

January 4, 2009

We had only planned to spend a week in Rota, Spain, before sailing south to Madeira and the Canaries, but instead we had to wait 20 days before finally getting an acceptable weather window. Luckily, we couldn't have asked for a lovelier small Spanish town in which to wait for weather. The historical district located next to the marina was fun to explore with its clean narrow streets, numerous small plazas, and beautiful churches displaying a mixture of Gothic and Baroque architecture. The outer doors lining the narrow streets often opened up to beautifully tiled interior vestibules, and beyond that inner courtyards. Being located along the coast, the town also had a lovely beach. While in Rota, we purchased food staples for our Atlantic crossing and also cleaned off the "red Sahara sand" encountered during the heavy fog near Gibraltar. This sand had stuck like glue to everything on our boat.



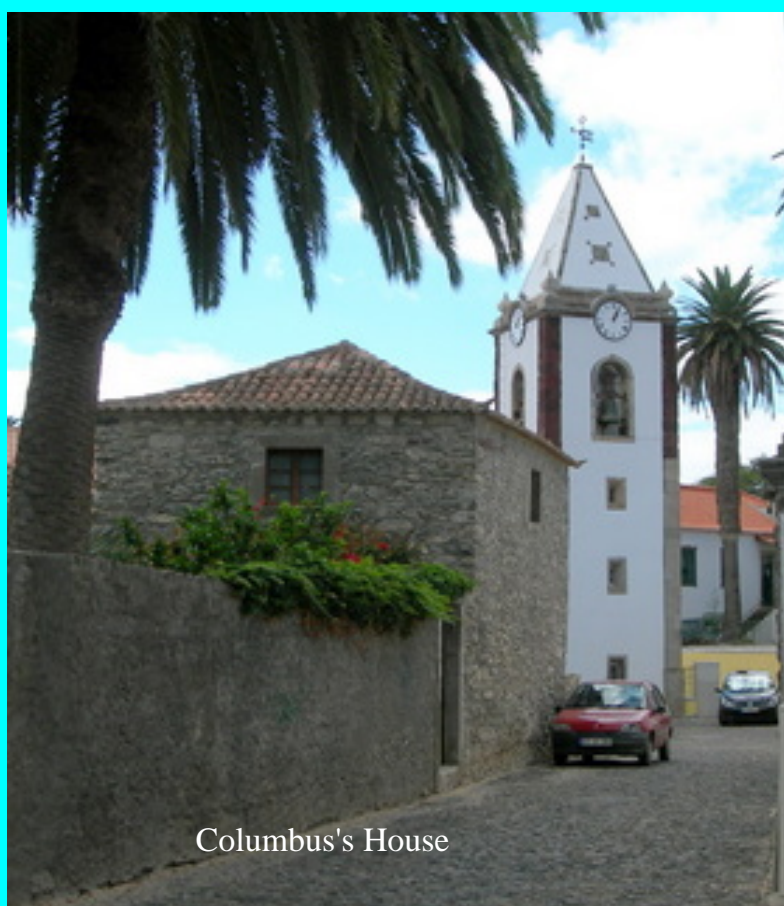
[Next Page](#)





On Tuesday, September 30, we departed Rota and sailed to Porto Santo in the Madeira Island group, 547 nautical miles southwest of Rota. We made great time, arriving in Porto Santo exactly 4 days later. During this passage, we motored most the first day before receiving the wind that had originally been forecasted. Then, for two days we sailed on a reach with winds NW 15 to 20+ knots and seas 6 to 10 feet. The last day, as the winds veered NE, we sailed on a broad reach, with the sea conditions remaining the same.

Porto Santo and Madeira, both volcanic in origin, were the only two inhabited islands in the Madeira Archipelago, an autonomous region of Portugal. Porto Santo, an arid island with an area of only 16.3 square miles, had around 4500 inhabitants. Today its sandy beaches were its main attraction. In the early 1480's, Christopher Columbus lived on the island after marrying Felipa Perestrello, daughter of the island's first governor. Today their house is a museum.



