Laid-back **Lanzarote**

*Leave the hordes behind and find the eccentric heart of this volcanic isle*

It’s the classiest and quirkiest of the Canaries, so expect much more than just Brits-abroad resorts. Pootle off in a hire car and you’ll be blown away by the volcanic scenery, white-cube villages and astounding installation art. Wherever you’re based, nothing is more than an hour away, so explore at your leisure. **By Linda Cookson**
SEE & DO

- Take it from the top and drive up to the scorched silence of Timanfaya National Park (reservasparquesnacionales.es; free guided tours — pre-book online). When its eponymous ‘fire mountains’ erupted in 1730, a quarter of Lanzarote was left crusted with lava. It still feels as eerie as an alien planet, cones and craters creating a stony whirlpool of ochres, greys and coppers. You’ll need to park at the Visitors’ Centre for a coach hop (£9; 35min) to reach the heart of the action. It’s like a ride in a moon-buggy.

- Just south of Timanfaya are the rippling black lava fields of La Geria — wine country. Look out for the semi-circular zocos (lava walls) that protect vines tended by straw-hatted farmers. It looks like a living sculpture park. Have a sip of the prize-winning results at Bodegas El Grifo, the oldest working winery in the Canaries, which has its own small museum (elgrifo.com; £4.50, including a tasting).

- Did you like Timanfaya’s space-age El Diablo restaurant, built from lava stones? And El Grifo’s wine labels? So you should: they’re the work of César Manrique, the Lanzarote-born architect behind most of the island’s genius flourishes. Head north for Jameos del Agua, his extravagant ‘leisure dome’ sculpted from a volcanic seaside tunnel (cactlanzarote.com/es/cact/jameos-del-agua; £8.60). There’s a concert hall and restaurant, and a lake where albino crabs flicker like stars.

- As an inland village, Haría is mostly white-and-green, like equally lovely Yaiza in the south. For a blue-and-white coastal vision, drive west to La Caleta de Famara, where honey-coloured sands unravel under dramatic sea cliffs. Or see sunset spot El Golfo, with its strip of fish restaurants. Just south of El Golfo is the crater-lagoon Charco de los Clicos, backdrop for the iconic ‘60s publicity still of Raquel Welch in a fur bikini.

- Bikinis (fur or otherwise) are optional on several beaches, including the more secluded of the coves that form Punta de Papagayo — the south’s protected National Park (entry £2.70 per vehicle). If you prefer to keep your kit on, make for Papagayo Beach, the third main cove past the toll booth. Quirky beach shack El Chiringuito (00 34 928 173833) has steps down to the stunning half-moon beach and idyllic views across a crumbling rocky archway of cliffs.

- Still some leisure time left? Rejoin the César Manrique trail in earnest. His weird-and-wonderful Jardín de Cactus in the northeast is another star turn. But if you’ve time for just one more thing, visit arts centre Fundación César Manrique in Tahiche (fcmanrique.org; £7), his late-‘60s former home. Subterranean volcanic bubbles house Bond-meets-Marrakech chill-out spaces of pools, louche seating and a dance floor. Imagine the parties!

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EAT

● Wine–country tapas

EL CHUPADERO (Tapas from £5)

Because: This off–road bodega in La Geria has super–tasty tapas (try dates in bacon, or crêpes with cactus jam). Book an outside table for views of shiny vines in the moonlight. Travel’s tip: There are Sunday night concerts once a month or more. Ring to check. Calle de la Geria 3, 00 34 928 177365.

● Lunch with the locals

CASA DE LA PLAYA (Mains about £13)

Because: It’s a much–loved lunch spot on the beach south of Arrieta fishing village. Order the octopus with papas arrugadas (‘wrinkly’ potatoes). Travel’s tip: This is a top stop between Jameos del Agua and Jardín de Cactus if you’re visiting Manrique attractions. Playa de la Garita 1, 00 34 928 173339.

● Seafood on the sand

BOGAVANTE (Mains about £15)

Because: This rustic seafood spot in El Golfo is right on the waterfront. The house special is a cracker: Arroz Con Bogavante, a soupy lobster paella for two (£44). Caldoso con Bogavante, a soupy lobster paella for two (£44). Travel’s tip: Be here in time for one of El Golfo’s magnificent tangerine sunsets. Ave Maritima 39, 00 34 928 173505.

