

**FLAME, ROCK, WIND & SEA**  
A TASTE OF LANZAROTE  
by Edward Bent

Here we are then, craning out of a window, slowly descending over a rippled sea towards the bare grey-brown hills of the island, interspersed with squat white buildings, seemingly Mexican style, meeting the sea or cradling in the background. Suddenly, the ground looms-up large, and with a bang and thud, FR4001 lands, followed by the roar of reverse thrust and the hand-clapping of passengers.

After several visits to Lanzarote, the island feels rather like one's back-garden. Just 60km long and 25km wide, covering 845 km<sup>2</sup> with a coastline of 213km. It contains an astonishing variety of landscapes, rapidly changing in short distances. One becomes familiar with these almost 'moving' characteristics and elevation, so that each day one can plan a different itinerary, yet be pleasantly surprised, or eagerly expectant of the rapid changes of scenery, adding to a sense of space and freedom. This huge diversity is accompanied by an admirable network of roads, many with parking lanes and characteristic pavement, often bordered by lines of Phoenix palm trees, irrigation lines and conduits for electricity. What a sense of relief to park so easily, to drive on well-surfaced and signposted roads, tyres humming on the basalt-asphalted road, and to walk safely. And be surprised, how drivers actually stop at zebra crossings!



Costa Teguisse beach



Costa Teguisse



Residence Costa Teguisse

But how has the island been influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic? The local residents are suffering the effects of unemployment and low wages, for what few jobs are available. At the same time the cost of some services has risen. So, the economic and social effects of the Covid pandemic are very serious. One also expects that maintenance work for hotels and other tourist structures and activities will have slowed or been suspended. The maintenance of tourist facilities in the Canary Islands has always been difficult because of an almost all-year-round occupancy or utilization.

While the number of tourists visiting Lanzarote is now increasing, it is unlikely to quickly restore the boom experienced prior to the pandemic. Not only, in the meantime, the possibilities and preferences of many tourists have changed. Despite this, the author believes that the love of this unique island, the toughness of its farmers and inhabitants will eventually succeed to

overcome these immense difficulties, providing they receive adequate support from public and private entities. Not just economic subsidies, but incentives to move with the times, in order to anticipate and meet new market demands. Above all, local government is engaging in a serious promotional campaign for tourism. And debate on future opportunities and resources, hopefully, streamlining the decision making and administrative apparatus.

The Canary archipelago is classified as an autonomous region of Spain and a peripheral zone of the EU. Decision-making can be very political and time consuming, due to the many tiers of public administration: from the local municipal councils, to the island Council (*Cabildo insular*) of Lanzarote, to the Council of Gran Canaria that includes Lanzarote, the regional Canarias Council of Gran Canaria and Tenerife that jointly administer the whole archipelago, to the national government in Madrid, and finally to the EU in Brussels.

In one way or another, the people of Lanzarote will eventually succeed to reconstruct their lives and the tourist industry. It will be an act of faith, supported by millions of tourists who have learnt to appreciate the island. For this reason, the article describes the island as it was, for many years *before* the pandemic.

It is difficult to know exactly why, but people often say that the island, its volcanic energy and landscape, wind, sea and skies, constrain us to confront ourselves and our partners, our individual identity and destiny. To fuel new thoughts, to regenerate. That such characteristics impose an immediate choice to visitors, whether they like or dislike the island, a common denominator, why certain foreign residents and repeat tourists are on the island.



Design of Timanfaya area

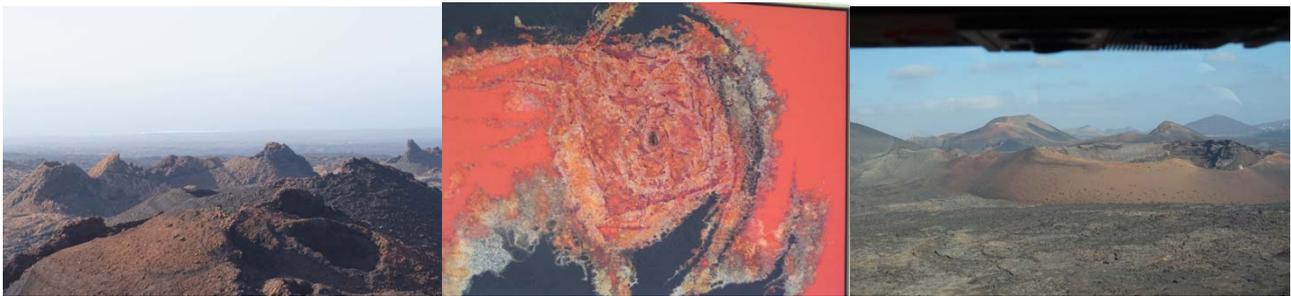
South of Timanfaya

Lichens

Whatever is written about Lanzarote, is subordinate to its violent volcanic history, not from a single important volcanic eruption, but many hundreds, not from a limited period of activity but one lasting six years, covering some 200 square kilometres of land, burning or burying more than nine villages and the most fertile land. Such history is more than the presence of dormant volcanic cones seen today, petrified lava flows and ash. Just imagine past eruptions, flames, iridescent lava flows, especially in the first phases. Explosions, pressure waves, empty metallic rumbling, earthquakes and new fissures. Clouds of smoke, boiling rain and asphyxiating gasses! Much the same, accompanying the volcanic activity of 2021 in La Palma, another island in the Canary archipelago. So, the undeclared power of the volcanic scenery of Lanzarote is never far

from our eyes, and demands attention. The hues of black, grey, sometimes red, talk of energy and heat, past eruptions, explosions, and fiery things lying beneath the surface.

There was continued volcanic activity between 1730 and 1736, and again, much more localized, in 1824. See the spectacular views, along the narrow undulating road from **Tinajo** to **Yaiza**, lost in the extra-terrestrial landscape of the *Fire Mountains (Timanfaya National Park)*. Hardly surprising, that the area is being studied and utilized by NASA and the ESA (European Space Agency) because of its topography, rocks and dust, characteristics similar to the surface of the Moon and Mars. The area was recently used to test landing parameters and movement of the *Perseverance Rover*. Its landing area on Mars was named after *Timanfaya*. The National Park includes a visitor centre and it is possible to take a bus journey around a central area that leads to *Islote de Hilario*. Although confined to a bus, the views are still spectacular. Organized walks and camel rides are also on offer.



