

The Canary Islands

Naturetrek Tour Itinerary

Outline itinerary

Day 1	Fly Fuerteventura
Day 2/3	Explore southern-central areas
Day 4	Fly Tenerife
Day 5	Teno Peninsula / north-west
Day 6	La Gomera
Day 7	Mount Teide
Day 8	Fly London

Departs

February/March and November

Focus

Birds, plants, butterflies

Grading

Grade A. Limited amounts of easy walking only

Dates and Prices

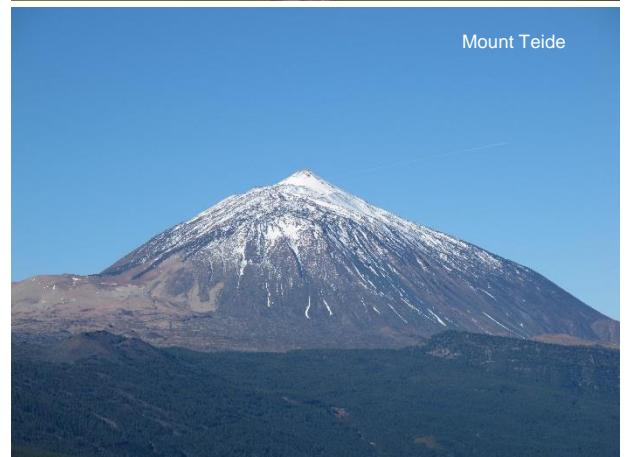
See website (tour code ESP15) or brochure

Highlights

- Mount Teide's fabulous volcanic scenery plus many endemic plants and insects
- Tenerife Blue Chaffinch & 3 Macaronesian endemics: Berthelot's Pipit, Plain Swift & Atlantic Canary
- Endemic Bolle's & Laurel Pigeons in Gomera's ancient Laurel forests
- Canary Islands Stonechat and Houbara Bustard on Fuerteventura



Canary Islands Stonechat



Mount Teide



Tenerife Blue Chaffinch



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NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather & other local considerations (such as ferry timetables) can necessitate some re-ordering of the programme during the course of the tour, though this will always be done to maximise best use of the time and weather conditions available.

Introduction

The Canary Islands, situated 100 kilometres from the coast of North Africa, are tremendously popular as a tourist destination but perhaps less well known for their natural history importance. A number of island endemics have evolved on this magnificent volcanic archipelago including seven species of birds and more than 600 species of plants. Because of their restricted ranges, four of the seven birds peculiar to the islands are listed among the 29 globally threatened bird species occurring in Europe. As we tour the islands of Tenerife and Fuerteventura, we will be able to see visible evidence of the evolutionary process described by Darwin, not only in the six endemic species of birds on the islands we visit, but also in the island species of lizards and plants such as the range of *Echiums*. The island forms of birds such as African Blue Tit and Great Spotted Woodpecker have, over a passage of time, developed distinctive characteristics and appear to be completing their own transition into status as separate species, shown most recently by the 2023 recognition of Canary Islands Chaffinch. For those interested in the Canary Islands' unique flora we strongly recommend the spring departure when most of the plants will be in flower.

Day 1

Fuerteventura

Today we depart from London Gatwick (although departures from other regional airports may be available) on a direct flight to Fuerteventura's International Airport.

Fuerteventura is drier and rockier than the other islands and is home to a number of North African species including an endemic race of Houbara Bustard, a species that is becoming endangered over most of its range owing to the hunting activities of Arabian falconers. Fortunately, the population on the Canary Islands is still healthy and Fuerteventura may well become one of the species' final strongholds.

Our large, tourist hotel is in the south of the island, about an hour's drive from the airport. It is conveniently situated for both desert and coastal exploration, and with species such as Red-vented Bulbul (introduced but well established), Great Grey Shrike and Hoopoe regularly in the grounds. Depending on our arrival time, on the drive south we may stop en route, to start our exploration of the island.



Houbara Bustard by James Lees

Day 2

Southern Fuerteventura

An early start this morning will see us heading out to explore the Costa Calma desert at first light. Black-bellied Sandgrouse, Cream-coloured Courser and Barbary Partridge are among the species which occur in the vicinity, as well as the star attraction for these arid plains, the Houbara Bustard; all these species can be very elusive, and most scanning is done from the vehicles. We should also listen for the scratchy song of Mediterranean Short-toed Larks which share this barren habitat and look out for Great Grey Shrike. Both of these species are distinct island races of the mainland forms. Later in the morning we will visit the Jandia Peninsula, home to the very rare *Euphorbia handiensis* and other desert species. We will look out for endemic Atlantic Lizards and East Canary Geckos here, as well as Berthelot's Pipit.

