

Flora & Fauna on Mount Teide & National Park

Mount Teide is an active though dormant volcano on the Canary Island of Tenerife. Its highest point reaches 3,718 metres above sea level. It last erupted from the El Chinyero vent on the northwestern rift back in 1909. The mountain is the highest in Spain and 13th highest in Europe. The island of Tenerife is the largest of the Canary Islands and is the third largest volcanic island in the world.



The volcano and its surroundings, including the whole of the Las Cañadas caldera, are protected in the Teide National Park which covers an area of 18900 hectares. This park was named a World Heritage Site by UNESCO on June 29th 2007.

Prior to the 1495 Spanish colonization of Tenerife, the native Guanches referred to the volcano as Echeyde. Echeyde, in the Guanches legends, meant some sort of powerful figure leaving the volcano that could turn into hell. The Guanches believed that Echeyde held up the sky.

The explorer Christopher Columbus reported seeing "... A great fire in the Orotava Valley..." as he sailed past the Tenerife on his voyage to discover the New World in 1492.

It is believed that Sir Edmund Scory was the first person to ascend the mountain in 1582.

During 2003, there was an increase in seismic activity at the volcano. Many volcanoes e.g. Mount St Helens, Soufrière Hills had similar seismic activity prior to becoming active. Such activity is considered as being indicative of magma rising into the edifice. The summit of the volcano has a number of small active fumaroles emitting sulfur dioxide and other gases including low levels of hydrogen sulfide.

Access is by a public road running across the caldera from northeast to southwest. A hotel is located in the National Park along with a small chapel. The Teleférico cable car goes from the roadside at 2,356 m most of the way to the summit, reaching 3,555 m. Each car carries 38 passengers (34 in high wind) and takes 8 minutes to reach the summit. Access to the summit itself is restricted; a free permit obtainable from the Park office in Santa Cruz is required to climb the last 200 m. Due to the altitude, oxygen levels are lower than at sea level making it unsuitable for people who suffer from heart or pulmonary conditions.

Flora and Fauna

The lava flows on the flanks of Teide weather to a very thin, but nutrient and mineral rich soil that supports a diverse amount of plant species. Vascular flora consists of 168 plant species, 33 of which are endemic to Tenerife.

Forests of Canary Island Pine (*Pinus canariensis*) occur from 1000-2100 m, covering the middle slopes of the volcano. At higher altitudes, the Las Canadas caldera provides sufficient shelter for more fragile species such as the Canary Island cedar (*Juniperus cedrus*), and the Canary Island pine (*Pinus canariensis*) to grow.

Flora & Fauna on Mount Teide & National Park

The most dominant plant species in the Teide National Park are the Teide white broom (*Spartocytisus supranubius*), which has a white and pink flower; the Canary Island wallflower (*Erysimum scoparium*), which has white and violet flowers; and the Teide bugloss (*Echium wildpretii*), whose red flowers form a pyramid up to 3m in height. The Teide Daisy (*Argyranthemum teneriffae*) can be found at altitudes close to 3,600m above sea level. The Teide Violet (*Viola cheiranthifolia*) can be found right up to the summit of the volcano, making it the highest flowering plant in Spain.



These plants are adapted to the tough environmental conditions on the volcano such as high altitude, intense sunlight, extreme temperature variations, and lack of moisture. Adaptations include acquiring semi-spherical forms, acquiring a downy or waxy cover, reducing the exposed leaf area, and having a high flower production.

The Teide National Park contains a huge range of invertebrate fauna, over 40% of which are endemic species, with 70 species only being found in the National Park. In contrast there is a limited variety of vertebrate fauna. Ten species of bird nest in the park.

These include the blue chaffinch (*Fringilla teydea teydea*); Berthelot's pipit (*Anthus berthelotii berthelotii*); the wild canary (*Serinus canaria*); and a species of kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus canariensis*).

Three endemic reptile species are also found in the park - the Canary Island Lizard (*Gallotia galloti galloti*), the Canary Island wall gecko (*Tarentola delalandii*), and the Canary Island skink (*Chalcides viridanus viridanus*). The only mammals native to the park are bats, the most common species of which is Leisler's bat (*Nycatalus leisleri*). Other mammals such as the mouflon, the rabbit, the house mouse, the black rat, the feral cat, and the Algerian Hedgehog have all been introduced to the park.

Echium wildpretii is a herbaceous biennial plant that grows up to 3 m in height. The species is endemic to the island of Tenerife, growing in the subalpine zone of the ravines of Mount Teide. It requires a lot of sun and is found in arid and dry conditions but it tolerates frost down to -15 °C. The common names are tower of jewels, red bugloss, Tenerife bugloss or Mount Teide bugloss. The Spanish word for this plant is *tajinaste*.

Gallotia galloti (Tenerife Lizard or Western Canaries Lizard) is a wall lizard and species of the genus *Gallotia*. It is found on the Canary Islands of Tenerife and La Palma. The striking color of adult males and their curious nature endear them to many tourists. At popular sights, notably Mount Teide, the lizards have become rather tame and an attraction of sorts themselves. It is quite popular to bring some ripe bananas along for the lizards, which are a most favorite food of this species and will provide travellers with good photo opportunities as the animals scurry over the rocks and even onto visitor's hands to catch a bite.