

La Palma



Perhaps more than any other island in the archipelago, La Palma offers the chance to experience real, unspoiled nature – from the verdant forests of the north, where lush vegetation drips from the rainforest canopy; to the desertscapes of the south, where volcanic craters and twisted rock formations define the views; to the serene pine forests of the Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente. No wonder the entire island was declared a Unesco biosphere reserve. It's the ideal place for a walking holiday, although trekkers are by no means the only ones who succumb to its attractions.

Mass tourism has yet to make its mark on 'The Pretty Island', as La Palma is nicknamed. The banana crop still represents a whopping 80% of the local economy, and the absence of golden beaches has diverted many travellers' attention elsewhere. Although things are changing – new hotels, golf course, ports and a bigger airport are all on the planning charts – for now La Palma is pristine and very pretty indeed.

Rainfall and spring water are more plentiful here than on any other island, making San Miguel de la Palma (the island's full name) the greenest of the archipelago. Orchards, vineyards and forests flourish, their soft beauty contrasting with the harsh crags and peaks of the volcanic heights that run down the island's centre. This is one of the most volcanically active islands; the archipelago's last eruption was in 1971 in Fuencaliente. That volcanic activity is responsible for La Palma's steep cliffs and plunging ravines. It's the steepest island in the world, shooting from sea level to 2426m in just over 10km.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Peer up at the night sky from the **Roque de los Muchachos** (p225), a world-class spot for stargazing
- Explore the natural wonderland of the **Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente** (p224)
- Bask in the sun and the breeze under the swaying palms of the black-sand beach at **Puerto Naos** (p223)
- Grab a rain jacket and hiking boots for a trek through the enchanted forest at **Los Tiles** (p227)
- Take a dip in the saltwater pools around **Piscinas de la Fajana** (p227)



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 922

■ POPULATION: 86,000

■ AREA: 708 SQ KM

HISTORY

Long before Castilla conquered the island in the 15th century, this rugged land was known as Benahoare. The first inhabitants could have arrived as early as the 5th century BC (although there's no hard and fast evidence to set the date), and they set up an orderly society that eventually divided into 12 cantons, each with its own chief.

The island officially became part of the Spanish empire in 1493, after Alonso Fernández de Lugo (a conquistador and, later, island governor) used a tribesman-turned-Christian to trick the Benahoaritas into coming down from their mountain stronghold for 'peace talks'. They were ambushed on the way at the spot now known as El Riachuelo. Their leader, Tanausú, was shipped to Spain as a slave, but went on a hunger strike on board the boat and never saw the Spanish mainland.

The next century was an important one for the island. Sugar, honey and sweet *malvasia* (Malmsey wine; see the boxed text, p210) became the major exports and abundant Canary pine provided timber for burgeoning shipyards. By the late 16th century, as transatlantic trade flourished, Santa Cruz de la Palma was considered the third most important port in the Spanish empire, after Seville and Antwerp.

The sugar, shipbuilding and cochineal (a bug used to make red dye) industries kept the island economy afloat for the next several centuries, but the island's fortunes eventually took a downward turn, and the 20th century was one of poverty and mass emigration. These days, the banana crop represents 80% of the local economy, but tourism is slowly growing.

INFORMATION

Books & Maps

Maps are available for sale at petrol stations, newspaper kiosks and bookshops. Tourist offices give out a very basic island map, but if you plan to explore, invest in a more detailed map, like the 1:50,000 map published by Ediciones David and created by Palmero Juan José Santos. Even better is the Freytag & Berndt 1:30,000 map, in English and German.

The hiking maps covering southern, central and northern La Palma given out for free at the tourist office in Santa Cruz give a good overview, and its *Hiking Guide* (in English and Spanish) is helpful too. But if you're a serious

walker, you should buy a hiking guide, such as *Landscapes of La Palma and El Hierro*, published by Sunflower Books, *Walk! La Palma* by Discovery Walking Guides, or *La Palma* by Rother Walking Guides.

ACCOMMODATION

Although booking ahead is always recommended, during most of the year you can probably find last-minute accommodation on the island. Be sure to book if you're arriving on the late ferry from Tenerife, plan to arrive outside of regular business hours, or if you plan to come during a major holiday or festival (see p209).

Comfortable, quality lodging is available across the island, but some of the best options include the quirky B&B-style Hotel San Telmo (p215) in Santa Cruz, the Hotel La Palma Romántico (p228) in Barlovento and the Parador Nacional (p217).

Live like a local in the *casas rurales* (rural houses) for rent across the island. For information and reservations, contact the **Asociación de Turismo Rural** (☎ 902 43 96 25; www.ecoturismocanarias.com; Calle Pérez de Brito 102, Santa Cruz de La Palma), which rents nearly 100 rural houses across the island.

Free camping is banned on the island, as in the rest of Spain, but there are a few basic camp sites scattered around the island. In most cases you'll need to apply in advance and collect your permit in person before you intend to camp.

ACTIVITIES

Many outfitting companies operate island-wide, so regardless of where you're based you can enjoy the activities La Palma has to offer.

Walking

Don't come to La Palma without allowing a generous chunk of time to explore its wondrous landscapes on foot. With 850km of trails, this is the ideal place for a walking holiday. Several companies offer guided hikes; the best is **Natour** (☎ 922 43 30 01; www.natour-trekking.com; Apartamento Valentina 4, Los Cancejos; day-long walks with guide €29-37; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri), a company operating island-wide. Popular routes include the walk around the Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente (p224), the Ruta de los Volcanes (p221) and the 'Enchanted Forest' walk through

LA PALMA

0 6 km
0 4 miles



forest land in the north. The company will pick you up at your hotel or a central meeting point.

Other reputable guide services include **La Palma Trekking** (☎ 922 18 14 33; www.la-palma-aktiv.com in German and Spanish; Aparthotel Las Olas, local D1, Los Cancajos; walking packages from €185) and **Ekalis** (☎ 922 44 45 17; www.ekalis.com; Las Indias 51, Fuen-caliente; guided hikes, bike trips, caving expeditions & rock climbing per day €37.50), which also offers hotel pick ups.

It's not necessary to hike with a guide; La Palma offers safe walking conditions to anyone who's prepared and carries a good map. But the beauty of having a guide, other than the history and anecdotes they can share, is enjoying a long one-way trek with transport arranged at either end. Throughout this chapter there's information on notable walks, with details on how to arrange your own transport by bus or taxi.

Adventure Sports

If just plain walking seems too tame, try rock climbing or caving. Ekalis (above) offers a variety of climbing and rappelling experiences as well as a two-hour spelunking expedition. It also offers bike rental (€15) and guided mountain biking trips, another popular activity on the island. If you're in shape, La Palma's endless climbs and dips will be thrilling, but if trudging uphill isn't your thing, guide services like those offered by **Bike'n'Fun** (☎ 922 40 19 27; www.bikenfun.de; Calle Calvo Sotelo 20, Los Llanos de Aridane; guide service per person €40, bike rental per day €8-14) offer transport to the top of a peak followed by a mostly downhill ride. All operators can pick you up at your hotel or a central meeting point.

In recent years, paragliding has really taken off (pardon the pun!); the island is considered one of the world's best places to glide. Try it in Puerto Naos (p223). More information about paragliding can be found at www.flylapalma.com or www.palmaclub.com.

Diving & Kayaking

For those wanting to get out on the water, diving outfitters in Puerto Naos (p223) and Los Cancajos (p216) will hook you up with tanks, wetsuits and fins. Sea kayaking expeditions are also available in Puerto Naos and Los Cancajos; contact Ekalis (above) for more information.

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Like any Spaniards worth their heritage, the Palmeros love a good party, and the year is packed with festivals and celebrations.

Each town has feast days, celebrating its patron saint with several days of parades, parties and other activities. They include the following:

Breña Alta (late June)

Breña Baja (25 July)

Barlovento (12-13 August)

San Andrés y Los Sauces (early September)

Tazacorte (late September)

January–February

Fiesta of the Almond Blossom A celebration of the beauty of the almond blossom in Puntagorda and of the town's patron saint, San Mauro Abad.

February–March

Carnaval Each year, around 50,000 people descend on Santa Cruz for Carnaval, the pre-Lent celebration that usually falls in mid-February. If you're here, don't forget your bottle of talcum powder (see the boxed text, p211).

March–April

Semana Santa (late March to early April) Members of lay brotherhoods parade down Calle O'Daly (Santa Cruz) in their blood-red robes and tall, pointy hoods.

May

Las Cruces (3 May) The island's crosses are bedecked in jewellery, flowers and rich clothes. Truly a sight to see.

June

La Patrona (2 June) The year's biggest party in Los Llanos de Aridane is held in honour of Our Lady of Los Remedios.

MAKE WAY FOR THE VIRGIN

Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (Feast Day of Our Lady of the Snows) is the island's principal fiesta. Don't miss the parade of giants and 'fat heads' (fanciful, rather squat characters with exceptionally large heads), though the high point is the dance of the dwarves, which has been performed here since the early 19th century. Every five years (2010, 2015 etc), the Bajada de la Virgen de las Nieves is celebrated. It's a religious procession where the islanders take the Virgin around the island throughout July and August, celebrating her arrival in each important town with a big party.

Corpus Christi The celebration of Corpus Christi at Villa de Mazo is a fragrant, flowery affair. Streets are decorated with elegant 'carpets' made of flower petals, seeds and soil.

San Juan (23 June) Marks the summer solstice, and is celebrated in Puntallana with bonfires and firecrackers galore.

August

Fiesta de Nuestra Señora de las Nieves (5 August) Santa Cruz puts on its party clothes for the celebration of the island's patron saint; see the boxed text, p209.

September

El Diablo (8 September) Fireworks, parades of devils and grim music in Tijarife provides a graphic show of the triumph of good over evil. About 30kg of gunpowder are used in the 20-minute show honouring Nuestra Señora de Candelaria.

December

Castanets (December 24) After Midnight Mass in Breña Alta and throughout the island, Palmero men perform skits accompanied by the noisy music of castanets.

