

Words by David Palacios
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THE BEST OF GRAN CANARIA

This island in the Canary Islands archipelago boasting more than 200 kilometres of coastline is a safe bet for a winter getaway. Unforgettable sunny adventures, spring-like temperatures, and a unique volcanic landscape are all waiting for you on these Atlantic shores.



* Prices may differ when departing from different airports.

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Maspalomas Dunes

The southern tip of Gran Canaria is home to one of the wildest landscapes on the island, a protected natural area since 1994 that spans more than 400 hectares and six kilometres of sand. This poetic Sahara-like landscape was shaped by the erosion of volcanic rocks, algae, and shells in conjunction with the wind. The dunes boast one of the island's most delightful microclimates, maintaining a pleasant temperature of approximately 22 degrees Celsius throughout the year, even in December. Head to the information point, where you'll be treated to a wonderful panorama of this unique landscape. A camel ride with the whole family is the perfect option if you want to appreciate the dunes from a different perspective. Tours last about 30 minutes, which is enough to get a good feel for this natural landmark. Then make sure you have a spot on nearby Maspalomas Beach to view the sunset – the setting with the dunes and the crystalline waters of the Atlantic Ocean is priceless.

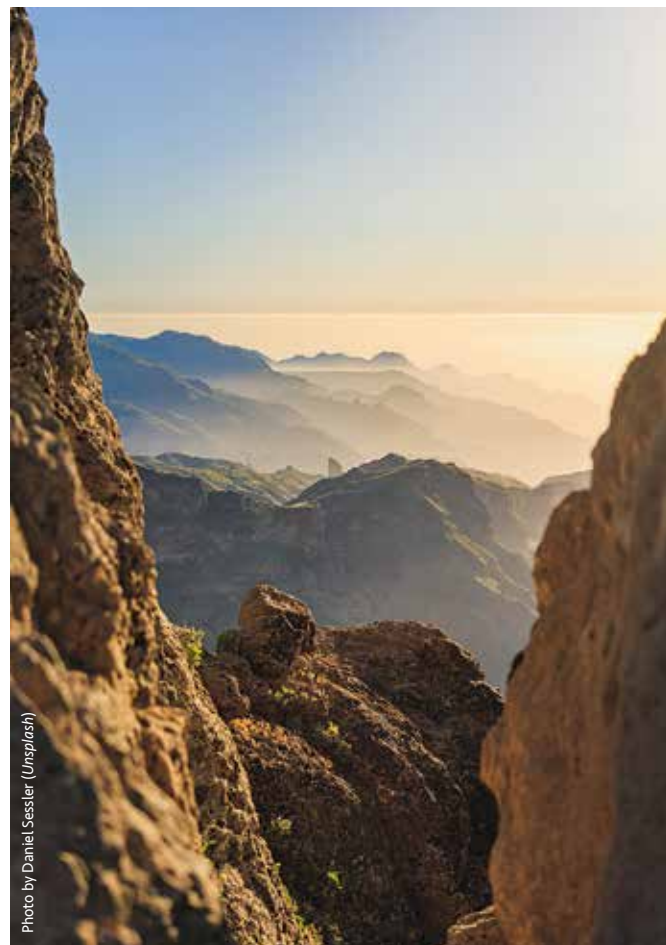
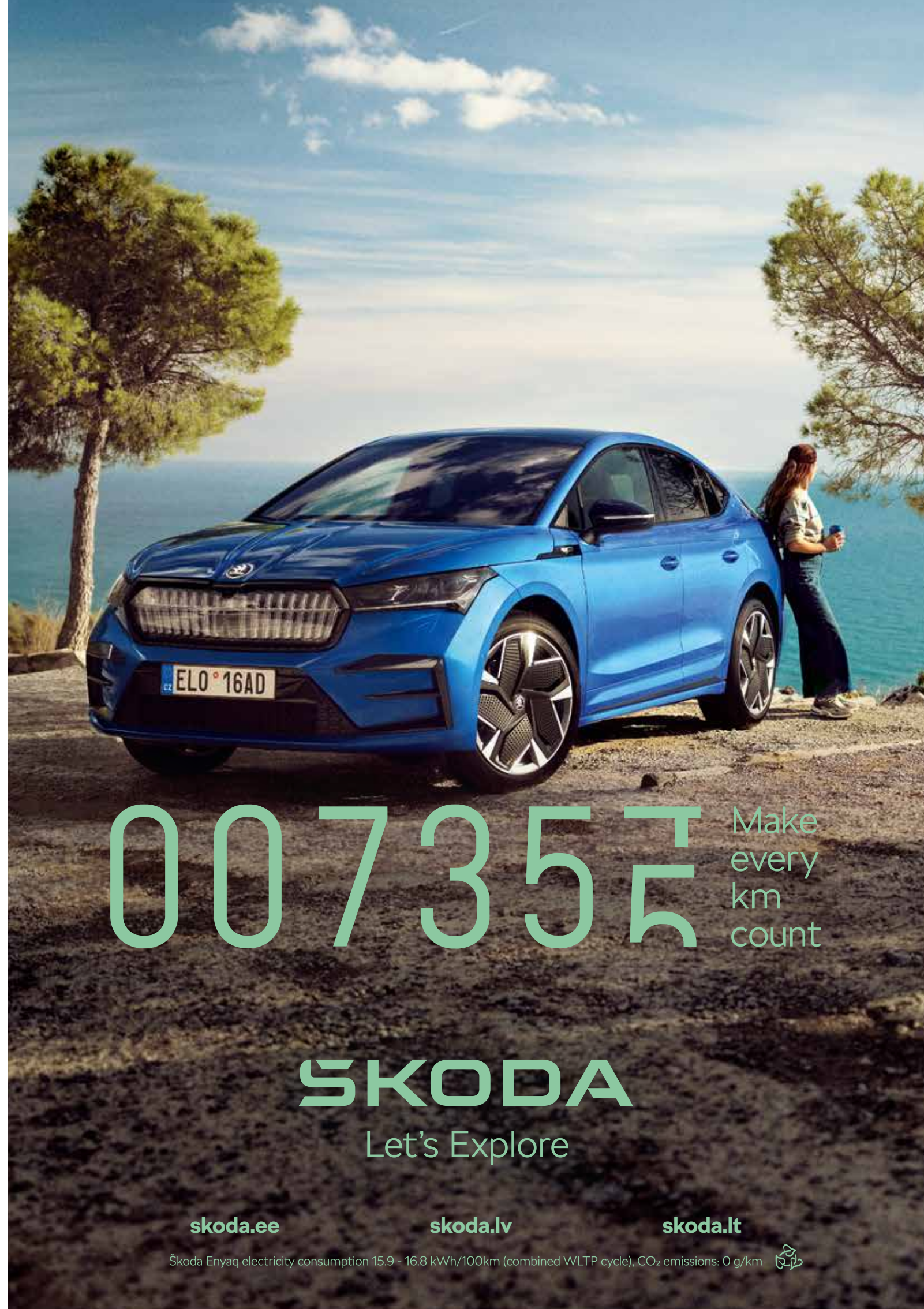


Photo by Daniel Sessler (Unsplash)

Roque Nublo

Hike up to this 80-metre-high rock on Gran Canaria overlooking the Atlantic Ocean for a deep breath of fresh, clean air. The archipelago's volcanic origins, dating back about 70 million years ago, placed this formation here. Nowadays, it's a must-visit for those wanting to explore Gran Canaria's natural wonders in a peaceful setting. The circular route from the Degollada de La Goleta car park takes about three hours and is a convenient option for enjoying the scenery. If it's a clear day, look to the horizon and you'll probably be able to see the top of the El Teide volcano on the neighbouring island of Tenerife, which is also the highest peak in all of Spain. The magical surroundings here were considered holy by the Guanches, the indigenous inhabitants of the Canary Islands, who believed they could communicate with God from here.



