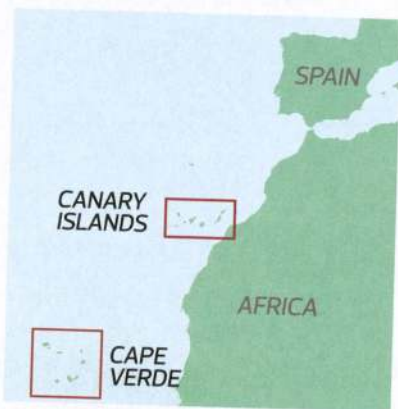
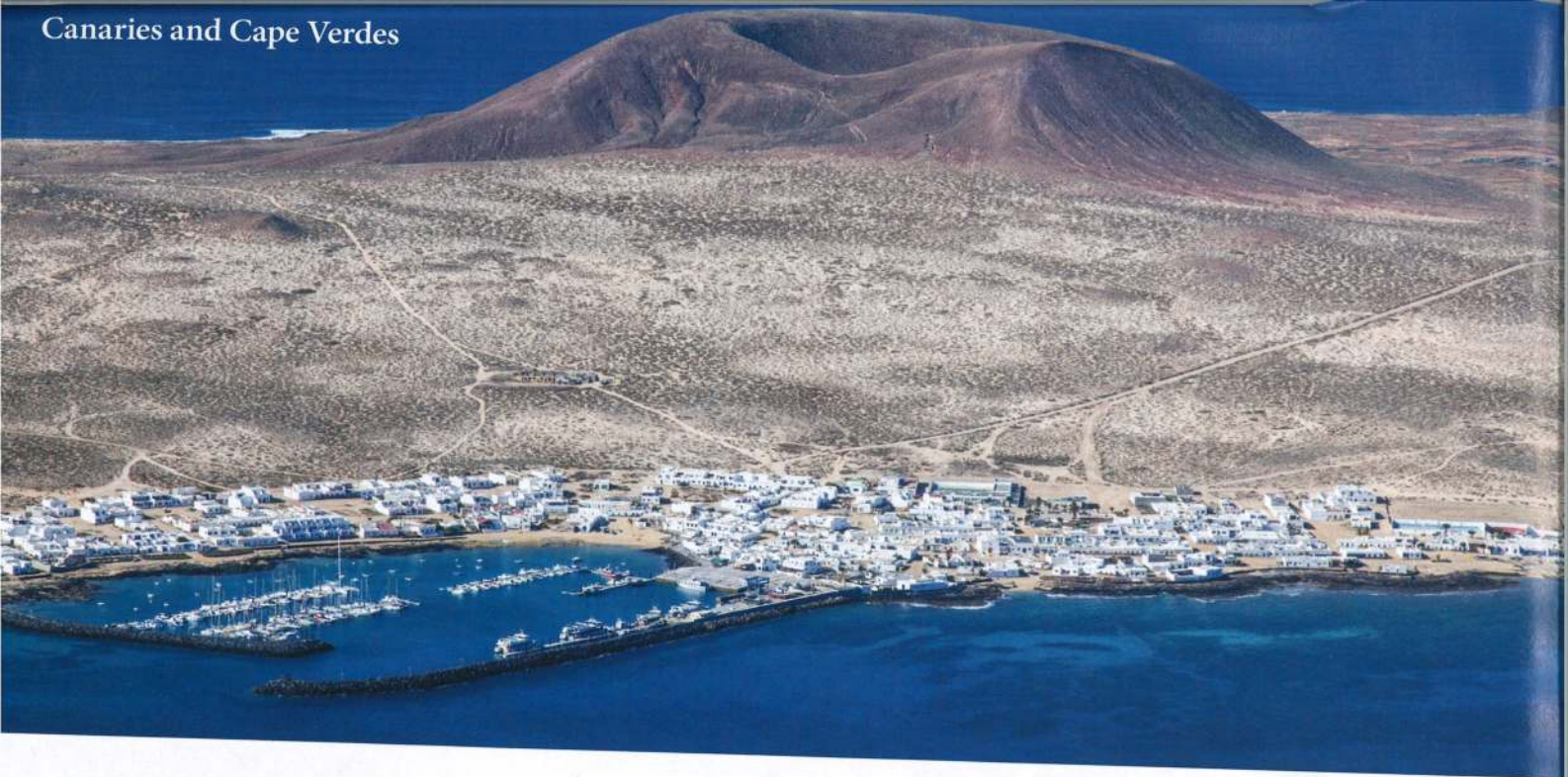


