

# Gran Canaria at Christmas

## Naturetrek Itinerary

### Outline itinerary

<b>Day 1</b>	Fly Gran Canaria
<b>Day 2</b>	Botanical Garden
<b>Day 3</b>	West of island and Cetacean trip
<b>Day 4</b>	Roque Bentayga and Canary Pine forest
<b>Day 5</b>	Laurel forest and mountains
<b>Day 6</b>	Dunes, caves and tapas
<b>Day 7</b>	North of island and wine tasting
<b>Day 8</b>	Fly London

### Departs

December

### Focus

Birds, plants, butterflies, cetaceans and history

### Grading

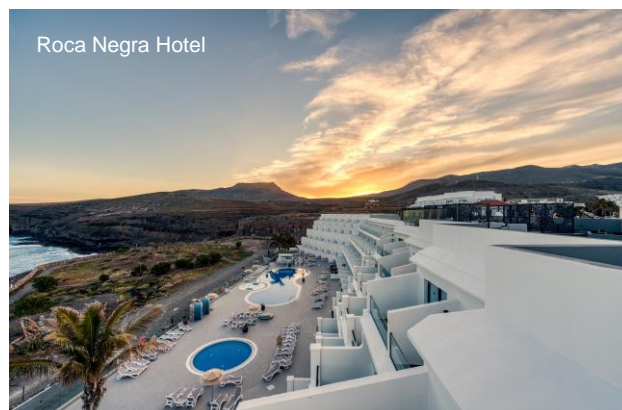
Grade A. Limited amounts of easy walking only

### Dates and Prices

See website (tour code ESP57)

### Highlights

- Comfortable spa hotel with pool
- Explore the beautiful Laurel forest and UNESCO World Heritage Site
- Gran Canaria Giant Lizard and endemic flora
- Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch, Canary and Laurel Pigeon
- Chance to dive for any PADI-certified guests
- Bottlenose Dolphins and other cetaceans possible
- Cory's Shearwater and Bulwer's Petrel
- Led by expert Gran Canarian naturalist guide + Naturetrek leader



Roca Negra Hotel



Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch



Dragon Tree alley



Naturetrek

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***NB. Please note that the itinerary below offers our planned programme of excursions. However, adverse weather and other local considerations 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 are remarkable for their wealth of unique plant and animal-life and are a popular holiday destination for those seeking rugged beauty and year-round sunshine. Whilst our long-standing and popular Canary Islands holiday visits Tenerife, La Gomera and Fuerteventura, this new 'Go Slow' tour will be our first to the centrally-located, circular island of Gran Canaria. Once an active volcano, Gran Canaria's highest peak, Pico de Las Nieves, rises into the clear blue Atlantic sky to well over 6,000 feet at its summit, providing fabulous panoramic views all around.

In order to explore this island at as gentle pace a pace as possible, we will be based for the week in a very comfortable and peaceful spa hotel situated in the quieter north of the island, just a short walk from the sea and natural salt water pools. From it we will enjoy, in leisurely fashion, both the island's endemic wildlife and its cultural and gastronomic highlights. In the Jardin Canario, Spain's largest and arguably most impressive botanical garden, we will gain a wonderful introduction to many of the habitats that we will visit during the week, as well as some of the Canary Islands' 600 endemic plant species. The gardens are also home to African Blue Tit, the local subspecies of Robin, and the impressive Gran Canaria Giant Lizard. The UNESCO Biosphere Reserve on Gran Canaria covers 40% of the island and stretches from the spectacular mountain tops down to the coast. During our two full days in the reserve, we will search for its wildlife and explore the most interesting pre-hispanic archaeological sites, including Roque Bentagya, a natural rock formation which is at its most impressive at the time of the autumn equinox in September, when we will be visiting. This area also offers the best chance of seeing the island's star endemic bird, the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch, as well as wild Canary, Laurel Pigeon, and the local subspecies of Common Chaffinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Completing the picture of our week on Gran Canaria will be a little wine-tasting, delicious local cuisine, plenty of opportunities in which to make use of the excellent facilities offered by the hotel, and a whale-watching excursion in search of Short-finned Pilot Whales, Bottlenose Dolphins and other cetacean species, as well as such seabirds as Cory's Shearwater and Bulwer's Petrel.

