

Tricky mission accomplished in Tenerife

From stargazing and sailing, to whale watching and water parks, the Macaronesian island provides the ultimate family holiday, writes Robin McKelvie

I have been set a daunting task. The toughest mission possible as a dad – putting together the ultimate family holiday, not just a beach flop. I have planned it meticulously. The island in Macaronesia I have chosen offers superb stargazing, boat-fresh seafood, the world's top-rated water park and is the best place on the planet to see pilot whales. Still, on the Edinburgh runway, I take in the expectant faces of my wife and two young daughters and feel the pressure.

Macaronesia sounds exotic. Tenerife perhaps less so. We quickly push past the snobbishness that sometimes unfairly blights the isle. A good start helps. That comes with a limo to the airport, fast track and lounge access through No 1 Traveller (www.noltraveller.com) and easyJet, as we have pre-booked seats and board first. The car hire is a relief too. We pick up our spacious people carrier with a minimum of hassle and breeze out of the airport before we are meant to have landed – our flight is an hour early.

We gun away from the beaches – if my plan works Tara and Emma will be too busy for sandcastles. We make our way up through the pine forests that lead towards the volcanic plateau that lies at Tenerife's heart. Our destination is the Parador de Las Cañadas del Teide (www.parador.es), named after the mountain Teide, at 3,718m Spain's highest. After introducing the girls to dishes of traditional papas arrugadas (or "wrinkly potato heads" as they dub them), we are off stargazing. Tenerife offers some of the finest night skies in the world. Our guide is Jose Fraga (www.starexcursions.com). Tara and Emma explore the moon's craters and then I share a smile with Jose as their eyes light up when they clap eyes on "twinkle twinkle little star". You probably know it better as the North Star.

It is time to roll down back through the pines to the southern resorts. We have rented an apartment through Holiday Lettings (www.holidaylettings.com)



com) which has sweeping views of the neighbouring isle of La Gomera. It also has a hot tub and access to a large communal swimming pool.

With a large kitchen and expansive living area we eat in a lot, but are also keen to dine out. At Molino Blanco (www.molino-blanco.com) we share lobster rice and more of those wrinkly potato heads. The waiters know what they are doing, treating our girls like the wee ladies they are quickly becoming. We move up a notch in sophistication at Restaurante Lucas Maes (www.restaurantelucasmaes.com). Tara and Emma enjoy their tuna, but are not as enamoured as mum Jenny by the delicious slow-cooked rabbit.

I have no worries about the girls enjoying the next day, as Loro Parque (www.loroparque.com) has been voted the finest zoo in Europe. This leafy oasis is so much more than just a zoo, with lush subtropical gardens alive with all manner of flora and fauna. We go through a shark tunnel, watch a colony of emperor penguins enjoying the snow

Above left: Tara and Emma in the shark tunnel at Loro Parque. Main: Parador de Las Cañadas del Teide on Tenerife's volcanic plateau. Right: a Lina yacht



'The lush gardens of the finest zoo in Europe are alive with all manner of flora and fauna'

and meet the park's latest arrivals, red pandas. Our "Premium" and "Discovery" tours reserve us seats at all the shows, cover lunch and reveal behind the scenes. The highlight for Emma is that I have organised for her to be in a boat pulled by dolphins in the aquatic show. Her face is priceless as the cetaceans skip her along.

This long day is not over as I have two more surprises. The first is dinner at Brunelli's Steakhouse (www.brunellis.com). Owned by the same people as Loro Parque it is similarly impressive. Just as we settle down to a feast of 28-day aged steak the glass wall descends to open up the Atlantic breezes and an epic sunset. The second surprise is that we are not going back to the apartment, but spend the night wrapped in the charms of the nearby Hotel Botanico (hotelbotanico.com), for me the best hotel in Tenerife's north.

After a morning exploring the hotel's famous gardens and a dip in its palm-fringed pool, it is time to drive back south. Our last base is the Ritz Carlton Abama

(www.ritzcarlton.com). Its dedicated Ritz Kids programme is designed for parents, as much as children, as it keeps the youngsters happy while we slip off to their private beach and check out one of its Michelin-star restaurants.

On our penultimate day we discover what TripAdvisor rates as the world's premier water park. Spend time at Siam Park (www.siampark.net) and it is hard to disagree. It is worth splashing out on one of its private cabanas, or even its new VIP villa with its own hot tub. When it is not available a private island is offered. We enjoy this, having our own shady base for exploring the multitude of rides. What Siam Park does so well is cater for all ages, with small pools for toddlers, through to more challenging rides for older children and terrifying thrillers for teenagers and adults.

