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**BEST GOLF
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Buenavista Golf



IN-DEPTH GUIDE TO TENERIFE



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What you can expect from a trip with your golf clubs to this Canary Island gem

IN TENERIFE, the sun is quite boring! It comes up with little fanfare, hangs about all day long then drops back into the sea again. There are rarely any clouds and the Canary Island basks at a nice balmy year-round temperature between 23 and 28 degrees centigrade.

People seem to like it! Germans in particular! They're down by the pool at the crack of dawn with giant-sized clothes pegs pinning their double-thick beach towels to the loungers, pretending to read their Kindles (it's still dark for goodness sake) and we all know they're flaunting the hotel's 'no reserving loungers' rule. Maybe they've been there all night? They're determined, that's for sure! And who can blame them. Tenerife's getting busier and competition for the best poolside spots is at an all-time high. There are a lot more people about. And a lot more traffic! Friday used to be busy as it was moving-day, the big changeover with one batch of tourists leaving the island and another arriving. Now everyday is Friday!

There's also a noticeable increase in construction; stacks of studios

decorating the hillsides like whipped-cream roulades. Above the golf courses, there are elegant, white, quadrilateral cubes, each with its own infinity pool; very James Bondish, style statements from the nouveau riche claiming a slice of paradise.

CLUBBING

After dinner, we tried to mingle with the masses (and be less snobbish) but listening to Jim Reeves or some old crone singing 'Yellow River' amidst a sea of cigarette lighter waving, half-sozzled women was a bridge too far. At the recommendation of some savvy looking locals, we hopped in a taxi to Avenue las Americas and the Magic Lounge. 'The Magic' is part of the Safari Centre where you find classy shops, expensive jewellery and top-brand apparel. Someone's twigged that Tenerife needed a class injection and here it is! If you're looking to do some shopping; Bounty, GAS, The Levi Store, Armani and Hugo Boss are all here. There are lots of good eating places also.

The water fountain opposite

the Hard Rock Café even jumps to the beat. As does 'The Magic' with live DJ's, sax players and sexy dancers. (I'm not talking about myself, of course!) And there's no cover charge. The drinks are slightly pricey at €10 for a large G&T but hey, you're on holiday and compared to the first places we visited, this is heaven and worth every Euro. Also recommended, although I didn't get a chance to go - but will most definitely next time - is the Papagayo Club in Costa Adeje along with the Buddha Bar in Las Americas. Just as a side note, at the end of my visit I met with Eduardo, the manager at Amarilla Golf Club and he tells me they also host a monthly dance event on the course's 11th fairway. Well, that's a novel way of bringing in some extra fees. Apparently, they turn the 11th into a par-3 for the day, allowing room for clubbers of both persuasions.

FOOD SCENE

You should notice straight away, Tenerife fruit and veg is much tastier. I've never had such sweet onions and salty Canarian potatoes or papas ▶

▶ arugardas (as they're known) have long been a favourite. It must be the sunshine and fertile volcanic soil. If I lived here I'd be a regular at the farmer's markets.

Consequently restaurant food is generally very good and during our week we enjoyed some excellent meals. Seafood is always a winner! Las Rocas Restaurant is attached to Jardín Tropical Hotel and enjoys an exceptional setting! Perched by the side of the Atlantic, you can almost reach down and touch the waves. Sunsets must be terribly romantic although we arrived in the dark yet it was still a 'charged' atmosphere. Chef Jorge Peñate and his team conjured up quite delectable plates, small

served chilled in a small, shot glass.

On the plane home, Billie, a new pal of mine and full-time Tenerife resident, also recommended a chicken restaurant called Adeje Chicken. "Great for food and views! Chicken is all they do..." I'll try it also on the next visit and let you know. I'm sure there are many great restaurants known by the locals and it seems prices in such places are reasonable. The cost of living in Tenerife is cheap, Billie told me.