● Innovative fine dining

LA BODEGA DE SAN JACINTO (Mains about £16)

Because: With tables beneath a huge ficus tree and a cluster of intimate dining rooms, this old stone house has charm and an inventive menu. Try the duck breast in dessert (Mains about £16). Travel’s tip: Do check out the traditional interior, with its wooden barrels, old weighing scales and tiled floor. Plaza León y Castillo 1, Haría.

● More Manrique magic

EL RISCO (Mains about £16)

Because: Manrique designed this classy blue–and–white affair in Famara for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs for his brother Carlos, its first owner. Walls are hung with his lithographs. Jardín de Cactus’s own restaurant does a neon–green cactus burger made from prickly pear, potato, onion and corn, served in a bright red bun (£6.50). It tastes a lot better than it sounds...

BECAUSE OF THE LIVELINESS OF LA GRACIOSA ISLAND...
Arty country house
CASONA DE YAIZA (Doubles from £71, B&B)
Because: Fans of Renaissance art will rave over the frescoes, cherubs and gilded mirrors in the 10 lavishly decorated rooms of this restored 19th-century mansion. Don’t miss the underground art gallery in the converted water cistern. Travel’s tip: The restaurant does great fresh fish, but closes mid-May to mid-July.
Calle Valle de Fenauso 11, Yaiza; casonadeyaiza.com.

Designer love-nest
VILLA CASITA CARMELO (Sleeps two from £85, self-catering; one week min)
Because: Decorated in muted earth colours, this secluded hideaway in Haría is a dream destination for loved-up couples. Stargaze from the patio or clink glasses by the romantically lit pool (shared with smaller neighbour, Casita Susi). Travel’s tip: Want to brush up your Spanish? The owners’ son offers Spanish classes for £9 an hour.
Calle Molino 3, Haría; real-lanzarote.com.

Zen retreat
CASA EL MORRO (From £105, B&B; three nights min)
Because: The seven self-catering cottages in this farmstead, in the southern village of Uga, nestle amid citrus trees, figs and jacarandas in gardens dotted with daybeds. There’s a heated salt-water pool, with yoga sessions and massages on tap. Travel’s tip: For a full-on Tibetan vibe, book the yurt — a colourful swirl of silks and kilims.
Calle El Morro 1, Uga; casaelmorro.com.

Platinum card glamour
LANI’S SUITES DE LUXE (Doubles from £275, B&B)
Because: Lanzarote’s mainstream resorts all offer luxury, but this exclusive adult-only enclave in Puerto del Carmen is the bees’ knees, with its 25 ice-white suites and tiers of private Jacuzzis. Travel’s tip: Go easy on the packing — freebies include White Company toiletries, sun hats, Crocs and sun creams.
Ave de Las Playas 26, Puerto del Carmen; lanissuites.com.

GET ME THERE
GO INDEPENDENT
There are good bus services from the airport. No. 161 goes to Playa Blanca resort, taking in Puerto del Carmen and Yaiza. For the north and west, take No. 22, or for the east the No. 23 to Arrecife for connections. Cicar (cicar.com) and Cabrera Medina (cabreramedina.com) offer seven days’ car hire from £90.

GO PACKAGED
Sovereign Luxury Travel (sovereign.com) has a week in a five-star hotel on Playa Blanca, from £1,018pp, B&B, from Gatwick. Or try Mercury Holidays (mercuryholidays.co.uk).

FURTHER INFORMATION
See turismolanzarote.com.

MAKE THAT A DOUBLE
Casa de Hilario, on the northern edge of town, is Casona de Yaiza’s sister hotel. The decor is similarly quirky, but with an added smattering of chinoiserie (casadehilario.com; doubles from £70, B&B)

Zentactics: clockwise from top left, interior of a Casa El Morro cottage; inventive fare at La Bodega de Santiago; the pool at Hotelito del Golfo; Tasca La Raspaabar on the promenade in Arrecife; super-deluxe glamour at Lani’s Suites in Puerto del Carmen

FURTHER INFORMATION
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