

# Adventure Island

To discover Tenerife's most glorious sights you'll need to hike up a volcano, bike down a mountain or head underground. Christian Williams explores



**C**limb high, sleep low,” goes the age-old mountaineering slogan. It’s supposed to help conquer altitude sickness, but it can also be used to make the most of your Jet2holiday in Tenerife. While you can’t beat the coastline for hotels, restaurants, bars and nightlife, you’ll need to get adventurous to enjoy Tenerife’s most spectacular natural bounties. Here’s how to hike, bike and cave your way off the beaten track and towards the most magical spots in the Canaries.

### Hike It

The Parque Nacional Las Cañadas del Teide at Tenerife’s centre is named after Mount Teide, Spain’s highest summit (3,718m) and the world’s

third largest volcano. Amazingly, it’s far smaller than the original volcano that blew its top here some 300,000 years ago. Teide sprouted in the huge crater that was left, which is so sun-baked and otherworldly it was used as a location for fantasy films such as *Total Recall* and *Clash of the Titans*.

Parts of the crater rim are now mountains in their own right and Guajara (2,715m) is the most accessible. Its summit lies some 600m above the crater and at the end of signed footpaths from the Parador Hotel ([paradores-spain.com](http://paradores-spain.com)) – one of the national park’s few buildings.

The climb is fairly steep and rugged, but it’s also highly rewarding. The flat summit provides a wonderful viewpoint from which to admire Teide and the lava tongues of its most recent eruptions. In other directions, the view takes in the neighbouring Canary Islands and portions of Tenerife’s dense pine forests, which drape across the backbone of the island before petering out as the steep and jagged slopes plunge into the Atlantic. ►



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takes in Los Organos, a row of massive basalt pillars that have been crystallised in the shape of organ pipes, some 2km south of the village of Aguamansa. Nearby, the old volcanic crater of La Caldera offers a great picnic spot, with a kiosk serving light meals, including excellent fresh trout. If you don't take a guide, be sure to take a good map.

If the four hours needed for the Guajara hike sound a bit much, then follow the marked path around the bizarre and twisted Roques de García on the opposite side of the Parador. Easily doable in two hours, this gentler circuit loops around some of the park's most spectacular volcanic landforms. The precariously top-heavy Roque Cinchado is a photo favourite, but it's also worth making your way to La Catedral, an enormous rock monolith with striking geometric patterns.

## Bike It

In the Orotava Valley all cars are funnelled along a single sealed road, making the dirt tracks ideal for exploration by mountain bike. Athletes in training routinely bike the 2,300m climbing from the coast to get up here, but for the less athletic the best way up is to let a company such as Tenerife Training (+34 922 331 191, [tenerife-training.net](http://tenerife-training.net)) shuttle you up. You can rent mountain bikes from them and they'll give you a guided tour tailored to your level of fitness and ability for as little as £42.

After exploring some of the park on two wheels there's the chance to stop for a snack at the hamlet of El Portillo, where a handful of restaurants serve traditional upland Canarian food such as soups and stews served with *gofio* (a thick flour used in place of bread) or rabbit in garlic sauce.