Columbus's House

[Next Page](#)

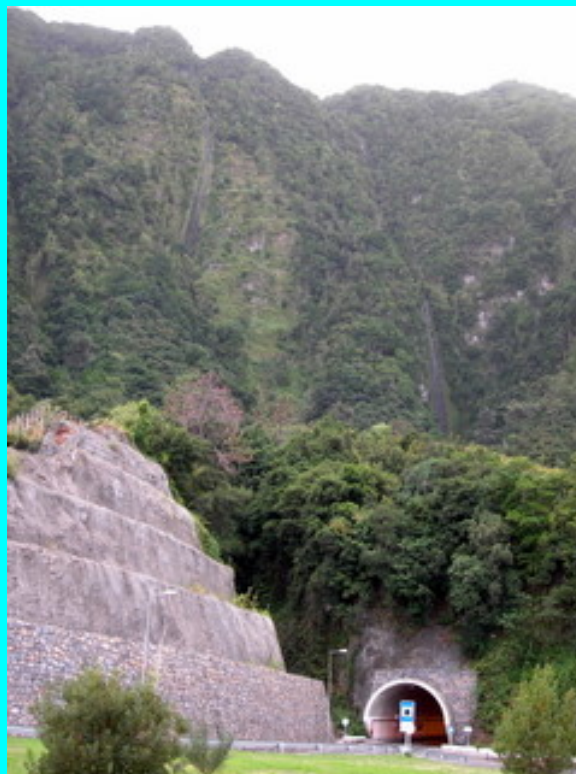


In contrast, Madeira, located 25 miles southeast of Porto Santo, was a mountainous, spectacular island with a rugged, verdant landscape. Its mountain range, with peaks ranging in heights up to 6000 feet, extended lengthwise across the island with many deep ravines radiating outward toward the coast. With almost no flat land, nearly all hillsides were covered with terraces, and a vast network of road tunnels linked the estimated 245,500 people living in the different communities on the island. Unlike Porto Santo, Madeira lacked sandy beaches, and so a few natural swimming pools had been created around basalt rock formations.



[Next Page](#)





We spent 10 days in the Madeira Archipelago, 3 on Porto Santo and 7 on Madeira. In Madeira we stayed at the Quinta do Lorde Marina where we enjoyed watching French cruisers prepare their boats for the “Rallye des Iles du Soleil”, a six month French rally starting from the marina. While in Madeira we rented a car to explore the island, to visit Funchal (the capital), and to take a levada walk. In the 16th century, the Portuguese started building levadas, ingenious irrigation channels, to bring water from the high mountain springs to the slopes and valleys. Today, there were around 1400 miles of levadas providing a vast network of walking paths.



*Funchal*



*Botanical Gardens*

[Next Page](#)





*Fishing Town; "Camera de Lobos"*



*Trail along "Levadas"*

Wednesday morning, October 15, we departed Madeira and headed toward La Graciosa in the Canary Islands. We had a great two day passage, sailing the entire time on a reach with winds NE, mostly 15 knots. The only difference were the seas during the two days. On Wednesday the seas were 3 feet; on Thursday the seas were 6 feet, causing water to be taken over our deck at times. During our two night sail we enjoyed a full moon. Due to the favorable Canary current, we made fantastic time, covering 310 nautical miles in two days.

The Canary Islands, an autonomous region of Spain, were volcanic in origin just like the Madeira Archipelago. We spent 2½ months in these islands before sailing across the Atlantic to the Caribbean, and during our stay we visited 5 of the 8 islands: La Graciosa, Lanzarote, Gran Canaria, Tenerife, and La Gomera. Each island had its own unique beauty, with the drier, more barren islands located along the archipelago's easternmost section.

[Next Page](#)



We spent three days in La Graciosa, the northernmost and smallest inhabited Canary island, enjoying its peaceful solitude. This small island was located a mile northwest of Lanzarote, and its anchorage was one of only a few protected anchorages in all the Canary Islands. La Graciosa was extremely arid and consisted entirely of volcanic rock, desert shrubs, and sand. During our brief stay we had some rainfall, and overnight the shrubbery turned green.