ACCOMMODATION

Accommodation on Tenerife can be difficult to gauge and sometimes quite misleading. On web pages or brochures, it's hard to tell if a 5-star is a

not 5-star in my eyes! The food and restaurant setup is actually quite lacking compared to many all-inclusive hotels I've stayed in - certainly not a patch on Turkey's.

So the best gauge of a property I would say is its cost. If it costs more it will be better. The three that I've stayed in on previously trips that certain did impress were No.1 - Gran Hotel Bahía del Duque Resort, that really was exceptional. My mother kept the soap boxes and shampoos that I brought back for years, so nice did they look. No.2 is undoubtedly Abama Resort and we'll give No.3 to Meliá Hacienda del Conde overlooking Seve's Buenavista course in the north of the island. On this next mythical

can't see them as you career towards the green. Signs of a buggy doing just that are so small and placed at the sides of the fairways that they're not much help. A golf pro I know from Scotland did it - and Stephen wasn't such a bad driver as I recall. Anyway, Adeje is a good start if not a bit of a driving adventure.

Next day we played Tecina on the island of La Gomera. This is a day-trip and a highly recommended one not only for the journey. You can get a day ticket on the Fred Olsen Express Ferry plus a return taxi including your round of golf for €157 per person which is not bad when you consider the travelling involved. By the way, you need to show your passport at the ferry

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samplings full of flavour and in total very satisfying. The best plan is to let the staff dictate a gastronomic journey for you, sea-flavoured and creatively presented.

Another good hotel-based restaurant we discovered was SeaSoul, part of Hotel Antheia, a nice 5-star hotel in Adeje which I've stayed in on a previous visit. Facing the sea and ideal for people-watching on the promenade, SeaSoul is also seafood-oriented but great for traditional Canarian dishes. We started with some local cheeses then I plumped for Turbot and rounded the meal off with Liqueur de Hierbas Ruavieja, the Spanish equivalent to Grappa - although a fair bit sweeter with a distinct herbal, minty flavour. It's also called Orujo and best

genuine, quality product or a trumped up 4-star follie. It often depends on the number of amenities a property offers to qualify it as a 5-star in the eyes of some tourism authority.

Similarly you can find very good 4-star properties such as Les Jardín Tropical where we stayed. Admittedly they were undergoing refurbishment when we visited so it was hard to tell how much they were going to improve things but the hotel's got a certain old-world charm and ease about it, and if the price is right, I'd go back.

I also stayed in Sandos San Blas. I think it gets its name from the wind. This coast is famous for windsurfing. It's officially a 5-star but for some reason you don't hear them trumpeting about that. It's

visit to Tenerife, I'd like to discover some boutique hotels and give them a try. Most of the obvious offerings are huge complexes so I wonder what the small property can offer.

THE GOLF COURSES

So now, what is there left to discuss? Oh yes, I'd suppose I'd better mention golf seeing as there are nine courses on the island.

We started with Adeje and it's a fairly good track. It offers a series of unique holes, so much so you'd think you were on several different golf courses. The par-3s are most memorable as are the terraces built for a banana plantation back in the day. There are, however, horror stories of people driving buggies over those little terraced walls, quite easily done I would say as you

port to get to La Gomera... I don't know why but they do ask to see them. The road to the other side of the island climbs and corners some serious hairpins. "I hate driving on mountain roads," Dave, our redoubtable driver decided. "Don't you worry!" I told him. You just keep your eye on the road and we'll do the views." And they are incredible. You can see Mount Teide back on the main island from many of the turns. Then it's over the top with signs for the village of Hernia and I hoped Dave wasn't going to have one!

The village and golf course of Tecina are both utterly charming! It's completely different over here, much quieter and more natural than the mainland strip. On the golf course, you drive a buggy up to the top and cascade ▶



▶ down more or less back and forth to the bottom. It's a short course and ideal for ladies but full of tight, testing challenges - fun for everyone. The fourth is a spectacular par-3 playing down towards languid Atlantic bays. So is the 11th! In fact, I've never known a course that offers so many stunning vistas. You finally arrive back at the clubhouse armed with some great memories and no doubt a batch of superb pictures on your phone.

