

› Understand the Canary Islands

CANARY ISLANDS TODAY 228

Find out how the islands plan to tackle tough economic times.

HISTORY 230

From the ancient Guanches to mass tourism, the islands' history equals a fascinating journey through time.

ISLAND CUISINE 237

Learn about traditional dishes and foods and what to look out for on the menu and in the markets.

CANARIAN ARTS & CULTURE 241

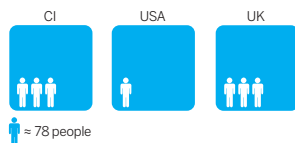
There are plenty of cultural highs here, ranging from edgy contemporary artwork to iconic architectural masterpieces.

LIFE ON A VOLCANO 246

Moody volcanoes and giant lizards: learn about the wild Canaries!



population per sq mile



Canary Islands Today

The Heat is On...

And not just on the beaches. Most tourists spend their holidays in a sun-kissed Canarian cocoon, blissfully unaware of *'la crisis'* that saw a dramatic downturn in the islands' regional economy caused by the recent global recession. In 2009, the decrease in foreign visitors here equalled a drop of some €1405 million over the previous year (contributing to the massive 40% fall in the overall Spanish loss of revenue from foreign tourism: -€3500 million). On the ground, hotels slashed their room prices, restaurants and shops pulled down the shutters and new construction ground to a shuddering halt.

But it is not all doom and gloom, statistics released in 2011 revealed that the previous year saw a gradual increase in tourism of 4.9%, despite forecasts that had predicted the contrary.

Diversity is the Name of the Game

One result of the economic downturn was a marked commitment by savvy officials to re-define the economic course of the islands and promote projects that were not necessarily tourist-driven. In recent years the Canaries have impressively upped their research and development capabilities in several fields. There are now two universities, an oceanographic institute, several agricultural and marine research centres and the most important astrophysics institute in the world, thanks to the clarity of the islands' skies.

As for tourism, diversity has also been the keyword here as officials demonstrate that, yes, there is life beyond the beach. *Casas rurales* (rural hotels) are sprouting up all over the islands, while activity holidays are also gaining speed. Historic trails are being signposted and mapped and the popularity of watersports, particularly windsurfing and kiteboarding,

- » Population: 2.1 million
- » GDP: €25 billion
- » Annual inflation: -0.6% (2010)
- » Unemployment: 29.48%
- » Official Canary Islands holiday: 30 May

In the Know

- » When you greet Spanish people for the first time, shake hands; a second time a kiss on each cheek is common, starting on the left.
- » Don't fondle fruit, veg, flowers or clothing in shops.
- » No matter how hot it is, don't walk around town in your bathing suit.

Top Conversations

- The economy** Is it finally improving?
- Smoking ban** Has led to thousands of job cuts as bars have closed due to lack of business from customers who smoke.
- The next fiesta** Is it time to start celebrating yet?

Top Local Reads

- The Canary News** Weekly newspaper of local news.
- Island Connections** Daily news and what's on—style information.
- Tenerife Magazine** Online news and lifestyle pieces.
- Lancelot** Bilingual monthly magazine about Lanzarote.