[Next Page](#)



Monday, October 20, we left La Graciosa and headed 35 nautical miles south to Marina Rubicon on the southern coast of Lanzarote, an area full of tourist resorts. We spent 6 weeks at Marina Rubicon preparing the boat for its Atlantic crossing, getting necessary items fixed, plus doing routine maintenance.



The island of Lanzarote, the easternmost island of the Canary Islands, was just 70 miles off the coast of North Africa. For 6 years, from 1730 to 1736, a quarter of the island's landscape was dramatically changed through an almost continuous series of volcanic eruption. Many villages and farm lands were destroyed. Much of the area became covered with thick layers of pumice and coarse ash. As volcanoes erupted, rivers of molten lava flowed to the sea and new smaller volcanoes were created. Today much of this area is now part of the Timanfaya National Park.

[Next Page](#)



During our stay we rented a car to explore the island. We visited Timanfaya National Park and its core, the Mountains of Fire (Las Montanas del Fuego). Here, we took a bus tour of the area. The barren volcanic landscape looked almost lunar with its contrasting red, ocher, and black colors. As we arrived at Los Hervideros where the river of solidified molten lava met the sea, the sun was low in the sky and the colors became even more intense.



[Next Page](#)





We also drove through Lanzarote's wine region, a very unique area. Here, wine farmers had learned to adapt and use the ash to their benefit. With Lanzarote's limited rainfall, farmers had found that the coarse ash created a type of porous mulch that absorbed moisture from the air into the ground, preventing evaporation. So today, the same wine (the Malvasia wine) that was grown before the eruption is still grown, except now each single vine is planted in pits, covered with the porous ash, and protected from the strong winds by small semi-circular walls.



Continuing northward, we visited the old historical capital of Teguise and drove through the island's two verdant valleys, a lovely contrast to the arid landscape found elsewhere on the island. Last, we visited La Cueva de Los Verdes (Green Caves), a large 4000 year old volcanic tube formed by once flowing lava.



*Auditorium inside large lava tube*



[Next Page](#)

Page 9





Monday, December 1, we departed Marina Rubicon and sailed overnight to the island of Gran Canaria, 99 nautical miles southwest of Lanzarote. With winds NE at 15 knots, we sailed across the channel on a broad reach. Unfortunately the wind waves and swells were counter to each other in the channel, causing the sail to be uncomfortable.

While on Gran Canaria, we stayed at the marina in the heart of the city of Las Palmas. Las Palmas, located at the northeastern tip of Gran Canaria, was the largest city in the Canaries and one of two capitals in the Canary Islands, a shared status it held with the city of Santa Cruz on Tenerife. Las Palmas de Gran Canaria was the capital of the eastern province; Santa Cruz de Tenerife was the capital of the western province.



[Next Page](#)



The island of Gran Canaria was circular in shape with a variety of landscapes surrounding its central 6394 foot mountain peak, Pico de Las Nieves. During our stay, we rented a car with our German friends, Imke and Uli, to tour the island. To experience the traditional Canarian culture, it was recommended that we visit the towns of Teror and Arucas. The charming rural town of Teror, nestled in the mountains, was definitely a welcomed respite after the hustle and bustle of Las Palmas. Its buildings displayed traditional Canarian architecture, and we were lucky enough to be there on market day. We lingered in Teror, first having a cup of coffee and then strolling through its local weekly market. Being near Christmas, we enjoyed eating roasted chestnuts.



*Roasting Chestnuts*

[Next Page](#)



Afterwards, we visited Arucas, one of the oldest towns in the Canaries, established in the early 16th century. All the buildings in Arucas' historical district were lovely, but its most prominent and striking structure was its stunning neo-Gothic cathedral, built in the early 20th century on the site of the original chapel. From the hill overlooking the town, the cathedral towered over all. From this vantage point, we could also look out over the entire landscape from Las Palmas to Arucas. Plastic greenhouses dotted the countryside. Many were being used to grow bananas, one of the island's exports. On our drive around the island, we continued to see more plastic greenhouses. Although efficient, they definitely didn't enhance the scenery.