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Barranco de las Vacas

What would be a trip without checking out the most *Instagrammable* place at your destination? In the southeast of the island, the Barranco de las Vacas, meaning ‘ravine of the cows’, is a canyon several kilometres long between Agüimes and Santa Lucía. It is believed to have been formed over the course of thousands of years by the force of water passing through. Today, only a small part of the canyon, the Barranco de Barafonso, is open to the public. The structure changes from a V-shape at the entrance to a U-shape, thus producing a true play of natural light. Winter is the best time to visit this enchanting place and admire the beauty of the natural formation in peace and tranquillity. It’s also highly recommended to visit in the morning for better photo opportunities and fewer people.



Banana production

As soon as you land, you’ll encounter big plantations of bananas spread across the island. Known here as the *plátano*, the banana is the most important crop in the Canary Islands, with Gran Canaria representing as much as 20% of all the production. Nearly all that produce is exported to mainland Spain, but this island is nevertheless the best place to try one of the products the Canarios are most proud of. Surrounded by more than 7000 banana plantations featuring 15 different varieties, the Museo del Plátano in Arucas is a good place to learn more about this important activity for the local economy. If you join one of the tours, you’ll receive a masterclass in the production of bananas and the important role this fruit has played in international commerce. Afterwards, delight your palate with one of the local banana-based desserts, such as banana flan or banana pancakes.

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Hidden beaches

With more than 130 beaches totalling more than 60 kilometres of sand, Gran Canaria hosts some unique locations unknown to most visitors. The Güi Güi Beach is a veritable paradise thanks to the cliffs and crystal-clear waters. Reaching the beach takes around an hour along a steep path, but the landscape on arrival certainly pays off. Güi Güi is also reachable by boat from the nearby ports of La Aldea de San Nicolás, Puerto de Mogán, Arguineguín, and Agaete. If you're looking for a volcanic landscape, Guayedra Beach in Agaete is the place to visit. Located along the imposing coastline of cliffs called the Dragon's Tail, it's a top spot to experience one of the best sunsets on the island. You'll find Guayedra Beach at the heart of the Agaete Valley, in between dark lava, palm trees, and cliffs. It's a mix of sandy and stone landscapes accessed via a panoramic path from the village with views of the island's rugged west coast.



Water sports

El Cabrón in Agüimes is known for one of the best marine reserves on the whole island. It's believed to be home to more than 400 species, including seahorses, rays, and cuttlefish. Put on your diving goggles and discover one of the natural wonders of Gran Canaria by snorkelling or scuba diving. Kayaking is also a good option to explore the island from another perspective and has recently been gaining popularity. The clear waters of Taurito Beach in the southern city of Mogán and the nearby sea caves are one of the most magical places to enjoy this activity. If you're more into surfing, the northern coast of Gran Canaria will be your best destination. The waves at Las Canteras Beach in the island's capital and the surroundings of El Confital and El Lloret are optimal for practising this sport.



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Photo by Jonas Von Werne (Unplash)

Whale and dolphin watching

Gran Canaria has long been recognised for its rich marine biodiversity. The archipelago's location near the African coast and the warm water temperatures all year round make it a great place to see cetaceans. Around 50 different types of species – including whales, orcas, and dolphins – can be found in the waters surrounding the island, making it one of the most diverse locations for cetaceans globally and the largest in Europe. Puerto Rico Beach at the southern tip of Gran Canaria is the departure point for most of the tours, which usually last a couple of hours. While no one can 100% guarantee cetacean sightings, the possibility is very high. Some tour operators even offer complimentary tickets for the following day in case you've had back luck.



