



THE FOREST OF ENIGMAS



What is it?

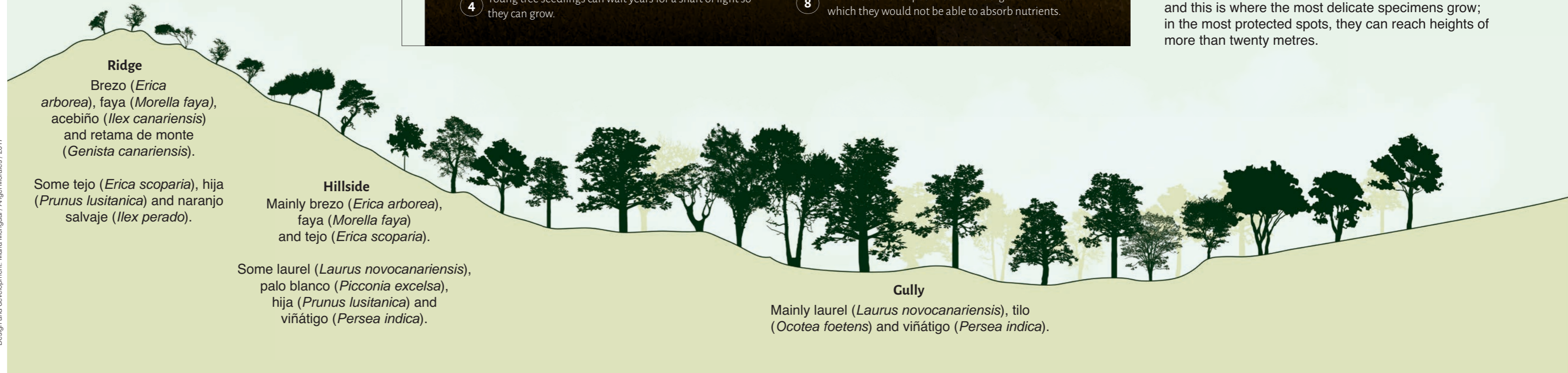
Laurisilva, or laurel forest, owes its name to the fact that most of its twenty types of trees have leaves resembling laurel. But it is made up of thousands of other species.

This ever damp and green forest cannot exist without the “sea of clouds”, which supplies it with water droplets and protects it from the sun and from sudden temperature changes.



Without the trade winds there would be no forest

The trade winds are a constant, gentle wind blowing from the northeast. The lower layer, in contact with the ocean, is laden with moisture and when it reaches more mountainous islands, the slopes force it upwards and the humidity condenses at a certain altitude, forming a sea of clouds. The water droplets are trapped by the vegetation, thus quenching the thirst of the forest. Curiously, this effect is even more pronounced in summer, turning the laurisilva forest into an oasis of freshness.

