

healing SANDS

Gran Canaria's quality spa resorts and well-preserved landscapes are living up to the island's long reputation for wellbeing, says **Carole French**

WITH ITS SUNNY climate, natural products like aloe vera – considered the purest in the world – and mineral rich water, Gran Canaria is a favourite with spa and wellness enthusiasts. In fact, it could be considered one of the first destinations to attract health tourists.

In the 19th century, stories of miracle treatments for lung and stomach ailments circulated in Europe and many journeyed to the island in search of a cure. Even doctors of the period are said to have recommended Gran Canaria for its health-giving water and climate. Today the island has one of the Canary Islands' finest selections of spa resorts and beauty centres.

One of the first spa centres built was at Playa de Maspalomas, location of the famous sand dunes

stretching some eight miles along the coast. Eduardo Filiputti, one of the first people to recognise the therapeutic properties of the fine sands and to use it in treatments for the body, built a heliotherapy centre at the dunes in the 1960s. It was quickly followed by new centres throughout the island.

Today, visitors can enjoy treatments using volcanic stones, fruits of the island, sea spray, and regenerative masks and wraps of mineral-rich algae, sea mud and sand. There are hydrotherapy, aromatherapy, thalassotherapy, thermotherapy, reflexotherapy, sauna and Turkish steam bath experiences on most spa menus.

Massage is popular for its slimming, anti-stress and relaxation benefits, and most pools have jets to massage the body, while rehabilitation treatments can help or cure rheumatism, ulcers and skin disorders.

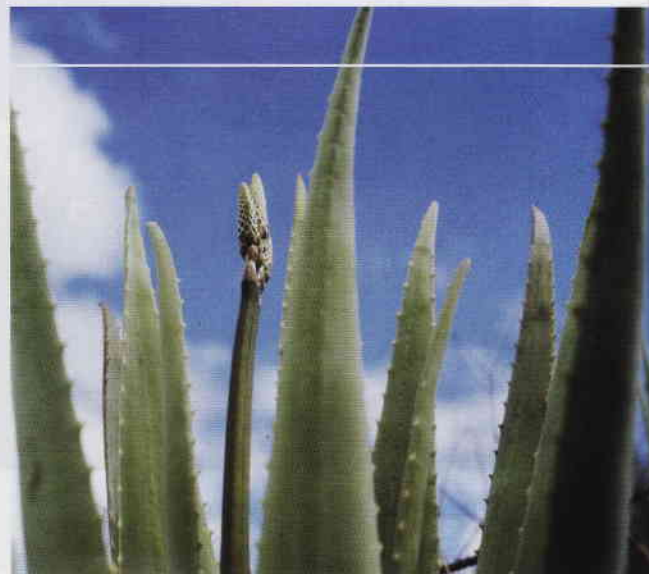
Many visitors travel to Gran Canaria purely for the spa experience, although most will consider treatments as an extension of their holiday, especially if travelling for the island's wealth of golf courses or simply for a fly and flop beach holiday.

Gran Canaria offers sports from swimming in clear waters to fishing, hiking and mountaineering; dining in city or harbourside restaurants; architecture such as the 16th-century Catedral de Santa Ana in the capital Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and exploring the countryside.

It's an island of so many contrasts, with miles of beaches, sand dunes and fishing harbours lining its coast, while lush farmland with rural villages surrounded by banana plantations, pine forests and a mountain range characterise its inland landscape.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ **CLEAN CUT:** The aloe vera found on Gran Canaria is considered to be the purest in the world. The plant's gel has therapeutic and healing properties and is used in many spa treatments. It's also used on sunburnt skin.
- ▶ **BODY BLUE:** Gran Canaria's natural waters are rich with minerals, including iodine and sodium, which are beneficial for the body.
- ▶ **SMOOTH SANDS:** The fine Maspalomas sands are said to have therapeutic qualities and are used in wrap and massage treatments for exfoliating and softening the skin. One of the island's first spas was located at the dunes of Playa de Maspalomas.





Sheraton Salobre Golf Resort & Spa

Don't Miss ...