*Timanfaya National Park*

*Evocative painting César Manrique.*

*Timanfaya National Park*

In another direction, from Tinajo, take the winding road down to **La Santa**, first appearing as a tiny hamlet of white buildings in the distance, framed by the deep blue horizon of the Ocean, volcanic hills and a patchwork of fields covered with black picón (volcanic gravel), also called lapilli, separated by dry-stone walls. Just before entering the village, a left turn takes us close to the sea, and paths that snake through the volcanic gravel and ash, in parallel with the coast all the way up to Arrieta, flanked by surging waves and spray.

At La Santa, groups of simple white-painted houses slope down to the rocky coastline. Black electricity cables, hang casually and disorderly, from wall to wall on these simple box-like constructions. The standard green aluminium doors and shutters, breeze-block skeletons of a few un-finished buildings, here and there. Around the corner, some dogs bark and a few resilient plants are seen growing in the picón.

Three or four sea-going **fishing boats** still operate from the tiny port, despite the now unbountiful sea in this area, for the handful of mainly Moroccan fishermen that man the boats. Cylindrical wire traps lie discarded on the rough marginal land. A sharp decline in catches due to over-fishing and pollution.

A strange mixture of peoples, from locals, to settled foreigners running bars and restaurants, shops that hire out and maintain bikes and other sports equipment. And a variety of tourists. A supermarket and a central Church with locked doors; the few priests on the island take turns

provide religious services. A few old, ‘well-used’ cars, their tarnished bodies paint-stripped by salt-laden winds, stand out boldly from the many hire-vehicles on the island

No shortage of determined runners and bikers everywhere around the roads, spilling-out from **Club La Santa**, a little further along the coast. Heroic, in this warm, sunny climate where the strong invigorating wind dries any sweat and stimulates the vast array of sports activities on the menu of this renowned Club. Operated by a Danish Foundation, its decided character stems from its sportive, mainly young to middle-aged Scandinavian clients, along with plenty of German, English and other nationalities.



Down to La Santa



Coast north of La Santa



Ocean fishing La Santa

Just outside the complex, an extension of Bananas is cultivated for the Club, under protective netting. The wind, the ever-present wind, decides many strategies, including: swimming, surfing and sailing, and ways in which different plants manage to survive; Phoenix palms hang-on by a thread along the roadside, some die. A touch more resistant, the round-leaved evergreen Judas trees (*Cercis siliquastrum*) do better here, along with other resistant or ground-hugging species, cacti and succulents.



Club La Santa



Collecting molluscs



Kite surfing Famara

We are not far, further along the coast, from the crashing waves and raking salt-laden winds of the well-known **Caleta di Famara**, prized by **kite-surfers**. Its strong undercurrents, and Ocean that extends far to the West, over to the Bahamas and Florida. Strong winds, especially from November to March, generate waves up to 4m high, good enough for international competition. A modern surfers’ village and shops for the hire and maintenance of equipment. A few bars and restaurants. All in all, an attractive low-key location, also for a few misplaced individuals,

incognito in the milieu; ex-bikers, amateur artists and musicians, ex-flower people, and marijuana.

On the long crescent of fine sand, one of the instructors with an Australian accent, teaches learners how to fix their wetsuits, harnesses and surf-boards. Out to sea, colourful kites can be seen cavorting in the wind pulling their assailants through the air and salty spray, in unknown directions.

Unashamedly, a group of small birds, dart along the water's edge, suddenly stop and just as suddenly, re-start their scattered walk. Beyond the access road, wind-blown-sand piles up against the wheels of parked vehicles. To the North, the island of **La Graciosa**, emerges from the sea, and further to the right, the dark *Risco de Famara* escarpment, completes the cameo, while a few intrepid, sun-worshippers, bake on the beach, making the best of combining sun, sea and wind.



Kite surfing Famara



Agricultural land La Santa



Sudden stop in construction

For an experienced botanist and horticulturalist, the interminable fields of black picón, light sandy soils and volcanic profiles, come as a surprise. With vast regions of needle-sharp rock, covered only by lichens, and flatter areas; notably the *Malpais de la Corona* in the Northeast, that originates from the activity, thousands of years ago, of the old 609m high **La Corona** volcano, a notable landmark. On the road from Arrieta to Orzola, a broad landscape stretches as far as the eye can see, large boulders of petrified magma covered by succulent plants, predominantly *Euphorbia* and *Kleinia* species. Terrain quite impossible to move over.

How can plants survive on this arid island with an annual rainfall of less than 150mm, abundant sunshine and constant winds? Who were the original inhabitants of the island, the **Berbers** from North Africa, the farmers who started to terrace the dry hills and who, together with subsequent European populations, built walls to regulate sudden surges of water from the scarce rains, controlling the torrents of water that would otherwise ravage the hard, dry ground, and allow the loss to the sea of the rainwater and fertile soil? Walls that have not been maintained.

But the first major challenge facing the inhabitants was the volcanic eruptions between 1730 and 1736 that covered some of the most fertile agricultural land. Prior to the eruptions, the island was a net exporter of grain. Much later, the relative importance of **agriculture** to Lanzarote declined with the rapid development of tourism starting in the 1960's. Tracts of land next to the

coastline, including agricultural areas, were purchased to build hotels and other tourist facilities, with or without local planning permission. Many young people left the land to enter the tourist industry or continued to leave the island for better opportunities, elsewhere. As economic conditions improved, some returned from exile in Cuba and the Americas, contributing to a Spanish dialect, often heard on the island today.

Yet, after the economic crisis of 2008, ambitious development plans to construct new hotels, houses and other tourist attractions, were abruptly shelved, leaving a few ugly skeletons and half-finished buildings. Still today the bare outlines of roads can be seen, orphaned from their original intent. A brief navigation with Google Earth, of the area just North of Costa Teguisse, near to the Hotel Beatriz Costa Spa, reveals just how extensive were these development plans. Today, the destination of these unfinished buildings should be closely examined in the light of new public-private development plans.



