

Island ride

The Canary Islands aren't all about packed 737s and package holidays. La Gomera (an hour's ferry ride from Tenerife) has some brilliant roads

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: Chris Neary



Tiger and Elaine seek the shade, but the temperature in January was a comfy 23 degrees.

After years of driving holiday hire cars around superb Canarian mountain roads I was badly missing my bike – and finally decided to do something about it. So after being offered a pittance to trade in my three-year-old, high mileage (36,000?), Triumph Tiger 1050, I decided to stick hold and take her to stay at our Tenerife apartment.

The outbound journey, with my wife Elaine on pillion, is a whole other travel story for another day, but from our base out here we could re-explore Tenerife on two wheels and visit the other Canary Islands. First on the list was La Gomera.

La Gomera is a small island about 25 miles west of Tenerife and can be reached via a fast ferry from the popular holiday destination of Los Cristianos on Tenerife's south coast. A return fare for two plus motorcycle costs about €100. We took the early morning crossing when the weather is clearer, arriving about an hour later in San Sebastian. The views back to Tenerife, dominated by Mount Teide, provided a stunning backdrop against the clear blue skies.

San Sebastian was Christopher Columbus's last call before heading off across the Atlantic, but for us it was the start of our day ride. Off the ferry, and within minutes we were climbing fantastic mountainside roads towards the Garajonay National Park, which covers the entire central area of the island. La Gomera is extremely mountainous, with many of the peaks extending right down to the coast, so there's no obvious coastal road to circumnavigate the island. Instead, the main roads form a convenient figure of eight through the mountains with many spurs leading off into ravines, eventually reaching dead ends where island stops and Atlantic begins. So communication isn't one of the island's strong points – locals on opposite sides of the many valleys used to keep in touch by a form of whistling speech!



Roads are pristine, and they apparently drive on the left, eh Chris?

WARM IN JANUARY

We were there in January, when Canary temperatures hover around a comfortable 23 degrees, perfect for motorcycling. Using my Garmin Zumo sat nav we planned to ride most of the available surfaced roads, and allowing for coffee and photo stops, this would amply fill our one-day trip. It's worth the ferry ride to get here,

This was Christopher Columbus's last call before heading over the horizon.





because La Gomera has a very different feel to the larger Canary islands – it's not only very quiet and peaceful but there is hardly any traffic on the mostly well-built roads.

A little prior research using Google Earth provided us with the perfect lunch stop. Mirador Cesar Manrique sits on the spur road leading down to Playa de la Calara, and is built into the side of a mountain providing stunning views from either its rooftop terrace or floor to ceiling panoramic glass wall. Almost vertically below, the twisting road we were about to ride was laid out before us in the sunshine. One of the many hairpins neatly caps a small chapel before the road passes through El Retamal with its verdant terraced landscape climbing up the surrounding steep mountainsides.

After lunch we eventually arrived at the ocean's edge on the west side of the island and reflected on just how much water and how many miles there were to next landfall. Still, turning around provided the opportunity to ride this fantastic road all the way back up to 1400 metres. With no cloud, Mount Teide was clearly visible across the water for most of our ride back down to San Sebastian. Without once seeing a motorway or dual carriageway, we'd covered well over a 100 miles on La Gomera and knew that although we'd seen most areas of the island, we'd hardly scratched the surface.



TOP LEFT: A ferry port's a ferry port – boat takes about an hour from Tenerife.

TOP RIGHT: La Gomera is not for acrophobics.

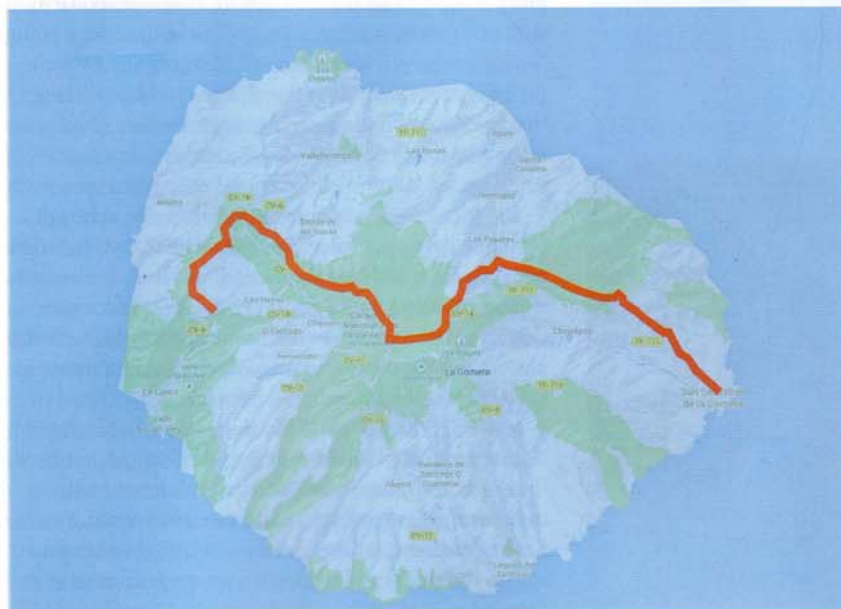
BELOW: You could say that Mount Teide is a bit of a landmark.

How to do it

Not everyone has an apartment on Tenerife to base their spare bike, but it's not that difficult to ride the Canaries. Canary Moto (www.canarymoto.com) will happily hire you anything from a Kawasaki ER-6 to a 1200 GS, starting at €89 for three days. That's the package holiday way to do it.

A more adventurous option is to ride down, which Chris and Elaine Neary did, though it's quite a trek, at 2700 miles. They took the Plymouth-Santander ferry, then had six days for a relaxed tootle across Spain and Portugal to catch the Tenerife ferry at Portimau on the Algarve. The current info is leaving from Huelva, just over the border in Spain. Either way, it's not cheap, at over €600 for two people and a bike to cross in July, and it takes nearly two days. Go to www.naviera-armas.com

Still, not many people have done that by bike from Britain – reason enough to book the ferry now, we'd say.



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Stunning rock formations alongside the mountain roads.