LA PALMA FOR CHILDREN

Building sand castles on the black-sand beaches of Puerto Naos (p223) and Los Cancajos (p216), or splashing in the salt-water pools in places like Piscinas de la Fajana (p227) are givens, but what to do after the beach? Older kids (12 and

above) will enjoy horseback riding with Finca Corazón (p220), while the younger crowd will get a kick out of the animals at Maroparque (p217).

Suitable hikes for kids include Mirador de los Roques (p225) and the Mirador Lomo de las Chozas (p225), both in the Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente; at the latter, you can even take a stroller. Throw in some history by taking the 1.5km walk around the **Parque Cultural La Zarza** (p228).

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

La Palma's **airport** (☎ 922 41 15 40), located just 7km from Santa Cruz, is in the midst of a major expansion project that aims to triple its capacity to three million passengers annually by 2010. Services here include rental car agencies, a currency exchange bureau and a small **tourist office** (☎ 922 42 62 12; www.tourlapalma.com; 🕒 8am-9.30pm).

At the time of research, it was possible to hop on direct flights to the island from Germany, Spain and Holland, but the number of flights here is likely to grow quickly. Check with **Aena** (www.aena.es) for the latest.

Interisland airways **Binter Canarias** (☎ 902 39 13 92; www.binternet.com) and **Islas Airways** (☎ 902 47 74 78; www.islasairways.com) keep La Palma

FOOD & DRINK

La Palma's main dishes, like those on other islands, are simple. What the island is really known for is indulgent desserts. Honey is an important food here, and historically La Palma was an important sugar producer. Most of the sugar cane is gone, but the islanders' sweet tooth remains. The *gofio*-honey-and-sugar *rapaduras* are a favourite tooth-rotter. Also tasty are *almendrados* (almond, sugar and egg cakes baked with cinnamon), *bienmesabe* (a paste of almonds and sugar) and *Príncipe Alberto* (mousse of chocolate and almonds).

Local cheeses, most made with unpasteurised goats' milk and many smoked, are worth trying. Get more information online at www.quesopalmero.es.

Wine & Spirits

Since the early 16th century, when Spanish conquerors planted the first vines on the island, La Palma has been known for its sweet *malvasía* (Malmsey wine). Thanks to the merchants and colonists who came in and out of La Palma's ports, the wine acquired fame throughout Europe, and some referred to the tasty stuff as 'the nectar of the gods'. Even Shakespeare wrote about sweet Canary wine, making it Falstaff's favourite in *Henry IV* and calling it a 'marvellous searching wine' that 'perfumes the blood'. You can also find dry *malvasía* as well as a variety of reds, whites and rosé wines, especially in the areas of Fuencaliente and Hoyo de Mazo. For more information visit www.malvasiadelapalma.com or embark on the **Wine Route** (www.infoisla.org/rutadelvino), which includes 16 visitable wineries.

Although the sugar plantations have all but gone, what remains is put to good use in the production of *ron* (rum) by the last producer on the island, Ron Aldea.

well connected to the rest of the archipelago, with several flights daily to each of the other islands.

Boat

The **Fred Olsen** (☎ 902 10 01 07; www.fredolsen.es) Benchijigua Express ferry (€49, two hours) is a good option for those coming from Tenerife. The ferry leaves Los Cristianos, Tenerife at 8pm, and the return trip leaves Santa Cruz at 6.30am. From Tenerife, you can then continue to La Gomera or El Hierro.

At the time of research, **Trasmediterránea** (☎ 902 45 46 45; www.trasmediterranea.es) still had not determined its ferry schedule or pricing, but anticipated offering summer-only services between La Palma and Santa Cruz de Tenerife and between La Palma and Arrecife, Lanzarote.

GETTING AROUND To/From the Airport

Bus 8 (€1, 20 minutes) makes the journey between Santa Cruz and the airport every 30 minutes from 6.45am to 11.45pm; on weekends, the service is provided only hourly. The bus also stops at Los Cancajos.

Bus

La Palma has a fairly good bus system (with 18 bus lines) that you can use to hop between the island's main towns. For complete route information, stop by a bus station or contact **Transportes Insular La Palma** (☎ 922 41 19 24; www.transporteslapalma.com). Route prices start at €1. If you plan to use the bus often, you're best to buy a Bonobus card. Cards start at €12 and represent a discount of about 20% off normal individual fares. They are on sale at bus stations, newsstands and tobacco shops.

Car

Having your own two wheels is the best way to tour the island at your leisure, and it's the only way to set about exploring every nook and cranny. La Palma is loaded with car-rental agencies, and all of those listed below can have a car waiting for you at the airport or port. Prices per day begin as low as €15 for tiny cars and week-long rentals. Expect to pay about €30 for a family-size car.

Auto Soyka (☎ 922 40 34 34; www.autosoyka.com; Calle General Yagüe 13, Los Llanos de Aridane) Specialises in 4WDs.

Cicar (☎ 922 42 80 48; www.cicar.com; La Palma airport) The island's best-known car-rental company, it has offices on all seven islands and offers reliable service.

Oasis (☎ 922 43 44 09; www.oasis-la-palma.com; Centro Cancajos local 301, Los Cancajos)

Taxi

Taxis are an easy but awfully pricey way to get around. A one-way trip to Puerto Naos from Santa Cruz will burn a hole €45 wide in your pocket, more than a day's car rental!

SANTA CRUZ DE LA PALMA

pop 18,260

The historic (and bureaucratic) capital of the island, Santa Cruz de la Palma is a compact city strung out along the shore and flanked by fertile green hills. Although it makes poor use of its gorgeous location – a huge car park acts as a barrier between the town and the ocean – the old town is a treasure waiting to be discovered

THE SWEETEST-SMELLING BATTLE

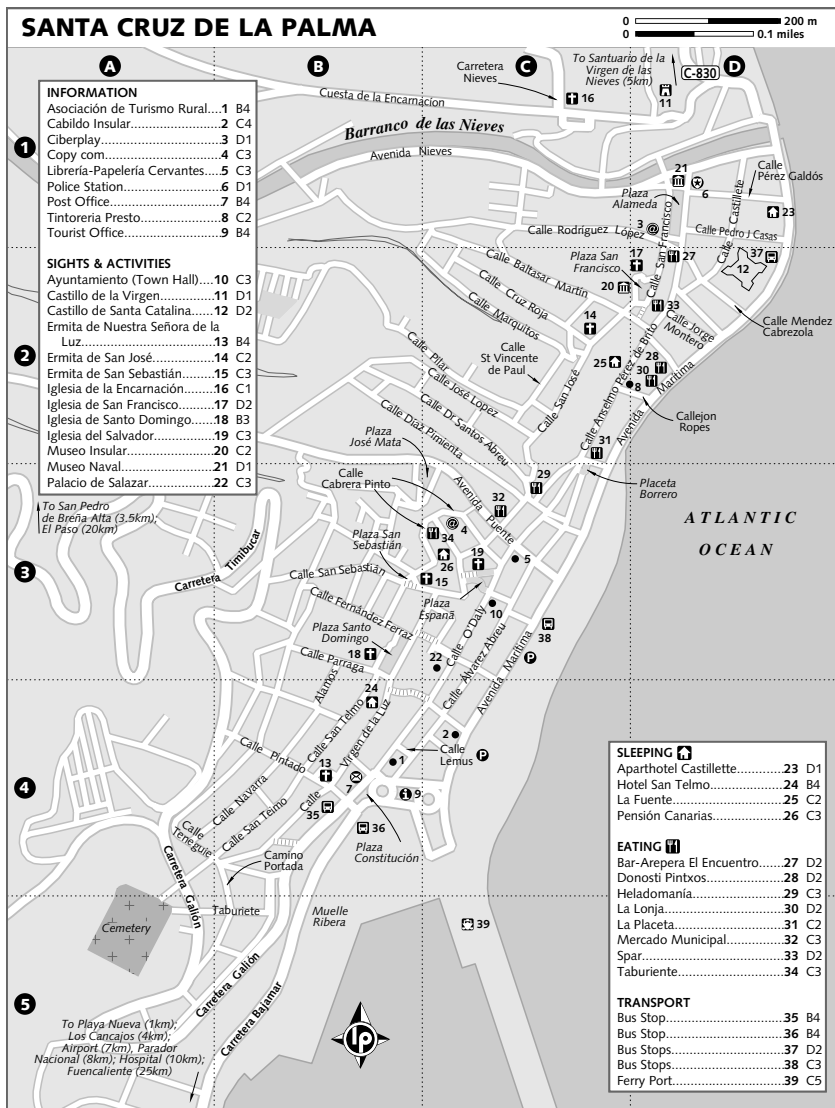
Tenerife and Gran Canaria are known for their, ahem, lively celebrations of Carnival, but unassuming Santa Cruz de la Palma also has a wild side. There's music, dancing, drinking and, of course, talcum powder. On Carnival Monday, the good citizens of La Palma bring buckets of white, fragrant powder down to the centre of Santa Cruz and prepare to do battle with their neighbours. After loosening up with a few drinks and a little music, the snowy spectacle begins. Anyone is a target in this all-out war and the town ends the night coughing and blinking furiously, covered head to toe with talcum powder. The tradition began to mock the *los indios*, Canarian emigrants who became wealthy in the Americas and returned to the island decked in white suits and Panama hats. Now it's just another excuse for a fiesta.

HISTORY

In the 16th century the dockyards of Santa Cruz earned a reputation as the best in all the Canary Islands. Ships were made with Canary pine, a sap-filled wood that was nearly impervious to termites, making the ships constructed here some of the most reliable and longest-lasting in the world. The

town became so important that King Felipe II had the first Juzgado de Indias (Court of the Indias) installed here in 1558, and every single vessel trading with the Americas from mainland Spain was obliged to register.

The boom brought economic security, but it led to problems as well. Santa Cruz



was frequently besieged and occasionally sacked by a succession of pirates, including those under the command of Sir Francis Drake.