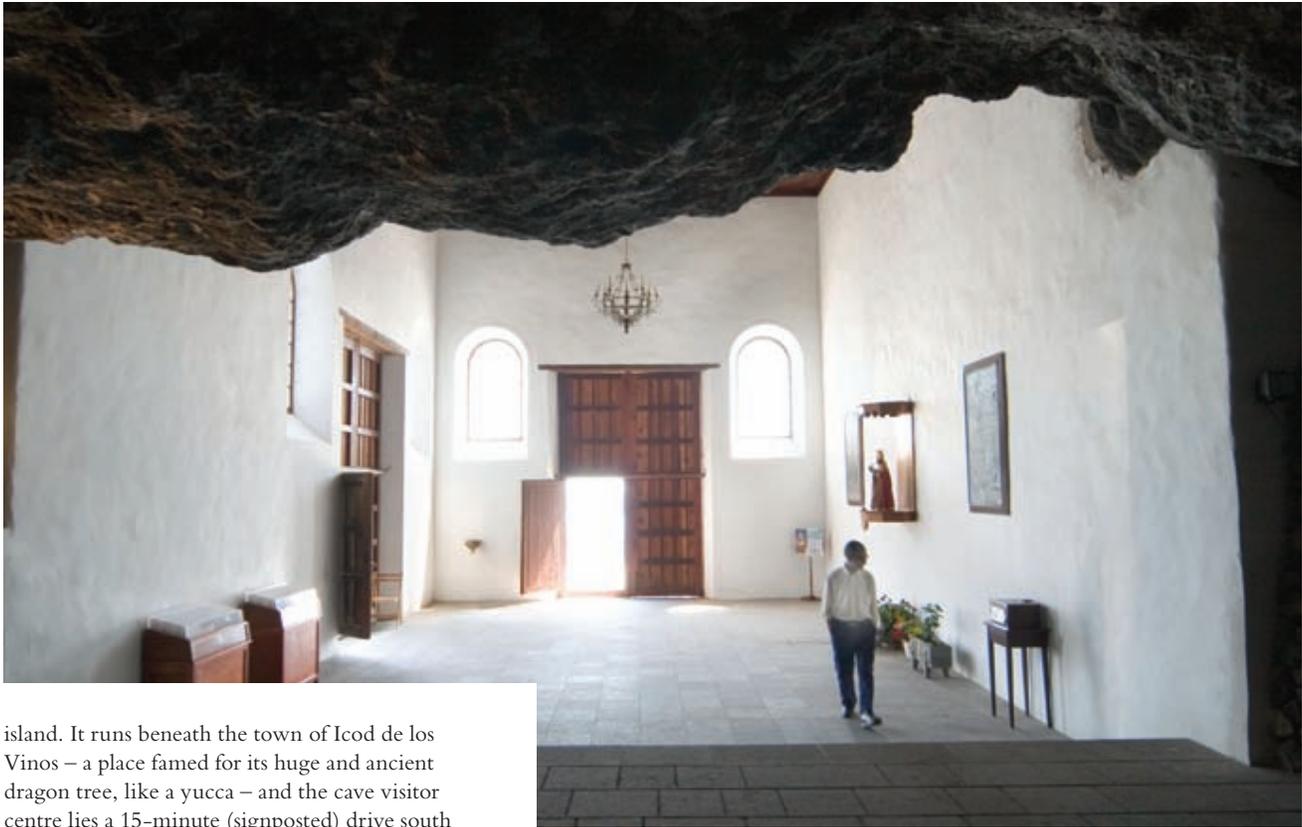
Then there's the epic downhill ride through the Orotava Valley to the coast to enjoy, where you can head off road and follow trails through the misty Canarian pine forest. One particularly good route

## Cave It

Tenerife's aboriginal inhabitants, the Guanches, traditionally lived in caves on the sunny side of valleys, buried their dead in caves on the shady side, and used some, such as the Cueva de San Blas, as religious shrines. Today, you can still find their homes in some parts of Tenerife – such as the Anaga in the northeast – carved into the rock.

Surprisingly, the island's most spectacular caves weren't really explored until the 1970s when teams began to map the network. It soon emerged that they were dealing with one of the world's largest networks and its longest cave, the Cueva del Viento (or "Cave of the Wind"; [cuevadelviento.net](http://cuevadelviento.net)), spans a full 18km under the north side of the ►





island. It runs beneath the town of Icod de los Vinos – a place famed for its huge and ancient dragon tree, like a yucca – and the cave visitor centre lies a 15-minute (signposted) drive south (it's a £4 taxi ride). The centre expertly explains how lava flows formed the cave.

Technically, it's a lava tube – a giant tunnel made and left behind 27,000 years ago by molten lava forced out of the earth. The process left behind bulbous basalt formations, including stalactites, cascades, terraces and lava lakes, which look particularly eerie during the cave tour because the only source of light comes from the group's miners' helmets.

The tour may only go 200m underground, but it's far enough to get a feel for this cold and rugged passage, which calls for warm clothes and sturdy shoes. It's an inhospitable place and there's little sign of life, so the spectacular fossils of an extinct giant rat and giant lizard come as a surprise, as does the fact that 190 different species still dwell here in the pitch dark. Many are small insects and most are so-called trogllobites: creatures that survive only in caves. Some 15 of these species were new to science when they were discovered here, but don't get too excited – an eyeless cockroach is about as glamorous as it gets.



**Above:** a church built into a cave at Candelaria. **Below:** the view from Cueva de San Blas

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