo; TOP: Caves at Ajuy

✓ Tried & Tested



GRAN HOTEL ATLANTIS BAHÍA REAL

From a beachfront room at this classy hotel, guests can look over to Lanzarote as well as the virtually uninhabited Isla de Lobos, offering a nice backdrop to break up the horizon.

The property is sophisticated – evening entertainment is more cello and harp than cabaret singer – and with 170 rooms and 72 suites, it is large but not intimidating. There's plenty of space to lounge by its network of pools, but also direct access to the beach where there are stylish loungers with the all-important windbreaks needed on Fuerteventura.

To eat, there are four à la carte restaurants offering cuisine ranging from traditional Spanish to Japanese teppanyaki cooked in front of you. It is also home to a spa offering a variety of therapies.

Book it: A night in a double room starts from €94 per person based on two sharing, including breakfast.

atlantisbahiareal.com/en



SUITE HOTEL ATLANTIS FUERTEVENTURA RESORT

For fun-loving families, this 383-suite complex is an upmarket holiday village. Situated about 50 metres from the beach, the all-inclusive resort has sporting activities for all ages from volleyball to tennis, with kids' and teens' clubs designed to help children find friends the same age.

There are a number of different areas, including an adult-only section with a bar, and each has its own pool tucked away amid the greenery that covers the resort.

There are four restaurants, with Spanish and Asian-themed eateries and a buffet among the offering.

Book it: Prices start from €83 per person per night based on two people sharing a Junior Suite on an all-inclusive basis.

atlantisfuerteventuraresort.com/en

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WINTER SUN FUERTEVENTURA DESTINATIONS

RIGHT:
Joggers in
Fuerteventura

FAR RIGHT:
Tostón
Lighthouse



PICTURES: MARIO ENTERO; SHUTTERSTOCK; ROGER MENDEZ

SAMPLE
PRODUCT

Jet2holidays offers seven nights' bed-and-breakfast at the Gran Hotel Atlantis Bahía Real for £819 per person based on two sharing, departing from Stansted on December 5. Seven nights' all-inclusive at Suite Hotel Atlantis Fuerteventura Resort, with flights from Stansted departing on December 12, costs from £569 based on two sharing, also with Jet2holidays. jet2holidays.com

→ there are places and times of day that favour beginners.

Wetsuits are advisable as although the weather never really gets cold in Fuerteventura, the sea is chillier in winter than in summer.

Pause: There's more to surfing culture than surfing itself. Since Corralejo has the waves that talented surfers crave, what has followed is an Ibiza-style Deep Chill scene in many of the bars and cafes as you head up the beachfront on the way to the town's port. DJs and acoustic guitarists are not an uncommon sight, and the places they play in offer chilled-out environments to while away an afternoon with a coffee or a couple of beers. It may appear otherwise, but dreadlocks and tattoos are optional.



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▶ GOATS TO COAST

Play: You may see a series of goat statues dotted around Fuerteventura. Don't be perturbed. It's not some sacred animal that they worship, merely "the most dangerous animal on the island", as many locals put it. If you do drive around the island you will

probably see them, roaming free.

Another animal prevalent in the hills is a very friendly species of African squirrel – which you're advised not to feed – that was introduced to the island some decades ago and has thrived. Nature lovers can also spot many different birds, from seabirds common around the coast to the hawks and crows that you can spot in the mountains.

Pause: With a warm attachment to goats comes a sense of pride in the products made from their milk. Goat's yoghurt is a staple at the hotel breakfast buffet, and most local chefs and restaurateurs will swear Fuerteventura's goat's cheese is the best in the world. It goes gloriously with walnuts and dressing in a salad. **tw**



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