[Next Page](#)



Originally, we had planned to spend 10 days on Gran Canaria before heading across the channel to Tenerife, but due to weather we had to wait an extra 5 days. Finally early Wednesday morning, December 17, we departed Las Palmas and headed northwest to Tenerife, 56 nautical miles away. Ten hours later, we arrived at Marina Atlantico in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the capital of the eastern province of the Canaries. On the crossing, we sailed on a beam reach with winds 15 knots and seas 4 to 6 feet, except for a few hours of motorsailing due to lack of wind.



Tenerife, the largest Canary Island, was also the most populated island. Its capital, Santa Cruz, was the second largest city in the Canaries after Las Palmas. The island of Tenerife was quite beautiful with dramatic, contrasting scenery. At its center, towering above all at 12,198 feet, was the volcano El Teide, the highest mountain in the Canaries and in all of Spain.

Here, just like in Gran Canaria, we rented a car with our friends, Imke and Uli, to explore the island. We first drove northeast through the rugged Anaga Mountains, then southeast to Puerto de la Cruz and the fertile Orotava Valley, and afterwards up to Teide National Park with its impressive volcanic landscape. On our way to El Teide, we stopped and walked around La Orotava's quaint historical district with its traditional Canarian architecture. A life-size Nativity scene completely surrounded its main square. During much of our drive we had limited views due to cloud cover, and while in Teide National Park we never did get to see El Teide. Sometimes, we even got caught in the thick of the clouds and had almost zero visibility.



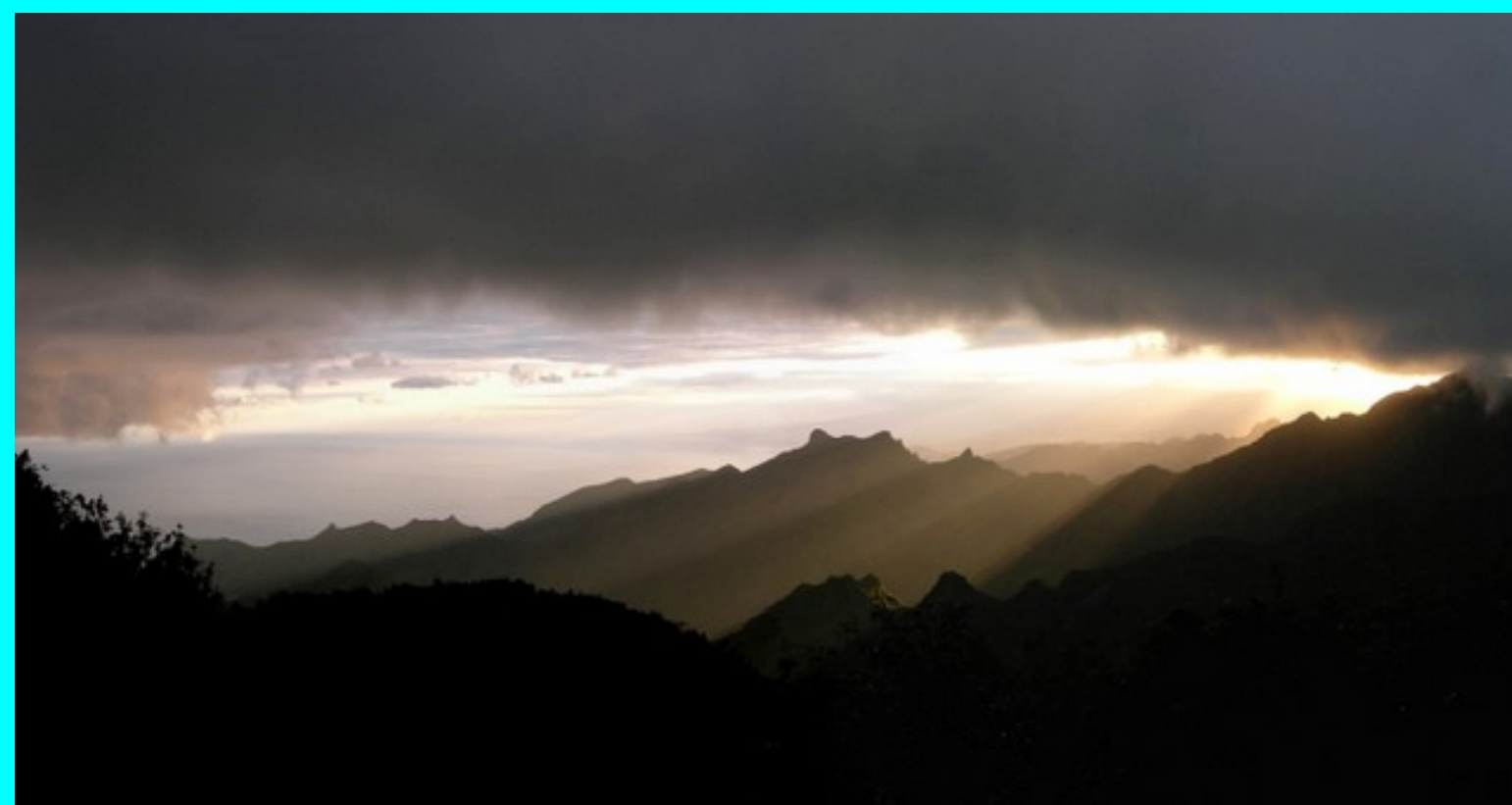
[Next Page](#)





