

q travel: with BARRIE MAHONEY

'Tweeters from the Atlantic'

Barrie Mahoney was a head teacher and school inspector in the UK, as well as a reporter in Spain, before moving to the Canary Islands to launch and edit a new English language newspaper. He enjoys life in the sun as a columnist and author, and continues to write a series of popular novels and books for those living and working in the sun.

Letters from the Canary Islands and Spain

As is the custom in the 'Letters from the Atlantic' series, this book includes letters written over a one-year period from the Canary Islands. These letters are inspired by life in the Canary Islands and Spain and are intended for all those who love these beautiful islands and the country that it is part of. The winter months have now set in, and much of Europe is currently facing chilly temperatures, rain, heavy cloud and even snow.

As I write this on a sunny, warm morning in December, I am reminded of those words uttered by Christopher Columbus when he referred to these island as "The Fortunate Isles"; they certainly are.

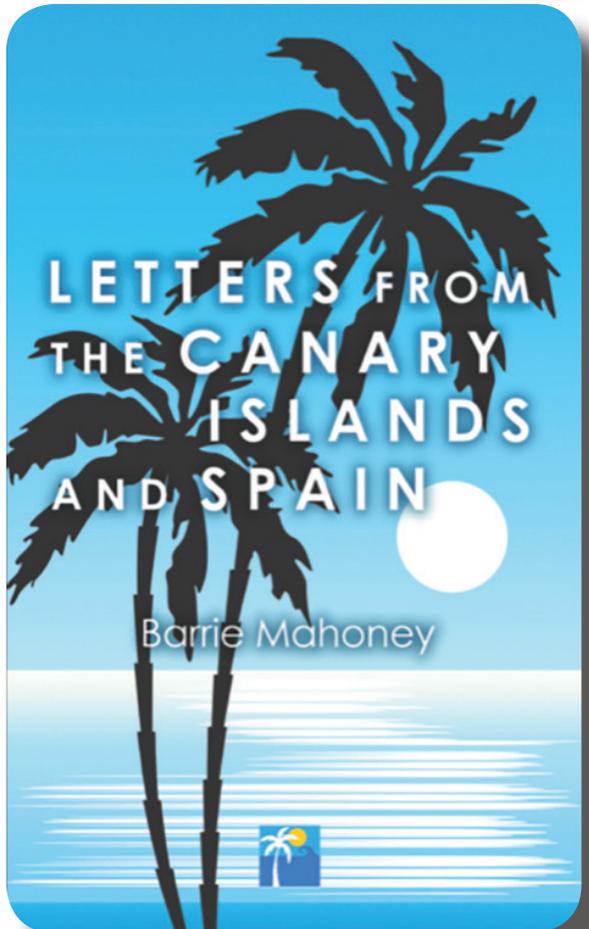
Despite living in what I have come to appreciate as one of the best places on Earth to live and work, these islands are not always the paradise that many claim them to be. In my weekly letters, I try to give a balanced and honest view of living on these islands, which is why I sometimes write about poverty and food banks, high unemployment, lack of affordable housing, the migrant crisis, physical and mental abuse, animal cruelty, robbery, murder, and drug and alcohol abuse to name just a few of the human conditions that impact upon this 'paradise'.

These disturbing reports often surprise readers and I occasionally receive indignant emails from island lovers who wish to express their displeasure about my more 'negative letters'. "You should focus on the best things about these lovely islands", I am told. "We don't want to read about island misery; we get enough of that at home", I was told recently by a visiting tourist.

I do not work for the tourist industry, nor the islands' government.

My aim, as always, is to try and give an unbiased and informed view of real life on these islands and Spain, and not to reflect the often dishonest, yet idyllic pictures in all those holiday brochures. Sorry to shatter illusions of near paradise, but life here is just not like that.

Whilst most of those 'all inclusive' glass palaces are owned and managed by overseas business interests, it is local people who have to work long, unsocial hours, often with low pay and poor working conditions to ensure that our overseas visitors have an enjoyable and memorable time.



For those who live and work in the Canary Islands and Spain, as well as other European countries, the looming spectre of Brexit has, for many, created a troublesome year. The future of Brits living in European Union countries remains uncertain, although all hope that common sense and pragmatism will eventually prevail for the benefit of everyone. The dream that myself and many others were able to fulfil of living and working in any European country and not to be restrained by location due an accident of birth, looks as if it will be denied to others in the future. Work and residency permits, driven by the need to restrict migration, which most had thought had long gone, have once again raised their ugly heads. The freedoms that we have been able to enjoy in the last forty years or so, look as if they are about to change. Only time will tell whether Brexit was a wise and successful strategy or not.

On a more positive note, this book aims to celebrate what I and many others enjoy about living in these wonderful islands, as well as Spain. It has been a joy this year to find that the islands' government has found ways of significantly reducing the costs for residents to travel across all the islands, as well as to the Spanish Peninsular.

This strategy is helping residents across all the islands to discover the many unique features of each island, as well as the opportunity to travel to Peninsular Spain, which has previously been denied to them, because of high travel costs. In addition, most of the islands are now offering heavily discounted tickets for internal travel, which is helping the unemployed to seek jobs further afield, students to access higher education, as well helping older people to explore and socialise.

On a more personal note, these islands are for me a paradise, and I could not imagine living anywhere else. When I first visited the Canary Islands on a package holiday so many years ago, I knew that one day, somehow, I would live here. I have been fortunate, the UK being a member of the European Union has certainly helped, as did my career change from teacher to reporter. Life is short, and I hope that in some small way, this book, as well as other books in the 'Letters from the Atlantic' series will help to inspire and motivate others to 'seek and live their dream'.

If you enjoyed this article, take a look at Barrie's websites: www.bariemahoney.com and www.thecanaryislander.com or read his latest book, 'Letters from the Canary Islands and Spain' (ISBN: 9780995602731).

Available in paperback from Amazon, Waterstones and all good bookshops, as well as Kindle editions.

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