

Understand the Canary Islands

CANARY ISLANDS TODAY236

Like the rest of Spain, the Canary Islands is facing tough economic times, but it's not all doom and gloom.

HISTORY238

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

ISLAND CUISINE245

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

CANARIAN ARTS & CULTURE248

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

LIFE ON A VOLCANO253

Moody volcanoes and giant lizards: take a walk on the Canary Islands' wild side.

Canary Islands Today

Visitors to this sun-kissed archipelago are generally blissfully unaware of the lingering effects of 'la crisis': Cripplingly high unemployment and a shaky welfare system suffering from government cuts are realities for many locals. But, thankfully, it's not all doom and gloom: in 2014, tourism and trade was finally showing an upward trend while, concurrently, islanders and environmentalists seem more committed than ever to conserving natural energy resources and curbing unsustainable tourist practices and development.

Best on Film

Broken Embraces (Pedro Almodóvar; 2009) Starring Penelope Cruz. Romantic thriller shot in Lanzarote.

The Dictator (Sacha Baron Cohen, 2012) Satirical political drama extensively filmed in Fuerteventura.

Wild Oats (Andy Tennant; 2015) Action drama with Demi Moore and Billy Connolly shot largely in Gran Canaria.

Fifty Shades of Grey (Sam Taylor-Johnson; 2015) Infamous honeymoon scenes shot at La Tejita in Grandilla de Abona, Tenerife.

Best in Print

More Ketchup than Salsa (Joe Cawley) Rib-tickling account of running a bar in Tenerife.

Canary Island Song (Robin Jones Gunn) Touching tale by the author of the popular Christy Miller series.

Walking in the Canary Islands (Paddy Dillon) Includes mapped-out walks throughout the islands.

The Wind off the Small Isles (Mary Stewart) Romantic thriller set in Lanzarote.

Natural Parks on the Canary Islands (Francisco J Macías Martín) An in-depth look at the national parks, with colourful images.

Tourism & Infrastructure

Tourism continues to represent an essential pillar of the Canarian economy and, in 2014, reached an all-time high with the number of foreign tourists holidaying here peaking at just over four million (some 26% of the total number of visitors to Spain). This is all the more impressive as, during the economic crisis of 2009–10, tourism dropped significantly.

Still representing a small percentage of travellers but predicted to increase is the number of astro tourists to La Palma: the world's first Unesco-recognised starlight reserve. Astro or not, Britons are still starry-eyed when it comes to holidaying here. In 2014, approximately one in three visitors was from the UK, outnumbering even Spanish visitors from the mainland.

Infrastructure is also greasing its cogs with the Gran Canaria train service slated to be running from Santa Catalina in Las Palmas to Meloneras in 2018, impressively powered entirely by a wind farm. Tenerife's train project is similarly back on track with construction of the first phase of the north-to-south track planned for 2016 (from Santa Cruz to Candelaria). A new marina and fishing harbour opened in Tenerife's Garachico in June 2013 providing another boost to the economy. And, after numerous stops and starts, Tenerife's motorway extension between Adeje and Santiago del Teide was completed in 2015.

Environmental Matters

You win some. You lose some. The fact that Repsol has cancelled its plans to drill for oil off the coast of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote has relieved most Canary residents (three out of four were opposed to the plan). At the same time, the huge megaport of Grandilla in Tenerife was finally given the go ahead in June 2013 after the European commission pledged €67 million