IMAGE © BANANA PANCAKE/ALAMY



Isle be there

The Canaries and Cape Verdes are rugged, beautiful and blessed with year-round cruising conditions. Rod Heikell discovers their charm



average winds are light and from aft of the beam when you head south towards where 'the butter melts'.

The trip to southern Spain or Portugal should ideally be made before October. The later you leave it the more likely it is that you will encounter strong winds which often blow from the south west.

Depressions often track north of 40°N in the autumn, but south of this you will still get caught by the tail end of these depressions. Care is still needed along the African coast as it is a long lee shore with southwesterlies. Ports of refuge are few and far between, though there are those who have cruised down the Moroccan coast and rate it.

If you are on the Atlantic Rally for Cruisers then you will ultimately be heading for Las Palmas on Gran Canaria where the ARC fleet masses ready for the off across the Atlantic, usually on the last Sunday in November bound for St Lucia in the Caribbean. The ARC now has an ARC+ that leaves earlier than the normal ARC for Mindelo in the Cape Verdes and then on to St Lucia



OPENING PAGES
Playa de Papagayo, Lanzarote

ABOVE
Caleta del Sebo and its marina on Isla de Graciosa (Graceful Island) just off the northern tip of Lanzarote. The marina can hold up to 215 boats of up to 15m in length and is five metres deep at low tide. The extinct Ajugas Grandes volcano is a reminder of less-placid times

BELOW
A view of Caleta from the marina, showing the harbourmaster's office

and another ARC+ that leaves, via the Cape Verdes again, to St Vincent in the Caribbean. The moral of this tale is that if you are not on the ARC then you need to be somewhere else, and you need to get your timings right for arriving in Mindelo in the Cape Verdes. There are a number of alternative marinas that are popular outside of Gran Canaria and we all have our favourites.

Graciosa

Whether you are on the ARC or not, my favourite first stop in the Canaries is at Graciosa Island. It is a separate and special place much removed from the razzamatazz of the other more touristy islands. On the south side of the island there is a large bay with good shelter from the northeasterlies and reasonable holding. On our first time in here we crept in just before midnight using everything we had to locate ourselves: the chart plotter, radar, depth sounder and eyes and ears. Closing on the anchorage Lu asked why I had turned the chart plotter off - "that's because it shows us trundling over the land," I said. The outermost boat didn't have an anchor →



When you have been spat out of the Straits of Gibraltar on the back of a levanter or encountered the Portuguese Trades in a blustery mood off the Atlantic Iberian coast you can't help but worry whether the rest of the passage down to the Canaries is going to be something of an ordeal. There are few thinking yachtsmen who don't have butterflies and a queasy stomach at the start of a passage and often this first step when leaving Europe from the Mediterranean or Atlantic Spain or Portugal can be a windy old affair. You don't need to be far down the coast on your way to the Canaries before the wind moderates and you start shaking reefs out and settling into the rhythm of life at sea. It comes as a bit of a relief. You do get the odd gale blowing in from the Atlantic, but on

light and we were close to ramming him, albeit at less than a knot, when Lu spotted him and I put the wheel hard over. We sat there for an hour just winding down and finishing off a bottle of good red before turning in. Whoever was on the yacht must have looked out and got a fright as he scuttled up and turned on the anchor light – too late. A plea to those who anchor: please put a decent anchor light out, especially if you are the outermost yacht in an anchorage.