Paths south of Quemada

Carpet of wildflowers

Quemada

Southeast on the island, follow the arterial road toward **Yaiza**, taking a left turn toward **Playa Quemada**. An imposing range of volcanic hills, *Los Ajaches*, dominates the scenery, with different shades of brown, occasional clouds casting shadows over their more rounded forms, now seeming closer, on nearing this hamlet by the sea.

One year, the fields in Lanzarote exploded in colour after a heavier than usual rainfall in December. On that journey, a spectacular carpet of wildflowers was seen; predominantly, yellow False Sowthistle (*Reichardia tingitana*) and blue Viborina (*Echium lanzerottense*). The softer, tastier vegetation, of these and other species, an unexpected bonanza for the goats, herded along the roadsides and across the fields.

These mountains beckon exploration. Perhaps, after a tasty meal of Paella in one of the local fish restaurants on the black rocky shoreline of Playa Quemada. To adventure along paths, over or cutting through the low windswept vegetation, looking across a great expanse of sea. Down below, patient men are seen with their fishing-rods standing out from the rocks, while tiny boats ply to and from a distant fish farm. After reaching the higher peaks, one can descend down to Papagayo and the Southern seaboard of the island. **Fish farming on the island is controversial; local people at Playa Quemada complain about its pollution of the coastal waters, the licence is due to finish in 2021. Then, there are plans to extend fish-farming to other coastal waters of the island.**

The native flora of Lanzarote is essentially *Macronesian*, here is not the place to describe the sub-types, genera and species most represented. The Palm trees (*Phoenix canariensis*), Washingtonia Fan Palms and Dragon trees (*Dracaena draco*), stand out from the crowd. Several of the low-growing herbaceous plants have *lanzerotensis* or at least *canariensis* as their species name. Most alien species of plants will grow in this climate, if sufficiently irrigated and given some protection against the wind. Many garden plants found on the island are ornamental introductions of, for example: *Bougainvillea*, *Agave*, *Yucca*, *Hibiscus*, *Ficus*, and *Schinus*. Not infrequently, the yellow flowering *Turnera ulmifolia* (Yellow Alder) can be seen in gardens, demonstrating its symbiotic relationship with ants, and what a wonder to see and smell a flowering *Stephanotis floribunda* (*Madagascar Jasmine*) occupying an entire balcony in Playa Honda! Importantly, the Cabildo (Island Council) is now encouraging landscapers and gardeners to use native species. The official botanical symbol of the island is *Euphorbia balsamifera* (Tabaiba).



Hotel Costa Teguiise



Holiday homes Playa Honda



A good restaurant C. Teguiise

Entering **Costa Teguiise** from any direction, finds rows and rows of holiday homes, hotels and shops. Less obvious, are the significant areas of residential houses, occupied much of the year by local Spanish-speaking people and some foreigners. Permanent residents, that live and work on the island. A good marker is the presence of fierce guard dogs, which can be seen taking their owners for a walk, most evenings. This creates a different atmosphere, typical of several towns on the island, where more residential locations merge, almost seamlessly, with the tourist zones by the sea. Costa Teguiise is administered from **Villa de Teguiise** to the Northwest, the old capital of Lanzarote up to 1852 and still today the centre of the municipal government (Ayuntamiento) for the area.

Villa de Teguiise is well-known for its Church, *Nuestra Senora de Guadalupea*, concentration of museums, artisans and its Sunday market. The large colourful market, as it used to be, is full of local stalls together with a variety of pedlars from Africa and other countries. And a great mix of home-made fast-food and snacks from residents, originally from continental Europe or the United Kingdom. The town was built by the Spanish on an elevated position. One of the best vantage points is occupied by the *Castilla de Santa Bàrbara*, from where there is a 360° view of the island.

The tourist areas of Costa Teguiise abound with hotels, shops, restaurants, bars, and beach-side activities, linked by a promenade the length of the town, that opens onto various beaches along

the rocky coastline. At the more westerly end, an oil-burning power station belches its distinctive, acrid brown smoke, demonstrating the direction of the prevailing wind, next to a couple of wind turbines, and in the far distance, cruise liners can be seen moored at Arrecife.

Local owners and traders are surprisingly tolerant. Groups of infamous ‘Brits’ on the island, continue to display moments of abandon to any discipline and decorum that might be expected from them at home. In various localities, menus abound with English breakfasts, Sunday lunches and fish & chips (fish imported from Whitby?), usually accompanied by the smell of cooking oil. Televisions broadcast football matches and other sports, uniting a common interest and culture. The beer flows and jokes are exchanged. There are even *Tetley-branded* delivery lorries. Here, many restaurant/bar owners are British or Irish and make their places, traditionally, homely. Such features are commonly seen in several other tourist locations, such as Puerto Del Carmen. While facing difficulties the result of Covid, most such residents are still likely to stay. But, plenty of tourists from elsewhere, also want their holiday sprees!

Fortunately, the ‘all-inclusive’ package-tour mentality is not, by any means, the only one on the island. A Swiss restaurant owner spoke laconically of the type of tourists that used to visit the island before the advent of low-cost flights. But, plenty of people engage in many activities and sports, and see the island from many very different perspectives. Laudable was a family from Liverpool; husband, wife and five children of various ages, who decided to **roller-skate** the many promenades, always taking care to let the younger children catch-up. Great way to get to see some of the island.



Castilla de Santa Bàrbara.

Cultivation of Aloe

Inside larva tube

Distant voices of children playing on the wet sand, drift over from the beach. Further out to sea, intrepid **windsurfers**, lean-out to pull their sails against the wind, speeding their boards over the incoming waves. Costa Tegüise is well-known for being windy.

Many shops are characterized by ungainly masses of plastic beach-ware and souvenirs of their Chinese owners, or the burgeoning shelves of duty-free spirits, mostly manned by families of Indian descent. Other shops sell duty-free perfumes, souvenirs and clothing. There is no real shortage of mini-supermarkets and other services. Restaurants and bars abound, for most tastes and pockets, that repeats itself in many other Lanzarote towns, no doubt, substantially scaled down due to the pandemic.