ORIENTATION

The historic centre of Santa Cruz runs parallel to the waterfront and is easily walkable, although as you head further from the coast the hills get steeper. The heart of activity here is Calle O'Daly (aka Calle Real), a long pedestrian boulevard lined with shops and colonial-era houses.

INFORMATION

Bookshops

Librería-Papelería Cervantes (☎ 922 41 18 15; Calle Anselmo Pérez de Brito 4) This is a good one-stop shop for maps, guidebooks, international newspapers and office supplies.

Emergency

Policía Local (☎ 922 41 11 50; Avenida de los Indios 18)

Internet Access

Ciberplay (☎ 922 41 15 10; Calle San Francisco 1; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4.30-10pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm & 5-10pm Sat, 10.30am-1.30pm & 5-8.30pm Sun) Just off Plaza Alameda.

Copy.com (☎ 922 41 27 20; Calle Cabrera Pinto 15; per hour €2; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 4.30-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.30am-1.30pm Sat) This place has just four computers, but you can also send and receive faxes and make photocopies.

Laundry

Tintorería Presto (☎ 922 41 80 69; Calle Anselmo Pérez de Brito 44; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 5-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat) Wash, dry and fold for €2.50 per 1kg.

Medical Services

Hospital (Hospital General de las Nieves; ☎ 922 18 50 00) The new hospital is an easy 10km drive or bus ride from town. Bus 9 makes the 15-minute trip hourly (€1.10).

Post

Post office (☎ 922 41 17 02; Plaza Constitución 2) Located by the big roundabout. It seems like an awfully big building for the postal needs of such a tiny island!

Tourist Information

Tourist office (☎ 922 41 21 06; www.tourlapalma.com; Plaza Constitución s/n; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat, to 2pm Sun) This small kiosk office stocks lots of information about the town and the island,

whether you're interested in hiking, festivals, history or gastronomy.

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Old Town

Chances are you'll be starting your visit either from the Plaza Constitución or from the huge ocean-front parking lot. Either way, you're a short walk from Calle O'Daly, the city's main street. Named for an Irish trader who made La Palma his home, the street is full of shops, bars and some of the town's most impressive architecture. The 17th-century, late-Renaissance **Palacio de Salazar** (Calle O'Daly 22) is on your left soon after you enter the street from Plaza Constitución. It's now home to a government-run cultural centre.

Wander north along Calle O'Daly and you'll come to the palm-shaded **Plaza España**, considered the most important example of Renaissance architecture in the Canary Islands. To one side sits the imposing **ayuntamiento** (town hall; ☎ 922 42 65 00), built in 1559 after the original was destroyed by French pirates. Across the plaza is the ornate **Iglesia del Salvador** (☎ 9.30am-1pm & 5.30-7.30pm). Though the church's exterior seems more fortress than house of worship, the interior boasts a glittering baroque pulpit dating to 1750, an ornate 16th-century wooden ceiling considered one of the best *mudéjar* (Islamic-style architecture) works in all the Canaries, and several fine sculptures.

Follow the steps heading up out of the Plaza de España to reach the upper town, where the shady **Plaza Santo Domingo**, with its terrace café, makes an excellent resting point. The **Iglesia de Santo Domingo** (☎ 4-5pm Sat) here boasts an important collection of Flemish paintings.

Head southwest on Calle Virgin de la Luz for a quick visit to the modest chapel **Ermita de Nuestra Señora de la Luz**, one of several small 16th- and 17th-century chapels in town. Another chapel, the **Ermita de San Sebastián** (Calle San Sebastián), is behind the Iglesia de San Salvador. Yet another is **Ermita de San José** (Calle San José), which has given its name to the street on which it stands.

Wander down to the waterfront to stroll alongside a series of wonderful **old houses** with traditional Canarian balconies. Many of the houses date to the 16th century and have been converted into upscale restaurants. The

islanders' penchant for balconies came with Andalusian migrants and was modified by Portuguese influences.

Towards the Barranco de las Nieves

Crossing the wide Avenida del Puente, a major thoroughfare, Calle O'Daly becomes Calle Anselmo Pérez de Brito. Make your way northeast towards the **Iglesia de San Francisco** (Plaza San Francisco; ☎ 6-7.30pm), another Renaissance church rich in works of art, the majority being unmistakably baroque.

The restored convent next door houses the **Museo Insular** (☎ 922 42 05 58; admission €4; ☎ 9.30am-1.50pm & 4-6pm Mon-Fri Oct-Jun, 9am-2pm Mon-Fri Jul-Sep), the island's museum. Here you'll find everything from Guanche skulls to cupboards of sad stuffed birds and pickled reptiles.

Gaze north across leafy Plaza Alameda (a good place to sip a *café cortado* – an espresso with a splash of milk) and you'll think Christopher Columbus' ship, the *Santa María*, became stranded here. But no, it's actually the city's **Museo Naval**, known as El Barco de la Virgen (The Virgin's Boat) to the locals. It was closed for repairs at the time of research, but until it reopens it makes for a great photo opportunity.

On the seafront, the **Castillo de Santa Catalina** was one of several forts built in the 17th century to fend off pirate raids. Across the ravine and higher is a smaller one, the **Castillo de la Virgen**. Tucked away on the same hill is the 16th-century **Iglesia de la Encarnación**, the first church to be built in Santa Cruz after the Spanish conquest.

Santuario de la Virgen de las Nieves

For great views over Santa Cruz and the shore, take the relatively easy 2km hike north of town to La Palma's main object of pilgrimage, the 17th-century **Santuario de la Virgen de las Nieves** (☎ 922 41 63 67; ☎ 8.30am-8pm).

To walk from Plaza Alameda, follow the road, which becomes a signposted dirt track, westwards up the gorge of the Barranco de las Nieves. It will take nearly 45 minutes to walk up, but coming back is faster. By car, follow signs from the Avenida Marítima where it crosses the *barranco* (ravine), then turn right on the Carretera de las Nieves (LP-101) and continue winding up the hillside until you see signs for the sanctuary. The curve-filled 5km trip

takes nearly 15 minutes. Bus 10 (€1, approximately 20 minutes) comes up hourly from the town centre from 7.45am until 4.45pm, and less frequently in the evenings and on weekends.

The church sits in a peaceful spot surrounded by trees and greenery, all in typical Canarian colonial style with balconies and simple façades. Walking into the church, however, you'll leave simplicity behind to encounter a fabulously ornate interior. The plush carpet, sculptures galore and crystal chandeliers are the precursor to the Virgin Mary herself, surrounded by a glittering altar. The 14th-century sculpture is the oldest religious statue in the Canary Islands, and probably brought by merchants before the arrival of the Spaniards. Every five years the Virgin is brought down to Santa Cruz in a grand procession (see the boxed text, p209).

There's a bar-restaurant in the church grounds.

SLEEPING

Unless your budget doesn't stretch beyond the *pensiones* (guesthouses) here, it doesn't make much sense to stay in Santa Cruz itself; the best places are elsewhere.

Budget

Pensión Canarias (☎ 922 41 31 82; pensioncanarias@automagui.com; Calle Cabrera Pinto 27; s/d €23/34, s without bathroom €22) Friendly staff and a very Spanish-looking tiled entryway are the best this quiet *pensión* has to offer. Rooms (with TVs) are low on charm but clean, if rather too dark. Ditto for the bathrooms.

La Fuente (☎ 922 41 56 36; www.la-fuente.com; Calle Anselmo Pérez de Brito 49; apt €35-63) The 11 apartments are all different, but each is decorated in a casual, beachy style with modern bathroom. There is no elevator but those willing to climb to the 4th floor are rewarded with amazing sea and town views. La Fuente also rents other apartments around town; see the website for details.

Midrange

Aparthotel Castillete (☎ 922 42 08 40; www.aparthotelcastillete.com; Avenida Marítima 75; d/q €51/71) The good points: amazing views of crashing waves, a kitchenette, the central location. The bad points: traffic noise and narrow and cramped rooms. This is a decent options for families with small kids.

our pick Hotel San Telmo (☎ 922 41 53 85; www.hotel-santelmo.com; Calle San Telmo 5; s/d €60/75) Opened in 2006, this cute and comfortable B&B-style hotel has just eight rooms with TV and ADSL line. The German owner's colourful personality is all over, from the huge lit fountain in the patio, to the eclectic art scattered about (it's all for sale), to the orange walls that are made even brighter with glitter.

EATING

Many of Santa Cruz's nicest restaurants are located along the Avenida Marítima, especially at the far northeastern end.

Self-Catering

Spar (☎ 922 41 71 06; Calle Anselmo Pérez de Brito 71; ☎ 8am-10pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) The largest grocery-store chain on the island.

Mercado Municipal (Avenida Puente; ☎ 6am-2pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat) Local and imported produce, Canarian wines and palm honey and other goodies are on sale at this small but airy fresh market. Perfect to prepare a picnic.

Budget & Midrange

Heladomanía (☎ 659 63 55 77; Calle Vandale 8; ☎ 10.30am-2.30pm & 4.30-8.30pm Mon-Fri, 10.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm Sat, 11.30am-2.30pm & 5.30-8.30pm Sun) For some of the richest ice cream you've had in a while, pop into Heladomanía, where the artisanal ice cream is made on the spot.

Bar-Arepera El Encuentro (☎ 922 41 10 44; Calle Pérez de Brito; arepas €1.50) Cheap and tasty, Venezuelan *arepas* (hot pockets made of corn or flour and filled with meat or cheese) are an island staple. Iron tables are set up on the shady plaza.

Donosti Pintxos (☎ 922 41 40 04; Avenida Marítima 57; mains €6.50-12) Basque-style tapas (called *pintxos*) make for a great quick meal, although there are also sit-down dishes, including Basque specialities like cod fish.

Taburiente (☎ 922 41 64 42; Calle Pedro Poggio 7; mains €9-10) Don't bother asking for a menu; it's whatever struck the owner's fancy that day. This is a local favourite, especially on weekends, when crowds come for tapas and typical Canarian dishes.

