

Treasure and Treachery in the Fortunate Isles

*Canary Islands,
Spain*

Located just over 62 miles (100 kilometers) off the west coast of Africa, the Canary Islands are ideally placed to receive powerful swells from the North Atlantic, which lurch out of deep water and land with a punch on the archipelago's abundance of reefs and beaches.

The most famous spots are in the village of La Santa, on the northeast coast of the island of Lanzarote. The crowning glory, a shallow slab called El Quemao, delivers some of the best left-hand barrels in the whole of Europe, while Morro Negro throws up freight-train rights just a stone's throw away. On the island of Fuerteventura, a dirt road known as the North Track carves a course through the barren lunar landscape, linking many of the island's best spots, from El Cotillo on the west coast to Corralejo on the east. Just offshore, the island of Lobos produces long right-handers at the base of an extinct volcano. On the south coast of Tenerife, the bustling resort of Playa de las Américas plays host to numerous fun reef breaks, while over on Gran Canaria, the capital city of Las Palmas offers a variety of peaks along a sandy stretch called Las Canteras.

Dozens of other less well-known spots dot the islands, from the hard-to-reach slabs of Gran Canaria's north coast to the secluded reefs of La Palma, the best of which was recently destroyed by lava spewing from the Cumbre Vieja volcano.

Often compared to Hawaii thanks to its climate and topography, the Canaries' fledgling surf community was deeply inspired by the waterman spirit of their brothers in the Pacific. As a result, many of the island's earliest trailblazers in the 1970s were not only fearless big-wave specialists but also expert fishermen and seafarers too. Among the most legendary was Sergio "El Halcón" ("the Falcon") who returned from a stint sailing in the Pacific to pioneer El Quemao, while living in a cave just beyond the tideline. Their legacy remains, with the Canaries continuing to serve as a stomping ground for Europe's most dynamic watermen and women. ~

