

For most of his life, Jason Kennedy had been looking for a place to lay down roots and call home.

Not just any place though...

It had to combine his four favorite things: a starry night sky, warm weather all year around, oceans, and mountains.

A native of Boston, Massachusetts, his quest took him across the U.S., visiting 35 of the 50 states. Deep down though, he knew he didn't want to spend his whole life in the U.S. So in the summer of 2017, he packed his things to go chase his dreams elsewhere—starting in Peru.

"I was planning to be there for three weeks, but ended up staying for six months working at a hostel," Jason says. "After that, I went to Montañita in Ecuador, where I worked as a bar manager in another hostel."

Prior to leaving the U.S., Jason had spent seven years working in the travel industry, accumulating a wealth of knowledge that would prove to be his golden ticket to a host of exciting destinations. He visited Colombia, Panama, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Costa Rica.

"In South America, I fell in love with the Andes, but it can get really cold there. I was in Costa Rica when some friends from the Spanish island of Gran Canaria showed me photos of Las Palmas and its boardwalk, the ocean, the mountains, and the open landscape. I was intrigued," he says. "So I decided to come here to check it out. Right after I walked out of the airport, I saw the mountains, the sun, and the ocean... and decided to stay."

"I've now been in Gran Canaria for 14 months. You can live very comfortably here and enjoy an amazing quality of life, without having to hustle and bustle all the time for something you can't really enjoy."

"I'm a trained fitness instructor and earn a living from online, group, and personal coaching, offering a unique blend of calisthenics, yin yoga, and mental empowerment to live music. I love to inspire our members to live their best life. It's my 'One Go Round in Life, Make it Count' approach that infuses everything I do."

Jason started his fitness business online, creating workout videos. "When I first came to Gran Canaria I had a vision, a

"Mountains, sun, and less hustle and bustle."



Part of the Canary Islands archipelago, Gran Canaria has one of the best climates in the world.

Building a Fitness Business on Spain's Gran Canaria

Natali Lekka

notebook to write down my ideas and put them into action, a tripod, a phone and a dream to fulfil," he explains. "I wrote, audio engineered, scouted locations, voice-over talent, and on-screen talent to

produce my first 30-minute workout program. From there, everything grew exponentially. I'm also volunteering at a surf hostel five shifts a week, and want to eventually open my own hostel and wellness retreat here on Gran Canaria."

In early 2023, the Spanish government's digital nomad visa for non-residents and start-ups came into effect. The news is music to the ears of the ever-growing digital nomad community. (A useful digital nomad Facebook group is [Gran Canaria Digital Nomads](#) and there's also: [Gran Canaria Expat Community](#).)

"I now have a lawyer helping me with the necessary paperwork and giving me advice on how to register a business," says Jason. "The Gran Canaria Tourism Board is particularly keen on inviting foreigners and digital nomads to come here and run Airbnbs and hostels."

Owning a property here is affordable too, which fits into Jason's long-term plans for his business. "I want to open a fitness and wellness center and I'm looking at spending about €300,000, which isn't that bad compared to what you're getting and the possibilities this can create," Jason says. "As an ex-travel agent, I can reach out to colleagues and plan a familiarisation trip so that Gran Canaria can become a destination for the travel agencies I've worked for."

But it's not just the affordability of Gran Canaria that's persuaded Jason to stay. The island is about 600 square miles and you can get around the circumference of the entire island in just six to eight hours. From the mountains to the ocean, to the sand dunes in the south, visitors can see everything in a matter of hours.

"I don't know any region in the U.S. that would give you such a rich variety of elements in such close proximity," he concludes. "It's a very attractive area."

The capital of Gran Canaria, Las Palmas, has a reputation for being a bustling digital nomad hub, while most of the tourist resorts can be found in the south of the island. With an average tempera-

ture of 72 F degrees all year round, the island is a favourite destination among Northern European expats, especially Germans, so while it's helpful to speak Spanish, English is spoken almost everywhere.

"I've definitely assimilated to the quality of life, but I'm still trying to learn Spanish," says Jason. "I started taking Spanish lessons in Peru, but I found that everywhere I went in Latin America, Spanish always sounded a little bit different. Luckily, I'm friends with a lot of Spanish teachers, so I'll be sitting with them to learn."

If you want to follow in Jason's steps, where do you start?

"First, find out what it is you're looking for and do a geographical search," he advises. "I had my four main criteria, so I'd been looking for those on all my previous trips. Some places had the ocean but not the mountains. Other places were very beautiful, but they weren't warm enough for me."

"Once I found what I was looking for, it wasn't a decision for me anymore. It was



a feeling—you recognize it.

"This is something that I'd been looking to do for a long time," Jason says. "I decided to go live my dreams and not waste any more time. I now feel my quality of life has massively improved. For example, I don't stress anymore about the political situation in the U.S."

"This is an island with lots of rich history... from the discoveries in the caves to the indigenous folklore. There's so much I want to learn and understand. And I want to lay down roots here."

If you'd like to follow Jason's adventures on Gran Canaria, you'll find him here on Instagram: [@jasonckennedy](https://www.instagram.com/jasonckennedy). ■

3 MUST-SEE SIGHTS AWAY FROM THE BEACH

Part of Spain's Canary Islands, Gran Canaria is the second most-visited island in the archipelago after Tenerife. It receives over 3.5 million visitors every year and enjoys consistent mild temperatures all year round.

It's popular with sun-seeking tourists from around Europe, who flock here for the beaches and the sunshine. But there's a lot more to Gran Canaria than the beaches. The island is rich in history and natural beauty.

Here are three must-see sights around the island:

Las Palmas: The capital of Gran Canaria, in the northeast of the island, is steeped in colonial history, and true to its name, it boasts more than 23,000 palm trees. Take a stroll through the Old Town of Vegueta to admire a beautiful blend of historical buildings and museums. Stop at Casa de Colón (Columbus House), a museum dedicated to Christopher Columbus who, rumor has it, stopped here during his first voyage to the New World in 1492 to have one of his ships repaired.

To the north of the city, you'll find



Gran Canaria's Maspalomas sand dunes move two to five meters each year.

the 1.7-mile-long sandy beach of Las Canteras. Dubbed by some as the European Copacabana, it's served by a host of nightclubs, cafes, shops, and restaurants. Try *papas arrugadas* (wrinkled potatoes), a traditional boiled potato dish served with a chili pepper garlic sauce called *mojo rojo*.

Pico de las Nieves: Located in the

center of the island, Pico de las Nieves ("snow peak") is the second-highest peak on Gran Canaria, at 6,394 feet. For keen hikers, there's a route that will take you through enchanting villages, deep ravines, exotic vegetation, and terraced fields.

At the summit, you'll be rewarded with panoramic views of the island and Tenerife floating in the distance. The roundtrip hike will take about six hours. If you're not up for the walk to the top, there's a bus that will take you to the viewing point at the top.

Maspalomas: For something totally different, head south to the wind-sculpted sand dunes of Maspalomas, which create the impression of an African desert set against the blue ocean.

Spanning 1.5 square miles, it's a vast, coastal nature reserve with a salt-water lake and a palm grove that can only be explored on foot or by camel.

The biggest resort in Gran Canaria, Maspalomas is particularly popular among surfers, windsurfers, divers, and naturists. Here you can also find Aqualand, the biggest water park on the island, with over 20 slides and Holiday World.