

Five islands

The volcanic lands of the Canary Islands are enough to tempt anyone away from the beach, finds Mary Novakovich

Drenched in sunshine and warmth all year round, the Canary Islands are a firm favourite with holidaymakers desperate for some beach time. But move away from the well-known resorts and there are some fascinating landscapes to discover.

Two of the most popular islands, Lanzarote and Gran Canaria, are full of surprises and offer clients experiences that are a world away from a standard beach holiday.

LANZAROTE: TO THE MOON AND BACK

Lanzarote's dark, dramatic volcanic landscapes often come as a slight shock to first-time

visitors who might have been expecting more greenery. But they're soon won over by the unique scenery of solidified lava and hundreds of volcanic peaks.

Whitewashed villages of low-rise houses echo the island's Moorish past, and strict planning regulations have severely limited the number of high-rise buildings.

There's a distinct feeling of otherworldliness, and it instantly draws you in. Just a drive past the island's vineyards – where the vines grow in stone semicircles dug into the black soil – is enough to convince clients that they've arrived somewhere out of the ordinary.

A major driving force behind



Lanzarote's volcanic landscapes come as a shock to first-time visitors expecting more greenery

the island's conservation was the artist, architect and visionary César Manrique, whose legacy is found all over the island, not just in his public works of art, but also in some of its most unusual attractions.

Along the island's south-western coast – close to one of Lanzarote's most popular beach resorts, Playa Blanca – is the small hamlet of El Golfo. Pretty enough on its own, the hamlet has two natural phenomena on its doorstep. Take the path from El Golfo to Lago Verde, a crater lagoon whose deep-green waters look as if they've come from another planet. Just beyond Lago Verde is Los Hervideros, →



Prestige Holidays offers a week's bed and breakfast in a Superior Room at the Princesa Yaiza Suite Hotel Resort from £959 per person, including Ryanair flights from Stansted on November 21 and transfers. Prices including car hire start at £1,019. prestige.holidays.co.uk

Tui features a week's half-board at the 5-T-rated Salobre Hotel Resort & Serenity from £830, based on two sharing. The price includes flights from Gatwick on November 29 and transfers. tui.co.uk



ABOVE: Princesa Yaiza Suite Hotel Resort, Lanzarote



RIGHT: Cueva de los Verdes, Lanzarote

BELOW: Maspalomas, Gran Canaria

whose 15-metre cliffs have been carved into jagged caves created by the full force of the Atlantic's crashing waves. It's a colourful spectacle, with a terracotta volcanic peak in the distance and deep-blue waters sweeping into dark grey lava cliffs.

But they're just the warm-up act for Lanzarote's star natural attraction. Volcanic eruptions in the early 18th century created the extraordinary lunar-like landscape of Timanfaya National Park. This vast sea of solidified lava can be experienced on a coach journey along the Ruta de los Volcanes, designed by Manrique, which is an eerie and mesmerising sight. There's also the option to explore the outer areas of the park on the back of a camel.

If, at the end of the tour, clients aren't convinced of the power of the volcano bubbling away beneath the

earth's surface, they can visit El Diablo restaurant in the centre of the park, where natural volcanic heat is used to grill meat and fish.

There are more subterranean wonders to explore at the eastern end of the island, including the Cueva de los Verdes, which, at more than four miles, is one of the longest volcanic tunnels in the world. At one point in its history, it resembled an underground village, when 17th-century residents hid there to evade marauding pirates. Nowadays, one of its caves is used as a small concert hall – surely one of the most atmospheric in the world.

César Manrique put his stamp on Jameos del Agua, a series of natural caves he transformed into an underground restaurant, bar and entertainment venue. It's an astonishing sight, with tables set beside an underground saltwater lake filled with

“**In the 17th century, residents hid in the four-mile-long volcanic tunnels to escape marauding pirates**

a peculiar species of blind crab.

For clients who want some beach time but with a difference, the soft sands of Playa de Papagayo offer a wilder experience than Playa Blanca towards the west. This intimate cove is the southernmost beach along the peninsula, and if clients don't want to drive along the ridge, they can walk

along the cliff path for about an hour. An entertaining alternative is to take one of the many boat trips on offer, which start at the well-equipped Marina Rubicón. Holidaymakers can have lunch or snacks on board, then when the boat drops anchor, they can swim to the beach.

GRAN CANARIA: GRAND DESIGNS

In contrast to Lanzarote's monochrome landscapes, Gran Canaria has so much natural diversity that it's known as a mini-continent. Its rocky northern half contrasts with its gentler southern portion, which is where you'll find one of the island's greatest sights.

While Maspalomas on the southernmost tip of the island is Gran Canaria's largest resort, it's also home to the spectacular Dunas de Maspalomas. Sprawling across

3 PLACES NOT TO MISS IN LAS PALMAS

The largest city in the Canary Islands has an appealing mix of a historic old town, a lively harbour and a long beach at Playa de Las Canteras. Here are three things that should be on any must-see list.

VEGUETA

The city's oldest district is the place to start, made up of narrow streets filled with handsome 15th-century houses. Vegueta's indoor food market is an excellent introduction to the local cuisine.

CASA DE COLÓN

This house-turned-museum devoted to Christopher Columbus is a must. Within the former governor's palace is a compelling collection chronicling Columbus's voyages, including a replica of the interior of one of his ships.

SANTA ANA CATHEDRAL

Just around the corner from the Casa de Colón is this magnificent cathedral, which took 400 years to build and, as a result, has an intriguing mix of architectural styles.

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Where to stay

Princesa Yaiza Suite Hotel Resort, Playa Blanca, Lanzarote

In a superb spot right by Dorada beach in Playa Blanca, the family-friendly Princesa Yaiza offers five-star luxury in classic colonial style. Its 385 rooms are spacious and pleasingly understated, and many come with kitchenettes. The facilities are top notch: several outdoor pools including dedicated children's pools, tennis courts, a spa and direct access to Dorada beach, as well as a choice of eight restaurants. A Superior Room starts at £169 a night including breakfast, based on two sharing. princesayaiza.com

Gran Canaria Salobre Golf Resort

In the hills about six miles northwest of Maspalomas, this classy golf resort almost blends into the surrounding terracotta hills. All of its 313



ABOVE:
Gran Canaria Salobre Golf Resort

contemporary rooms have balconies, and the design cleverly incorporates a series of swimming pools on different levels, including a romantic infinity pool. The spa's outdoor pool also has superb views. Double rooms start at £184, including breakfast. salobregolfresort.com

one and a half square miles, these sand dunes really do look as if part of the Sahara desert has wandered over from Africa by mistake. It's even more surreal with the ocean forming a vivid blue backdrop.

There are no footpaths within the dunes, so holidaymakers can explore on foot or by camel. One of the most pleasant ways to watch the sunset is to walk from Maspalomas Lighthouse into the dunes and watch the colours of the sky work their magic on the sands.

Just to prove that Lanzarote doesn't have a monopoly on volcanic landscapes, Gran Canaria is home to the Caldera de Bandama. This massive crater is more than half a mile in diameter and filled with palms, orange trees, fig trees and eucalyptus. Not surprisingly, it's a popular hiking spot, and just next to it is the oldest golf course in Spain. From the viewpoint of Mirador de Bandama, you can catch sweeping views of the island's mountainous heart, stretching as far as Las Palmas. TW



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Energize yourself with the activities and make sure you don't leave Tenerife without trying its delicious cuisine and spending time with the open and friendly Canarian people. Sitting on a terrace overlooking the sea and trying its typical foods should be on the to-do list.

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