Together with the other islands, a number of island endemics have evolved on this magnificent volcanic archipelago, including more than 600 species of plants and six species of birds, the star attraction of Gran Canaria being the very rare Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch, as well as Berthelot's Pipit, Atlantic Canary and the re-introduced Laurel Pigeon. We will also be able to see visible evidence of the evolutionary process described by Darwin in the island-specific forms of familiar birds such as Blue Tit, Great Spotted Woodpecker, Robin and Chaffinch. Reptiles include the Gran Canaria Giant Lizard and Gran Canaria Skink. The flora is very distinct from most European destinations, with many species found only on Gran Canaria, not even on the adjacent islands. The 'round island', as it is known, is the third largest of the Canary Islands, but is less than 50 kilometres across, and rises in the centre to the summit of Pico de las Nieves at 1,949 metres.

For those interested in the Canary Islands unique flora we strongly recommend the spring departure when most of the plants will be in flower.

While this is a 'Go slow' tour, the size of the island and the mountainous terrain mean that there will be some long journeys by minibus, often on winding roads. However, we will have opportunities to make full use of the hotel's facilities and the natural saltwater pools nearby, and all outings are optional. Extra activities such as scuba diving can be arranged on request (at extra cost).

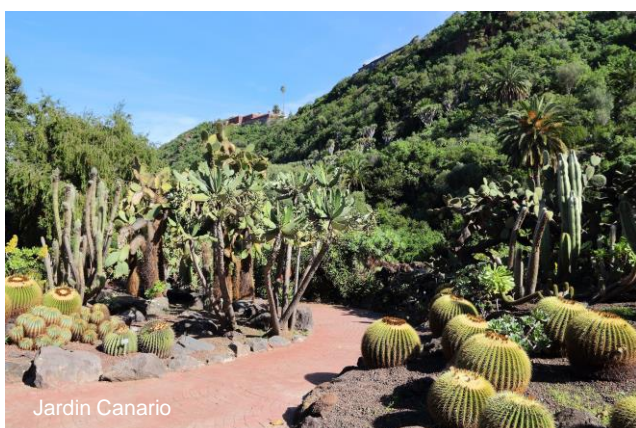
## Day 1

## Fly Gran Canaria – Transfer to Hotel

After our direct flight to Gran Canaria airport (probably arriving late afternoon), we will meet with our local guide Guillermo, and make the drive round to the north-west corner of the island, to our delightful hotel overlooking the sea. Here, the volcanic nature of the island is apparent, with the black rocks and sand. After settling in to our rooms, we will meet to discuss plans for the week, perhaps have our first stroll down to the natural salt water pools, and enjoy a delicious buffet dinner together.

## Day 2

## Botanical Garden; Caldera de Bandama



Jardin Canario

Today we will have the opportunity to visit the capital city's Botanical Garden, which may be considered the most impressive (and largest) in the whole of Spain. This provides an excellent introduction to the habitats we'll be visiting during the week, including many of the 600 endemic species of plants to be found on the Canary Islands, with some only occurring on Gran Canaria. The garden is a good location for the Gran Canaria subspecies of African Blue Tit (*hedwigae*) and the Gran Canaria subspecies of

European Robin (*marionae*), as well as Waxbills. We will also keep an eye out for the Gran Canaria Giant Lizard, which can grow up to 80 centimetres in length!

After lunch, we will drive the short distance to the Caldera de Bandama. This dramatic crater of the last volcano active on the island, now some 200 metres deep, is a good point to see Atlantic Canaries and Berthelot's Pipit, while plants include *Rumex lunaria*, *Euphorbia balsamifera*, and the white, Gran Canaria endemic *Echium decaisnei*. We may take a stroll here (we won't hike to the bottom!), before returning along the north coast road to our hotel.



