



Paradise lost

To enjoy a taste of the Canary Islands, says *Emma Gregg*, look no further than Gran Canaria, a veritable treasure trove of stunning natural landscapes

A continent in miniature: it sounds as tame as a theme park installation. But when the Gran Canarians describe their island in this way, they're actually being rather modest. The phrase does scant justice to the wild, rugged variety of its landscapes. Bundled into one bite-size package are deep ravines and craters, rocky slopes, pine-clad mountains, lush orchards and golden, undulating dunes.

Gran Canaria has some charming examples of Canarian architecture too. For a glimpse of the grandeur of the colonial era, take a stroll through Vegueta, the historic quarter of Las Palmas. Lying on the southern fringe of the capital, its elegant squares are edged with fine whitewash and lava-block houses with tall windows and ornamental balconies. Clustered around the stately Catedral

Santa Ana are several museums including Casa de Colón, a gorgeous mansion where Columbus reputedly stayed.

Further inland, in Arucas, a jumble of whitewashed and pastel houses line the cobbled streets and locals sip sugarcane rum in shady courtyards. Looming over this town and the banana plantations that surround it is one of northern Gran Canaria's most distinctive landmarks, the neo-gothic Iglesia de San Juan.

Strike out towards the mountains and the island's volcanic origins will become apparent. The volcanoes are benign but there's an impressive reminder of their fiery past in the kilometre-wide Caldera de Bandama, its gaping abyss now softened with greenery. The eruptions of past millennia have left the northwest fertile and in spring and early summer the slopes are freckled with flowers. Vineyards

flourish too: the islanders have been making wine here since the 15th century.

The hairpins leading up towards Pico de las Nieves, the island's highest point, feel a world away from the busy highways of Las Palmas and the coastal resorts. Even when the tourist hotspots are bursting with visitors, it's possible to enjoy Gran Canaria's scenery in near-solitude. From Cruz de Tejada, a stone crucifix at the top of the pass, there are lovely views south over the part of the island that has been designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

In the sunny south, Maspalomas is busy enough to bring you back to earth with a bump – but this region, too, has its own scenic grandeur. Backing the beach is an array of gigantic sand dunes. Best of all, there's an easy way to enjoy them: just hop on a camel and get ready to take a starring role in your own desert epic.

NEW for 2011 Grand Princess will be embarking on an 11-night Canary Islands cruise from Southampton, departing 4 June. The itinerary will include calls at Las Palmas (Gran Canaria), Santa Cruz (Tenerife), Arrecife (Lanzarote), Funchal (Madeira) and Vigo (Spain). Fares from £1,169 per person. **Visit www.princess.com for more information**

PhotoLibrary / 4 Corners

Norwegian Fjords

Nature's nirvana

John Malathronas heads to the Norwegian Fjords and shares five of the most spectacular views to be found in this strikingly beautiful area

When in Norway, it is the pristine wilderness of the fjords you rightly want to experience, but nobody ever tells you about the truly stunning views from the land. So, when you unwittingly come across them, the memories linger longer, cherished like a favourite antique you discovered hidden in a humble flea market. Here are five of the best...

FLYDALSVJUVET If it is romantic panoramas you desire, none come more dazzling than that from Flydalsjuvet, a hanging rock above the village of Geiranger. The views over the tranquil village and the imposing majesty of its fjord – a UNESCO World Heritage Site – are as legendary as they are unique: the densely wooded rocks rise up to 1,400 metres and are punctuated with rivers, lakes and waterfalls.



Alamy / Corbis / 4 Corners

In 2011, you can see all these fabulous views for yourself onboard either Crown Princess or Grand Princess, sailing to the Norwegian Fjords from Southampton or Dover. With cruises ranging from the seven-night Norwegian Fjords Interlude to the 18-night Land of the Midnight Sun itinerary, there is more choice for 2011 than ever before. Fares start from £849 per person. **Visit www.princess.com for more information**



FLÅM RAILWAY The Flåmsbana railway provides a manmade visual feast. From the snow-capped roof of Norway at Myrdal you plummet 900 metres on a spiralling ride to Flåm at the tip of the Aurlandsfjord. Every turn is a picture, every stop a chance to steal glances of roaring waterfalls through rock crannies and hand-chiselled galleries.



NORTH CAPE For the most supreme of summer views, travel north to where the Atlantic meets the Arctic under North Cape Rock. For there is nothing more dramatic than watching the awe-inspiring midnight sun, where our familiar celestial body gives an almost extra-terrestrial performance, as it reaches for the horizon but never sets.



PULPIT ROCK If you want to make a real adventure out of your visit to Norway, try hiking for two strenuous hours to reach the prospect from Pulpit Rock, a flat protrusion over a sheer vertical cliff near Stavanger, where the limitless sight of the bare granite slopes of the Lysefjord bring rugged Scottish landscapes to mind. Simply stunning.



MOUNT FLØYEN Not far from the Bergen Fish Market lies the entrance to one of Norway's top attractions: the Fløibanen Funicular. Within eight minutes you are 320 metres above sea level at the top of Mount Fløyen, where you enjoy a breathtaking view over the Hanseatic trading post of Bryggen, the narrow port tongue of Vågen, the Nordnes promontory and the Isle of Askøy.