Buses abound on the island, either taking passengers to and from hotels and tourist spots, or the public transport '**GuaGua**' buses that operate an efficient and low-cost network from the main depot in Arrecife. How has this been affected by the pandemic?

Notably present throughout the island are museums and shops, selling cosmetic and medicinal products from **Aloe vera**. Commercial cultivation can be found at the *Lanzaloe* farm and shop near Orzola to the North. However, greater quantities are grown and processed on the other islands of the archipelago and possibly mainland Spain. Products on sale are surprisingly expensive and use dispensers rather than tubes, an irritating change. On a positive note, most of the staff are young, helpful and multilingual.

For medical matters, there are numerous well-stocked chemists and private clinics that brandish their British or German (Arzt) allegiances. In cases of emergencies, *ambulances* characteristically *hare* along the roads at breakneck speed with their wailing sirens, carrying patients to the main hospital in Arrecife.

Costa Teguisse and Teguisse are positioned strategically, good roads reach more northerly or southerly regions on the islands, or the capital Arrecife. In particular, they are both fairly near to the tourist attractions; *Jardín de Cactus*, *Fundación César Manrique (Tahiche)*, *Casa Museo César Manrique (Haria)*, *Jameos del Agua* and *Cueva de los Verdes*. In these last two places, beneath the *Malpais de la Corona*, two sections of an extensive 6km long **larva tube** are open to the public. 'Jameos', is the aboriginal word for tunnel, referring in this case to the larva tube formed during past volcanic activity of La Corona. The scientific interest of NASA and ESA on the island, mentioned previously in relation to the *Timanfaya National Park*, is also focused on this phenomenon, since larva tubes on the Moon and Mars, might be suitable for underground human settlements.

And the ceaseless wind, great for drying the washing and invigorating the spirit, less so when lying on an unprotected sunbed. Drooping branches of **Phoenix palms** (*Phoenix canariensis*) heel with the blow, their leaves designed to spill the wind. Planted in-line along many of the roads, their lower branches are pruned each year to give space on the pavement and parking lanes. Dust cavorts across any bare land, depositing a thin layer on terraces, windows and vehicles. The wind characterizes the island as much as the sunshine and sea and the relatively stable climate throughout the year. But, be warned that in January to February, in humid, unventilated accommodation, temperatures can rapidly plunge on clear nights, giving a dry, penetrating coldness for several hours. Traditionally, buildings are not heated.



*Echinocactus* spp.

*Opuntia* parasitized by *Dactylopius*.

Fields of *Opuntia*, Mala

This morning, an excursion to *Jardin de Cactus*, between the villages of **Guatiza** and **Mala** on the East of the Island, off from the main road to **Orzola** in the North. The creation of *Jardin de Cactus* was inspired by *César Manrique*, the most notable figure on the island for his artwork and dedication to the development of many wonderful locations, while promoting the island as a Biosphere Reserve. The Garden contains a wonderful collection of cacti, many species in specimen size, supplied at its inception by cacti collector and expert Guillermo B. Perdomo Perdomo, from his nearby property in Mala. He is also author of the book *Lanzarote Cactus Garden*, a book recommended to all cacti enthusiasts (ISBN: 84-95938-41-3). In this climate and available sunshine, cacti and succulents grow quickly.

Outside the Cactus Garden, masses of fleshy, rounded leaves of *Opuntia* cacti (Prickly Pear) can be seen growing in field after field, separated by stone walls, especially between Mala and Guatiza, once the centre of the economically important **Cochineal industry** of Lanzarote. The boiled, dried and crushed bodies of these insects (*Dactylopius coccus*), parasitic on species of *Opuntia* cacti, give rise to a red dye (E120) still used today in the cosmetic industry (lipstick) and alimentary industry for sweets, drinks like Campari, and for clothing. On the narrow winding road from Mala to **Charco de Palo**, the huge extent of the *Opuntia* cultivation is evident. Be forewarned that Charco de Palo is the only officially recognized **nudist centre** of the island. Unsuspectingly, one might find close encounters with bronzed, statuesque figures, casually walking between the buildings or reclined on the hot, black rocks, next to cascading waves.

Further along the road, brings us to **Arrieta**, a seemingly ‘two horse town’, but which hides a well-known beach and many small fishing boats that help supply some good fish restaurants. There is an *Aloe vera* museum, some shops and a quite large residential quarter. In the gardens, bright *Bougainvillea* flowers vie with fruit trees, including bananas, succulents and cacti. Futuristic perhaps, on entering the town, a supply tower from which to recharge electric vehicles.



Arrieta



Strait below Mirador del Rio



Maize cultivation south of Mirador

From Arrieta, a road reaches up to the *Las Atalayas* (presenting the highest 670m peak on the island), a high plateau, and the spectacular vantage point of *Mirador del Rio*. This overlooks, the island of **Graciosa** and the strait, far below, once the location for a challenging annual swimming event. Also visible is the *Salinas del Rio*, the oldest salt-pan on the island. Lanzarote once had many salt-pans, today limited to just one or two. Traditionally, the salt was used to preserve the

catch on the fishing boats, and subsequently in canning, transport and sales. These latter roles declined due to refrigeration. Today, part is sold as sea-salt for cooking. Numerous small fishing boats are stationed at the port of Graciosa next to the village *Caleta de Sebo*.

**Graciosa** is part of several small islands North of Lanzarote that together constitute the *Chinijo archipelago*. This area, stretching down to an expanse of sea to the West of Famara, is a **Marina Reserve**, one of the largest in Europe. Sea-fishing is banned, with few exceptions that include recreational fishing. *Marine ecologists find that fish-stocks recover more quickly in marine reserves* seabream (*bocinagro*) and parrotfish (*vejja*) feature large in the local catch. Sardines, crustaceans and molluscs are important, along with some tuna, also caught in game-fishing. Various species of dolphins and whales navigate the seas of the archipelago. This makes the Reserve, and other coastal areas, especially good for diving.

