



Caroline Ventris-Field
travelled with
Oonasdivers to El Hierro
off Tenerife and reports
on a beautiful island and
a great holiday
experience ...

WE TOUCHED down at Tenerife airport after a pleasant flight and I looked forward to meeting our tour leader. We were on a familiarisation tour to El Hierro, where I would sample the diving and my mum would do some walking. We were both looking forward to seeing this little known island – the smallest of the Canaries.

After a warm welcome from our guide we were driven to the Tenerife hotel which we stayed at on our first and last nights. As we were both feeling a bit tired by this point we made use of the hotel's pizza restaurant which was very pleasant and then retired to bed for a good night's rest.

The next morning we met the group we would be diving and walking with for the next few days. For a couple of the guests it was their fourth time returning to the small island! We were then transferred to the ferry port where we grabbed some breakfast and a coffee before embarking on the two hour ferry ride to our final destination.

As the big high rise hotels and busy roads of Tenerife disappeared behind us I looked forward to seeing the majestic island of El Hierro and I wasn't disappointed! Nearing the island I saw clouds skimming the tops of the mountains and it looked like something from a fairy tale.

We disembarked the ferry and started the 45 minute drive to the south of the island. This journey brought more wonder as we passed through volcanic landscapes with lava flows and volcanic cones, a pine forest and gentle meadows together with rocky coasts of colossal cliff, which plunge down into clear, blue waters. We saw vines, aloe vera plants and passed a cheese factory which makes, I later discovered, the most delicious smoked goats cheese.

We arrived in La Restinga at about 1.00pm and stopped off at the dive centre, El Submarino, where we met Fernando and Silvia, who run the centre and were very welcoming. We dropped off our kit, and showed our log books and proof of dive insurance (it is essential that you have these items). We were then told to meet back for our check dive at 3.30pm.

After a little time relaxing on the balcony of our apartment I made my way down to the dive centre which was about a two minute walk away. We walked down to the jetty directly in front of the centre and climbed onto the RIB. After about five minutes we arrived at the dive site, Ponta Restinga.

I wasn't sure what to expect from the diving after being used to the Red Sea but I was pleasantly surprised. Visibility was good at 20m+ and the water was around 22°C. We descended the line and hovered at about 8m for a while looking at the coral and fish, and there were a lot of fish!

We spotted a beautiful Eagle Ray, big grouper, trumpet fish, hogfish, wrasse, amberjacks, bream, parrotfish and moray eel. Our maximum depth on this dive was about 18m though it does drop to 30-35 metres. We remembered to keep an eye on the blue, there is a good chance here of seeing larger pelagics! Reluctantly we completed our safety stop and clambered back onto the RIB with big smiles on our faces.

It wasn't long until we met again for 'Happy Hour' which is held by Shane and Ollie each evening. Both the divers and walkers get together to share their experiences of the day and choose what they will be eating that evening. Dinner was in a local restaurant and we experienced the Irish 'craic' and our first taste of the liquor '43' and then finished the evening at 'El Bar', the most southerly bar in Europe.

The next day we met at the dive centre at 9.00am ready for our second dive. Again after a short ride in the RIB we arrived at 'Baja Bacarones'. We started the dive on the larger pinnacle and spent a lot of time observing the extensive marine life around. There were plenty of cracks and crevices to explore on this dive and lots more fish to see. Whilst swimming across to the smaller pinnacle we spotted a beautiful Butterfly Ray cruising above the sand. Again lots of smiling faces greet us back on the RIB.

As I was returning to Tenerife the next day, I decided to spend that afternoon exploring La Restinga. It is a lovely little fishing village with a beautiful harbour, located on the "Mar de la Calmas" (Tranquil Sea) which is a maritime reserve. There are two supermarkets and half a dozen restaurants, a bar and a very nice bakery. Little English is spoken here so a Spanish phrase book is a must. It really is so different from anywhere I have stayed before. I found it so refreshing to be somewhere which is very unspoilt by tourism; it feels like a real holiday! Everybody is really friendly and whilst I was there I only saw one other RIB taking divers out.

El Hierro is a beautiful island with so much to offer. The diving is fantastic and with 27 dive sites within a 10 minute RIB ride from the harbour, you are spoilt for choice. If you like something a little bit different this is the place to go. Very few tourists, very little English spoken, all within four hours of the UK, a rare treat!



El Hierro was a unique destination enjoyed by a friendly group