

Mar y Sol – Disabled Heaven!

By Judy Graham

“This place is paradise. It’s paradise when you’re in a wheelchair but can sit at a dining table. Paradise is a hot swimming pool. Paradise is being normal, like everyone else.”

“This place is paradise because you’re not the odd one out here. Everyone is disabled, so you’re just normal, says wheelchair user Maureen Symons, who’s been coming to the Mar y Sol hotel for a month each winter for the last 18 years. “It’s my second home.”

For a second home, this is a pretty nice place – a warm (90F) swimming pool, easy access everywhere, lovely

big studios and apartments, a good buffet restaurant, a computer room, friendly people and near the most disabled-friendly beach in Europe.

Indeed, there can be few hotels anywhere in the world as totally accessible as Mar-y-Sol in Los Cristianos, Tenerife. It has everything any disabled person could want in a holiday hotel and more.

I stayed there in January, when it was cold, blustery and grey in the UK, it was balmy in Tenerife – like a perfect summer’s day in England. The ideal climate for someone with MS – warm and dry, with no humidity and a manageable four-hour flight on a budget airline.





The accessible Las Vistas beach in Los Cristianos has a ramp and toilets

MS & The Tenerife Connection

The Tenerife climate has a special connection with MS: The idea for the Mar y Sol hotel was conceived by its German owner Hans-Joachim Fischer, whose first wife had MS. When neurologists ran out of medical things to help her, one suggested that the dry climate of south Tenerife would do her the world of good. And it



The wheely friendly promenade at Los Cristianos

did! She arrived there limp and floppy, but soon regained a sense of well being.

But when they first went to Tenerife in the mid 1970s, Mr Fischer and his wife found there was absolutely nothing for disabled people – no accessible rooms in hotels, no ramps in shops, no wheelchair-friendly promenades by the beach, no disabled toilets. Nothing.

Surely there must be somewhere for disabled tourists to stay? But there wasn't. So Mr Fischer vowed to build somewhere himself and little

by little, over three decades, he has built the best possible hotel for disabled guests and their families.

How things have changed since their first visit! Now, the Mar y Sol hotel and Los Cristianos have become a beacon for disabled people and you will probably find more

people here on mobility

scooters and wheelchairs than at any other European resort.

Frau Fischer may have been the first person with MS to flourish in Tenerife but she has been followed by many thousands with MS since then. Over the years, the majority of guests at Mar y Sol have had MS, though today there are people there with a wide variety of disabling conditions.

The big draw is the Mar y Sol hotel itself. Another attraction is one particular beach in Los Cristianos called Las Vistas. It's a disabled person's dream beach. It's ramped, has accessible toilets and lifeguards to tempt you into the sea with their amphibious rubber vehicles.

No wonder so many disabled people congregate here each day. Accolades to the local council who made all this happen. Best of all, Las Vistas beach is just a short scoot from the Mar y Sol hotel, albeit up a rather steep hill.

In fact, so steep that my little Shoprider Cameo scooter, brilliant on the flat, couldn't make it up the hill and conked out. But help was at hand! Right next door to the Mar y Sol hotel is an outfit called LeRo, where you can hire or buy any kind of disability



Lifeguards are always at hand

Accessible Tenerife



An apartment with separate bedroom



View of the sea from the balcony of my studio apartment



A typical shower room – completely accessible

equipment. I promptly hired a powerful scooter which could breeze up the hill, no problem. It was a wonderful little vehicle to wizz me all over Los Cristianos and along the promenade to the more swish Playa de las Americas.

Had I wanted to, I could have hired all manner of stuff from LeRo – from floatation aids to air mattresses to electric beds to hoists. LeRo can also provide carers and they also have a wonderful airport-to-hotel

adapted vehicle taxi service, taking all the hassle out of the transfer. They even meet you in Baggage Reclaim and pick your bag up for you! This is my idea of a stress-free holiday.

Designed For Disabled People

Tenerife – particularly Playa de las Americas and Los Cristianos – has plenty of hotels that

can accommodate disabled people. But Mar y Sol is different because it is designed specifically for disabled people and their



The buffet restaurant at dinner

families.

Mar y Sol has a range of accommodation from cosy studios to deluxe apartments sleeping 4 or more. Prices depend on size and the time of year. All of them have plenty of wheelchair turning space, a little kitchenette, dining table and chairs, big wet rooms with all the equipment you might need, including a choice of shower chairs, and balconies to soak up the sun and sea air. They even give British guests their own kettle! (Germans use saucepans).

Everyone is on half board and the buffet service dining room at breakfast and dinner is informal, relaxed and friendly. You might find yourself sitting at the same table as a Swedish, German, Dutch or Danish person and it's



The hotel's computer room is a great place to make friends

easy to strike up conversation as everyone speaks English.

The computer room – with half an hour's internet access for



Therapies at Terra Lava are ideal for someone with MS

€2 – is a great place to strike up friendships, which is how I came to get chatting with Maureen Symons from Cambridge and a young mother from Sweden who had taught both her young children to swim in the warm water of the swimming pool.

The Mar y Sol complex also boasts a calm and relaxing therapy centre called Terra



Maureen has made a real home from home

Lava offering a range of holistic treatments suitable for people with MS such as Tuina, physiotherapy, massage,

acupuncture, yoga and QiJong. For sporty types it also has a fully accessible sports hall and the hire of disabled golf buggies.

Spend The Winter In The Sun!

How I envied Maureen, who spends one whole glorious month at Mar y Sol each winter in the same studio, getting 5% off for stays of 4 weeks. (Some people stay longer and pay less: 10% off for stays of 8 weeks, 15% off for 3 months.) "I use my Disability Living Allowance to pay for this", she told me. "I can use my DLA any way I like and this is how I want to use it." For her it's truly a home from home.

"I've got my own electric bed, my own sun lounger and I've brought all my own stuff like pillows and duvet so it really feels like home. I've also got my own fan, heater, iron, and ironing board. I can store it all here when I'm in Cambridge. Food and electricity is included in the price, so I hardly need to spend

any money at all."

Maureen has certainly found her place in the sun. "This place is paradise. It's paradise when you're in a wheelchair but can sit at a dining table, paradise is a hot swimming pool, paradise is being normal, like everyone else.

Able-bodied people ask, 'Where's the 'normal' loo?' I love that!"

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