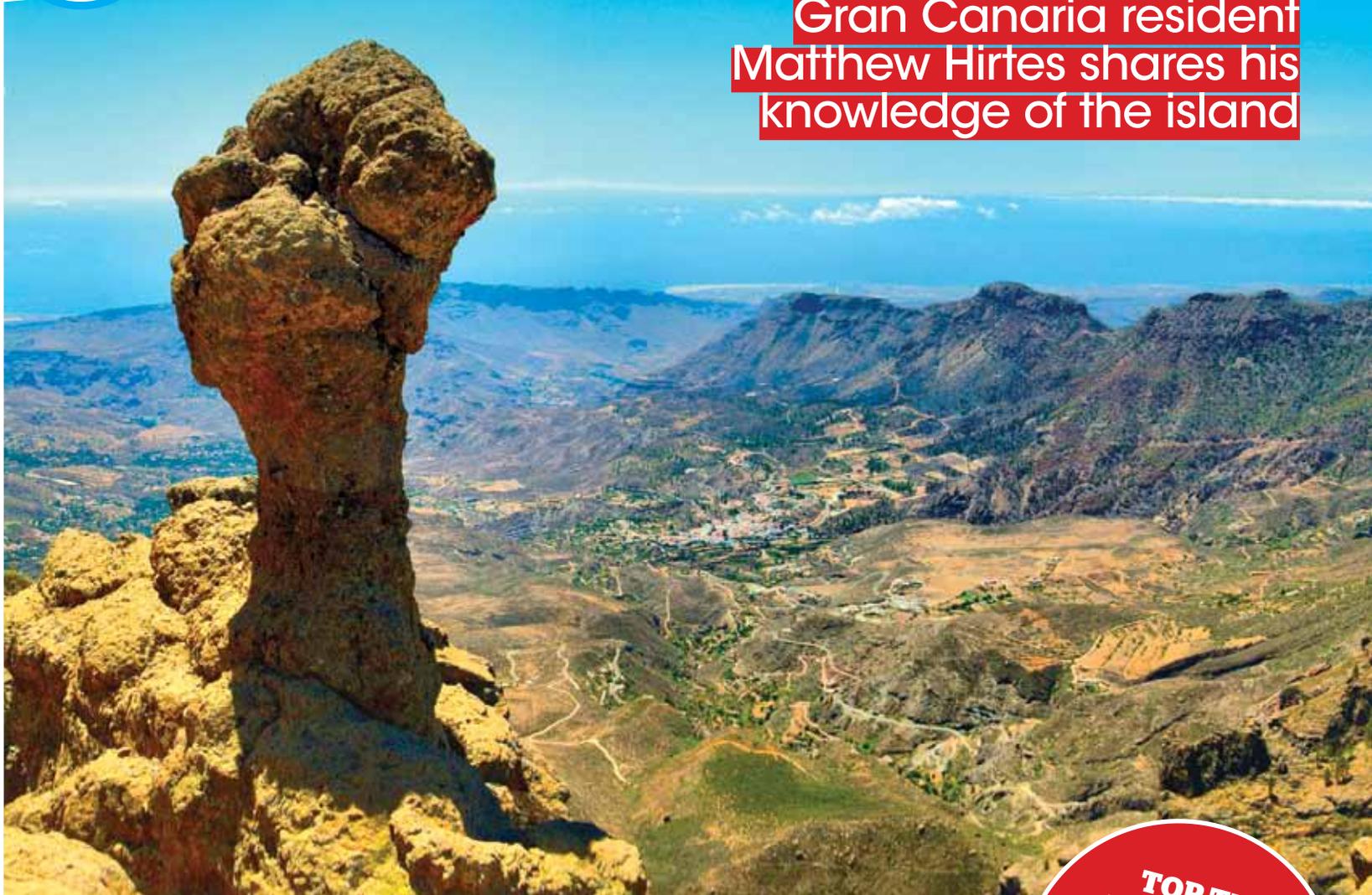




SPAIN

Gran Canaria resident Matthew Hirtes shares his knowledge of the island



» GRAN DESIGNS

With a ‘mañana’ culture even more relaxed than that pervading the Spanish mainland, Gran Canaria is the Australia of the Northern Hemisphere.

The locals are so laidback, they’re positively horizontal. These natives share an Antipodean love of surfing, and the guaranteed waves earn the island another comparison: Europe’s Hawaii. Clients will be able to judge for themselves if you book with Factory Surf School, offering a mobile masterclass across surfing spots on the north coast.

● **SELL: CHILL AND THRILL**

The likes of Dubai, Egypt, Tunisia,

and Turkey have vied with Gran Canaria to attract the bucket-and-spade brigade, but a weakening euro and political unrest elsewhere are bringing many back.

Returning tourists find the island has changed, moving upmarket. There’s a bigger concentration of five-star hotels in Meloneras than anywhere else on the island, and Playa del Inglés’ notoriously tacky nightlife spot Kasbah is being knocked down.

Gran Canaria is a particularly ►

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easy sell in winter – guaranteed sunshine and all-inclusive resorts just four hours' flight away, with a great choice of airlift from charter and scheduled carriers. The latest route is from Ryanair, which starts flying from Manchester this month.