► **Puerto de Mogan:** A town full of traditional houses covered in bougainvillea, Puerto Mogan has a marina and pedestrianised squares. It's a great place to dine in a harbourside restaurant. www.puerto-de-mogan.com

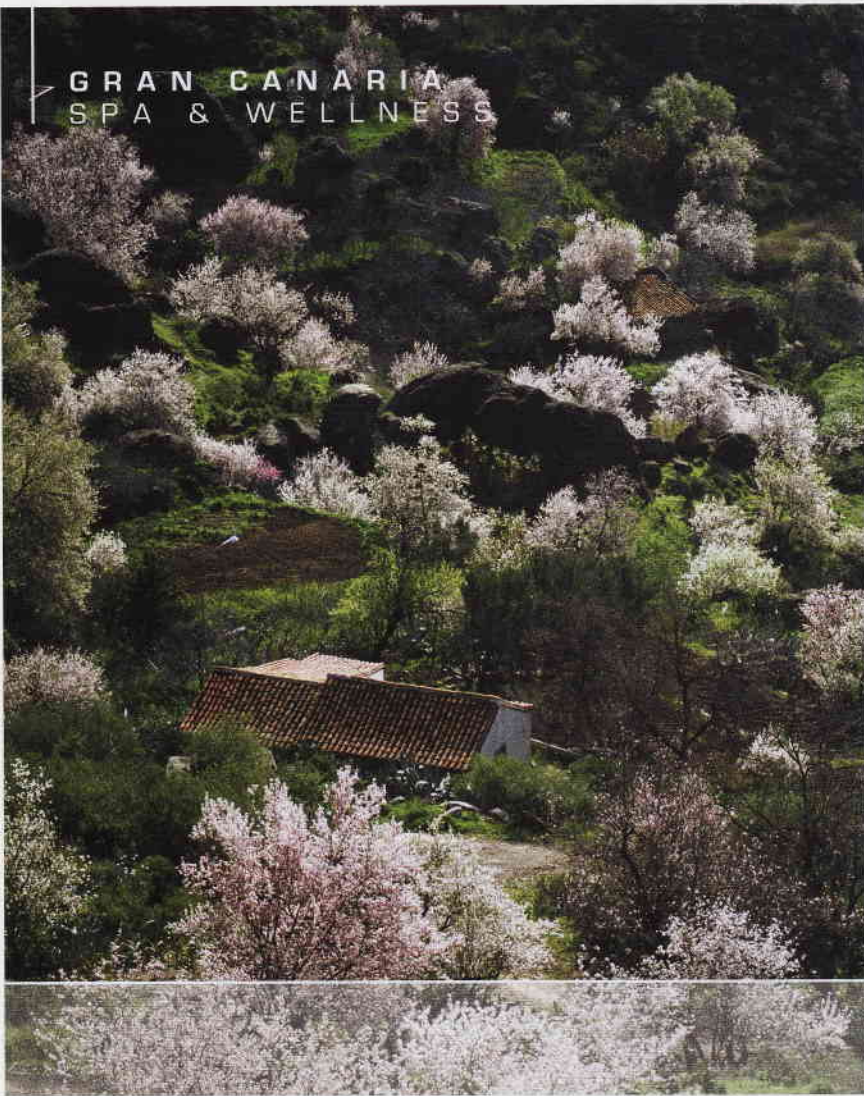
► **Museo Canario:** Dedicated almost entirely to the aboriginal population of the island in pre-Hispanic times, the Museo Canario tells how the Guanches of Gran Canaria lived. www.elmuseocanario.com

► **Roque Bentayga at El Bentayga:** A favourite haunt of wildlife and photography enthusiasts and one

of the highest points on the island, the site has an archaeological park where visitors can see natural wonders like rock caves.

► **Maspalomas:** The protected sand dunes of Maspalomas attract everyone from sun worshippers to adventurous tourists keen on camel trekking.