The land on the plateau South of Mirador del Rio, is excellent for the *stone-mulched cultivation* of crops such as potatoes and maize. The area receives moisture that precipitates from the clouds as they pass over the sharp escarpment from the West. In some places, the fertile clay soil that lies beneath the picón is revealed. Another interesting species of plant seen in this area was *Glebionis coronarium* (*Chop Suey Greens*) grown in small quantities as a leafy vegetable for its aromatic leaves. A bright yellow ring at the base of the white, chrysanthemum-like petals, makes it an attractive flower.



*Caleta near Mojòn blanco*



*View from road Tegüise to Haria.*



*Descending to Haria*

Because of the steep escarpment and humid climate of this location, mention might be made of the once economically important **Orchil**, a purple dye extracted in Lanzarote from a few species of the *Roccella* lichen.

The narrow coastal road from Arrieta to Orzola, passes through a strip of fine sand, white in places, that continues down to the sea, where one or two tiny bays have been sculptured from the sharp volcanic rocks (e.g.: *Caleta del Mojòn blanco*) in which to walk and swim, amongst darting fish, distant from the rolling Ocean waves. There are plenty of sandy beaches in Lanzarote directly facing the Ocean, but swimming requires care and attention because of tidal currents, size of the waves and rapid shelving to deep water. In compensation, there are many natural or artificial swimming areas formed within the ever-present basalt rocks. **Orzola** is a messy town with a few fish restaurants, boats, and some holiday homes, yet important for its ferry boats to Graciosa. The strait is not so wide, but the sea can get very rough. Graciosa is for

dedicated sunbathing, no shortage of deeply sun-tanned faces returning on the fast hydrofoils or ordinary ferries. There are no asphalt roads. The island also promises good biking, jogging, surfing, walking and of course diving.

The descent on the last section of the windy road North from Teguise, brings us, unexpectedly, to the town of **Haria**. A mixture between an Arab settlement and an Oasis, tall palm trees emerging from between the low, white buildings across the town, partially surrounded by impressive hills, some of which are terraced and worked agriculturally.

Lying in a sort of basin, these palm trees receive no artificial irrigation, in contrast to many of the trees growing on the island. There is a Saturday market, plenty of artisans and shops. Also, the last home of César Manrique, the museum of which one can visit. The area is excellent for trekking in the company of knowledgeable guides. Easier access to the town is afforded by the road from Arrieta that passes through *Valle de Temisa*, another area of agricultural production also well-known for its swathes of native plants, flowering in early spring.

The majority of foreign residents in Lanzarote come from Britain and Germany. By way of generalization, it is said that residents of German origin, about 3%, are settled more frequently in the more northerly areas, including Haria, while those of English origin, about 5%, more to the south, around *Tias*, *Puerto Del Carmen* and *Playa Blanca*. These two countries still constitute the largest number of foreign residents, although post-Covid, this might be changing.

The long uphill road from Arrecife or Costa Teguis, in the direction of **San Bartolome**, likely needs your foot on the accelerator pedal. Atop of *Montana Mina* to the right, a number of wind turbines move slowly, in synchronization. San Bartolome is an important centre for agriculture, evident from the buildings, local inhabitants and services. Soon past the town takes us to another famous monument of César Manrique, *Casa Museo del Campesino*. Within this complex, a remarkable restaurant was built below the surface occupying a huge volcanic bubble. The road to the left leads to the main wine-growing area of La Geria.



El Jable towards Teguis



Sweet potatoes, El Jable



Biological production from Canary bees

To the right, takes us to Teguis. This road dips down, cutting across an extensive plain of agricultural land, **El Jable**, covered by sand (*Jable* derives from the French for sand, *Sable*). Westerly trade winds from the coast are responsible for depositing the sand over fertile land. An

area also well-known for its wind-farm under development. The main crop is the sweet potato. Only small areas are cultivated, the land left fallow for one year after each harvest. Planting into the fertile soil beneath the sand, takes place after the rains, that usually come around November/December time. Other crops grown in the area include cereals, watermelons and pumpkins. No irrigation water is used. This **dry farming** requires wide inter or intra-spacing, due to the scarcity of ground water. It is quite normal to see two stands of Maize growing together. Do not think of big harvests/ha when farmers refer to the area of land cultivated!

Further along this road, a **demonstration farm**, the *Finca Machinda* can be visited at **Tao**, for the typical cultivation of vegetable and fruit crops, sold locally, and further towards Tinajo at **Tiagua**, the *Museo Agricola* shows the history of agricultural production on the island. **Apiculture** is a relatively new activity on the island and greatly appreciated by local farmers since the honeybees improve the quality and yield of many crops. Canary honeybees have a distinctive black band on their abdomens. This private venture, started by a long-standing German resident, extends to the production of dried fruits for retail.

From the white sand of a sunny beach, to the falling light just before sunset, feathery red-tinged clouds float over the blue. Swallows, seen in May, delight in their island stopover on the long journey, from deep within the African continent to parts of Europe. Lanzarote is a haven for resting and migrant birds, certain reptiles and other animals, more than justifying its status as a UNESCO biosphere reserve.

With tourism, there also came a huge demand for **drinking water**. This is provided mainly by bottled water, tourists commonly seen humping plastic bottles and demijohns from shop to residence. Delivery lorries arrive by boat from Gran Canaria, plying the roads to supply bottled water to the supermarkets, hotels and tourist centres. For other uses, as many as seven **desalination plants** feed fresh water into a network covering the island, burning a notable amount of fossil fuel in the process. By definition (*United Nations*), desalinated water should contain no more than three parts per million of salt. On average, the desalinated water in Lanzarote might not exceed this, but the salt content is still sufficient to eventually compromise the delicate balance of **stone mulching** when used in drip irrigate for agricultural crops, garden plants and trees, due to evaporation. The salt also reduces the life of domestic boilers. The cost of fresh-water to residents is high, some residents might require it to fill swimming pools and the like. A lower rate is applied for agricultural use.

