



La Gomera

922 / POP 21,950

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Why Go?

From a distance La Gomera appears as an impenetrable fortress ringed with soaring rock walls. Noodle-thin roads wiggle and squirm their way alongside cliff faces and up ravines, and the tiny white specks that represent houses seem impossibly placed on inaccessible crags.

Viewed from up-close, however, that rough landscape translates into lush valleys, awe-inspiring cliffs and stoic rock formations sculpted by ancient volcanic activity and erosion, and those white specks reveal themselves to be charming white-walled villages.

A paradise of natural beauty, this small, round island is not the sort of place that offers golden beaches or wild, tropical nightlife. Instead this is an island on which to lace up your hiking boots and hit the myriad walking trails that weave across this lush and spectacular island.

When to Go

La Gomera, like all the islands, is a year-round destination, but there are certain times in the year that make a visit here even more worthwhile. Most people come to La Gomera to hike, and spring (March–April) is when the trails are at their best, the weather neither too hot nor too cold and the hills carpeted in subtropical flowers. September and October are also good months and two major festivals in September add cultural colour to your visit.

History

Throughout the 15th century the Spaniards tried unsuccessfully to conquer La Gomera. When they finally managed to establish a presence on the island in the middle of the century, it was due to a slow and fairly peaceful infiltration of Christianity and European culture rather than the result of a battle. Early on, the original inhabitants were permitted to keep much of their culture and self-rule, but that changed when the brutal Hernán Peraza the younger became governor (see the boxed text, p161). The Gomeros rebelled against him, unleashing a bloodbath that killed hundreds of islanders.

After the activity of those first years, and the excitement that accompanied Christopher Columbus' stopovers on the island, there followed a long period of isolation. La Gomera was totally self-sufficient and had little contact with the outside world until the 1950s, when a small pier was built in San Sebastián, opening the way for ferry travel and trade.

Even so, it was difficult to eke out a living by farming on the island's steep slopes, and much of the population emigrated to Tenerife or South America.

Getting There & Away

AIR

The **airport** (☎922 87 30 00) is just 3km outside the centre of Playa Santiago. Interisland airways **Binter Canarias** (☎902 39 13 92; www.binter.net) connect La Gomera to the rest of the archipelago, via Tenerife, several times daily.

BOAT

Several ferries and jetfoils arrive daily at San Sebastián's busy port, which is just at the foot of the town. Most people come in on the quick jetfoils from Los Cristianos, in Tenerife.

Fred Olsen (☎902 10 01 07; www.fredolsen.es) The fastest, but most expensive, boats, running to/from Los Cristianos (Tenerife) three times daily (four on Friday; from €29 one-way, 40 minutes). Also sails to Santa Cruz de la Palma daily except Saturday (daily except Monday from La Palma; from €56 one-way, 1½ hours). At the time of research boats also ran from La Gomera to La Estaca (El Hierro) on Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Sunday (from €60 one way, two hours) but at the time of going to print they had been cancelled.

Naviera Armas (☎922 87 13 24; www.navieraarmas.com) Heads to/from Los Cristianos (Tenerife; from €27 one-way,

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Valle Gran Rey	27				
Hermigua	16	23			
La Laguna Grande	18	11	8		
Vallehermosa	27	16	15	13	
	San Sebastián de la Gomera	Valle Gran Rey	Hermigua	La Laguna Grande	

Approximate distances only

one hour) five times daily Monday to Friday, once on Saturday and twice on Sunday. Also sails to Santa Cruz de la Palma daily except Saturday (from €37 one way, 2½ hours).

SAN SEBASTIÁN DE LA GOMERA

POP 8451

The capital of the island in every way – economically, bureaucratically and historically – San Sebastián has an appealing historic centre with shaded plazas and pedestrian-friendly streets. Its main claim to fame is that Christopher Columbus stayed here on his way to the New World, and you'll learn more about the famed explorer here than you ever did at school, as his every footstep (real or imagined) in the town has been well documented for visitors. If you've just hopped off the boat from Los Cristianos in Tenerife, you're likely to be stunned at just how different San Sebastián feels from its neighbour just over the water.

History

On 6 September 1492, after loading up with supplies from La Gomera, Christopher Columbus led his three small caravels out of the bay and set sail westwards beyond the limit of the known world. When Columbus was on the island, San Sebastián had barely been founded. Four years earlier, in 1488, there had been a terrible massacre in the wake of the failed uprising against Hernán Peraza, the island's governor. When it was all over, what had been the Villa de las Palmas, on a spot known to the Guanches as Hupalán, was renamed San Sebastián.

The boom in transatlantic trade following Columbus' journeys helped boost the fortunes of the town, which sits on a sheltered harbour and was one of the