► **Palmitos Park:** A sprawling zoological and sub-tropical botanical gardens, Palmitos Park has palm trees and exotic shrubs, an orchid house, aquarium, birds of prey and animal enclosures. www.palmitospark.es ►



GRAN CANARIA
SPA & WELLNESS

► Gran Canaria became a World Biosphere Reserve in 2005 and is considered important for the protection of flora, fauna and wildlife

World Biosphere Reserve

Gran Canaria is classified as an international biosphere reserves under a UNESCO biodiversity conservation initiative, the Programme on Man and the Biosphere. A total of 105 countries are participating in the project, which is designed to maximise the sustainable use of natural resources.

Gran Canaria became a reserve in 2005 and is considered important for the protection of species of flora, fauna, wildlife or any natural geological feature. The volcanic island is known for its variations of climate, from the sands at sea level through lush farmland, banana plantations and pine forests to its high mountains,

The island is famous for its many natural wonders including the Maspalomas sand dunes. These have been a nature reserve for over 100 years, along with Roque Bentayga at El Bentayga, one of the highest points on the island; Roque Nublo, a landmark rock formation; and the fascinating area of Cenobio de Valerón, where there are nearly 300 caves.

In addition, Palmitos Park, Cueva Pintada and Jardin Canario are three of the most important botanical or archaeological parks in Gran Canaria.

In order for land to become a biosphere reserve, a legally protected core area must be provided, including a zone where non-conservation activities are prohibited and an outer zone where approved practices are allowed. UNESCO awards the title to countries or areas that have established ecological-friendly terrestrial, coastal or marine ecosystems through zoning and management. www.unesco.org ■

TOP 5 SPA RESORTS

► THERAPY & WELLNESS CENTRE, GRAND HOTEL RESIDENCIA

A range of treatments offered at the Grand Hotel Residencia's contemporary spa suite in Maspalomas include algae-based peeling to rejuvenate the skin, thalassotherapy mineral pools, mud therapy, anti-cellulite and anti-ageing treatments and shiatsu massage, plus the popular Rasoul Bath and Cleopatra Bath. It also has an aqua fitness suite and hamam lounge. T: 00 34 928 72 3108. www.grand-hotel-residencia.de

► TALASOTERAPIA CANARIAS SAN AGUSTÍN

At around 7,000 sq metres in size, the Talasoterapia Canarias San Agustín, part of the Hotel Gloria Palace, is one of the largest spa and wellness centres in Europe. Its signature treatment is thalassotherapy, where a series of seawater pools provide benefits for the body. Other treatments on its menu include mud and marine therapies. T: 00 34 928 76 5689. www.hotelgloriapalace.com

► GRAND SPA CORALLIUM, COSTA MELONERAS RESORT

Located in the Gran Hotel Costa Meloneras Resort, Maspalomas, the luxurious Grand Spa Corallium offers a spa and relaxation area of some 3,700 sq metres. Among the treatments are shiatsu, stone therapy, algae wraps, mud masks and Turkish, Thai and Oriental massage. It has 14 private treatment rooms, plus four types of swimming pool. T: 00 34 928 12 8181. www.lopesanhr.com

► SPA INAGUA, HOTEL CORDIAL MOGAN PLAYA

The Hotel Cordial Mogan Playa's spa suite is elegant and relaxing, just a short walk from the harbourside of Puerto de Mogan. It offers a range of massages, including the popular shiatsu, along with seaweed wraps, mud therapy treatments and reflexology, plus sauna and spa bath experiences. T: 00 34 928 72 1147. www.cordialcanarias.com

► ALOE SPA, SHERATON SALOBRE GOLF RESORT & SPA

Overlooking the lush greens of the 27-hole Salobre Golf Course fairways, this spa is the perfect place to unwind after a hard day's play. Facilities include saunas, steam bath, Jacuzzi and ice springs with a whole range of massages and body treatments. T: 00 34 928 94 3000. www.sheratonsalobre.com

SAMPLE

FIRST CHOICE HOLIDAYS is offering a one-week half-board stay at the Hotel Cordial Mogan Playa in Puerto de Mogan from £785 per person flying from Stansted, £803 from Manchester or £849 from Birmingham. The price includes use of the hotel's Spa Inagua. T: 0871 200 7799. www.firstchoice.co.uk