



La Palma

📍 922 / POP 86,000

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Why Go?

Perhaps more than any other island in the archipelago, 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 deserts 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 was declared a Unesco biosphere reserve.

The absence of golden beaches has diverted many travellers' attention elsewhere and mass tourism has yet to make a major mark on 'The Pretty Island', as La Palma is nicknamed, but walkers are one group who have cottoned on to what the trails of La Palma have to offer, and what they've discovered has made them very happy indeed. We're not surprised: La Palma can make anyone happy.

Best Places to Eat

- » Taburiente (p179)
- » Casa Goyo (p183)
- » Restaurante Chipi-Chipi (p183)
- » La Vitamina (p190)

Best Places to Stay

- » Hotel La Palma Romántica (p224)
- » Hotel San Telmo (p223)
- » Apartamentos Playa Delphin (p224)
- » Pensión la Cubana (p223)

When to Go

La Palma follows in the climatic footsteps of all the islands in the archipelago and is a year-round destination. As on other islands, 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. Carnival (March/April) in Santa Cruz is an unmissable spectacle of costumes, floats and, ahem, talcum powder...

History

Long before Castilla conquered the island in the 15th century, this rugged land was known as Benahoare. The first inhabitants could have arrived as early as the 5th century BC (although there's no hard and fast evidence to set the date), and they set up an orderly society that eventually divided into 12 cantons, each with its own chief.

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 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 bug 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. These days around 40% of the island's workforce depends on the banana crop, but the tourism industry is quickly gaining ground.

i Getting There & Away

AIR

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

Interisland airways **Binter Canarias** (www.binter.net.com) and **Islas Airways** (www.islasairways.com) keep La Palma well connected to the rest of the archipelago, with several flights daily to Tenerife and Gran Canaria, and more

ROAD DISTANCES (KM)

Los Canarios de Fuencaliente	25				
Puerto Naos	47	22			
Barlovento	19	42	44		
El Paso	17	22	10	34	
	Santa Cruz de la Palma	Los Canarios de Fuencaliente	Puerto Naos	Barlovento	

Approximate distances only

occasional direct flights to some of the other islands.

BOAT

The **Fred Olsen** (☎902 10 01 07; www.fredolsen.es) *Benchijigua Express* ferry (€49, two hours) is a good option for those coming from Tenerife. The ferry 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 (€37, 2¼ hours, 4am Tuesday to Saturday, 4pm Sunday)
- » Los Cristianos, Tenerife (€44, four hours, 4am Tuesday to Saturday, 4pm Sunday) All travel via La Gomera.
- » Santa Cruz de la Tenerife, Tenerife (€24, four hours, 4pm Friday, 7am Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday) Travels via La Gomera.
- » Puerto de la Estaca, El Hierro (€25, 3½ hours, 2.30pm Sunday)

Trasmediterránea (☎902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es) sails the ocean blue for Santa Cruz de la Tenerife, Tenerife (€23, 5½ hours, 4pm Friday). The same boat continues onto Las Palmas de Gran Canaria (Gran Canaria) and Cádiz (Andalucía) in one and three days respectively.

SANTA CRUZ DE LA PALMA

POP 18,260

The historic (and bureaucratic) capital of the island, Santa Cruz de la Palma is a compact city strung out along the shore and flanked by fertile green hills. Although it makes poor use of its gorgeous location – a huge car park acts as a barrier between