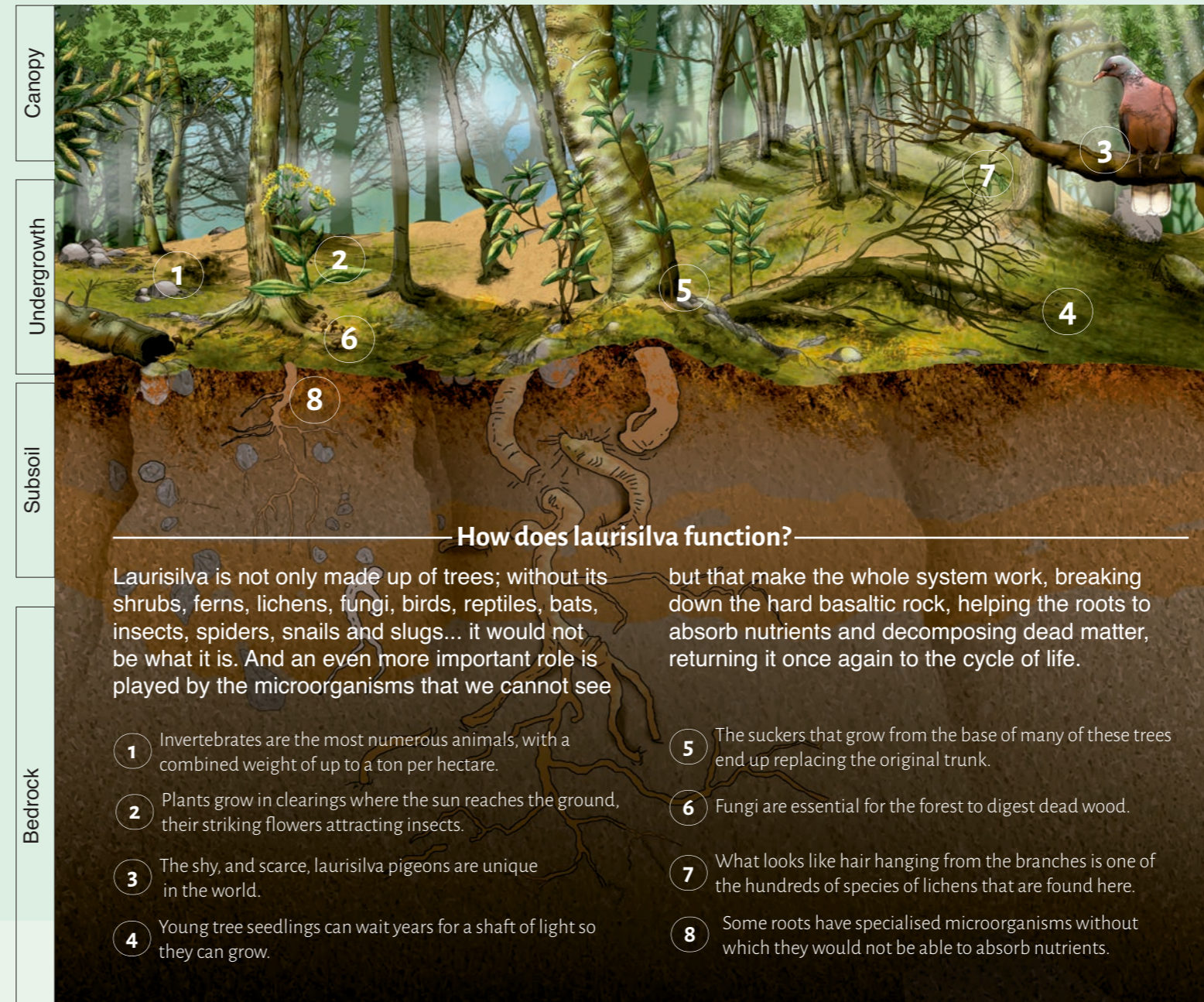


Laurisilva

“The essential is invisible to the eyes”
The Little Prince. Antoine de Saint Exupéry

The importance of this forest goes far beyond its beauty. It is an ancient forest that survives only in scattered outposts, whose continued existence depends upon a wind. It continues to surprise us

as we discover new unique species and the subtle interrelationships between the different species; much like a symphony that requires the members of the orchestra playing together in harmony.



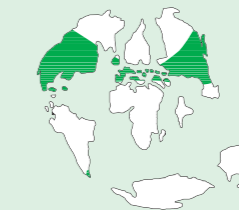
How does laurisilva function?

Laurisilva is not only made up of trees; without its shrubs, ferns, lichens, fungi, birds, reptiles, bats, insects, spiders, snails and slugs... it would not be what it is. And an even more important role is played by the microorganisms that we cannot see

but that make the whole system work, breaking down the hard basaltic rock, helping the roots to absorb nutrients and decomposing dead matter, returning it once again to the cycle of life.

- 1 Invertebrates are the most numerous animals, with a combined weight of up to a ton per hectare.
- 2 Plants grow in clearings where the sun reaches the ground, their striking flowers attracting insects.
- 3 The shy, and scarce, laurisilva pigeons are unique in the world.
- 4 Young tree seedlings can wait years for a shaft of light so they can grow.
- 5 The suckers that grow from the base of many of these trees end up replacing the original trunk.
- 6 Fungi are essential for the forest to digest dead wood.
- 7 What looks like hair hanging from the branches is one of the hundreds of species of lichens that are found here.
- 8 Some roots have specialised microorganisms without which they would not be able to absorb nutrients.

Why is it so important?