[Next Page](#)





[Next Page](#)

Page 14



As we wanted to be in La Gomera for Christmas, we stayed only 5 days in Tenerife. Monday, December 22, we sailed across the channel to La Gomera. We left the marina on Tenerife at sunrise, sailing southwest along its eastern coastline on a broad reach with winds ENE at 15 to 20 knots. On our sail we had an unobstructed view of El Teide. Once pass Tenerife's southern coastline and into open waters, the winds became NNW at 15 knots and seas 3 to 6 feet, forcing us to use the engine to point higher into the wind in order to make our destination by nightfall. Just as the sun was setting we arrived at the marina in San Sebastian de La Gomera, a small town on the island's east coast. In all, we had traveled 64 nautical miles that day.

La Gomera, the third smallest island in the Canaries, was a rugged island, definitely an unspoiled gem of natural beauty. Geologically, it was one of the oldest volcanic islands in the Canaries. Almost circular in shape, water erosion through time had created almost fifty canyons on the island, all radiating outward toward the sea from the island's center, Mt. Garajonay, at 4879 feet.

We spent 13 days on the island before pushing off across the Atlantic. While in La Gomera we rented a car. Much of our drive took us along mountainous winding roads, and from many of the viewpoints majestic El Teide could be seen across the channel on Tenerife. Along our drive, we saw beautiful mountainous scenery, impressive volcanic domes, and hillsides dotted with farming terraces. We arrived back in San Sebastian at dusk.

