



## Tenerife's Tourist Troubles

Dear Sirs,

You probably already know something about the Canary Islands and have undoubtedly heard about them as a major holiday destination. The Canary Islands government spends millions of Euros each year promoting the archipelago throughout Europe and even in such unlikely, out-of-the-way places as the Great Wall of China.

However, mass tourism is now causing grave environmental harm to the Canary Islands and destroying the local culture and society. On the one hand, there is the direct impact of massive tourist development along our coasts, which cannot withstand the rising tide of holidaymakers. On the other hand, there is the impact of all the infrastructure needed to support the tourist industry (motorways, airports, sewage systems) and the severe strain placed on resources (electricity, gas, fuel, and water).

The get-rich-quick mentality created by mass tourism and the rising numbers who are trapped in dead-end, low paid jobs (as waiters, cleaners, hotel staff, and building workers) means many Canary Islanders are now powerless to shape the future. This is ruthlessly exploited by local politicians, who distract the voters with Carnivals and the like while they hatch plans for yet more building development.

The environmental disaster in the Canary Islands is giving rise to absurd situations like the building of golf clubs in the desert areas of the archipelago. This involves supplying water from desalination plants, which consume vast quantities of energy. Since the Canary Islands are dependant on oil for almost all their energy needs, this is a criminal waste of dwindling resources.

The archipelago's dependence on the outside world and mass tourism is pushing up the cost of living. Most of the locals are employed in poorly-paid jobs and their wages are falling in real terms. The islanders are already the worst-paid workers in Spain - a country that trails behind in most EU comparisons.

The Canary Islands' authorities are currently engaged in a propaganda campaign extolling "sustainable development" while pursuing policies that threaten our very future. Tenerife must be unique in the world - with a land area of scarcely 2000 square kilometres, it has: two international airports; a major oil refinery; three thermal power stations; 130 kilometres of dual carriageways; at least 20 ports of varying sizes; several industrial estates; three urban areas of over 200,000 inhabitants apiece; and any number of illegal jerry-built dwellings lacking basic amenities. Add some 9 million tourists a year and Tenerife is an environmental catastrophe writ large. Spain has long had a bad reputation in this field but the Canary Islands are setting new records.

How can one talk of "sustainable development" when only a third of the arable land is still being farmed? Meanwhile, the permanent population has doubled and the islands are now dependant on foreign oil to desalinate water and import foodstuffs and other basics.

ATAN (Asociación Tinerfeña de Amigos de la Naturaleza) is an ecological association that was founded in 1972 to defend the Canary Islands' unique environment and culture. We currently operate a web site featuring hundreds of articles on the wholesale destruction of the archipelago: <http://www.atan.org>.

We have recently produced a shortened version of the site in English at: <http://www.atan.org/en>. The sheer variety and quantity of the material in Spanish means that we have translated into English only those articles likely to be of greatest interest to foreign readers. We hope you will support our campaigns - after all, much of the Canary Islands' fauna and flora is unique and found nowhere else in the world. Our embattled archipelago is a vestige of the ancient super-continent of Gondwanaland - environmental destruction here represents a loss for Mankind as a whole.

Finally, we beg you to visit our Web site and help us combat the massive environmental damage being inflicted by mass tourism. Ours is a desperate plea to the wider world. We know that the forces of destruction in the Canary Islands are too strong for us to fight alone. That is why we are asking for your support before it is too late.

ATAN  
Asociación Tinerfeña de Amigos de la Naturaleza