



La Palma

📍 922 / POP 86,000

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Best Places to Eat

- Enriclai (p187)
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Best Places to Stay

- Hotel La Palma Romántica (p233)
- Hotel San Telmo (p232)

Why Go?

La Palma, the greenest of the Canarian islands, offers the chance to experience real, unspoiled nature – from the verdant forests of the north, where lush vegetation drips from the rainforest canopy; to the desertscapes of the south, where volcanic craters and twisted rock formations define the views; to the serene pine forests of the Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente. No wonder the entire island has been declared a Unesco biosphere reserve.

The absence of golden beaches has diverted many travellers' attention, and tourism (aside from walkers and cruise liners) has yet to make a major mark on the island. The capital is also an architectural gem, with its 16th-century centre lined by beautiful balconied mansions and houses.

In fact it is hard to find an unattractive corner on La Isla Bonita (the Pretty Island) and, provided unchecked development stays at bay, it is likely to remain that way.

When to Go

- Spring and autumn offer the most pleasant conditions for hiking, with generally clear skies and warm temperatures.
- As the most northwesterly island, La Palma catches more Atlantic cloud, and rain, than any other island and winters in the north can be quite wet.
- Carnaval (March/April) in Santa Cruz is an unmissable spectacle of costumes, floats and, ahem, talcum powder...

History

Long before Castilla (Spain) conquered the island in the 15th century, this rugged land was known as Benahoare. The first inhabitants are thought to have arrived as early as the 5th century BC. The island officially became part of the Spanish empire in 1493, after Alonso Fernández de Lugo (a conquistador and, later, island governor) used a tribesman-turned-Christian to trick the Benahoaritas into coming down from their mountain stronghold for 'peace talks'. They were ambushed on the way at the spot now known as El Riachuelo. Their leader, Tanausú, was shipped to Spain as a slave, but went on a heroic hunger strike on board the boat and never saw the Spanish mainland.

The next century was an important one for the island. Sugar, honey and sweet *malvasía* (Malmsey wine) became the major exports and abundant Canary pine provided timber for burgeoning shipyards. By the late 16th century, as transatlantic trade flourished, Santa Cruz de la Palma was considered the third most important port in the Spanish empire, after Seville and Antwerp.

The sugar, shipbuilding and cochineal (a beetle used to make red dye) industries kept the island economy afloat for the next several centuries, but the island's fortunes eventually took a downward turn, and the 20th century was one of poverty and mass emigration, mainly to Venezuela, Uruguay and Cuba. These days around 40% of the island's workforce depends on the banana crop, but the tourism industry is gradually gaining ground and Santa Cruz port is becoming increasingly popular as a cruise ship port of call.

i Getting There & Away

AIR

La Palma's **airport** (☎ 902 40 47 04, 922 41 15 40; www.aena.es) is located 7km from Santa Cruz. Services here include car-rental agencies, a currency-exchange bureau, restaurant and a small **tourist office** (☎ 922 42 62 12; www.tourlapalma.com; Airport; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-6pm).

Airline **Binter Canarias** (☎ 902 39 13 92; www.bintercanarias.com) keeps La Palma well connected to the rest of the archipelago, with several flights daily to Tenerife and Gran Canaria, and more occasional direct flights to some of the other islands.

BOAT

The **Fred Olsen** (☎ 902 10 01 07; www.fredolsen.es) ferry (€42, two hours) leaves Los Cristianos, Tenerife, at 7pm, and the return trip

leaves Santa Cruz at 5.45am. From Tenerife, you can then continue to La Gomera or El Hierro.

Naviera Armas (☎ 922 79 61 78; www.navieraarmas.com) connects La Palma with the following:

- San Sebastián de la Gomera, La Gomera (€24, 2¼ hours, one daily Tuesday to Sunday)
- Los Cristianos, Tenerife (€41, 3½ hours, one daily Tuesday to Sunday)
- Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Gran Canaria (€72, 14½ hours, one daily Tuesday to Sunday) with stops at La Gomera and Tenerife

Trasmediterránea (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es) sails the ocean blue for Santa Cruz de la Tenerife, Tenerife (€22, 5½ hours, 4pm Friday). The same boat continues on to Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Gran Canaria, and Cádiz, Andalucía, in one and three days respectively.

i Getting Around

BUS

Transportes Insular (☎ 922 41 19 24; www.transporteslapalma.com; Avenida Los Indianos 14) La Palma buses keep Santa Cruz well connected with the rest of the island. The bus stops are near Plaza Constitución and along Avenida Marítima. Routes include bus 1 (€5.50, 45 minutes) to Los Llanos de Aridane every half-hour or so. If you plan to use the bus often, consider buying a Bono Bus discount card. Cards start at €12 and represent a discount of about 20% off normal individual fares. They are on sale at bus stations, newsstands and tobacco shops and are valid on buses across the island.

CAR

Having your own car is the best way to explore the island. La Palma has plenty of car-rental agencies located throughout the island.

Cicar (☎ 922 42 80 48; www.cicar.com; La Palma airport) Also has an office at the port in Santa Cruz.

Oasis (☎ 922 43 44 09; www.oasis-la-palma.com; Centro Cancajos local 301, Los Cancajos) A reliable local car rental company that also operates out of La Gomera.

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Los Canarios de Fuenaliente	25			
Puerto Naos	47	22		
Barlovento	19	42	44	
El Paso	17	22	10	34

Approximate distances only