

Canary Islands

A Greentours Itinerary

Days 1, 2 & 4

Montanas de Teno - Laurel Forests

Rugged mountains are cut by deep valleys and massive cliffs plunge precipitously into the sea in the northwest of Tenerife. This is the sparsely populated Montanas de Teno and it has some of the best remaining Laurel Forests in the archipelago. A verdant landscape, it is fed by moist air from the Atlantic, and has a soft yet uncompromising beauty. El Fraile has one of the richest floras in the Canaries with over 300 species of flowering plant, including endemics such as the *Centaurea canariensis*, *Limonium fruticans* and *Tolpis crassiuscula*. Strange Sow-thistles form an important part of the flora of these islands - here there's locally common *Sonchus radicans* and the almost tree-like *Sonchus arboreus*. Amongst *Maytenus canariensis* and *Picconia excelsa* shrubs bloom rare *Dorycnium broussonetii* and *Marsetella moquiniana*. In the Barranco de Masca we'll find enormous *Aeonium pseudourbicum* with the impressive spires of *Echium virescens* and on dry slopes amongst pretty *Euphorbia atropurpurea* we'll seek little endemic *Orchis canariensis*. The Euphorbia covered Punta de Teno is the most westerly point on the island and is a good place to observe seabirds such as the very common Cory's Shearwaters. Whales, dolphins and even sharks are frequently seen from here.

Between the peaceful villages of Erjos and Masca lies an important remnant of Laurel forest, now protected as a reserve. We will wander along tracks through this unusual deep-green mossy forest looking for exotic and unusual species such as *Habenaria tridactylites*, a member of a large genus of orchids. Its nearest relative is found in Nepal! The endemic Bolle's and Laurel Pigeons are both confined to this habitat and are, as a consequence, extremely uncommon. Two more endemic species will be seen here - Plain Swifts which are common in the skies above, and the diminutive Tenerife Goldcrest. We should see the Indian Red Admiral, a species with a remarkable distribution occurring from Japan to the Himalayas, but nowhere in between there and the Canaries! Tracksides harbour the gorgeous yellow and purple-flowered blooms of *Romulea grandis*. We'll visit the strange Los Piramides at Guimar, their origins still uncertain, though there's no denying that they bear a strong resemblance to certain pre-Columbian architecture in the New World.

Day 3

Sierra de Anaga

The extensive forests of Sierra de Anaga have a very unusual ground flora with brilliant orange-flowered *Isoplexis canariensis* and climbing *Canarina canariensis* with its orange bell-flowers inhabiting deepest shade. Endemic *Aeonium cuneatum* and white-flowered *Silene lagunensis* flower with Salvias, *Sideritis* and several more

widespread species of *Aeonium*. We will have a half-day visit to the famous botanical gardens above Puerto de la Cruz. Founded in 1788 and intended as a staging post for tropical plants arriving from the New World, the gardens have maintained their luxuriance and have a very tranquil atmosphere. In the hills behind there are just a few of the almost mythical Dragon Trees left. These bizarre plants have survived here since the Tertiary epoch, and nowadays their nearest relatives are in Socotra and the Central Saharan Mountains. They yield a red gum which was once sold as Dragon's blood! Speaking of red, the stunning Lotus *berthelotii* originates in the Orotava Valley, and though probably extinct in the wild, we'll at least be able to see it in local gardens. We hope to find the almost equally attractive and just slightly less extinct Lotus *maculatus* which flowers near Anaga.

Days 5-8(am)

Gomera & Garajonay National Park

On Day 5 a ferry takes us to Gomera but en route to the ferry we'll explore terraces by the south coast harbour orchids such as delicate green *Gennaria diphylla* and the much rarer Tenerife endemic, *Barlia metlesicsiana*, a relative of the European Giant Orchid. Coastal areas have an almost Saharan flora. Low dune-like landscapes are dotted with the dome-like plants of yet another strange Spurge - this one being *Euphorbia balsamifera*. To the west of El Medano small coastal pools attract a variety of passing sandpipers, godwits and egrets. On the slopes of the remarkable red cinder volcanic cone of Montana Roja are yet more Saharan plant specialities such as unusual *Ammodaucus* and various species of *Heliotropium* and Lotus. Monarch Butterflies are common here and we will also find the unmistakable Canary Blue, an unusually distinctive and beautiful member of this family. Other butterflies include the migratory Long-tailed Blue and the incredibly small African Grass Blue. The mosaic of banana plantations and xerophytic scrub is an ideal home for the elusive Spectacled Warbler and in the driest areas we shall look for Barbary Partridge, Stone Curlew, Berthelot's Pipit (another endemic) and the endearing Trumpeter Finch.