Around in the fishing harbour at Caleta del Sebo there is a 'marina' where two pontoons have been laid. There are no real facilities, but it is secure and well protected and you can walk into the village around the sandy road that leads into town. There is not a lot here and it is a simple place with a slower pace of life compared to some of the resorts on the bigger islands. There is a bit of controlled tourism, but no big hotels or villa-rash, just the village where the streets are sand and there are hardly any cars. A good place to arrive and to stay for a few days. The island is now protected as a nature reserve. You should advise the harbourmaster in advance of your arrival.

Tel +34 928 842 147
Email puertocaletadesebo@puertoscanarios.es

Lanzarote

Lanzarote has three major marinas with differing aspects to them.

Puerto Calero This was the first marina on the island and the one we habitually head for. It has good facilities, a fuel dock and good bars and restaurants. The marina can get busy, but the marina staff will always do their best to find yachts a berth and few are turned away. The drawback to Puerto Calero is that you will need a hire car or taxi to go to the big supermarkets on the road to Arrecife, though that also gives you time to do a tour by car around the island. The advantage of the place is that it feels a bit like a hidden gem among all the development on the island.

Lanzarote Marina Situated in the old harbour at Arrecife and run

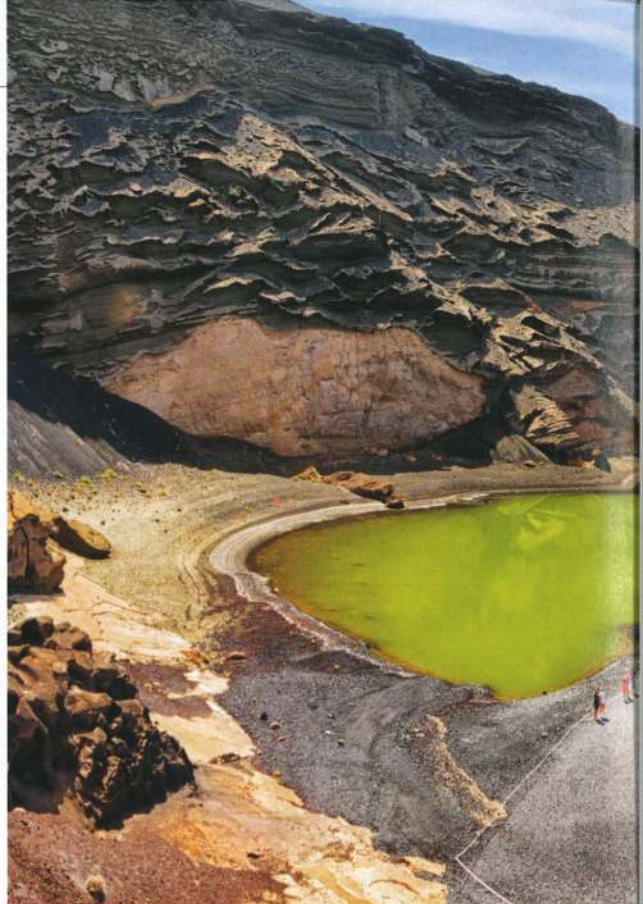
by the same management team as Puerto Calero. You are right in the middle of town here and so next door to all facilities. There are good restaurants and supermarkets within walking distance, though you will likely need some transportation when provisioning up for the Atlantic passage.

Marina Rubicon A popular marina at the southern end of Lanzarote. Good shelter and restaurants and bars. Some provisions. The marina is quite up-market and there are rules against painting and varnishing, grinding, working on the pontoons, and so on.

Gran Canaria

Most yachts will be making for here if they are participating in the ARC or arriving after the ARC has left. From September to when the ARC leaves at the end of November most berths are reserved for ARC boats – it's very difficult to find a berth here while the ARC is in town.

