



1. Spring in Las Palmas 2015



by Johan Kjellander 2015

During the spring in Las Palmas we had a fantastic time with so many activities that time passed quicker than I thought was possible. There was hikes and excursions, the Carneval, the Fridays at Sailors bar, many old friends visiting and new friends made. In April we went to Morocco for a week and in May we sailed to Fuerteventura.

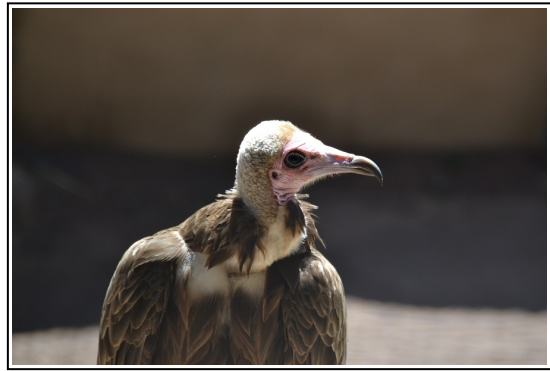
By the end of May we left Bird of Passage in Las Palmas and returned to our home in Aland to build a new house, but in October we were back in Las Palmas again and started the preparations for crossing the Atlantic in January 2016.



In Las Palmas the spring starts in January, there is never any real winter. I usually went on a mountain hike each week and Tove did her exercises in the Romano park every second day. The weather was never a problem.

Parque Romano has a number of exercise tools and there is also a cafe where you can sit down and relax with a cup of coffee after your workout. If you are lucky one of the wild parrots living here will settle down in a tree close to you.





Our oldest son Martin came to visit us in February. One day we went to see Palmitos Park, the biggest animal park on Gran Canaria. Lots of reptiles and birds.



They also have a very nice Dolphin show. The trainers were real acrobats. The girl on the right picture is thrown into the air by the dolphins, spins around and passes through a plastic ring held by her partner, before she hits the water again.



Another attraction is the bird show. Parrots, hawks, owls and eagles are let loose to fly free above the audience.





A great place on Gran Canaria in springtime is Jardin Botanico, the public botanical garden founded by Swedish Erik Svensson in late 1950. Entrance is free and there is a bus stop right outside. I have been there on several occasions at varying times of the year and each time it is different. There are so many species and there is always something in bloom, even in December or January.



February is also the month of the big Carneval. Las Palmas celebrates for more than a week with different events every day but the Carneval is the most important. It is one of the worlds biggest, this year it had more than 120 trucks and more than 200.000 people in the streets. We followed it from the start to the end for 8 hours and had a fantastic time. So much nice people, no bad feelings anywhere. Everybody was dressed up in some way and very happy.



Tradition says that the carneval started as a protest against the strong moral of the catholic church. Once a year, nobody had to obey these rules. Stealing, swearing or cheating on your husband or wife was permitted. Everybody could do most anything they liked to but to prevent punishment after the carneval you had to be disguised.



Today the Carneval is more focused on costumes and having fun. Some costumes are really fantastic, probably very expensive and often highlight current happenings in culture and politics in a humorous way.

The police officer on the right picture is pointing at the green badge on his right arm saying "Policia Tropical" instead of "Policia Nacional". Tropical is the major beer brewery on the Canary Islands and they use the same green colour on their bottles and cans. Policia Nacional is something completely different.



There is always a fiesta somewhere on the Canary Islands. In the beginning of February the city of Tejeda celebrates that the almond trees bloom with a fiesta that lasts for three days. Products made from almond are sold in the streets and there is music, competitions and shows.



Using a long stick to climb up or down steep hills is a special technique originally developed by Guanche natives long before the Europeans arrived to the islands. Today this skill is still known and learned by new generations. During the Almond festival in Tejeda a group of young boys and girls showed how to do it.



The city of Arucas is famous for its rum and its cathedral. Now and then we organize a visit to Arucas and usually start with the rum factory and taste their products. This time we were more than 20 people, mostly Scandinavian sailors. There are more pictures from Arucas in the Gran Canaria section of the Cruising Logbook from 2013.



Our friends Tommy and Kerstin came to stay with us for two weeks. We had lots of fun, walked in the mountains and cooked fresh lobsters for the first time in our life. You need a big pot of water and plenty of salt. Let the water cook up and then put in the live lobsters. Cook for 10 minutes and that's it. It takes plenty of time before the lobsters are cool enough to eat. Serve as usual with baguette, cheese and aioli or mayonese. Cold Canarian Cava is good for drink.



When we have time, we try to catch up with all the boat jobs that are waiting. The new boom made it necessary to alter the sun cover for the main sail. Quite a big job actually, took several days but the result was very satisfying.