I also know from past trips that the Hotel Jardín Tecina nearby is equally charming. As I recall, guests stay in little villas. It's a bit dated but gorgeous. The ideal scene would be to stay here for at least one night, it's so quiet and peaceful. I've never done it, only visited - but yet again, I intend to do so - one of these days soon.

We also played Las Americas and I played Amarilla on my own at the end of the visit. Las Americas is okay. The front nine is much more elevated and interesting but the back is a bit pedestrian playing through thin avenues of cypress trees with the occasional pond. These are holiday tracks and the challenge for half-decent golfers might be trying to get through the fourball ahead.

I've been visiting Amarilla for over 20 years and, disappointingly, there has been little change to it - a new tee box at the memorable fourth and the same at the 12th by the marina, both laudable recent additions.

Very nearby Golf del Sur is much more interesting as I recall with lots of volcanic sand bunkers, cacti and barankas. I didn't play it this visit due to a fierce sore throat which developed and I was told came from the Calima wind that occasionally blows over from the

Sahara making Tenerife a few degrees hotter than usual and lots of people coming down with a cold that never manifests - just a throat that feels like you've swallowed crushed glass.

So let's get to the main golf dish of the day, Abama. Wow! They set the bar high when they built this one - and to be honest it puts all the other Tenerife courses well in the shade. Buenavista, Seve's seaside track on the north of the island, comes in a distant second but Abama's presentation, challenge and breathtaking views of the sea along with the Island of La Gomera tops them all.

Is there a catch? It costs €270 for a round including a buggy so that might be an issue for some - and you most certainly need to use a buggy on this course. You can save yourself a €100 on green fees if you're staying in the hotel. But whatever - save up your pennies and take on this high calibre course and you'll be emotionally quids in. It's simply outstanding! That's also why I'm saying to leave it till the end of your trip because once you play this, it'll spoil you for the rest of them.

Of course, there are many long holes and demanding approach shots to the greens so it's a track designed for better golfers. But there's enough room out there on the fairways that any player can enjoy it. The two outstanding features are the views - incredible, and the presentation of the golf course - first-class.

We met with Brendan, the resident Irish pro during our round and he was telling us a bit more about the course. "It's the greens that catch you," he told us although it's a challenge enough getting to them. "You need to get on the ride side of the flag otherwise it's usually



Las Americas



Los Palos

three-putt time."

At the stunning, downhill tenth hole he told us: "There are 22 lakes on the golf course and we hired a company to go and fetch the balls out of them. They brought up more than 79,000." That's a lot of lake balls but then there are a lot of lakes. To be honest they don't come into play as much as you think. On long holes like the tenth, it's easy enough to plot your way along and stay dry. There are three lakes on the par-4, 11th and I'm sure they catch more than their fair share of errant balls but it's fair punishment.

Abama offers a strong finish too, the last three holes a bit different from the rest, long and brutal but good if you've hit your stride, which to be honest you should have done at the first - otherwise it could be a long round. The resort is run by Ritz-Carlton

and again, from past experience, I can tell you this is an exquisite luxury hotel with exemplary service, a luxurious spa and exceptional fine dining. The building along is unusual, like a terracotta lego avalanche cascading down towards the water. Inside it's very Moorish. The two Michelin-star restaurants encompass both Basque and Japanese cuisine. One more time, it's a while since I've stayed here and I pine to go back.

CONCLUSION

So that's our recap of golf on Tenerife. The overriding message is you get what you pay for. Judging by the bars and resorts, there are a lot of people looking for cheap holidays in the sun and the same can be said of the golf but if you spend that little bit extra, it'll make your experience exponentially the better. ■