Las Palmas On the north east corner of Las Palmas. The marina is situated in a basin at the southern end of the commercial harbour and is handily situated right in the middle of town. There are good



ABOVE
The saltwater Charco de los Clicos, or Lago Verde (Green Lake) in Timanfayo National Park. The green colour is due to algae and contrasts with the black volcanic sand and red sandstone

BELOW
Puerto Calero, Lanzarote, our usual port of call



repair facilities and good chandlers. Supermarkets are a short walk away from the marina and will deliver to yachts berthed here and there are restaurants and bars aplenty in town.

If you like a bustling town with all the facilities that come with it, then there is everything to like about Las Palmas. Yachts that are not taking part in the ARC will usually plan to be here at the beginning of December and unless you leave for the Caribbean not long after arriving, then you will likely be at sea for Christmas. From here to the Caribbean is around 2,800 miles and if you reckon on a passage duration of 18-20 days, which is a fairly average length of journey, then you can work out what the odds are for arriving in the Caribbean for Christmas. I left here on 2 December on passage to Guadeloupe and arrived there on Christmas eve after encountering Tropical Storm Peter on the way – a rare occurrence at that time of year but then weather is weather, and you never know what the gods have in store for you.

Other berthing options

There are a number of other marinas dotted throughout the islands used by visiting yachts though I have no first-hand experience of them and



only the reports of others who have used them. There are also smaller marinas often associated with a resort, though visiting yachts may find it difficult to get a berth in them.

Marina Santa Cruz on Tenerife. On the north east corner of the island. Reported to be limited visitors' berths. Good yacht facilities and provisions and restaurants nearby.

La Gomera Marina on Gomera. Full service marina and those that use it like the place, though southerlies can cause a surge. Provisions and restaurants in town.

Santa Cruz Marina on La Palma. Again one that people like but it does get an awful surge with southerlies. A barrage gate is planned across the entrance. Provisions and restaurants ashore.

Provisioning

If you are headed down to the Cape Verdes, you need to do the bulk of your provisioning in the Canaries. The large numbers of tourists who flock to the larger islands in the winter mean that facilities are well developed in terms of provisioning

BELOW

The broad sweep of Playa del Ingles with the dunes of Maspalomas in the background, on the southern coast of Gran Canaria

BELOW LEFT

Just a fraction of the provisions needed for a trans-Atlantic crossing

for the passage across to the Caribbean. Most of the staples, fruit and vegetables, fresh meat and produce are shipped in from Spain. Any of the big supermarket chains will have good supplies of tinned items, flour, pasta, cous cous and pulses, as well as Spanish specialities as well. You can get excellent hams and salamis, chorizo, cheeses and good fresh fruit and vegetables. If you haven't provisioned fully before arriving in the Canaries don't worry too much as the larger supermarkets on the main islands →





'Mindelo is not only handily placed as a convenient stepping stone on the way to the Caribbean, but also has a well protected harbour and a convivial marina'

Mindelo which is not only handily placed as a convenient stepping stone on the way to the Caribbean, but also has a well protected harbour and a convivial marina.

Entry into Porto Grande is straightforward by day but should not be attempted at night as there are lots of old unlit hulks and a few wrecks to be avoided. Once inside anchor off tucked as far into the bay as you can and clear of any known wrecks which might foul your anchor. Alternatively, there is the small marina with water (mostly) and electricity and some smiling and friendly mariners to keep an eye on things.

On first sight the islands are not much to write home about. The Cape

ABOVE
The sun bathes Mindelo Harbour, São Vicente, Cape Verde in golden light as it sets over Monte Cara

BELOW
Lu shopping in Mindelo market

BELOW RIGHT
Woman selling tuna in Mindelo fish market. Although there are only basic provisions to be had in the market, the fish is very good and there is a surprising range of vegetables

Verdes are dusty, dry places where the trades whip up what little topsoil there is and blow it clear across to the Caribbean. Out of the dust and the wind you sail into Porto Grande to find the hulks of old ships at anchor or blown ashore and a ramshackle old town around the edge of the bay.