The climate is certainly a selling point for the 'Island of Eternal Spring', although it varies by region. The south can reach temperatures up to 10C hotter than the north. There's also an east-west divide. Where the former can be cloudy, the latter is invariably clear. And then you have the mountainous centre of the island, which resembles a skiing resort minus the snow.

Gran Canaria is rightly famous for its beaches. There are more than 80 and they tend to be sandy, particularly in the south where sand was shipped in to create Anfi de Mar and Amadores beaches. The north boasts Las Palmas de Gran Canaria's Playa de las Canteras, truly one of the world's great urban beaches. Over in the east, there are plenty of sports beaches including Pozo Izquierdo – great for windsurfing. Beaches in the west tend to be stonier and populated

'Little Venice':
Puerto de Mogán



Board stupid:
Las Canteras Beach



Walk under water:
take a Sea Trek
at Anfi del Mar



Spanish blue:
the Grand Hotel
Residencia

by locals – or by hardly anyone at all, in the case of remote GüiGüi.

Gran Canaria's historic *caminos reales*, royal pathways, have been spruced up with new signposts to cement the island's reputation as a fantastic hiking destination. There's also a Camino de Santiago route through the interior's charming *pueblos*

blancos (white towns), reminiscent of their Andalusian counterparts. Cycling is also increasingly popular, with professional riding teams using the island for warm-weather training.

● **STAY: MOVING ON UP**

Although Gran Canaria doesn't boast the quality of hotels of neighbouring Tenerife, your clients can still stay in some style.

Meloneras is home to a number of Lopesan hotels,

including the Lopesan Costa Meloneras, where seven nights' B&B with Thomson leads in at £935 in April. Here, tourists can enjoy a proper pampering at the Corallium Spa, which even includes a womb room, where visitors regress to their pre-birth days.

Maspalomas, next door, is home to Seaside Gran Hotel Residencia. Elegant and colonial in style, it's where Bruce Springsteen stayed when he played the island. ▶



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Sleek splendour:
 Sheraton Salobre

In the hole: the
 Real Club de Golf
 de Las Palmas

Silva service: Manchester City's David
 Silva (second left) at Anfi Beach Club

Classic Collection offers seven nights with breakfast from £1,446 in April. Nearby Seaside Palm Beach offers luxurious retro-chic style in palm-filled grounds; Thomas Cook offers a week's half board in January from £1,049.

Above Maspalomas is the Sheraton Salobre, which has a secluded location by two golf courses, and extensive facilities.

Even Playa del Inglés has been gentrified. The Bohemia Suites & Spa is an adult-only hotel with a sleek design and numerous treatments, where a week's B&B in May starts from £785 with Sovereign Luxury Travel. For a more affordable option suggest the three-star Corona Blanca self-catering apartments – the central location will suit party lovers who want to enjoy the area's legendary nightlife.

Clients with a big budget might well be interested in the Radisson Blu in Arguineguín. As much fishing village as resort, this luxury development brings some glamour to Manchester City and Spain midfielder David Silva's

hometown. And, being in the southwest of the island, it's the sunniest, clearest spot. Prestige Holidays offers a week with breakfast this summer from £860.

Four-star Hotel Riviera Marina is in chilled-out Playa del Cura, but has tennis courts and a children's playground for those who don't just want to lie on the beach. Jet2holidays offers seven nights' all-inclusive from £452 in May.

For a more intimate stay, suggest a rural hotel. Roughly halfway between the airport and Las Palmas de Gran Canaria lies the Hotel Rural Mondalon. It's a hot spot to chill out in, and its kitchen offers a winning combination of experimental cuisine and generous portions.

● **SEE: BEYOND THE RESORTS**

Clients who hire a car can explore an island that's roughly the same size as Greater London – though far less flat.

If they follow the GC-2 to Gáldar they'll find the Cueva Pintada archaeological park and

museum, a step back in time to the days before the 15th-century Spanish invasion, when the Berber-descended *canarii* roamed the island.

The GC-2 ends at Agaete, located on Gran Canaria's north-west tip but a doppelganger for a Greek island village. Recommend visiting nearby Bodega Los Berrazales to sample the vineyard's wine, along with the coffee and tropical fruit grown on this farm.

Capital Las Palmas de Gran Canaria makes for a great day trip. Founded in 1478, one of its early visitors was Christopher Columbus on his way to sailing the ocean blue in 1492. An LPA Card allows clients to visit the Casa de Colón (Columbus House museum) plus other places of interest.

A great way of getting to and from these historic attractions – and the city's shopping centre – is on the city's hop-on hop-off sightseeing bus, bookable through Do Something Different for £13 per adult and £7 per child.

Boat trips show Gran Canaria's jaw-to-the-floor coastline from a very different perspective. Attraction World offers catamaran packages from £31/£15.

Adults will enjoy the rub of the green on the island's seven golf courses, including Real Club de Golf de Las Palmas, the oldest course in Spain. Kids will prefer the Angry Birds Activity Park which opened in Puerto Rico in 2013. Both will love the Anfi Sea Trek Helmet Diving, a deepish-sea adventure for the absolute beginner. **TW**

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