Well over half the land, previously used for agriculture, today lies abandoned. Long ago, local farmers found ways of cultivating crops in these extremely marginal conditions by stone mulching. Protagonist is the picón (called volcanic sand or ash, although particle size is more like fine gravel), mostly black, although in some regions around El Golfo, it is often red. The picón is porous and overlies fertile clay soil beneath, it gathers condensation water produced during the night. The water percolates down into the clay, by gravity and capillary action, where it is held

and made available to plant roots. The picón gathers warmth, and shades the soil from the sun, it significantly reduces the loss of moisture due to evaporation. However, when mixed with the clay, during harvesting for example, the picón loses this property, and every-so-often needs renewing.

When driving around the island, fields of picón are commonly seen, divided by dry-stone walls. Some, growing maize, or perhaps a crop of water-melons, where the large fruits can be seen sitting above irregular extensions of vegetation. Some areas will be cropping *Papas bonita* (rounded, wrinkled potatoes typical of the island). Very tasty, they are usually baked, or cooked in seawater. Ordinary potatoes, some for export, are also grown, along with spinach, lettuce, carrots and some other vegetables. The onion is the main export crop, Lanzarote onions are known for their strong and sweet taste. Large numbers were seen, drying under sun, in a concentration of farming, to the Northeast of Tinajo. Tomatoes are also successfully harvested from ground-hugging plants. Various farms, guarded by vociferous dogs, were seen connected by a narrow winding road, where it is easy to meet pick-up trucks or a tractor or two.



Food for the goats



Potatoes growing in the picón



Bodega, La Geria

Rarely seen, are various farms that raise goats for renowned cheeses, and poultry for egg production. But, to satisfy the needs of the tourist industry and residents, large volumes of subsidised meat, cheese and fodder crops, vegetables and fruit, are imported from other islands in the Canary archipelago, Argentina, The Netherlands and mainland Spain.

On an island of wind, sunshine and sea, renewable energy accounts for an ever-increasing slice of the total **electricity** supply. Lanzarote is connected to Fuerteventura by a seabed supply cable and both islands import diesel for the ENDESA power stations. But wind farms on Lanzarote are on the increase, the largest project being located in the area of El Jable, referred to previously in the context of agriculture. Other renewable sources being developed on the island, include a submerged wave-energy system connected to the grid, and photovoltaic capacity, although the locations of the latter were not evident to the author. Finally, a small capacity is generated from biogas, presumably from the digestion of organic waste. One of the inhibiting factors in energy development could relate to the fact that demand is very uneven, widely spread-out over the

island, and the existing grid would need further investments. The cost of electricity is said to be subsidized to assist local inhabitants and the tourist industry.

Take a left turn at the roundabout at *Casa Museo del Campesino* with its distinctive César Manrique sculpture, and enter the main wine producing area of Lanzarote, **La Geria**, the road leading to the village of **Uga**. This road passes through an area of many large **vineyards (Bodegas)**, some facing the road, others, more distant. The Bodegas appear much as Spanish Haciendas, their vine growing set amongst areas of volcanic rock or a smoother topography of petrified lava flows. The larger vineyards combine grape cultivation with wine production and sales. Some have museums, demonstrations and wine tasting. But the area is also interspersed with a constellation of very small growers that work their ‘patch’ either professionally or much as a hobby, selling their harvest to the larger vineyards.



*Crop of grapes, La Geria.*



*Grapevines, La Geria*



*Traditional cultivation*

Further along the narrow road, impressive grey-black profiles of some old volcanoes appear, distinctively ‘tattooed’ with flat rings of low stone walls, from the lower to upper heights. These form part of the traditional method of cultivating grapevines on the Island. A concave, circular depression about 3m in diameter and 1.5-2m in depth, is modelled into a deep layer of picón, overlying fertile soil. Any rain or condensation water channels into the centre where the vine has been planted into the soil. The depression, together with a low semi-circular stone wall facing the prevailing wind, captures moisture and reduces its loss by evaporation. Just how do the farmers walk up the side of the volcanic hills to service their plants, harvest the grapes and carry them down to the roads!?

A big movement on the island is turning to biological (organic) cultivation and consequently the resulting wine is labelled ecological. Some of the holes, left abandoned, are being replanted. By far the largest, but not exclusive, type of wine produced is **Malvasia** from white grapes. Judging by the international awards, some very good quality wines are produced in Lanzarote.

On the left, along the main road from Tias to Yaiza, finds the remarkable *Finca Uga demonstration farm*. This privately owned establishment might be visited on formal request. It engages in educational tours, and is a must for anyone interested in the island’s agriculture. Most of the horticultural and agricultural opportunities, offered by the island and its climate, are on display. They raise goats, pigs, some cattle, and produce award winning cheeses. The umbrella

organization also has widespread interests in vineyards and hotels. indeed, the farm supplies produce to the Hotel Princess in Playa Blanca, amongst others. Outdoor crops or protected cultivations on the farm, include: Papaya, Figs, Citrus varieties, other tree fruit and strawberries. More recently, a significant cultivation of drought resistant varieties of Olive plants has started for the olive oil.



Grapevine.

Papaya

Papaya, Finca Uga

Villa a Nazaret

The **local government research and extension** service for agriculture is found in **Tinache**, on the same road that passes the *Fundacion Césare Manrique*. This Foundation is the best place to get to know the creative energy of this man, artist, architect and sculptor, and his love for the island. Here he designed a remarkable multi-level home inside a volcanic bubble. Externally, a small area is devoted to an area of stone-mulching agriculture. A little further North on the road to Tegüise, is the grand villa at **Nazaret**, once owned by actor *Omar Sharif*, which he lost while gambling!

When driving to **Playa Blanca** from Yaiza, only goes to emphasize the isolated position of the town, a tourist centre on the extreme Southern seaboard, as the road cuts through miles of the *Los Rostros* area of sharp volcanic rocks, covered with hundreds of different species of lichens. Quite impossible terrain to walk over. It is a relief to finally arrive at the outskirts. The town consists of a long, rather narrow extension facing the sea and the island of **Fuerteventura**, connected by fast Fred Olsen ferryboats. Notable, is a wide promenade stretching the entire length of the town, intersected by the port, then reaching the **Marina Rubicon**, an area also dedicated to a splendid Saturday market. Here, one can mix with the wealthy owners of yachts and motorboats, against a backcloth of sparkling blue sea and the *Isla de Lobos*, just off the Northern coastline of Fuerteventura. On the landward side, shops and tourist activities mix with a wide stretch of holiday homes and estates, some left incomplete after the economic crisis of 2008. The promenade, links hotels and residences, sandy beaches, including the notable *Playa Dorado*. A coastal path further East reaches other sandy beaches, including the well-known *Playa Papagaya*, also reached by a secondary inland road. To take the secondary road North from Playa Blanca, is to coast past the largest remaining **salt-pan** on the island, *Salinas de Janubio*. Today it produces about 2,000 tons of salt each year for local use, a huge drop from its former importance.