Gran Canaria Giant Lizard



## Day 3

## Boat trip from Puerto Rico

It's a long drive this morning, round to the south of the island via the west coast, but we will stop along the way to admire the amazing views; a new road has made parts of this route less winding. We will take a break at the coastal lagoon of La Aldea, which can be good for waders (as well as coffee!). Our destination is the coastal village of Puerto Rico, where we hope to take a boat trip aboard 'Spirit of the

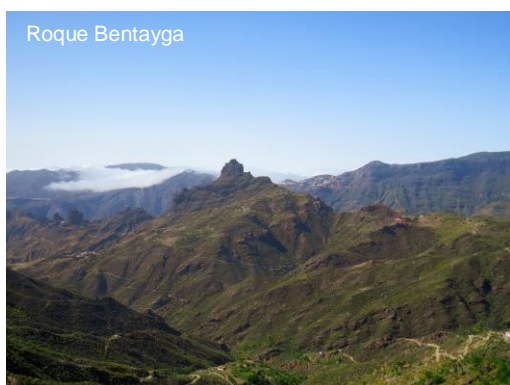


Short-finned Pilot Whales

Sea'. The waters round the Canary Islands offer good opportunities for seeing Bottlenose Dolphins and Short-finned Pilot Whales among other Cetacean species, along with Cory's Shearwater and, maybe, Bulwer's Petrel. The trip lasts two hours, but on some days it is longer to allow for the opportunity to swim. Back on land, we will take time for refreshments, before taking the motorway back round the east of the island.

## Day 4

## Roque Bentayga and Canary Pine forest area



Roque Bentayga

An early start this morning will see us heading up into the mountains to the Roque Bentayga. This sacred rock, in the centre of the island, is one of Gran Canaria's most impressive spots. The pits, caves and engraved rocks that the original indigenous Canarians used to worship

are still there and, on the equinoxes a solar phenomenon occurs as the sun's rays fall on a centuries-old carved disc. There is an informative visitor centre, toilets and a fairly short, but steep, path up to the sacred platform (walking poles may be useful).



Path up to Roque Bentayga

After our time here, we will visit an area of the Canary Island Pine forest, which is the prime area for one



Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch

of the world's rarest birds, the Gran Canaria Blue Chaffinch. This species, recently split from the similar Tenerife Blue Chaffinch, is an endangered species, but the population in two areas is being boosted by the release of captive-bred birds. However, it is still often elusive: we will look! Other species here are likely to include the Gran Canaria subspecies of Great Spotted Woodpecker and Canary Island Chiffchaff and the Canary Island subspecies of Common Kestrel. Plants here include the yellow broom-like

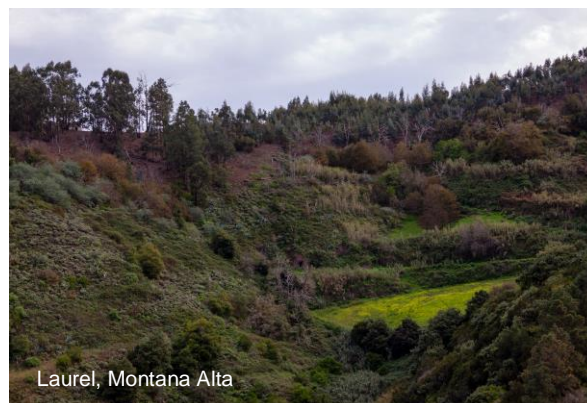
*Adenocarpus foliosus*, and island endemics *Echium onosmifolium*, and the purple-flowered Wallflower *Erysimum albescens*.

After our early start, we will head back to the hotel in good time for some rest and relaxation in the afternoon. When it is not the equinox, our start does not have to be so early, so our return may be a bit later, too.

## Day 5

## Laurel Forest and mountains

Today we will have a leisurely start, driving to Los Tilos de Moya, where we will follow the circular Laurel Trail of a little over a mile. This will give us the opportunity to explore a remnant of the once-extensive Laurisilva, the Laurel forest that used to cloak the northern slopes of the island. Key plant species here are *Ocotea foetens*, *Laurus novocanariensis*, *Myrica faya*, and *Semele androgyna*. In more open areas we find *Hypericum canariensis* and *Artemisia thuscula*, while a variety of *Aeonium*



Laurel, Montana Alta

*arboreum* and *Aeonium canariense* favour shady spots. There is a good chance here of seeing Laurel Pigeon, as well as Canary Island Speckled Wood and Canary Red Admiral. We will also explore the area around Firgas, learning about the re-introduction and ongoing conservation of Laurel Pigeon in Gran Canaria, and the re-establishment of areas of Laurisilva to extend its habitat.