On the ferry journey we'll see plentiful Cory's Shearwaters, their sublime gliding skills a marvel of nature, and hopefully we'll see the rarer Little Shearwater too. Common and Bottle-nosed Dolphins are frequently sighted and Short-finned Pilot Whales can often be seen, flying fish too! We'll hope to encounter rarer species such as False Killer Whales either from the ferry or from headlands on Gomera and at Teno on Tenerife.

On Gomera tourist development is low-key and the island largely ignored by the sun-seeking masses. This is an island of extensive Laurel forests draped over the many steep ridges that radiate from the island's central peak. This landform has had a profound effect on the life of the Gomeros; communication has always been extremely difficult, indeed until recently the only sensible method of getting anywhere was to take a boat round the coast. The art of the Silbadores (Whistlers) can still be witnessed on this island. This surprisingly complex language, based on piercing

whistles, was developed by the native Guanches to cope with communicating across the precipitous drops and sound-absorbing forests.

The recently designated Parque Nacional de Garajonay is the prime reason for our visit. Cloaked in some 4000 hectares of Laurel forest, with some magnificent old trees, this is the largest single stand of this rare habitat in the archipelago. The luxuriant ground flora has survived intact with streamsides rich in ferns such as *Asplenium* and *Woodwardia*. This is the stronghold of many of the endemic birds as well as local subspecies of Sparrowhawk and Great-spotted Woodpecker, both now very uncommon. In particular both Macronesian pigeons, Bolle's and Laurel, have their biggest populations in Garajonay. The Tenerife Kinglet is not uncommon. Old sun-drenched walls are great places to look for Golden Skink and Tenerife Lizard. The Canary Blue and American Painted Lady enjoy their warmth too. With luck we'll encounter the Monarch and its African relative, the Plain Tiger. As with Tenerife the succulent *Aeoniums* are commonplace but here they are represented by a new suite of species. Beautiful Lotuses cover cliffs with sheets of golden-yellow, while blue is supplied by *Globularias*, and various shades by the amazingly diverse *Euphorbias*.

On the morning of Day 8 we'll catch the morning ferry back to Tenerife which will give us further chance to see dolphins and shearwaters.

Day 8(pm) & 9

Teide - the Volcano & El Medano

Teide dominates the skyline from practically every point on the island. The elegant 12,198 foot snow-capped volcanic peak is surrounded by a massive crater known as Las Canadas. This is a National Park; a land of dazzling sunshine and strong colour. In fact, so much like an alien world that several film directors have used the petrified lava and shining fields of obsidian in their depiction of primaeval or alien settings - Two Million Years BC was filmed here. Even the plants have got in on the act. The Tajinaste, a bugloss, will only have leaves out at this season but when blooming they present stunning three metre spikes of red-purple flowers. The caldera has a flora which is largely endemic, not only to Tenerife, but in many cases to this one huge volcano. We will take the cable-car to the top where there is a tremendous panorama of Tenerife and the other islands of the archipelago, set like jewels in the hazy blue sea. Up here there is little life except for the occasional Green-striped White and one tiny plant which flowers just below the snows and is known only from this mountain - the Teide Violet. Lower down we'll encounter the strongly-scented white-flowered *Spartocytisus supranubius* which blooms with yellow *Adenocarpus viscosus* and *Nepeta* and *Pterocephalus* species. Canaries twitter from Canary Pines and the endangered Blue Chaffinch, another endemic, can most easily be found (you guessed it ...) at a well-known picnic spot!

Day 10

Departure

There'll be time to further explore the habitats around our hotel and along the southern coasts before we head to the airport and the end of our holiday on these varied and exciting islands.

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