Top End

La Placeta (☎ 922 41 52 73; Calle Borrero 1; mains €7-10; ☎ closed Sun) A charming little bistro on a tiny square, La Placeta has a small menu featuring everything from ravioli to Canary *mojo*

(spicy salsa sauce), including lots of vegetarian dishes. Downstairs, get sandwiches, desserts and tapas (€1 to €3). Head upstairs for the dining room.

La Lonja (☎ 922 41 52 66; Avenida Marítima 55; mains €10-17; ☎ closed Sun) Inside an old Canary house with balconies overlooking the seafront, La Lonja is perhaps the city's most upscale restaurant, with a mix of Canarian, Castilian and Mediterranean fare like paella, suckling pig and roasted cheese with *mojo*.

DRINKING & ENTERTAINMENT

Santa Cruz is no mecca for night owls; on the island, Los Llanos de Aridane takes that title. But there are plenty of quiet terrace bars where you can nurse a drink or two. Along Avenida Marítima, which is lined with cafés and *zumerías* (juice bars), you'll find a family-friendly atmosphere. In town head to Calle Álvarez Abreu, the closest thing you'll find to a nightlife scene. The Plaza José Mata, off Avenida Puente, also has a few bars.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

For details about ferry services to and from Santa Cruz, see p211.

To/From the Airport

Bus 8 (€1, 20 minutes) makes the journey between Santa Cruz and the airport every 30 minutes from 6.45am to 11.45pm, stopping in Los Cancajos on the way. On weekends, the service is provided only hourly. A taxi to the airport costs about €15.

Bus

Transportes Insular La Palma buses keep Santa Cruz well connected with the rest of the island. The bus stops are near Plaza Constitución and along the Avenida Marítima. Routes include bus 3 (€4.20, 45 minutes, 10 daily) to Los Llanos de Aridane and bus 11 (€1.40, 20 minutes, nine daily) to Puntallana.

GETTING AROUND

The best way to get around Santa Cruz is on foot. If you come in by car, try to find a parking spot in the large car park by the waterfront, as the narrow streets are much better enjoyed while walking. If you're in a hurry you can catch one of the buses that run up and down the Avenida Marítima (fare around €1) or hop in a **taxi** (☎ 922 41 60 70).

AROUND SANTA CRUZ

LOS CANCAJOS

A prettily manicured waterfront and a small volcanic beach are the main attractions of this cluster of hotels, apartments and restaurants 4km south of Santa Cruz; calling it a 'town' would be stretching it. Los Cancajos has none of the charm of Santa Cruz or other authentic, lived-in towns, but it nevertheless makes a good home base thanks to its abundance of quality lodging options and agreeable beach, which is one of the best on the island.

Information

INTERNET ACCESS

Planitel (☎ 922 43 42 33; Carretera Los Cancajos; per hr €2; ☎ 9.30-2pm & 4-9pm Mon-Sat) Here you can also get phonecards or use the phone booths.

MEDICAL SERVICES

Centro Médico (☎ 922 43 42 11, 653 81 31 58; Centro Comercial Los Cancajos, local 307; ☎ 9am-3pm Mon-Fri) English spoken.

Activities

Several activity outfits are set up in Los Cancajos. Dive with **Buceo Sub** (☎ 922 18 11 13; www.scuba-diving-la-palma.de; dive incl equipment €36; ☎ 9.30am-6pm Tue-Sun), based beside the H10 Costa Salinas aparthotel, or **La Palma Diving Center** (☎ 922 18 13 93; www.la-palma-diving.com; dive incl equipment €38; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat), in the Centro Cancajos shopping centre (on your left as you enter Los Cancajos from Santa Cruz).

Plenty of tour operators are also set up here.

Tours Viva (☎ 922 43 53 00; Urbanización San Antonio

del Mar; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 10am-1pm Sat) organises bus and hiking trips. Rent bikes from **Autos Damián – Club Ciclista** (☎ 922 43 46 88; Centro Cancajos local 211; bike rental per day €11; ☎ 9am-1pm & 5-7pm Mon-Fri, 9-11.30am Sat).

Sleeping

Most accommodation options here are apartments or aparthotels (hotels where the rooms resemble small apartments). In most cases, the official prices quoted here are somewhat higher than what you can get by booking through travel agencies or online booking sites. Throughout Los Cancajos there is free street parking near lodgings.

Aparthotel Las Olas (☎ 922 43 40 52; www.a-caledonia.com; 1-2-person apt €65-85; ♿) Modern, tidy apartments, many with views of the water, are spread over a large waterside resort complex surrounded by lush gardens. The large pool, newish look and spacious rooms have made this one of the most popular places to stay on the island.

Hacienda San Jorge (☎ 922 18 10 66; www.hsanjorge.com; 1-3-person apt €65-86; ♿) The Canary-styled Hacienda offers small but attractive apartments with separate bedrooms, open-plan kitchens and great views, but what really makes this place special are the verdant gardens that surround the pool and all four of the aparthotel's buildings.

Also recommended:

Apartamentos Lago Azul (☎ 922 43 43 05; www.apartamentoslagoazul.com; 2-3-person apt €48; ♿) Simple one-bedroom apartments with large balconies overlooking the ocean and an attractive pool area.

H10 Costa Salinas (☎ 922 43 43 48; www.h10.es; 2-3-person apt €65-90; ♿) A large, full-service resort run by the good-value H10 hotel chain, this is a popular

GREAT OFF-THE-BEATEN-TRACK EATING

Some of the island's best restaurants are a short drive from Santa Cruz. For unbeatable local flavour, it doesn't get any better than this.

- **Restaurante Chipi-Chipi** (☎ 922 41 10 24; Calle Juan Mayor 42, Velhoco; mains €8-13; ☎ closed Wed & Sun) This is a meat eater's haven, with a variety of grilled meats all served with loads of *papas arrugadas* (wrinkly potatoes) and *mojo* (spicy salsa sauce made from red chilli peppers).
- **our pick Casa Goyo** (☎ 922 44 06 06; Carretera General Lodero 120; mains €5-10; ☎ closed Mon) Hands-down the best seafood on the island can be had at this beach-shack-like eatery just south of the airport. Hear the roar of the planes as you savour *vieja a la plancha* (pan-grilled parrot fish) and *papas*.
- **El Cantillo** (☎ 922 43 49 20; Carretera Aeropuerto 67; mains €8-12; ☎ closed Tue) Fish, Canarian specialities and grilled meats (the rabbit and goat are especially tasty) make this a popular place.

aparthotel for families. H10 also runs the H10 Taburiente Playa, a traditional hotel.

Eating

The area around Centro Cancajos has several casual restaurants and bars, many with terraces. Self-caterers can head to the **Spar** (☎ 922 18 14 44; Urbanización Costa Salinas) supermarket near the H10 hotels.

Tasca Alavasca (☎ 922 43 47 54; Oasis de San Antonio L4; tapas €2-4) Located on the main road that cuts through Los Cancajos, this intimate tavern is a popular place to get tapas and *pintxos*, especially at night, when a bar atmosphere takes over.

El Pulpo (☎ 922 43 49 14; Playa Los Cancajos; mains €6-10; ☹ closed Wed) This water-side beach shack is the place to come for fried fish and a friendly beach-bum attitude.

Casablanca (☎ 922 43 51 99; Centro Cancajos; mains €6-10; ☹ closed Tue) Come here for tasty wood-oven pizzas and a charming terrace perfect for enjoying La Palma's mild nights, or even for after-dinner drinks.

El Lagar (☎ 922 43 46 24; Centro Cancajos, local 304; mains €6-12; ☹ closed Thu) Everything from curries to pizzas to fresh Canarian fish is served at this sprawling beach-side restaurant at the back of the Centro Cancajos. By day, enjoy great ocean views.

Drinking & Entertainment

A handful of bars and terraces scattered behind the Centro Cancajos serves as Los Cancajos' nightlife centre. Although offerings vary wildly by season and night, you may find anything from DJs and dancing, to live music, to a quiet sip-your-drink-and-chat atmosphere.

Getting There & Away

Bus 8 (€1, 10 minutes) passes through every 30 minutes on its way from Santa Cruz to the airport; a second bus does the route in reverse. The main bus stop is at the Centro Cancajos shopping centre.

BREÑA ALTA

pop 6670

Just outside Santa Cruz, this rural, tranquil area isn't a major destination but it is home to a few notable sights, renowned artisans and the classy Parador Nacional hotel.

Kids will love **Maroparque** (☎ 922 41 77 82; www.maroparque.com; Calle Cuesta 28; adult/child

€11/5; ☹ 10am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 6pm Sat & Sun), a small zoo where 300 species of animals and lots of local vegetation make for a pleasant afternoon.

our pick Parador Nacional (☎ 922 43 58 28; www.paradores.es; Carretera de Zumacal, Breña Baja; r €135-169; ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹) is an elegant hotel about 8km south of Santa Cruz and outside the nucleus of Breña Alta. It looks like a huge Canary farmhouse overlooking the ocean. There is a pretty pool surrounded by grass and a lovely botanical garden. Rooms are spacious and sun-filled, with a sitting area and panoramic views. The Parador's restaurant (menú €29) serves local specialities and island wines, and is a great place for a special dinner. Sitting on a hill overlooking the ocean, the setting is unbeatable.

THE SOUTH

Banana plantations, pine forests, volcanic landscapes and rugged coastline mark the southern tip of La Palma. Due to its recent volcanic activity (several volcanoes erupted in the 20th century, the most recent in 1971), the landscape is much drier than what you'll find in the north. Still, it's beautiful in its starkness.

VILLA DE MAZO

pop 4760

A quiet village 13km south of Santa Cruz, Mazo is surrounded by green, dormant volcanoes. The town is known for the cigars and handicrafts made here and for being a highlight of La Palma's **winery route** (www.infoisla.org/rutadelvino).