We also try to travel around and learn more about the island. The aboriginal Guanche population of the Canary Islands is thought to have arrived from the Atlas mountains in North Africa 500-1000 years BC and lived an isolated stone age life until the 15:th century when the islands were conquered by the Europeans.

There are many very well preserved remains of Guanche culture on the Canary Islands. One is Canada de Los Gatos in Puerto Mogan, a 1300 year old settlement with buildings and graveyard. Tove and I took the bus from Las Palmas one day and found a very nice excavation with lots of interesting information, also in English.



Mountain hiking is a popular activity among the Swedish sailors in Las Palmas. A popular hike, not too far from Las Palmas, is the hike from the small village San Andres on the north coast, along the Azuaje valley to the village of Firgas 500 meters above sea level.



You leave the bus in San Andres, walk through narrow streets, along the seaside and then turn south up into the Azuaje valley. The first kilometers run through banana plantations but after an hour or so you are completely in the wilderness. There is only a small path to follow.



As you continue, the valley gets narrower. After about 6 kilometers you pass under the GC 100 road bridge and then you arrive to the ruins of the *Balneario de Azuaje*, a health resort built in the end of the 19:th century but only in use for 50 yeqars or so.



Today, the ruins serve as a good resting place for hikers. If you want to, you can continue further south up into the valley but to reach Firgas you have to follow a steep path up along the side of the valley. The distance is less than two kilometers, but the height difference is 300 meters so it's wise to take a good rest before you start.



After the steep climb up to Firgas it is always nice to have a rest on one of the bars. Before you take the bus back to Las Palmas you should also visit the centre of the village and have a look at the spectacular water staircase.



A hike which is even closer to Las Palmas is the one on La Isleta just north of the city. We usually take a yellow city bus up to the small village Las Coloradas and then follow the coast east until the road ends. From there we take a smaller path west, close to the seaside and finally end up on the beach of Las Canteras. This walk is relatively short and easy, mostly down hill.



Another hike close to Las Palmas is the one from the Auditorium to Los Giles. About 7 kilometers up hill as you see on the picture above. The hills around Los Giles are used by paragliders for launching. If you arrive in the afternoon when the sea breeze has established you might see them jump off the cliffs.





The most beautiful views however are to be found in the mountains of central Gran Canaria. I took these pictures during a hike from Cruz de Tejeda to Artenara via Roque Nublo in January 2015.



El Roque is a small village, only a few houses actually, a few kilometers from Roque Bentayga. You can walk here or go by car. Up on slope of the roque is a system of large caves called Cuevas del Rey, once inhabited by nobles of the Guanche people of Gran Canaria.



Barranco los Cernicalos (Eng:Kestrel, Sv:Tornfalk) is a valley on the east coast of Gran Canaria. It starts in Lomo Magullo not far from Telde and runs west up into the mountains. A very beautiful hike with several waterfalls and narrow passages. In the middle of March we followed the path in the bottom of this valley, about 7 kilometers, until it ends with a waterfall. The last part is steep and you will have to climb through a couple of difficult passages.



Later in March, Skandinaviska Klubben (Scandinavian Club) arranged a hike from Pico de las Nieves (highest peak of Gran Canaria, 1949 m) down to Cruz Grande by the GC-60 where their bus picked us up. As you see, the weather was foggy this day but from other times that I did this hike, I know that the views over the south of Gran Canaria up here are impressive.



A week later, Skandinaviska Klubben arranged a hike from San Pedro up to the natural park of Tamabada. A steep climb almost 1000 meters up with fantastic views over the west coast of Gran Canaria.



In the old times, young men training to become officers in the navy went through education as cadets on special navy school ships. This tradition persists in some countries and navy school ships still visit harbours in other countries on their tours. The public is sometimes invited aboard so last year I visited Swedish navy school ship Falken (two masted schooner) and Portuguese navy school ship Sagres (three masted barque).

This year the beautiful Spanish navy school ship Juan Sebastian de Elcano (four masted schooner) came to Las Palmas and we were lucky to have the possibility to visit her. According to Wikipedia she is: *the third-largest Tall Ship in the world, and she is the sailboat that has covered more nautical miles in History: more than 2,000,000.*



More common visitors are the big cruising ships. There is often one or more at the same time in the harbour. Some of them are among the worlds biggest and most famous, taking several thousand passengers and additional crew. Like floating cities. The ones above, I happened to catch as they passed our mooring on their way out of the harbour. Google their names if you want to know more about them. They are: Azura, Queen Mary, Explorer of the Seas, Anthem of the Seas, Queen Elizabeth and Rotterdam.



End of Spring in Las Palmas 2015