Food and flea markets

For more than two centuries, the northern village of Teror – which is also one of the oldest towns in the whole Canary Islands – wakes up every Sunday morning to find the Plaza de Sintes full of market stalls. From textile artisans to local products and even religious objects, all can be found at this *mercadillo*. If you happen to be in Las Palmas on a Sunday, pass by the Ramblas Juan Rodríguez Doreste to discover more than 400 stalls selling clothes, shoes, and groceries. The San Lorenzo Farmers' Market on Sundays in the capital city is also a good visit if you're into organic vegetables. In the south, the marina in Mogán turns into a flea and farmers' market every Friday. Make sure to get a souvenir from a local designer before getting on the plane to return home.



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Photo courtesy of Poemas by Hermanos Padrón

A flavoursome dish at Poemas by Hermanos Padrón

Unique flavours

Local Canarian cuisine is simple yet has an exotic touch and unique flavours. When visiting the archipelago, definitely try the traditional dishes. *Sancocho*, which is boiled salted fish served with potatoes (or *papas* as they're called here), and the traditional red and green *mojo* sauces are some of Gran Canaria's signature foods. *Gofío*, a cornflour-based side dish, accompanies nearly every dish. If you prefer to upscale your gastronomic experience, head to the southern Playa de Patalavaca and meet Germán Ortega at *Michelin*-starred *La Aquarela*. He's one of the chefs leading Gran Canaria's fine-dining scene with a menu that combines modern local recipes with Nordic influences from his previous work experience in Sweden. Shrimp from Mogán and quail from La Palma are among his most popular creations. In Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, the well-known Padrón brothers (Juan Carlos and Jonathan) present an immersive gastronomic experience using local, seasonal products at their *Michelin*-starred restaurant *Poemas*.



Rum production

The cultivation of sugar cane had been well established on Gran Canaria by the time Christopher Columbus took this grass from the Canary Islands to the New World and Santo Domingo in the Caribbean on his second trip to the Americas in 1492. The *Arehucas* distillery in Arucas began producing rum in 1884, making it Europe's oldest rum cellar still in operation; shortly after, this product became very popular across all of the Canary Islands. Take a tour to explore the aging cellar with over 4000 oak barrels and taste the distillery's varieties of spirits. *Arehucas* has been proudly delivering its products to the Spanish royal family since 1892. If you prefer to sample the local rum in a milder way, you might want to try *ron miel*, which is a traditional liqueur and the perfect option for a pre- or after-dinner drink. **bo**



Next to Cruffins, at the same address, sits my favourite restaurant, Two More Beers, which has excellent food and an impressive selection of over 100 types of beer, including some Latvian gems. A personal favourite of mine is the venison burger in a potato-hemp seed waffle paired with an in-house brewed beer. Business hours: every day from 12.00 to 24.00, and until 02.00 on Fridays and Saturdays.



Recommended by
Jānis Vilisons
Member of the board
of the hotel "Konventa Sēta"

Old Riga is renowned for its splendid architecture, but it holds a special place in my heart as my workplace and my preferred area for enjoying good coffee, delicious food, and great music.

A daily ritual for me involves a visit to Cruffins bakery at Kalēju 9/11, my favourite spot for an afternoon dessert and coffee. The cruffin is a new, trendy pastry – croissant dough baked in the shape of a muffin with either a sweet or savoury filling – and it's perfect with a cup of coffee or a glass of chilled prosecco. With its striking interior, Cruffins is also an ideal place for capturing memorable photos. Business hours: every day from 10.00 to 20.00, and until 18.00 on Sundays.



For holidays or outings with friends, I suggest The Stage, a bar/restaurant located in the heart of Old Riga at Kalkū Street 17. With its excellent food and fine selection of beer and stronger spirits, its special feature is the live music. There's nothing quite like enjoying a drink, while soaking in the view of historical architecture and listening to live music. Business hours: daily from 12.00 to 24.00, and until 02.00 on Fridays and Saturdays.

Whether you're seeking a sweet treat, a gourmet dinner, or a lively night out, these spots are quintessential to experiencing the charm of Old Riga.

