

QUITE CANARY

VIEW FROM JARDIN TECINA HOTEL SOLARIUM



FOR A QUIET LITTLE GETAWAY IN THE ISLANDS, GO LA GOMERA, SAYS ROGER WHEELER

You may have noticed the recent ad campaign for the smaller of the **Canary Islands**, heavily promoting **El Hierro**, **La Palma** and **La Gomera**. Everyone knows **Gran Canaria** and the 'delights' of the Yumbo Centre – 'to each his own' is my motto – and **Tenerife**, my own favourite island, which combines the best of all the others.

Fancying a side trip on our last visit to Tenerife, we took a two-night break on La Gomera, which lies just an hour by fast ferry from **Los Cristianos**. **Fred Olsen Lines** runs the ferry and it also runs the largest hotel on the island – **Jardín Tecina**.

La Gomera is the second smallest (just 25km in diameter), and one of the greenest of the Canary Islands, with many micro-climates. Steep gorges with banana plantations,



orange and lemon groves and almond trees radiate out from the highest mountain, **Mt Garajonay**. It's all very peaceful and tranquil, and feels a million miles from the tourist hotspots of **Las Américas** or **Playa del Inglés**.

We took a look at the lovely four-star **Parador de la Gomera** in the capital, **San Sebastián**, but decided to stay at Jardín Tecina, a beautiful four-star resort on the cliffs overlooking the **Playa de Santiago**, about an hour's drive south. There are no straight roads on Gomera – everything else is though. The route is described as 'scenic', though 'scary' would be more accurate. The views are, of course, stunning.

Jardín Tecina is a large low-rise hotel; the rooms are spread over acres of tropical gardens. The public rooms are typical old Spanish colonial, reception staff are friendly and enthusiastic, although we were unlucky to get a new member of the team who, when asked where our room was, just said, "Down that way". After about half an hour of wandering the lush gardens looking, we stopped a porter who was zipping around on one of the motorised luggage carts and he directed us to Room 221.

The hotel is basically all-inclusive, as there is nowhere to eat or drink in Playa de Santiago other than the hotel. There are three restaurants catering for about 600 people per sitting, but sadly the hotel can accommodate 900-plus. The maitre d' in the **International Restaurant** admitted that they could not feed everyone very well when the hotel was full. You are strongly advised to book for dinner at least four weeks ahead of your arrival; otherwise you could be on a diet. That said, the food can be very good and the service quirky, and the breakfast buffet was truly fantastic – with champagne freely available.

There are loads of swimming pools and hundreds of sun loungers and although the bulk of the guests were German there were very few 'towel reservations'. We were there in November and the weather was great – 28 degrees. We noted a few solo gentlemen and a few same-sex couples. Surprisingly, for a very middle-class hotel, there is a solarium on the roof of the main building where you could sunbathe in the nude.

You could play endless different sports, from tennis to squash and golf, diving, pétanque and even billiards are available, so five stars for the facilities. The evening entertainment was equally good, on a very Spanish tourist level, and there are bars everywhere.

We paid a total of 420 euros (about £320) for two nights' full board with drinks and wine. The rooms were huge with very large comfy beds and a big terrace – excellent value for money.

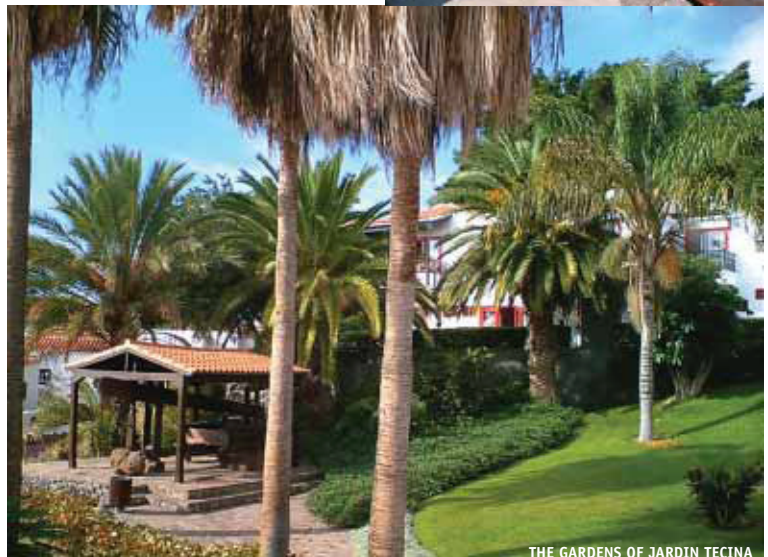
Would we go back? No. La Gomera is lovely but there are no real beaches, although **Valle Gran Rey** further on from Playa Santiago does have a semi-shady beach, once very popular with hippies. The island is a paradise for walkers, if that's your thing (it was not ours, though). The **Garajonay National Park** is a World Heritage Site, but a drive up **Mt Teide** on Tenerife could satisfy all your wilderness needs.

So go to La Gomera for a complete break. Most visitors stay for an average of ten days and if you're into golf or games that would be fine, although you will get bored with the catering after about five days. Three days are enough to give you an idea of the island from which **Christopher Columbus** set sail in 1492.

On our return to Tenerife we had dinner at the wonderful **Restaurante Los Roques** on the quay of the beautiful fishing village of **Los Abrigos**. A perfect night and the end of a fab holiday, except out of the night came a small fishing boat carrying about 300 of the more than 26,000 refugees who have arrived in the Canaries recently from Senegal. The sight of these people, huddled together in appalling conditions in this small boat, having survived a crossing lasting many days with just the clothes they were wearing, was a very sobering sight. The First World meeting the Third World before our very eyes was something we will never forget.



REFUGEE BOAT FROM SENEGAL



THE GARDENS OF JARDIN TECINA