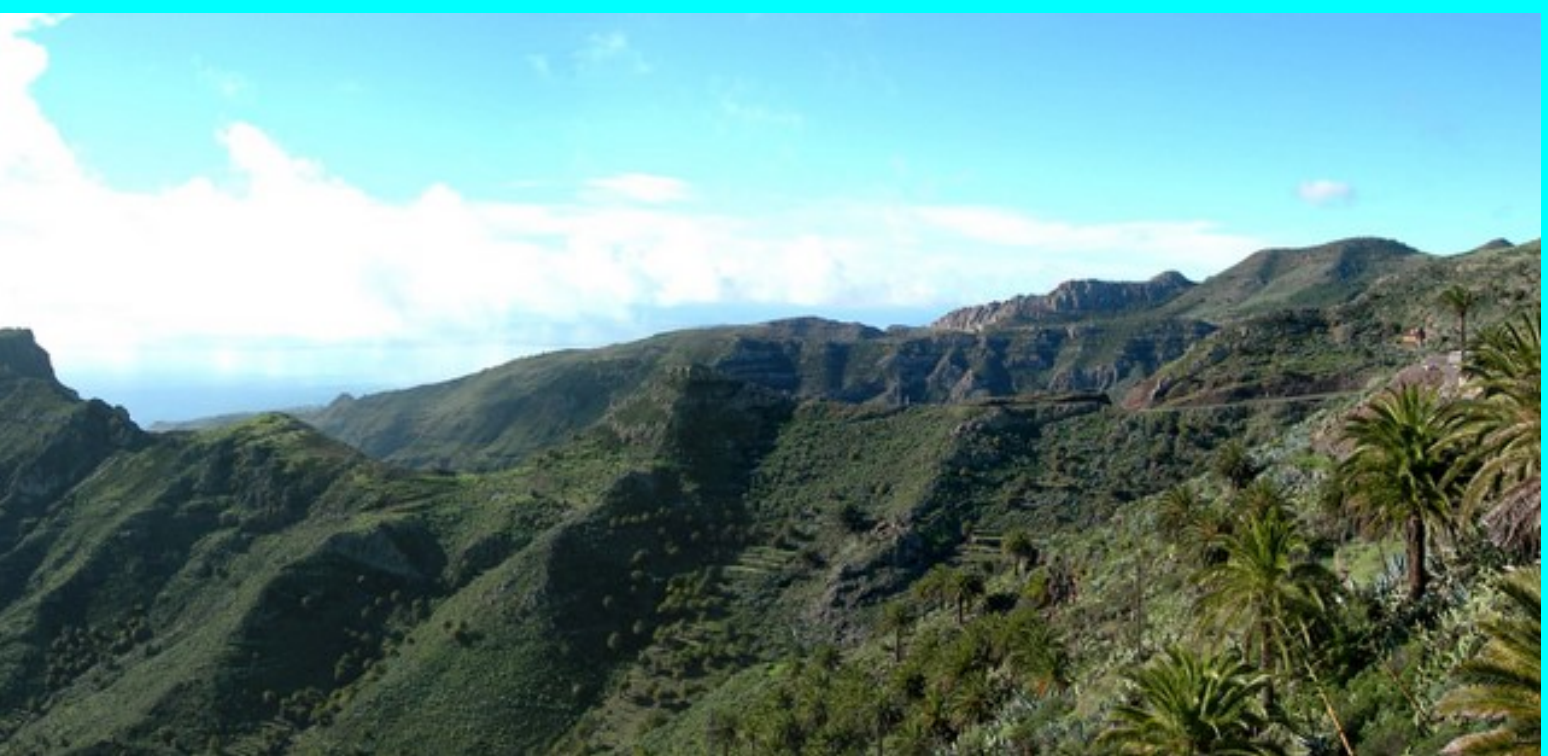


[Next Page](#)