Playa Dorado



Marina Rubicon



Ferry per Fuerteventura

In the past some of the salt-pans also exported salt to other islands in the Canary archipelago. Further along the rocky coastline, the road arrives at another major tourist spot, **El Golfo**. *Be advised, that throughout the island, bikers and runners often use these secondary roads, and driving needs particular attention.* This road is a dead end, since it borders the Timanfaya National Park. A walk down to the sea at *Charco de los Chicos*, demonstrates spectacular formations of rocks sculptured by the meeting of molten larvae with the sea. Also, the position of large black boulders, originating from masses of molten-larva spewed out from the once active volcanoes. Interestingly, the particles of sea-washed picón on the beach are rounded rather than angular. The location offers various shops and restaurants specializing in fish.



El Golfo



Where lava met the sea



Coastal path, El Golfo

Next stop is **Tias** via Yaiza, driving past areas of red picón and differing profiles of grey volcanic cones with bushes and other vegetation trying to colonize the lower slopes, and flat areas of rocks painted light grey-cream with lichens. This important, seemingly more 'mature' town, lies on an elevated plane, overlooking the coast. Incomparable views down below, extend from aeroplanes taking off and landing from the airport, to the town of Puerto Del Carmen, the distant seascape and range of hills to the Southeast. Volcanic scenery in the other directions encompasses the tourist villages of Conil and Asomada, leading down to Macher. These places are well-known for their foreign residents, villas and plentiful, barking guard-dogs. Tias feels less touristy, more residential. It is home to the British-Hispanic Secondary School, holiday homes, the Ayuntamiento (municipal government) and sports centre. Also, the Church, *Nuestra Señora de la Calendaria*, plenty of shops and services, and probably the best bakery on the island. The Ayuntamiento serves the community which includes Puerto Del Carmen.



Tias

Holiday homes, Tias.

Plants versus wind and drought

**Puerto Del Carmen** is a massive tourist complex on the island, where holiday-makers can easily forget they are on a volcanic island, and think that nothing else exists outside of the seaside location. A long promenade stretches along the seafront from the sandy beaches of *Playa that for plants and animals in terrestrial reserves*.

Coastal waters around Lanzarote are particularly rich in fish biodiversity, partly due to the volcanic formations rising from the seabed; escarpments, caves and platforms provide hiding places for marine life. Judging from the fish served in the local restaurants, seabass (*spigole*), *Matagorda* to *Playa de los Pocillos* and to *Playa Grande* next to the older town centre and a tiny port. A string of hotels, housing estates, clinics, shops, bars and restaurants adorn the town, together with diving schools and equipment hire. Traditionally, a preferred location of English and Irish tourists, reflected by the pubs and entertainment venues. A few holiday villages and clinics, preferred by German tourists, are found between Matagorda and the start of *Puerta Del Carmen*.

A secondary road to the Southwest arrives at **Puerto Calero**. Hotels, holiday homes and villas extend over terrain that slopes down to a magnificent **Marina**. Are we at Portofino or Miami? Ocean-going yachts to admire, smaller sailing vessels and motorboats tied-up to the docks, set against turquoise water leading to the sea. Listen to the rigging that clangs noisily in the wind. Admire some of these ocean-going yachts; annual yacht races to the Bahamas start at this Marina. A busy dockyard and a string of restaurants and up-market shops, compete with Ocean fishing and tourist trips in a small submarine. A fascinating place, singular in its purpose and location.



Marina, Puerto Calero

Shipyard, Puerto Calero

Plenty to choose from

At the opposite end of Puerta Del Carmen, a good walk or run, takes us along a promenade, from **Matagorda** to Playa Honda, passing the very end of the airport runway. Splash around in shallow water on the sandy beach between the rocks, walk the promenade, or watch the aeroplanes take-off or their long slow decent over the sea, picking on the distant lights as they arrive in range. The smell of kerosene and burning rubber wafting in the wind! The pandemic will have significantly reduced the number of domestic and international flights. (20)

**Playa Honda**, borders the airport runway, and lies in the community of San Bartolomeo. It is distinctive in many ways, firstly because it is the industrial centre of Lanzarote, concentrated on the right side of the main road from Arrecife. Also, because the town has the second largest population in Lanzarote. Along the same road, lies the **Centro Comercial Deiland Plaza**, probably the best on the island.



Promenade, Matagorda to Playa Honda

One of the beaches, Matagorda

The main road is lined with shops, and leads into the largest residential quarter. Next to the seafront on the airport side, a large parking area and the IES secondary school, from which now and again, groups of students exit to enjoy the main beach. In the other direction, a long promenade connects holiday homes and some fine villas on the seafront. A huge *Ficus lyrata* (Fiddle-leaf fig tree) occupies a corner garden. In some other picón gardens, bright red flowers covered a few Flame trees (*Brachychiton acerifolius*). More commonly, the gardens are planted with well-spaced cacti and succulents. This promenade is great for walking, jogging and biking in face of a sea-breeze and wide, open beaches, separated by areas of typical black basalt rocks.



Playa Honda

Flame tree

Ficus lyrata

Sunset

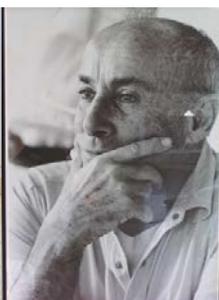
Worth mentioning are the economic advantages of spending time on Lanzarote, some of which will have changed post-Covid. Classified as a peripheral region of the UE, it has a VAT tax at 7%.