Don't be put off – initial looks are deceiving. There is vibrancy and colour ashore and some of the best music in Africa. Cape Verde musicians are renowned all over Africa from the wonderful, sad melodies of morna, think Cesária Évora, who came from the Cape Verdes, to the acoustic funana and batuque melodies, all of it an exotic blend of Portuguese, Brazilian and African elements. Many of the →



will have most things you need.

The large numbers of Europeans who visit the Canary islands means that you can find foodstuffs from all over the EU in the larger supermarkets as well as the Spanish products. Yachts tend to provision up and attend to any last-minute modifications and repairs in the bigger islands: Lanzarote, Gran Canaria or Tenerife. There are large supermarkets near all the marinas, though you may need a hire car to transport all the provisions you will be buying.

Mindelo in the Cape Verdes

It is something over 900nm downwind from the Canaries to Mindelo on the island of São Vicente. Apart from any acceleration zones around the Canaries, the trades will be moderate from the Canaries getting somewhat more robust towards the Cape Verdes. Most yachts will be headed for



Canaries and Cape Verdes

restaurants will have a local live band playing and you shouldn't miss it.

The Cape Verdes is a poor place and you will only be able to get a few basic provisions in Mindelo. In the local markets you can get good fish and a surprising range of vegetables. In a high valley on the adjacent island of Santo Antão the moisture-laden trades condense and provide water for a patchwork of market gardens. Around town the old colonial architecture reminds us the Portuguese were once here, though many of the buildings need a lick of paint.

From Mindelo it is a tad over 2,000 miles to the Caribbean which knocks 800 miles or so off the route from the Canaries. And you get more reliable trades this far south. I'm not sure where the North Atlantic got the moniker 'the pond' from because quite simply it isn't – a pond that is. The trades bowl through the Cape Verdes at a good rate though once you are clear of the islands things settle down. You will still get squalls coming through, mostly at night, but it seems to me you get fewer of them than the direct route from the Canaries. So, despite the numbers of boats crossing the 'pond' these days, it still commands respect and thorough preparation.

Downwind rigs for the crossing

While some yachts will go for a twin headsail set-up, most yachts opt for a combination of main and poled

'The trades bowl through the Cape Verdes, but once you are clear things settle down'

out headsail. Yachts with swept back spreaders have more of a problem on tradewind routes as you can't really run dead downwind without damaging the main. The usual answer is to run with the wind on the quarter and gybe downwind at 120-130° off the wind. Not only does this add miles to the passage, but also means speeds need to be greater to keep up with a boat waddling dead downwind. If you are contemplating a new boat for tradewind passages take a look at the rig first.

Even with straight spreaders it is worth adding anti-chafe to the aft edges to protect the mainsail. We use foam pipe insulation taped around them.

Most boats will have a roller reefing headsail and on any tradewind passage we look at where the wind is likely to be coming from and rig the pole on the leeward side

before the start of the passage. On a west about Atlantic crossing the wind is normally E-ENE so rig the pole to starboard. As long as you have forward and after guys on the pole it's easy to roll a bit of genny in or out depending on the wind strength. If it looks like a squall cloud is coming your way, then you can roll a good chunk of the headsail away until it passes. Passage making is all about keeping things snug and getting to the other side without breaking anything – at least anything major. ✦



ABOUT ROD HEIKELL

Rod is the author of innumerable pilot guides and his in-depth knowledge is respected across the global sailing community

Useful contacts

CHARTER

Endeavour Sailing: endeavour-sailing.co.uk. Tel: 0034 928 849 670

Velvet Sailing:

velvetadventuresailing.com. Tel: +44 (0)7801627660



Catching the Atlantic swell off the Cape Verdes



Fresh bread – a real treat mid-Atlantic