



Poolside perfection

The blue water of the lake was inviting but as I hobbled barefoot over stones at the edge, I braced myself for the icy shock that was surely in store.

It never came. Instead, I launched myself into cool, refreshing waters and admired the view of a cloudless sky, rocky hills and the pines that shaded the lake shore.

Forget infinity and wave pools, this was the real thing – and the best way to cool down after the heat and dust of a 4x4 safari, even if I couldn't persuade my 14-year-old son Tom to join in.

Tom and I were on a week

With a teenage son in tow, Nigel Williams discovers that Gran Canaria offers fun for all the family

break in Gran Canaria, with me looking for laidback lounging in the sun while sensing this wouldn't be enough for a teenager.

Gran Canaria is the most heavily populated of the Canaries, a cluster of islands

in the Atlantic but an autonomous region of Spain. It's shaped like a volcanic cone – the highest point is at nearly 2,000 metres in the middle – and resembles a miniature continent with the sand dunes of Maspalomas on the coast to the mountains and ravines in the centre.

We had left behind the often overdeveloped coastal strip with its busy road, concrete hotels and apartment blocks for the natural beauty of the island's interior.

Our safari began at Puerto Rico on the coast. It was a squash in the back of the Landcruisers and there was no roof to shield us from the sun.

At first we headed up a metalled road through one of the ravines towards the centre of the island. Then the road started to twist through white-washed villages, past pines, almond and banana trees and candelabra-shaped cacti.

We stopped for a refreshing papaya juice in a mountain café and to admire the view, with the Roque Nublo (rock in the clouds) pointing skywards like a spiky finger in the distance.

We rattled off-road on to a sharply twisting, stony track and bounced through clouds

of dust, too busy hanging on to take photos. After half an hour we were ready for a water stop and tour guide Stephen's impromptu lesson on how to prepare and eat a prickly pear.

We finally got rid of the dust by taking a shower back at the Hotel Orquidea in Bahia Feliz (happy bay), a small resort on the south-east coast.

Tom was finally ready to unwind, taking over the Jacuzzi that came with our eighth-floor penthouse suite. It boasted stunning sea views, two balconies and a huge satellite TV

The Orquidea is right on the beach. In high season it's aimed at families and has a creche, kids' club, organised games and playground, so if you want to chill out you could happily stay there for the entire holiday, knowing the little ones will be entertained.

Its three pools are set in attractive landscaped gardens, but with so many people settling down at the poolside



● Discover Roque Nublo, the 'rock in the clouds' on a mountain safari