In a dry environment, water is a magnet for birds and insects, and away from the desert habitat we will look in areas of scrub and cultivation for Spectacled and Sardinian Warblers, Hoopoe, Spanish Sparrow, and the endemic race of Linnet. Looking skywards we may see both Plain and Pallid Swifts and a soaring Egyptian Vulture is always a possibility. Easterly winds can produce occasional falls of migrants on the island and if such conditions prevail, we could encounter a few reminders of home such as Willow Warbler, Redstart and Pied Flycatcher.



We may return to the desert in the late afternoon.

Day 3

Central Fuerteventura

Depending on our sightings the previous day, we may take another early drive into the desert, or alternatively explore the coastal strip near the hotel.

After breakfast we head north-west, visiting a goat farm where Ruddy Shelduck and Little Ringed Plovers may be found near the irrigation pools. This is often a good location for Trumpeter Finch, with their strange nasal calls. Moving on north, into the hills, we are also likely to encounter charming little Barbary Ground Squirrels which scurry among the rocks in fearless fashion but are always alert to any sign of danger, as well as the island race of Northern Raven.

A picnic area south of Betancuria provides the opportunity to look for the east Canaries race of African Blue Tit as well as the strange-looking plant *Apteranthes burchardii* growing underneath *Asparagus horridus*. A short walk along the Vega de Rio Palmas may give Laughing Dove and Spectacled Warbler as well as the chance of Greenish Black-tip butterfly, Epaulet Skimmer and Sahara Bluetail.

Day 4

Transfer to Tenerife

Today we will be flying west to Tenerife. However, as our flight is likely to be mid-afternoon, we should have time first to explore more of Fuerteventura. After checking out, we will head north towards the airport, taking the opportunity to explore one or two barrancos which are often good locations for Canary Islands Stonechat and the Canary Islands race of Egyptian Vulture. We will also look for waders such as Black-winged Stilts and Green Sandpiper around standing water, as well as Monarch and Plain Tiger butterflies.

Our 50-minute flight will take us to Tenerife North airport, where we are likely to arrive in the late afternoon, and from here it will take about 1.5 hours to reach our delightful hotel on the edge of Vilaflor, on the southern slopes of Mount Teide. Tenerife is the largest of the seven islands, roughly triangular in shape with a wide range of habitats dominated by the 3,718 metre high Mount Teide and the surrounding pine forests. The hotel grounds hold stands of Canary Pine (*Pinus canariensis*), home to Tenerife Blue Chaffinch, Atlantic Canary and the Tenerife subspecies of Great Spotted Woodpecker. Also here is the newly recognised endemic, Canary Islands Chaffinch.



We will check in and enjoy a delicious evening meal together.

Day 5

Teno Peninsula

We need an early start this morning to drive to the ancient cliffs of Teno Natural Park, one of the most botanically rich areas of Tenerife. Plants of interest within this area include Leafless Spurge (*Euphorbia aphylla*), Tenerife Wax Plant (*Ceropegia dichotoma*), Teno Knapweed (*Cheirolophus burchardii*), *Sonchus radicans* and *Vieraea laevigata*, to name but a few. The road through this area is not for the faint hearted and can be closed at times by landslides and/or rock falls. If this is the case at the time of our visit, then we



will search out some of the endemic flora at some nearby locations. From the point it is worth scanning the sea for Cory's Shearwaters and Cetaceans, while the cliffs may hold Barbary Falcon (now considered a subspecies of Peregrine). The critically endangered Tenerife Speckled Lizard may also be found in this area.

Later we take the winding mountain road to Masca, stopping en route to walk in the margins of the Laurel forest, where we watch and listen for the endemic Bolle's and Laurel Pigeons. There are many plants

unique to this laurel forest and the sunnier margins, among them species like Canary Tree Heather (*Erica canariensis*), Canary Holly (*Ilex canariensis*), Canary Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus canariensis*), Canary Islands Foxglove (*Digitalis canariensis*) and Canary Bindweed (*Convolvulus canariensis*). Canary Island Chiffchaffs are abundant, and with agreeable weather, butterflies will be all around us and should include Canary Speckled Wood, Canary Blue, Tenerife Brimstone and Canary Red Admiral.

We make our way along the narrow roads back down to Santiago before taking the more gently graded road up to the edge of the crater and back down to Vilaflor. This will be a most memorable day as some of the plants must rate among the rarest in the world and the accompanying scenery is absolutely breathtaking.

