

TASARTE

Disaster recovery

Several weeks after floods devastated their small town, the population of Tasarte in Gran Canaria continues its bid to return to a normal life, although progress is slow.

Pictures of the massive flooding and mudslides which hit the area on 21 December made the national headlines but now that the media glare has eased the victims quietly get on with the clean-up of the town and beaches, which is expected to take several months.

Some have lost everything, include local carpenter Ismael Díez, whose entire workshop was destroyed leaving him with no way of earning a living. "I lost about €120,000 in equipment and wood but at least I did not get dragged away by the rushing water and mud and end up at the end of the ravine," says Ismael, who hopes the aid promised by the Canarian government



The clean up is expected to take several months

will arrive sooner rather than later. Another local man Salvador Díaz confesses openly that he feared for his life as he saw everything swept away in the freak flood. "The boulder-filled waters descended from the hillside like lightning and I could only watch and pray as

I watched from my roof. My sister's house next door was simply washed away and my own has suffered extensive damage," he explained.

Tasarte's Christmas and New Year Celebrations were understandably low-key this year and most spent the fes-

tive days cleaning the mud and debris from the homes and salvaging furniture and personal effects. Doctors in the area say they have had to prescribe tranquilisers and anti-depressants to several residents to help them cope with the tragedy.

LA ALDEA

Tourism boost

The town of La Aldea de San Nicolas in Gran Canaria is looking to tourism to resolve the worrying local unemployment problem.

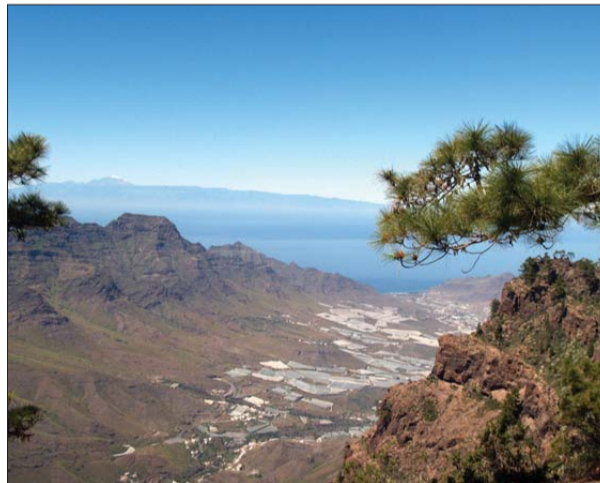
According to the La Provincia newspaper, one third of the town's 3,000 people of working age are out of a job following the closures of major employers, particularly in the tomato sector, whose mainland and European markets have been badly hit by cheaper tomatoes from neighbouring Morocco.

A local cheese maker has also closed down in recent times, adding to the jobless

queue. The council in La Aldea has set aside land to build a large upmarket hotel and a golf course to attract tourists but a dispute over boundaries with local landowners has so far delayed the plans.

"We don't want to replicate the tourism model of the resorts in the south but rather to offer visitors activities that blend in with our rural surroundings," says mayor Tomás Pérez.

The authorities will have to be very creative in their tourism plans if they are to get around limitations such as the fact that 85 per cent of the land around La Aldea



La Aldea hopes to attract more tourism

is classified as conservation land. "It is ironic that we are one of the places with most hours of sunshine in

the Canaries and yet have been unable to develop any form of tourism here so far," added the mayor.

CITY POLICE

150th anniversary

The city police force in Las Palmas has marked the 150th anniversary of its creation with good news.

Speaking at the official ceremony commemorating the corporation's decision to convert into a formal police body the sizeable group of night watchmen (serenos) who patrolled the streets of the capital, law and order

councillor Jesús González announced that the budget for 2010 included provision for an additional 50 officers.

"I hadn't intended to make the news public yet but there is no better day than today," said González, adding that a large proportion of the new posts would be used for environmental controls, particularly to combat noise and illegal building work. The

commemoration of the birth of the force followed painstaking detective work by two local policemen in the city archives.

The pair uncovered a series of documents recording the lead-up to the switch from the popular 'serenos' to a proper force, which was the first local police body to be set up in the Canaries.

News in Brief

Street violence

Gang fights

• More fighting between rival gangs of youths in San Agustín has prompted calls for tougher action by the authorities to clamp down on the phenomenon.

In the latest incident Canarian and Moroccan youths squared up to each other in the early hours of the morning outside a well-known pub in the local Centro Comercial. Fifteen police officers were needed to quell the large-scale disturbance, in which one Moroccan sustained a broken leg and several other youths suffered minor injuries. Police denied local reports that the gangs used knives in the fight. Traders have repeatedly warned about the potential repercussions on tourism in San Agustín of the fighting.

Air transport

Power failure chaos

• The strategic role of Gran Canaria airport's control centre was in evidence for all the wrong reasons earlier this month when a power failure brought further chaos to flights to and from the Canaries.



The power failure at Gando caused chaos in Canarian air traffic control

Just days after the latest industrial action by air traffic controllers caused delays of up to five hours, flights were hit by a glitch in the power system, which is linked to those of all the other airports in the Canaries.

All landings and departures from the islands were suspended for over half an hour and flights bound for the Canaries from elsewhere, including Germany and the UK, were put into a holding pattern while the problem was resolved. The incident, which affected 350 flights in all in one of the busiest weeks of the year, led to a backlog of delays that was not resolved fully for almost two days.

The Canarian Department of Tourism said the combination of the Gran Canaria control centre power failure and the air traffic controllers' work to rule had given the Canaries, "a third world image to the holiday world," and called for assurances that the problems would not be repeated.

Drug smuggling

Full nappies

• Police in Gando airport arrested a young mother who tried to bring in cocaine to the island in her baby's nappies.

The woman's nervous behaviour after landing on a flight from the mainland drew officers' attention in the arrivals hall. She was questioned about her trip to the Canaries and in view of the confusing responses police opted to search her hand luggage, where they found half a kilo of cocaine inside the disposable nappies and another small package attached to the nappy worn by the three-month old baby. The woman was remanded to the local prison pending further investigation.