As soon as you enter town, make a left to head down to **Museo Casa Roja** (☎ 922 42 85 87; Calle Maximiliano Pérez Díaz; admission €2; ☹ 10am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 11am-6pm Sat & 10am-2pm Sun), a lovely pinkish-red mansion (built in 1911) with exhibits on embroidery and Corpus Christi – a festival the town celebrates with particular gusto (see p210). The house itself has an impressive imperial staircase and ornate tiled floors.

Beyond the museum is **Escuela Insular de Artesanía** (☎ 922 42 84 55; ☹ 8am-3pm Mon-Fri Oct-Jun, to 2pm Jul-Sep), the island handicrafts school, which runs a shop where you can buy tobacco, embroidery, ceramics, baskets and other goods. To get to the shop, head

into the school's main patio and up the stairs on your right.

You can also buy artisan goods at the weekend **market** (Via de Enlace Doctor Amílcar Morera Bravo; ☎ 3-7pm Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), where produce, handicrafts and a variety of food products are sold.

Down the hill from the school is the imposing **Templo de San Blas**, Mazo's 16th-century church, which sits on a small plaza overlooking the ocean. Inside, the church boasts a baroque altarpiece and several interesting pieces of baroque art.

Continue 800m down the hill (take the car unless you want to trudge back uphill) to reach **Cerámica el Molino** (☎ 922 44 02 13; Carretera Hoyo de Mazo; admission free; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat), a meticulously restored mill that houses a ceramics museum and workshop where artisans make reproductions of Benahoare pottery. There's a popular souvenir shop as well. You can also get here from the LP-132 highway.

Sleeping & Eating

Hotel Rural Arminda (☎ 922 42 84 32; Calle Lodero 181; s/d with breakfast €50/75; 🏠) With just five rooms, this intimate B&B boasts lush gardens, fabulous ocean views and a peaceful setting amid the banana palms just outside Mazo.

San Blas (☎ 922 42 83 60; Calle María del Carmen Martínez Jerez 4; mains €5-8; 🏠 closed Sun afternoon & Mon) In the centre of town, get simple dishes like pastas, salads, *chocos* (cuttlefish) with *mojo verde* (green sauce) or goat with potatoes served on a shady outdoor terrace.

La Cabaña (☎ 922 44 03 10; Carretera a Fuencaliente Km6; mains €5-13; 🏠 closed Mon) Enjoy grilled meats, fresh fish, salads, soup, *papas arrugadas* with *mojo*, and fabulous bread cooked with anise (an island speciality) at this rustic spot just off the highway south of town. The balcony terrace affords an ocean view – although you'll have to put up with traffic noise.

Getting There & Away

Mazo is sandwiched between the LP-1 and LP-132 highways. Get here by bus 3 (10 daily), which links Mazo with Los Llanos (€4.40, one hour), Fuencaliente (€1.70, 30 minutes) and Santa Cruz (€1.45, 20 minutes).

PARQUE ECOLÓGICO DE BELMACO

The first ancient petroglyphs (rock carvings) found on the archipelago were discovered at this site in 1752. A 300m trail that winds

around various cave dwellings once inhabited by Benahoare tribes people is the heart of this 'ecological park', but the real attractions are the whorling, sworling, squiggling rock etchings, which date to AD 150. There's also a museum and small shop.

Belmaco (☎ 922 44 00 90; Carretera a Fuencaliente Km7; admission €2; ☎ 10am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun) boasts four sets of engravings, and experts remain perplexed about their meaning, though they speculate that the etchings could have been religious symbols.

Bus 7 from Santa Cruz heads down this way four times daily (except weekends). The nearest bus stop is about 400m south of the cave.

PLAYA BLANCA

Just 1.3km north along the LP-132 highway from the Parque Ecológico de Belmaco is an unmarked road that leads down to **Playa Blanca** (White Beach, though 'Salt and Pepper Beach' would be a better name). A perfect picnic spot, here you'll find a tiny hippy hamlet with a few summer homes, a tranquil beach and a rocky coast perfect for fishing or crabbing.

FUENCALIENTE

pop 1856

South of Belmaco, the LP-132 highway joins with the larger LP-1 and leads to Fuencaliente (Hot Fountain). The area gets its name from hot springs that were once believed to treat leprosy, but were buried by a fiery volcano in the 17th century. The original spring should be restored and opened to the public soon. Don't think that the volcanoes have calmed down; the last eruption was in 1971, when Volcán Teneguía's lava flow added a few hectares to the island's size.

You'll drive through a lovely pine forest before reaching Los Canarios de Fuencaliente, the urban centre of Fuencaliente.

Sights & Activities

Creating a stark, at times lunarlike, landscape, the volcanoes in this area are the newest in the archipelago and are the main draw of Fuencaliente. The beauty of their low, ruddy cones belies the violence with which they erupted.

Don't miss the short but breathtaking walk along the rim of **Volcán San Antonio** (☎ 922 44 46 16; adult/under 13yr €3/free; ☎ 9am-6pm Oct-mid-Mar, 9am-7pm mid-Mar-Jun, 9am-8pm Jul-Sep). It takes just

DETOUR

If you're in the mood for some scenic driving, take the LP-1282 highway far past the Princess resort complex to the very southern tip of the island and the **Playas del Faro** (Lighthouse Beach) and **Las Salinas** (a salt deposit known as a bird-watcher's paradise). Return to civilisation by following the highway, now called LP-130, north to complete the loop. Be careful at night; the road is curvy and unlit.

20 minutes to walk the gravel path halfway around the yawning chasm of this great black cone, which last blew in 1949 and is now being repopulated by hardy Canary pines. Afterwards, take a look at the small visitor centre, where a seismograph constantly measuring volcanic movement in the area shows a boring but comforting straight line. You can also take a **camel ride** (15min €6) around the volcano.

From the visitor centre, a signposted trail leads you to **Volcán Teneguía**; its 1971 eruption leads the archipelago's most recent. The easy walk there and back takes about two hours.

After getting your fill of the craters, check out the town's other claim to fame: the wines made in this volcanic soil. The largest winery in town is **Bodegas Teneguía** (☎ 922 44 40 78; www.vinosteneguia.com; Los Canarios s/n; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-2pm Sun), with white, red and sweet wines that are sold all over the island and beyond. There's also a good restaurant in the winery (see right).

You can also tour Fuencaliente by bike. **Fuencaliente Bikes** (☎ 628 51 32 42; www.fuencaliente.bike.com; bike rental per day €13, guided excursion €35) meets groups in town and leads downhill rides to the beaches (below)

Fuencaliente, with its ideal wind and climate conditions, has become a magnet for paragliding. Experienced paragliders (with their own equipment) often take off in Las Indias and land near the San Antonio volcano, but there are no flights available to novices.

BEACHES

The coast around Fuencaliente is largely inaccessible, with banana plantations, rocky outcrops and steep cliffs lining much of it. Two pleasant exceptions are **Playa de la Zamora**

and **Playa Chica**, black beaches tucked side by side in coves. They're no secret but are rarely crowded. To get here, take the Carretera de Las Indias (LP-1282) past the San Antonio volcano toward the hamlet of Las Indias. Follow the curves downhill until a small sign indicates a turn-off for the *playas* (beaches) to the right.

Sleeping

Apartamentos & Pensión Los Volcanes (☎ 922 44 41 64; Carretera General 86; d/apt €22/25) A nice surprise, with newish, tasteful décor, private bathrooms and some rooms with a small balcony. Apartments are studio-style, with a kitchenette, sitting area and bed all in the same room.

El Nísparo (☎ 902 43 06 25; www.islabonita.es; Las Indias, Fuencaliente; 1-3-person rural house €45-55) Nestled among vineyards in the hamlet of Las Indias, just outside Los Canarios, this intimate rural house is the ideal escape, with a terrace overlooking the Atlantic and original touches like a round kitchen with a wood ceiling.

Hotel La Palma Teneguía Princess & Spa (☎ 922 42 55 00; Carretera La Costa Cerca Vieja 10; 📞 📺 📺 📺 📺) Technically two hotels (La Palma Princess and Teneguía Princess), this sprawling, self-contained resort complex near the waterfront (8km south of Los Canarios) is the most ambitious hotel on the island. With 625 rooms, several pools and marvellous ocean views, the overall effect is pleasing. But keep in mind that you're a winding, 20-minute drive from anything, and public transport down here is limited (four buses a day). To explore the island, stay elsewhere.

Eating

El Quinto Pino (☎ 922 44 45 16; LP-1282, Las Indias; mains €6-10; ☎ Thu-Sun; 🍴) Pizzas, grilled meats and vegetables are the speciality at this tiny, family-run spot in the hamlet of Las Indias, northwest of Los Canarios.

Tasca La Era (☎ 922 44 44 75; Carretera Antonio Paz y Paz 6; mains €7-12; ☎ closed Wed) A farmhouse-style restaurant with a terrace and garden area, this is a charming spot for simple meat and fish dishes.

El Patio del Vino (☎ 922 44 46 23; Los Canarios s/n; mains €9-12; ☎ closed Mon) Behind the Bodegas Teneguía is this upscale restaurant, where house soups and local game dishes are served in a tranquil and spacious dining room.

Getting There & Away

Bus 7 (€3.20, one hour, up to five daily) heads between Fuencaliente and Santa Cruz via Mazo. Bus 3 (€3.20, one hour, up to eight daily) stops in Fuencaliente, except weekends, on its way between Los Llanos and Santa Cruz.

THE SOUTHWESTERN COAST

The road up the west coast from the bottom tip of the island is full of open curves that swoop past green hills dotted with cacti and low shrubs. The highway runs along a ridge, leaving the glittering ocean a blue haze to the left. Other than the view, there's not much here, unless you count the small bar at the **mirador** (lookout) 6km out of Fuencaliente in the tiny town of El Charco.