Day 6

La Gomera

An even earlier start this morning takes us down to the harbour at Los Cristianos where we breakfast in the port before boarding the ferry to La Gomera. Unfortunately, the new, faster catamaran ferry has greatly reduced opportunities for sea-watching, but we hope to make the best of the opportunity provided by the small rear deck to look especially for Cory's Shearwaters and Short-finned Pilot Whales.



Once ashore on La Gomera, we will take time to regain our land legs in the park in San Sebastian, before driving up to the spectacular Garajonay National Park, which surrounds the peak of, the same name, rising to a height of 1484 metres and dominating the 25-kilometre-long island. This park contains the largest tract of native Laurel forest in the whole Macaronesian region. The steep-sided valleys of the park are often shrouded in mist and cloud forming scenes more reminiscent of a high Andean valley than a holiday in the sun!

Plain Swift, Bertholot's Pipit, the Tenerife subspecies of Goldcrest and Canary Island Chiffchaff are all common on La Gomera but the two birds we will be particularly hoping to find are the endemic Laurel and Bolle's Pigeons. The viewpoint at Mirador El Rejo is a good vantage point to take time to survey the forest spread out below and perhaps locate a few pigeons flying over the canopy. Views of perched birds are somewhat harder to obtain so we must be sure to note the diagnostic tail pattern which serves to distinguish the two species in flight.

Another viewpoint will give us Gomeran Bugloss (*Echium acanthocarpum*) and other endemic species, as well as the possibility of a short but fairly steep walk into the forest. As we make our way back to the harbour, we will enjoy some of the dramatic geology of the island, before catching the early evening ferry back to Tenerife.

Day 7

El Teide

One of the highlights of our week will be our drive through the caldera of Las Cañadas, with the peak of Mount Teide soaring above and the spectacular range of forms and colours of the minerals here. We will see Teide White Broom (*Cytisus supranubius*), Teide Sticky Broom (*Adenocarpus viscosus*) and the dramatically tall spikes of Teide Bugloss (*Echium wildpretii*), although sadly not in flower as our visits fall outside the main flowering period for most plants at this altitude. The insects and small mammals inhabiting the park have to avoid the attentions of Great Grey Shrikes which maintain a constant watch from the top of spiky bushes and from Kestrels hovering overhead. Taking time to enjoy this habitat, we then drop down through the lush vegetation of the northern slopes, near Aguamansa, with good opportunities for the endemic subspecies of Goldcrest (*teneriffae*), African Blue Tit (*teneriffae*), Robin (*superbus*) and Canary Islands Chaffinch.

Retracing our route across the caldera, we may take further opportunities to look for Tenerife Blue Chaffinches and Atlantic Canaries and also explore some of the lower southern slopes of Teide. On this more relaxed day there may also be time to enjoy the hotel's spa facilities and pool.

Day 8

London

Depending on our flight times, we may have the opportunity to enjoy our local surroundings before heading to Tenerife South airport for our direct flightback to the UK.

Grading & Focus

This tour is graded A with very easy short walks. The focus of this holiday is to visit a variety of Canarian habitats in search of many of the endemic and range-restricted species which live here. It is not a tour which will suit keen walkers as we tend to drive between sites by minibus, explore them, and drive on, with the scale of the islands necessitating more time spent in the vehicles than on some tours. Many other Naturetrek European holidays provide much greater opportunities for walking.

Food & Accommodation

All food and accommodation is included in the price of this tour. Both hotels have a swimming pool and are extremely comfortable. Please note, however, that on Fuerteventura there are no rural, family-run hotels in the customary Naturetrek style that are large enough for a group so we must stay at a larger tourist-style hotel.

Flights

Tenerife and Fuerteventura have become increasingly well served by charter flights and the new low-cost carriers from regional airports. Whilst our group flights will be booked from Gatwick, if you would like a quote from a regional airport, please do give us a call. Please note however that regional flight times may not dovetail with our group flights, and you may have to consider paying for your own taxi to or from our hotel or spending an additional night on the island close to the airport.

How to book your place!

In order to book your place on this holiday, please give us a call on 01962 733051 with a credit or debit card, book online at www.naturetrek.co.uk, or alternatively complete and post the booking form at the back of our main Naturetrek brochure, together with a deposit of 20% of the holiday cost plus any room supplements if required. If you do not have a copy of the brochure, please call us on 01962 733051 or request one via our website. Please stipulate any special requirements, for example extension requests or connecting/regional flights, at the time of booking.