Our last day is a packed one. In the morning we venture up into the hills to La Casona del Patio (www.ginestarhotels.com). Tara loves being back in the saddle, while Emma is startled, then delighted, by her first



horse ride. They finish off the experience grooming a Shetland pony.

Whether you spend a week in a five-star hotel or a B&B, the highlight of any family holiday is proper family time. Our last afternoon trip with Lina Yacht (www.linayacht.com) provides that, as we have our own yacht. Dolphins skip around us as we push out of Puerto Colon. We reach the deeper waters where we hope to find pilot whales. Tara and Emma scream that they can see a dark shape under the water and a pod of whales bursts the surface all around, undeterred by the girls' whoops.

It is hard to define what makes the ultimate family holiday, but this escape to Macaronesia proved perfect for us. Job done.

FACT FILE

easyJet (www.easyjet.com) offers flights to Tenerife from Edinburgh from £150 return. Robin McKelvie hired his car through carrentals.co.uk.

For further information about Tenerife, visit www.webtenerife.co.uk

Do Not Disturb

Auchrannie Resort, Arran

Voyage of discovery

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As we watched the bow of the ferry open and cars roll off, my two-year-old son's jaw dropped in astonishment. This was to be his first time on a boat and he was insanely excited. Not in his wildest dreams had he imagined that we could actually drive on to the ferry. We were at Ardrossan, bound for Arran on our first holiday as a family of four since the birth of our baby girl Sarah. Even though the ferry crossing is less than an hour long, our holiday already felt full of adventure.

We arrived at Auchrannie Resort in Brodick five minutes after disembarking. It felt like a world away from our usual city life and we couldn't wait to explore the current Hotel of the Year (Scottish Hotel Awards). Auchrannie comprises a four-star country house hotel with two restaurants and leisure centre plus a newly-built, four-star spa hotel with a family restaurant, children's entertainment, games hall, two pools, gym and spa. There are also 30 five-star luxury lodges for up to eight people.

We were booked into an executive suite in the spa hotel, and what a treat it was. The spacious living room with views over Goat Fell was uber modern with its faux fur chaise-longue built into the wall and a cosy wall-mounted fire, out of the little ones' reach. The bunk beds in the children's room had built-in lights and TVs (the suite had four in total) and the huge bathroom had everything a family could need. Boutique to a new level.

Room service
The executive floor houses lots of extras, including use of an exclusive lounge with complimentary snack bar and refreshments and a terrace with designer furniture and a hot tub. There are also "resource rooms" with washing machines, tumble dryers, microwaves and ice makers. Within the room itself there is a Nespresso machine with complimentary pods, tea making facilities and fridge



stocked with fresh milk and mineral water. **Worth getting out of bed for**
The second we were unpacked, we headed to the on-site leisure centre for a swim. The children's pool has water features including a waterfall and colour changing fountains.

Arran's soft play centre, the Play Barn, is within the grounds of the resort and guests are given free access. My son loved the well-designed equipment and giant slide. My baby even found lots to entertain her.

For the more intrepid, the resort offers adventure activities including mountain biking, Segway excursions, kayaking and gorge walking. To recover from the exertion, the spa has all sorts of luxurious treatments.

Wining and dining
The resort has three restaurants. Cruize, the family-friendly brasserie, was ideal for our first meal, but the following night we decided to spoil ourselves at Brambles. Auchrannie's upmarket seafood and grill restaurant. Children are welcome, and the staff are attentive and friendly. For our starters it was a toss-up between the deep-fried breaded Arran Camembert or the award-winning hot smoked salmon and haddock cake with tartare sauce, so we got one of each. Both were sublime and I really didn't want to share either with my wife. Luckily the portions

were generous. For main course, we eventually decided on the delicious grilled fillet of sea bass with west coast crab and coriander fritters.

For pudding we were intrigued by the deep fried apple pie, apple crumble shot and Granny Smith sorbet. Wow! The pie was insanely sweet but balanced beautifully by the tart and tangy sorbet, all washed down with a creamy, crumbly drink. It was certainly the most original dessert I've had. Meanwhile my son Reuben polished off his fish and chips with an enormous bowl of locally made ice cream. Happy faces all round.

Little extras
Our suite came with fluffy robes, slippers and beach towels, which were perfect for pooltoting to and from the hot tub. The resort runs a free bus service between Auchrannie and the ferry terminals for every sailing. **Guest book comments**
Auchrannie Resort feels like home, but much better. It is wonderfully luxurious and totally family friendly. I can't wait to return.

— Gavin Munro

Prices for an executive suite at Auchrannie start from £219 (2 adults, bed and breakfast) during June/July. Standard rooms from £119 (2 adults, bed and breakfast) Auchrannie Resort, Auchrannie Road, Brodick, Isle of Arran KA27 8BZ (01770 302 234), auchrannie.co.uk