Keep heading north and you'll travel through a series of tiny, almost uninhabited villages. Stop in **San Nicolás** for a while (it's 1km past the village of Jedey), to eat at **Bodegon Tamanca** (☎ 922 49 41 55; Carretera General; mains €4-12; ☹ closed Sun dinner & Mon), an atmospheric restaurant located in a spacious, natural cave with stone-topped tables and booths that seem to be dug into the rock. This is a meat lover's kind of establishment, whether you like it grilled, cured or stewed.

THE CENTRE

The bowl-shaped Caldera de Taburiente, and the national park named after it, dominate the centre of La Palma, with rocky peaks, deep ravines and lush pine forests blanketing the slopes. The LP-2 highway, which links Santa Cruz with Los Llanos, skirts the southern rim of the park, and from the road you can sometimes see the characteristic cloud blanket that fills the interior of the caldera and spills over its sides like a pot boiling over.

Two of the island's important commercial centres, El Paso and Los Llanos (the island's largest town), are here, making this region the economic engine of La Palma. It's also a key banana-growing area and, as you near the west coast, banana plantations fill the valleys. The coast is home to some of the island's longest and prettiest beaches.

EL PASO

pop 7440

The gateway to the Parque Nacional de la Caldera de Taburiente (p224) – the park's visitor centre is just outside town – El Paso is the island's largest municipality, with sprawling forests and around 8 sq km of cultivated land. The modest town centre, however, won't detain you for long. If you're driving into town, turn right at the 'Casco Histórico' sign to reach the main attractions.

The first stop is the **silk workshop** (☎ 922 48 56 31; Calle Manuel Taño 6; ☹ 10am-1pm Mon, Wed & Fri, 10am-1pm & 5-7pm Tue & Thu), where silk is made according to traditions that have barely changed since the industry arrived on the island in the 16th century. The restored 18th-century **Ermita de la Virgen de la Concepción de la Bonanza** is a curiously painted little chapel. Renovations mercifully left intact the splendid *mudéjar* ceiling above the altar.

El Paso's real appeal is its natural beauty, and a great way to enjoy it is on horseback. The German owners of **Finca Corazón** (☎ 699 62 95 17; www.la-palma-reiten.com; Cuesta de la Juliana, El Paso; guided excursions €40-75; ☹ 11am-6pm) will take equestrians of all levels on 2½- to five-hour rides in and around the national park.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión La Tienda (☎ 922 49 73 42; www.lapalma-pension.de; Calle Cruz Grande 1; d €25-70, 2-person apt €60; ☹) Six immaculate rooms in a whitewashed, traditional Canary house on the outskirts of town make up this friendly guesthouse. A well-tended garden and fruit trees give it a tropical air. For a real treat, book the Suite Don Andreo, with its own terrace and romantic fireplace.

Casa Elida (☎ 922 48 61 65; www.casaelida.de; Calle Pilar 3; 2-4-person apt €35-69) Several old stone Canary houses huddled together have been converted into six quaint apartments with terraces and gardens. Simple, clean and rustic, the apartments themselves are appealing, but the setting is fabulous.

Bodegón La Abuela (☎ 922 48 56 09; Calle General Tajuya 49; mains €4-12; ☹ closed Thu) On your left as you leave El Paso toward Los Llanos, this home-style eatery with a terrace serves delicious rabbit and game dishes.

La Cascada (☎ 922 48 57 27; Carretera Cumbre; mains €4-12; ☹ closed Thu) Just 1km out of town you'll find this hearty restaurant popular with local workmen (always a sign of fair

prices and filling food). Spare ribs, veal chops, veal tongue stew... vegetarians best look elsewhere!

REFUGIO DEL PILAR

On the LP-203 highway, outside El Paso off the LP-2, is the **Refugio del Pilar** (☎ 922 41 15 83), an expansive park with a picnic area and camp site. You can pitch a tent for up to seven days at this tidy park, which has shower and toilet facilities, but you'll need to get permission one week in advance from the island's **Cabildo** (☎ 922 41 15 83; fax 922 42 01 87; Avenida de los Indios 20, La Palma).

This is the trailhead of the popular **Ruta de los Volcanes**, a 19km hiking trail that meanders through ever-changing volcanic scenery and gives privileged views of both coasts as it heads south along the mountain ridge, through the heart of volcanic territory and towards Fuencaliente (p218). This trail is

part of the long-distance GR-130. Allow six to seven hours for the trek – it's demanding and is best undertaken on cool, cloudy days, as there is not much shade or fresh water along the way. You should arrange transport from Fuencaliente.

LOS LLANOS DE ARIDANE

pop 21,045

The economic centre of the island, Los Llanos lacks the obvious charm of the capital or some of the smaller villages, but the shady plazas and pedestrian streets of the historic centre are worth exploring. Set in a fertile valley, this has historically been one of the island's richest areas, with a long tradition of cultivating sugar cane, bananas and, more recently, avocados. These days it's home to many of the island's business and services, and many young Palmeros are moving here to find jobs.

LOCAL VOICES

Uke is not what you could call soft-spoken. A bar owner and part-time tour guide, he's known for entertaining his charges with opinionated tales (in English, Spanish or German) of La Palma's history, culture and current events as he leads them huffing and puffing along the island's hilly trails. Today he and group of two dozen visitors are tackling the 19km Ruta de los Volcanes (Volcano Route), which runs along a mountain ridge in the south of the island.

Uke, who grew up in Venezuela after his Palmero parents migrated there in the 1960s, doesn't even get winded as he rattles off facts about his ancestors' homeland. 'Canary pine trees can live 500 years. They survive lava flows in part because of their very thick bark,' he says, his foot propped up on a stump where the bark is 10cm thick. 'That black hill is the volcanic cone where the island's last eruption happened in 1971,' he says, pointing in the distance. 'The banana crop still represents 80% of the island's economy... One of the best desserts of La Palma is *Príncipe Alberto*... If you want to enjoy island nightlife, you should come at Christmas or during Easter week, when all the students come home from the university on Tenerife... The best restaurant for fresh fish is Casa Goyo...'

The lively commentary goes on for hours. He's like a human encyclopaedia with only one entry: the island of La Palma.

Uke's story is not unlike that of many Canarios. The son of emigrants, he finally returned to La Palma as an adult, now that the island's hardest economic times have passed. Yet, although he's clearly enamoured with his island, not all is not paradise here, he insists.

'Part of the trail we're hiking on right now will be turned into a golf course if the politicians have their way,' he says.

'Overdevelopment is bad for all of us. It destroys the landscape that people travel all this way to see. But it also destroys the island lifestyle. For example, right now almost everyone on the island is involved in the banana industry one way or another. If developers are allowed to build golf courses (which must be watered) the price of water will go up and the banana plantations won't be cost-effective. The Palmeros will end up selling their banana plantations and losing their source of extra income.'

Uke spreads his pro-preservation gospel to the dozens of tourists who walk with him every week. Is it making a difference? He can't say. But about one thing, he's insistent: 'Enjoy La Palma while you can, because changes are coming.'

if charmless, rooms, some with balconies overlooking the plaza. Rooms and common areas are spacious enough, but we've seen coat closets bigger than the bathrooms.

our pick Hotel Amberes (☎ 922 40 10 40; www.hotel-amberes.com; Calle General Franco 13; s/d with breakfast €60/95; ☎ reception 11am-2pm). A renovated 1660 manor house with just seven well-appointed rooms, this romantic spot in the heart of town boasts a pretty interior patio, Canary-style balconies, gorgeous wooden floors and ceilings and luxuriously simple furnishings. If reception is unattended, go to Restaurante Amberes on Calle Luna.

Eating

The cafés dotting the Plaza España are ideal for breakfast, a midday coffee break or an informal lunch.

Market (Plaza Mercado; ☎ 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) Browse the fresh market for fruit, veggies, cheese, meat and more. The perfect spot for self-caterers.

Salta Si Puedes (☎ 922 46 38 79; Avenida Tanausú 29; mains €5-10; ☎ closed Wed) Choose between an old-fashioned formal dining room or a rustic, summer-camp-like room with long communal tables to savour the grilled meats and fish that are the staple of this homey eatery, a 15-minute walk beyond the centre.

Aridane Grill-Restaurante (☎ 922 46 43 14; Calle Francis Fernández Taño 29; mains €8-11; ☎ closed Sun) Although the grilled meats and fish are delicious, Aridane's real claim to fame is its fabulous setting inside a Canarian patio, where you can see the flames of the grill dancing and even peek above the patio walls to catch a glimpse of mountains in the distance.

Getting There & Away

Buses from the **bus station** (Calle Luis Felipe Gómez Wanguemert) include bus 1 (€4.20, 50 minutes, up to 17 daily) to Santa Cruz, bus 3 (€2.70, 40 minutes, up to eight daily) to Fuencaiente and bus 4 (€1.30, 20 minutes, up to 21 daily) to Puerto Naos.

TAZACORTE

pop 6500

One of La Palma's most charming destinations, the historic town and port of Tazacorte is strung out along the western coast. The port marks the spot where Spanish conquistadors first came ashore in the 15th century. Shortly after, they built the island's first church, **San**

Miguel Arcángel (Plaza España), just inland. The cluster of small houses that today forms the nucleus of the old town followed in the 16th century. There's a small **tourist office** (☎ 686 98 77 22; Plaza España; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Fri) here.

Most people, however, come for the sun and black sand of the manicured resort at the far northern end of town. Hemmed in by stoic volcanic cliffs, the baylike **beach** is calm. Not so calm is the steep climb up to **Mirador de El Time**, which begins here. Bring plenty of water, plan to sweat and give yourself 2½ hours for the trek. Better yet, catch a ride up to the *mirador* in a **taxi** (☎ 922 48 06 52) and hike down to the beach, marvelling at the views.

Get out on the water with **Agamenon** (☎ 650 77 77 48; adult/child €20/10; ☎ 10am-3.30pm), a leisure boat that takes several daily excursions to see whales, explore coastal caverns or deep-sea fish.