*Volcanic Domes*



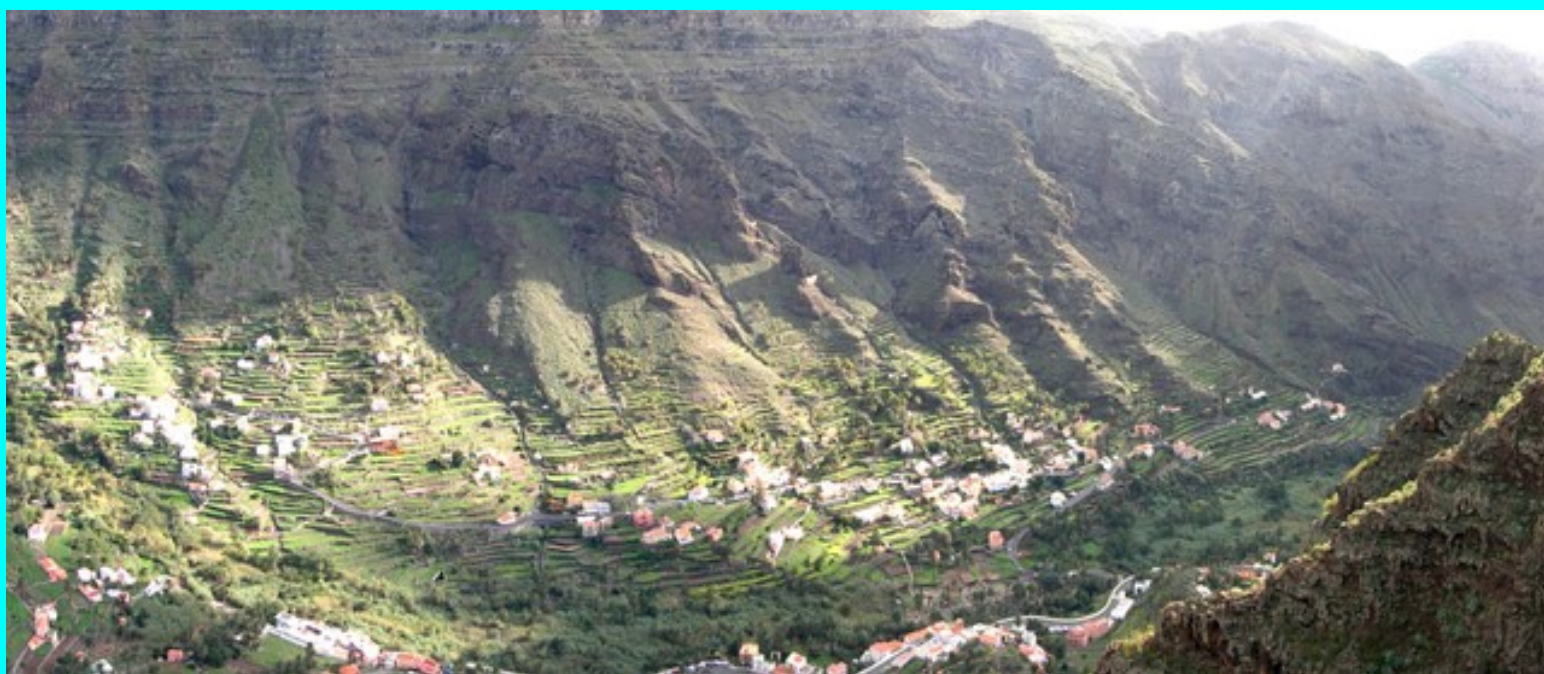
[Next Page](#)





[Next Page](#)





*San Sebastian*

The marina in San Sebastian was located in the heart of the town's historical district. On Christmas day, we attended Christmas church services at the same church Christopher Columbus and his men prayed at before setting off on their first voyage across the "unknown" Atlantic in 1492. Although the church had been rebuilt a couple of times since the period of Columbus, the church still retained its 15th century Spanish architecture. On New Year's Eve, the town welcomed in the new year, first with fireworks at midnight and then afterwards with dancing and entertainment in the town's square until sunrise. As our boat was close to all the festivities, we had little sleep that night.



*Columbus prayed at this church and walked down this street before crossing the Atlantic on his voyage of discovery.*

[Next Page](#)





*San Sebastian Town Square*

During our stay in La Gomera, we watched two rowers prepare their single-man state-of-the-art rowboats for an epic journey across the Atlantic to Antigua in the Caribbean, 2700 miles away. At 8 am on January 1, they both departed the marina. (Two days later one returned due to severe stomach pains, but the other rower continued on in his 19-foot rowboat, making the voyage to Antigua in 88 days.)



On Sunday, January 4, after a lovely stay in the Canary Islands, we too departed La Gomera on our passage across the Atlantic to Antigua. But, unlike the first voyage by Columbus into the “unknown” Atlantic, we were lucky to have an abundant wealth of information and equipment at our fingertips.

[Back to Index](#)