Petrol stations abound and petrol is still relatively cheap. But, car-hire costs have almost doubled, and some of the wide range of hotels and residences remain closed. Prices are normally per room, not per person. Plenty of rented flats are advertised, but because many flats are purchased exclusively as holiday accommodation, internal furnishings are often minimal, insufficient for long rentals.

**Arrecife** (Spanish for ‘reef’), the main town of Lanzarote, has a population of about 35% of the island’s population of 150,000. To follow the descent from the ring-road to the seafront, looking for a place to park, is not a happy experience. Ramshackle buildings vie with those antique or restored and an occasional new entry. A few breeze-block walls and an empty space, electricity cables hang limply in the air, cars parked haphazardly where they can, along narrow roads. A few improbable shops, are occupied by residents of a decidedly African or Colombian extraction. The town started off as a small fishing village, part of the mainstay activities of the island. Its location was favourable to the rapid growth in trade between the old worlds of Europe and Africa and the new worlds of the Americas. The number of residents increased accordingly, and resulted in a disorganized urban development. Today, this area is modified by modern housing developments, offices and public buildings, part of which stretches away from the sea, intersected by a ring-road. The town centre runs from the seafront to *El Charco*, a tidal lagoon for small boats, close by the Church of *San Ginés*. Shops and bar/restaurants line the main street. Many retired local residents with older wizened faces, play cards in the bars or sit on the benches, passively declaring their history and permanence on the island, in contrast to the milling, temporary, tourists. On occasion, one might encounter a Mexican-style band, moving through the streets, singing and playing guitars; there are plenty of local festivals. Opposite *El Charco*, the new *Arrecife Marina* has greatly modified the area. Plenty of yachts and motorboats, a boatyard, services and parking. Opportunities for shops, restaurants and a supermarket, complement the new development. On the other side of the strait, a few sea-going fishing boats are moored. Arrecife is said to be the second most important base in the Canary archipelago for fishing. To continue in this North easterly direction toward *Costa Teguisse*, passes the art museum of *Castillo de San José* and reaches a point overlooking the docking peers for **cruise liners** that frequent the harbour. Close by, regular **passenger ferries** link Lanzarote to Cadiz in mainland Spain and Las Palmas (Gran Canaria). On this part of the coast, the relative position on the sea of *Armas* ferries can be used to tell the time of day!



Aboriginal figures



Cesàr Manrique



Promenade, Arrecife



Fulvia &amp; Edward

Opposite the Marina, a lovely wide promenade extends the length of the town, and beyond, in the direction of El Cable and Playa Honda. Near the centre in the seaward direction, lies the distinctive *Castillo de San Gabriel*. The town has several interesting museums and an arts centre. Plenty of shops and a little greenery lines the seafront. Further along, the *Grand Hotel & Spa* represents an important landmark, built next to the sandy beach of *Playa del Reducto*. More hotels and condominiums continue along the roads parallel to the seafront, ending in a distinctive building of the Cabildo (Island Council), next to a large parking area that opens onto the promenade.

So, here we are, a volcanic island of fishing, salt-pans and agriculture, alternating with all-year-round tourism, in all its many vests. Volcanic cones covered in grey ash, scarred here and there by landslides sometimes provoked by the removal of picón for use in agriculture and gardens. The combination of sunshine, wind, and sea stimulates people to participate in sporting events; marathon running, biking, surfing, swimming and diving. But, also just to appreciate these aspects, wide-open skies and fleeting clouds, sunrises and sunsets over vast expanses of Ocean and dark volcanic silhouettes. What ideas, then, are under consideration, what projects are being introduced, to redevelop the island's economy, not just tourism, after the disastrous effects of Covid?



Sea



Stone



Sky

In the medium to long-term, **energy generation** from renewable sources will increase substantially for Lanzarote (and the Canary Islands as a whole), reducing the costs of importing diesel. The introduction of electrically driven and hybrid powered vehicles will reduce the cost of importing petrol. **Low-cost flights** and all-inclusive accommodation packages will return, business as usual, subject to a variety of incentives. Tourism associated with sports activities is likely to return quickly with little promotion, since the island offers a unique environment and combination of structures for sports and fitness.

**More qualified** cultural & agricultural tourism might further the development of pre-organized guided tours of 7-14 days addressed to some of most particular features of the island: agricultural production and transformation, cultivation of grapevines and the production of wine, local flora & fauna, marine life and protection, volcanology - the island's heritage, and walking the island.

The **ageing population** in Europe is an increasingly important market. Retired people, still independent, could be offered long-stays on the island, minimum 3 months, in all-inclusive accommodation with appropriate support, at affordable prices. This would include, in each offer, a range of activities and health-giving pursuits (not intended as bespoke wellness centres for all age groups), with onsite medical and physiotherapeutic assistance and management. This type of initiative might attract investment to complete the construction of hotels and houses left unfinished. Equally, large hotels might convert part of their occupancy to this type of tourism. Finally, joint investments could be sought to develop completely new structures with similar objectives. Such schemes could be jointly sponsored and promoted by the Spanish Health Authority in Lanzarote and the Health Authorities of the countries from which the participant tourists came from. Indeed, these authorities could provide some form of selection of participant tourists and control the quality of offers.

A significant injection of capital would be made to the **agricultural sector** in Lanzarote. To enable qualified young agricultural graduates and technicians, together with public experimental stations, to engage in the evaluation of new natural methods of water collection for irrigation, new crops and methods of cultivation in the open air and in protective structures, product transformation (e.g.: dried vegetable & fruits, juices), the raising of livestock and poultry. Part of the research and training would be full immersion in the existing agricultural practises, before embarking on practical trials, that could also be realized in cooperation with established growers, import/export traders and the distribution chain. The ultimate aim would be to establish new commercially valid farms, firstly favouring internal demand to substitute imports, later developing potential export markets. Graduates and technicians would be attracted from other Canary Islands, mainland Spain and other European countries.

So, take a cocktail on a hotel terrace, or a pint of beer in a local bar, walk and relax on this wonderful island. Enjoy what it has to offer, all in the space of a few hundred square kilometres!

Edward Bent, Bergamo 20/12/2021