Sleeping & Eating

Apartamentos Luz y Mar (☎ 922 40 81 63, 922 42 85 02; 1-2-person apt €30-38; ☎) One of several basic apartments by the beach, Luz y Mar offers a small, uncluttered place to lay your head, with kitchens, balconies and ocean views. The rooftop pool is a plus.

Apartamentos Miramar (☎ 922 46 34 39; 2-person apt €30) These simple apartments, a short walk from the beach, boast balconies and kitchens.

Taberna del Puerto (☎ 922 40 61 18; Plaza Castilla 1; mains €7-15) One of several waterfront restaurants, this one has an attractive, rustic feel and an enviable ocean view. Paella and grilled fish and meats dominate the menu.

Getting There & Away

If you're driving and want to visit the historic centre, park on the main highway that cuts through town. Don't get caught in Tazacorte's maze of one-way streets. Otherwise, head down to the port where there is plenty of street parking.

PUERTO NAOS

One of La Palma's two tourism centres (Los Cancajos, on the east coast, is the other), Puerto Naos is a town that exists almost solely for the tourists who come to relax on its beautiful black beach, rest under its palm trees, soak up the views of its glittering ocean and stroll along its beach-front promenade. Huddled around a rounded bay and protected on

either side by tall rock cliffs, the town makes a good base for sun lovers who want easy access to the north and interior.

Activities

Lolling on the soft black-sand beach may well take up all your time here. But if you're in the mood for more excitement, try scuba diving with **Tauchpartner** (☎ 922 40 81 39; www.tauchpartner-lapalma.de; Edificio Playa Delfin 1; dive €30; 🕒 9.30-11am & 5-7pm Mon-Sat). It offers a range of classes as well as single dives.

Cyclists can call on **Bike Station** (☎ 922 40 83 55; Avenida Cruz Roja, local 3; bike rental per day €6-24, guided trip €38-44; 🕒 9am-1pm & 6-8pm Mon-Sat), offering rentals and a range of challenging guided mountain-bike rides.

Paragliding is quickly gaining momentum here; aficionados come from throughout Europe to take advantage of the island's ideal conditions and easy take-off and landing sites. Arrange for a tandem glide with **Kiosco Playa Morena** (☎ 610 69 57 50; Paseo Marítima; tandem glide €80-130; 🕒 noon-6pm).

Viajes Yadir (☎ 922 40 81 06; Avenida Marítima; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sat) offers a bit of everything, from car hire to bus trips.

Sleeping

The town centre is full of apartment blocks, most of them family-run affairs advertising vacancies with a small sign on the door. Make it easy on yourself by contacting **Tamanca** (☎ 922 40 81 47; www.tamanca.com; Calle Mauricio Duque Camacho 46a; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Fri, 9am-2pm Sat), an agency that rents out properties in and around Puerto Naos.

Sol La Palma (☎ 922 40 80 00; www.solmelia.com; Punta del Pozo s/n, Playa de Puerto Naos; s €43-73, d €86-146, apt €71-116; 📞 📺 📺) If you don't want to self-cater, this package-tourism-style hotel is your only bet. With a sprawling, kid-filled pool overlooking the Atlantic, beige I-could-be-anywhere-in-the-world rooms and an all-you-can-eat buffet, it's your standard resort hotel but is comfortable.

Bungalows Sonvida (☎ 922 46 38 36; www.bungalows-sonvida.com; Todoque; 1-2-person bungalow per week €280-410; 📞 📺) Located outside Puerto Naos in the tiny town of Todoque, these apartments and bungalows are set among lush gardens. A pool, sunny terraces and great views make this a soothing escape. Rooms, with a mix of Canary- and Ikea-style decor, are spacious and tidy.

Eating

Orinoco (www.islalapalma.com/orinoco; Calle Manuel Rodríguez Quintero 1; mains €5-10; 🕒 closed Wed) It's not the kind of place that charms by looks alone, but this homey spot is the locals' favourite for fresh fish and traditional Palmero desserts.

La Roca (☎ 922 40 82 14; Paseo Marítima 4; mains €8.50-16) Both fish and meat lovers coincide on the beach-side terrace of La Roca, where the sound of crashing waves may interfere with conversation – all the better to concentrate on dishes of fried baby cuttlefish, grouper fillet and leg of lamb.

Getting There & Away

Bus 4 (€1.25, 20 minutes, up to 21 daily) makes the trip to and from Los Llanos.

PARQUE NACIONAL DE LA CALDERA DE TABURIENTE

Declared a national park in 1954, this pristine nature reserve is the heart of La Palma, both geographically and symbolically. Extended across 46.9 sq km, it encompasses thick Canary pine forests, a wealth of freshwater springs and streams, waterfalls, impressive rock formations and many kilometres of hiking trails. Although you can reach a few *miradores* by car, you'll need to explore on foot to really experience the park's beauty. Before you start out, see the boxed text, p45. The morning, before clouds obscure the views, is the best time to visit.

The heart of the park is the **Caldera de Taburiente** itself (literally, the Taburiente 'Stewpot' or 'Caldron'). A massive depression 8km wide and surrounded by soaring rock walls (it doesn't take much imagination to see where the name came from), it was first given the moniker in 1825 by German geologist Leopold von Buch, who took it to be a massive volcanic crater. The word 'caldera' stuck, and was used as a standard term for such volcanic craters the world over. This caldera, however, is no crater, although volcanic activity was key in its creation. Scientists now agree that this was a majestically tall volcanic mountain, and that it collapsed on itself. Through the millennia, erosion excavated this tall-walled amphitheatre.

As you explore the quiet park, all may seem impressively stoic and still, but the forces of erosion are hard at work. Landslides and collapsing *roques* (pillars of volcanic rock) are

frequent, and some geologists estimate it will finally disappear in just 5000 years. See this fast erosion near the **Mirador de la Cumbrecita**, where a group of pines stands atop a web of exposed roots, clinging miraculously to the hilltop. These trees were once planted firmly in the ground, but metres of soil have been lost during their lifetime.

Information

The interesting **visitor centre** (☎ 922 49 72 77; caldera@mma.es; Carretera General de Padrón; ☎ 9am-2pm & 4-6.30pm) is 5km outside El Paso on the LP-2 highway and offers free general information (be sure to pick up the English *Caldera de Taburiente Paths* map), detailed maps and guides and an excellent museum. The centre's 20-minute film (shown occasionally in English) is worth seeing. Bus 1 (€1 from El Paso, 10 minutes) between Santa Cruz de la Palma and Los Llanos stops by hourly.

Walking

Many trails traverse the park, but unless you plan to spend several days exploring, you'll probably stick to the better-known paths outlined here. Most are in good shape, though the trail from La Cumbrecita to the camp site is notoriously slippery and should be avoided by novice hikers, and the trail running down the Barranco de las Angustias can be dangerous in rainy weather.

Signposting is improving but may still be confusing. Although you're unlikely to get really lost (and there are usually groups of hikers out on the trail to help you if necessary), you're best off buying a detailed map, like the 1:25,000 *Caldera de Taburiente Parque Nacional*, for sale at the visitor centre.

THE SOUTHERN END

Most people access the park from either El Paso or Los Llanos. You'll need a car, taxi or guide to cart you up to one of the *miradores* that serve as trailheads.

To get an overview of the park, there's no better walk than the PR LP 13 trail, which begins at **Los Brecitos** (1081m). Get there from Los Llanos by following the signs first to Los Barros and then on to Los Brecitos. The path leads through a quiet Canary pine forest, past the park camp site, across a babbling brook, and down the Barranco de las Angustias, crossing countless small streams along the way. Watch out for interesting sights like the

brightly coloured **mineral water** that flows orange and green, the interesting shapes made by **pillow lava**, and rock formations like the phallic **Roque Idafe**, an important spiritual site for the Benahoaritas. This six-hour hike is popular and is suitable for anyone in average-to-good physical shape. Be careful, however, if it has rained recently or if a storm seems imminent; the 'Gorge of Fear' can quickly become a raging torrent, and people caught in its fast-rising waters have died.

The best way to hike this trail is to park at Las Hoyas, at the base of the Barranco de las Angustias. From here, 4WD **taxi shuttle services** (☎ 922 40 35 40; per person €10; ☎ 8am-noon) whisk you up to Los Brecitos and allow you to enjoy the descent back to your car without backtracking.

Another option is to drive up the LP-202 from the visitor centre to the **Mirador de la Cumbrecita** (1287m), where there is a small **information office** (☎ 9am-7pm). The 7km drive passes turn-offs for the Pista de Valencia and the Ermita del Pino, leading you through a peaceful pine forest to sweeping views of the valley. From the car park, you can make an around-trip hike up to the panoramic views from **Pico Bejenado**; allow 2½ hours for the trek. Those with less time can take a 3km circuit trail to both the **Mirador de los Roques** and the **Mirador Lomo de las Chozas** (♿); the final part of the loop is a flat, wheelchair- and stroller-friendly 1km trail between Lomo de las Chozas and the car park. The very best views can be had at sunrise or sunset.

THE NORTHERN END

A string of rocky peaks soaring nearly 2500 metres high surrounds the caldera, and the trail running along these rock walls affords a thrilling vantage point from which to observe the park and the rest of the island. A narrow dirt trail, part of the long-distance GR-131, skims the entire northern border of the park, and shorter trails branch off of it and venture down deeper into the park.

One of the most spectacular sections runs between the **Roque de los Muchachos** and the **Pico de la Nieve**, which is off the LP-1032, a winding highway that branches off the LP-1 highway 3km north of Santa Cruz and snakes its way across the island, skirting the rim of the park and its northern peaks. Avoid backtracking by taking two cars and leaving one at the *pico* (the

THE WORLD'S LARGEST TELESCOPE

No, those round, space-age-looking things squatting on the peak of Roque de los Muchachos aren't something from a theme park, and no, they're not alien spaceships come to explore earth. They are the telescopes of the island's astronomical observatory, one of the world's best places to study the night sky. Tossed out in the Atlantic, far from urban centres and city lights, La Palma is an ideal place to stargaze. More than 75% of the nights here on El Roque are clear, a statistic that's hard to beat.

