

A Grand Group in Gran Canaria

Many of you will be aware that I am a keen fan of Preferred Travel Services walking holidays. You will have seen them advertised in the Courier. This year they offered a new holiday – Walking in Gran Canaria and I was privileged to be in the first group to try it out in January. I had a flight from Edinburgh booked with Flyglobespan but they folded in December. Full marks to PTS who were on the phone straight away and got me on an alternative flight from Glasgow.

We flew out on the Monday morning and were warmly welcomed by our smiling rep, Concha, who had led several members of the group on previous holidays in Tenerife and elsewhere. We were quickly transferred to our hotel, the Reina Isabel in Las Palmas, where we were booked in for seven nights half board. It is a four star hotel and although some of the decor is a little tired the service was impeccable with towels and toiletries changed daily. There was a wide selection of food and at breakfast, apart from the usual staples, there was also an unlimited supply of Cava. As someone commented, if this had been Scotland or Ireland, all day breakfasts would have been exceedingly popular. There was a beach beside the hotel, a rooftop bar (with complimentary coffee and pastries) and a swimming pool and gymnasium on the roof.

On Tuesday there was an orientation tour of Las Palmas and a walking tour of the old town. The cathedral and Columbus House are worth visiting. The library at Columbus House contains a vast collection of books about America and Columbus. You can freely examine books and manuscripts that are hundreds of years old. Transport was available for those who wished it otherwise we were told that it was an hours' walk back to the hotel. Alas we were to hear the phrase "It is only an hours' walk" several times during the week. Don't believe it – you are in for at least an hour and a half's exercise!

On Wednesday we started the day by taking a bus to Cruz de Tejeda where we met up with our walking guide, Rambling Roger (he talks a lot). We climbed through a pine forest and followed an ancient path with spectacular views. After a stop at some famous caves, Las Cuevas de Cabellero, we descended to the village of Las Arbejas then continued to Artenara, the island's highest town at an altitude of 3800 feet. Artenara is a troglodyte town with many of the cave houses still occupied. The cave houses do have modern sanitation and satellite television. They are quite popular as holiday homes.

Thursday was a free day so I took the opportunity to visit the Elder Museum of Science and Technology. The staff were very pleasant and helpful and clearly proud of their museum. It was very much 'hands on' and the message everywhere was "It is forbidden not to touch".

Everyone agreed that the Friday walk was superb. We again started at Cruz de Tejeda but headed off in a different direction from Wednesday. We traversed a ridge before climbing 1000 feet up to Roque Nublo. The name translates as 'rock in the clouds' and is the most famous natural landmark on the island. On the return journey we stopped to see the sand dunes at Malpenas. It was a long day though at the end of it everyone was tired but happy.

Saturday was another free day so I headed back into the old town to visit the Museum of the Canaries. Incidentally, the name comes from the Latin word for dog (canis) and has nothing to do with little yellow birds.

Our Sunday walk started at the Cueva Grande and went through meadows and woods to end up in the market town of San Mateo.

There was a small corner shop opposite the hotel that provided enormous filled rolls for only 1.50 euros on walk days.

For good food, good walking and a hearty dose of winter sunshine this is a trip that would be hard to beat.

Appeared in the Stobbie Rambler Magazine, Dundee.