



## ISLAND IDENTITY

# Celebrating Canarian culture

By Barbara Belt

May 30, 1983, was the first **Día de Canarias: the annual celebration of Canary Island culture, achievement, history, sport and gastronomy.**

According to its founders: "It affirms and identifies us, despite our naturally fragmented territory, and ignores sectionalism and tensions". This spawned the concept of 'Canariedad', a nice bit of sociolinguistics denoting 'that which pertains to Canarian identity'.

The date chosen was more to do with politics than Canariedad. Other regions may choose significant historical dates to celebrate local identity, but May 30 was chosen to commemorate the first session of the Canarian Parliament, nine months after Autonomous status was granted to the islands.

On March 9, 1983, the (still) Provisional Parliament debated a motion presented by UPC spokesman Oswald Brito to fix a date for celebrating a day that would: "Have an historical, but at the same time contemporary, significance, with a future focus". The admirable sentiments of this tall order created much argument in the fledgling parliament and the idea was nearly abandoned: the new



↑ La Graciosa's islanders won the Gold Medal for their fight for eighth Canary Island status

parliament's first fracas. Enter another Canarian called Brito (for they are legion): Augusto, from the PSOE party, who suggested using the date the first Canarian Parliament was constituted. This was a solution that pleased all parties who would, by implication, henceforth be remembered every Día de Canarias. When newly elected Government President Jerónimo Saavedra convened the inaugural session of the Canarian Parliament on May 30, the date for the new Día de Canarias was set.

Día de Canarias is an institution, celebrated all over the Islands, featuring attractive national dress that has enjoyed a resurgence of popularity over the last 34 years. Each island has its own version.

There are romerías, or country processions, fiestas, sporting events, concerts, school parties and performances of Canarian legends and a select group of Canarians is awarded the Islands' Gold Medal on this date.

Predating Día de Canarias by three years, the ceremony was

created in 1986. Medals were to be awarded to 'persons, corporations and institutions, who whether in or outside the Canaries, have made themselves worthy of recognition within the Islands', according to the original 1986 decree.

The Gold Medal is the Canary Islands highest honour and winners receive their award at the Canaries Day institutional act, which takes place each May 30, this year in the Pérez Galdós Theatre in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria. The list of 2017 winners is long:

the Asociación Niños Especiales de La Palma, 'whose dedication since 1994 has improved the quality of life of handicapped persons on the island of La Palma'; Ramon Padron, 'whose investigation and recuperation of El Hierro's musical tradition has kept it alive'; Casco Viejo de Corralejo neighbours group, 'for their successful fight for the old quarter'; Michelle Alonso and Israel Oliver 'for their brilliant performance in the Para-

Eighth Island group, 'for its campaign for inhabited island status'; Champions League winners Iberostar Canarias Basketball Club; Queen's Cup winners Rocasa Handball Club; and finally, Los Guaraperos de La Gomera, 'for keeping alive a 500 year old tradition'.

This specialist occupation requires considerable knowledge, not a little daring, agility and balance. The extraction of guarapo, or palm sap, by said 'guaraperos' (palm tap-



↑ The Asociación Niños Especiales de La Palma won a Gold Medal for improving the quality of life for handicapped persons

lympics in Rio last summer'; Tenerife scientist Basilio Valladares, 'for his work with parasitology and tropical diseases'; Gran Canarian trapeze artist Pinito del Oro, 'for her legendary circus skills'; Luján Pérez Art School, for its 'place of honour in the history of art in the Canaries'; La Graciosa

pers) requires them to climb a long trunked, swaying palm tree and to work with sharp tools and precision at the top, before climbing safely down. The award, sadly, comes too late for father of three, Jesus: Valle Gran Rey's principal guarapero, who was found dead under a palm tree in March.

**Sunset Happy Hour** at SIAMMALL

EVERYDAY 7 to 9 pm  
**May & June**

WEEKLY DRAW "Sunset Happy Hour"

SIAMMALL

Sunset Happy Hour Siam Mall: SPECIAL OFFERS

www.siammall.com

21 Offices (from 8 to 20m<sup>2</sup>)

Virtual Office

**{ MY PLACE }**  
Coworking Tenerife

One day trial for free!

Coworking (1600m<sup>2</sup>)

www.myplace-canarias.es | 922 099 201

Pol. Industrial San Jerónimo