We will then move on to explore again areas of Canary Pine forest and enjoy the mountain vistas. Today we expect to be out to watch the sun setting: the evening light showing the jagged ravines and peaks in all their splendour. We will eat out this evening, enjoying local cuisine and wine, before returning after dark to our hotel.

## Day 6

## Dunes, caves and tapas

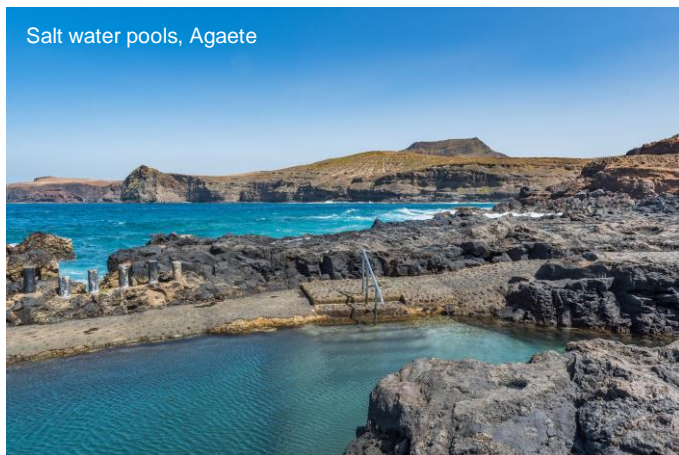
Today we will venture south again, this time to visit the extensive dune system at Maspalomas. Although adjacent to the tourist resort, there is also a lagoon here which is good for waders, including Kentish Plover. Other migrants and vagrants may be seen here, too. Later we move on to an area which is good for Trumpeter Finch, the East Canarian Lesser Short-toed Lark and the Canary Island subspecies of Great Grey Shrike. Dune-desert vegetation here includes *Kleinia neriifolia*, *Schizogyne glaberrima* and *Salsola vermiculata*.

We will head inland to the isolated and charming Barranco de Guayadeque, a ravine which is full of history, archaeology and ethnographic interest. In fact, lunch today will be tapas, enjoyed inside a cave restaurant! The ravine also holds one of the richest areas of endemic flora, with species such as *Helianthemum tholiforme*, *Descurainia preauxiana* and *Malva canariensis*.

## Day 7

## Maipes de Agaete and wine-tasting

Today we will remain in the north of the island. Only about 10 minutes from our hotel, we will visit the



Necropolis of Maipes de Agaete with its ancient burial mounds some of which are around 1,300 years old.

We will then move on a short distance for a visit to the Bodega Finca La Laja, in the Barranco de Agaete, where products include Oranges, Mangos, Papayas and Europe's only coffee plantation. Here too, they make excellent wines, and we will have the opportunity for some tastings (and maybe

make some purchases to take home).

The rest of the day will be at leisure at the hotel, so we can enjoy the spa, natural swimming pools and the sunset by the ocean.

## Day 8

## Transfer to Airport – Fly UK

Today we must reluctantly pack our bags and return to the airport. We will probably be able to have a leisurely start, before saying our farewells to this beautiful corner of Gran Canaria.

## Grading & Focus

This tour is graded A with easy short walks, although the ground will be often rough and stony, and the walk to the Roque Bentayga is steep. Proper, closed footwear and walking poles are recommended. 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, as well as experience some of the cultural aspects of the island. Due to the size of the island and the central mountainous terrain, there will be more driving than is usual in a 'Go Slow' tour, often on well-surfaced but narrow, winding roads. It is not a tour which will suit keen walkers as we tend to drive between sites by minibus, explore them, and drive on. 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. The hotel has a swimming pool and spa facilities and is extremely comfortable.

## Flights

Gran Canaria has 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](http://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.

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