Since the 2007 unveiling of the mammoth Grantecan (Gran Telescopio Canario, or GTC), the Roque de los Muchachos Observatory boasts the world's largest telescope. The €1 million investment allows scientists to 'study the formation and evolution of the galaxies throughout the history of the universe, investigate why more stars were formed in the past than now, or observe the rings of spatial material that give birth to new planets near young stars,' the scientific director of the GTC, José Miguel Rodríguez, told the Spanish press.

Although the new telescope is grabbing everyone's attention, the observatory was long home to Europe's largest telescope and has been the site of important research. La Palma's observatory is linked with the Teide Astronomic Observatory on Tenerife, and together they form the Instituto de Astrofísica de Canarias (IAC). The observatory is normally closed to the public, but until 9pm you're free to drive around.

parking area is a 20-minute walk from the trail itself). Then drive (or get a ride) up to the Roque de los Muchachos, the highest point on the island at 2426m. The walk back down to the Pico de la Nieve should take four to five hours.

Numerous *miradores* dot the LP-1032 highway around the Roque de los Muchachos; even if you don't hike the rim, the views from up here are worth seeking out. At night, this area offers unbeatable **stargazing** (see the boxed text, above).

Sleeping & Eating

The park's only **camp site** (free) offers basic services for 100 people at a peaceful spot beside a stream. To stay here, contact the visitor centre (p225) 15 days in advance to request a permit. The maximum stay is two nights in summer and six nights in winter. You will need to show your passport to pick up the permit. There are bathrooms here but no food services; bring everything you'll need (and take it away when you leave).

Getting There & Away

No roads run through the park, and there are only three ways to access it: via the LP-202 near the visitor centre, via the track that goes from Los Llanos to Los Brecitos, or via the LP-1032 highway in the north. There are no buses.

THE NORTH

The dense tropical forests, fertile hills and towering pines that create a blanket of green over the northern half of the island couldn't be further away from the volcanic, sun-baked south. This is the least-accessible – and many say most beautiful – part of the island, with rocky cliffs plunging into sapphire waters and deserted black beaches surrounded by palm trees.

SAN ANDRÉS & LOS SAUCES

pop 5380

San Andrés, 3km off the main LP-1 highway, is like something from a storybook, with hilly, cobblestone streets that lead past low, whitewashed houses. The **Iglesia de San Andrés** has its origins in 1515 and is one of the first churches the Spanish conquerors built on the island, though most of what you see today was built in the 17th century. Inside, take a look at the lavish baroque altarpieces and the coffered ceiling.

Los Sauces, just north of San Andrés, is a modern town with two pretty central squares (or one big one bisected by the highway, depending on how you look at it). The grand church, **Nuestra Señora de Montserrat**, is on the square and has some valuable Flemish artwork inside. Named for the patron of Catalunya, this church is evidence of the many Catalans who participated in the island's conquest.

More important (and more interesting) than anything in Los Sauces itself is the **Los Tiles biosphere reserve** (below) just out of town.

Sleeping & Eating

Pensión Martín (☎ 922 45 05 39; Calle San Sebastián; s/d €18/25) The simple rooms have views of the owners' garden and the mountains behind. The three rooms share a bathroom, the place is clean and the owners are friendly.

Pensión Las Lonjas (☎ 922 45 07 36; Calle San Sebastián 16; s/d €20/25) The house itself is in a charming, traditional Canary style. The street-level rooms, which open onto the highway, are modern and attractive, if somewhat damp and dark.

La Placita (☎ 922 45 03 87; mains €2-5; ☒ closed Wed; ☑) One of several restaurants on the main plaza in San Andrés, this informal café has a good selection of salads, sandwiches, egg dishes and pizzas.

Getting There & Away

Bus 11 (€3.10, 25 minutes, up to 9 daily) connects Santa Cruz with the centre of Los Sauces; those heading to San Andrés will have to walk or try asking the driver to make an extra stop.

CHARCO AZUL

Beyond San Andrés on the LP-104 highway is a sign pointing the way to Charco Azul, a beautiful swimming hole 3km further on. A bit of tastefully applied concrete has been added to the volcanic rocks along the shore to make a series of natural-looking saltwater pools with sunbathing platforms between them.

Past Charco Azul, construction work is underway on the **Puerto Espindola**. When it's finished (and no-one's making guesses on when that will be) it will have a nice beach, a garden and a small recreational port.

LOS TILES

A biosphere reserve since 1983, the nearly 140 sq km of Los Tiles are covered with a lushly beautiful rainforest that's literally oozing with life. This moist, cool, natural wonderland is one of the most magical spots on the island, a must-explore place where you can wander among the diverse flora and fauna and the largest *laurisilva* (laurel) forest on the island.

At the helpful **visitor centre** (☎ 922 45 12 46; www.lapalmbiosfera.com; ☒ 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-5pm

Nov-Jun, 8.30am-2pm & 2.30-6.30pm Jul-Oct) you'll find maps, a video about the biosphere and a small museum. Nearby is a rustic **restaurant** (☎ 922 45 12 46; mains €7-10, ☒ closed Wed) serving grilled meats on outdoor picnic tables.

Fabulous hiking trails cut through Los Tiles' dense vegetation. The shortest walk is the steep 750m climb up to the **Mirador Topo de las Barandas** (allow 45 minutes round trip), where around 700 steps leads to a spectacular view of the gorge running out of the reserve.

Even better, though, is the long, ravine-side hike to the **Marcos and Cordero Springs**, which passes through a dozen damp tunnels (bring a flashlight and rain jacket) and winds past waterfalls, through forest and alongside volcanic dikes. The hike isn't incredibly steep (except in short stretches), but it can be slick; be careful. A popular way to tackle this hike is to get a **taxi** (☎ 922 45 09 28, 616 41 88 47; per person €15) from Los Tiles car park up to the Casa del Monte; call two to three days ahead for a taxi. From here, the hike to the springs and back should take about four hours.

Getting There & Away

Coming from Santa Cruz, follow the signs to Los Tiles off the LP-1 highway. The visitor centre is 3km up LP-107, which runs alongside the lush Barranco del Agua. No buses venture up here, so you'll need either your own wheels or strong legs.

BARLOVENTO

pop 2360

Skip the town itself in favour of the natural attractions that lie beyond, like the **Piscinas de la Fajana**, calm saltwater pools where frothy waves pound just beyond the subtle concrete barriers. About 5km east of Barlovento, on the LP-1 highway, you'll turn-off toward this starkly beautiful coastal spot, where red-tinged rocks and a savage ocean create a memorable Kodak moment. Bring snorkelling gear to appreciate the underwater scenery.

Dine at **La Gaviota** (☎ 922 18 60 99; mains €7-15), a restaurant set inside a cave above the beach. Lots of fried fish and a token sirloin steak make up the menu. If you want to linger longer, stay at **Apartamentos La Fajana** (☎ 922 18 61 62; 2-person apt €30-36), where the whitewashed apartments with balconies and amazing ocean views have a real away-from-the-world feel.

Inland, head to the **Laguna de Barlovento** (☎ 922 69 60 23; camp site per tent €4.50; ☒ 9am-8pm),

a camp site and recreational area set beside an agricultural holding tank (that is, the *laguna*) built inside the crater of an extinct volcano. Call ahead to request permission to camp here.

For more creature comforts, and the only three-star hotel this side of Santa Cruz, head to **Hotel La Palma Romántica** (☎ 922 18 62 21; www.hotella-palmaromantica.com; Las Llanadas s/n, Barlovento; s/d €78/108; 📍 🚗), a rural hotel with an elegant restaurant (mains €8 to €11) and sweeping views of the valley. The 44 rooms are spacious, with high ceilings, terraces, lounge chairs and a sitting area. They could have used some of that space for the bathrooms, though – they're tiny.

PARQUE CULTURAL LA ZARZA

Two Benahoare petroglyphs are the main attraction at the **Parque Cultural La Zarza** (☎ 922 69 50 05; adult/child €1.80/0.90; 🕒 11am-7pm summer, to 5pm winter). Heading west out along the LP-1 towards La Mata, the park is 1km past the turn-off for La Mata (it's on a curve and easy to miss – keep an eye out for the signpost). To actually see the geometric-shaped etchings, take the 1.5km circuit into the park itself. Back at the visitor centre, you can watch an informative 20-minute video about the life of the original inhabitants and take a tour around the interactive museum.

FROM LA ZARZA TO TAZACORTE

Ethereal, pristine, stoic, eerie, peaceful... choose your adjective for the lonely land-

scapes here on the island's northwestern coast. Pine forests, fallow fields, occasional rural settlements and sweeping views of the banana plantations by the Atlantic are the main attractions between La Zarza and Tazacorte (p223). This is a solitary, tranquil area that was largely isolated from the rest of the island until recent times. Countless hiking trails, many of them quite challenging, provide most of the entertainment here.

The small towns of **Puntagorda** and **Tijarafe** are worth a brief stop, if only to wander the streets of their historic centres. There is a **camp site** (☎ 922 49 33 06; www.airelibrelapalma.org; camp site per person €5, tent rental per day €4, cabin rental per person €10; 📍) at Puntagorda that offers guided hikes for groups. Tijarafe is home to a small **museum** (☎ 922 49 00 72; Casa del Maestro, Calle 18 de Julio 11; 🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Fri summer, to 3pm winter) dedicated to traditional culture. To get to the museum, follow the signs to the Casa del Maestro from the main highway.

Several lookouts offer privileged vantage points of the northwest coast's inspiring scenery. **La Muralla Restaurant** (☎ 660 32 23 05; Carretera General Aguatavar; mains €8-12; 🕒 closed Mon), between Puntagorda and Tijarafe, offers fine dining (fresh fish, kebabs, pork chops, steak, paella) with even finer views from the breezy terrace or minimalist dining room. Just south of Puntagorda is **Mirador de Garome**, overlooking a majestic gorge. Further south, **Mirador del Time** looks out over Tazacorte.