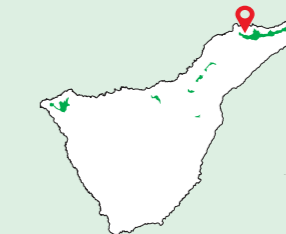
Laurisilva forest 50 million years ago

You may have heard that the laurisilva is a “fossil forest”. It is a remnant of the forests that populated the humid and temperate zones of our planet between 50 and 20 million years ago. When the climate cooled, this type of vegetation could only survive near the tropics.



Distribution of laurisilva in the world (today)

With the glaciations of around 2.5 million years ago, the laurisilva forests almost disappeared and only resisted in some isolated outposts, including Macaronesia, a string of Atlantic islands untouched by the ice age.



Current distribution of laurisilva on Tenerife

In today's climate, laurisilva can only survive where there is a sea of clouds, but human occupation has restricted it to a quarter of its potential area.

Its origins in a now extinct forest and its island isolation have created an ecosystem with hundreds of unique species, which you will not see anywhere else on the planet.

Is it all the same?

Like in a football stadium, not all the areas covered by laurisilva have the same conditions. The plants are distributed according to their “category”. Up on the summits the hardest species grow, plants that resist the buffeting of the wind and the lack of fertile soil. The slopes are steep and hold little soil, although more species grow here than on the summit. The gullies are the VIP area and this is where the most delicate specimens grow; in the most protected spots, they can reach heights of more than twenty metres.

How to get there



Download our free APP

San Cristóbal de La Laguna
Tourist information office:
922 631 194

Cruz del Carmen Visitor Centre:
922 633 576

Buses TITSA:
922 479 500
www.titisa.com

Emergencies:
112



Remember: you are responsible for your own safety when walking.

A walk with enigmas, answers and new enigmas

This route allows you to enjoy this forest with all your senses. Despite its proximity to the city of La Laguna and busy roads, you will soon forget the outside world and the laurisilva will seep through the pores of your skin in a matter of minutes.

But this forest also hides some enigmas that are not so easy to unravel. The idea of this route is to show you places where you can stop and ask yourself certain questions that will take you beyond mere contemplation. You will already know the answer to some questions, others will capture your imagination, or not... You will find all the answers on the back of this leaflet.

You may have new questions to ask. The staff of the Anaga Visitor Centre at Cruz del Carmen are at your service and will help you as much as they can; there are still so many questions left unanswered about the intricate networks behind the survival of this forest. New studies and discoveries are made every year. Let us hope that the laurisilva will never cease to amaze us.

Route information

Circular route

Starting Point: Zapata Viewpoint

Length: 5 km

Elevation gain: 600 metres.

Difficulty: Low, except for occasional short sections with steep and slippery slopes.

Where does the route go?

This route mainly stays within the municipality boundary of La Laguna with a small stretch in Tegueste. To give you an idea of its importance, here is a list of all the "titles" given to this area:

- Biosphere Reserve
- Rural Park
- Special Protection Area for birds
- Special Conservation Area
- Natural Habitat of Community Interest
- Woodland of Public Interest
- European record for endemic species per km²

2 An old laurel tree is the guardian of other newborn trees that will grow in the coming decades. Fallen leaves and dead trunks are another link in the cycle of life. Do you see the fungi growing on them? In spite of their humble stature, they are indispensable, as are other beings that we cannot see: the microbes. Without them, there would be no forest; do you know why?

1 There are many days when you cannot see a thing from this viewpoint. This "cannot see a thing" is due to a fundamental element for life here: the sea of clouds. Where do these clouds come from? Why are they so essential for the forest?

Take a moment to note your sensations of humidity, light, wind, temperature, sounds and colours, because everything is about to change. The laurisilva forest awaits you.

7 It is only a small stream, but bear in mind that the Sahara desert is only 300 kilometres away. This small miracle would not be possible without the trade winds, without the forest that drips water and without the soil that maintains life.

From here you will return to the starting point along an ancient path that zigzags down the hillside, which reminds us that we have been visiting and exploiting this forest for centuries.

The laurisilva is a unique forest, but it is crucial to our lives for reasons similar to all other forests on this planet.

3 This hole carved in the wall collected water that was drunk by the pack animals from the old forest workers' house that you will find a short distance ahead. Look at the channel through which the water reaches the trough. Where does the water come from? Take a closer look to see the drops that fill it. Is it magic? Maybe. This is the magical influence of the trade winds.

4 Is the wind gusting hard through the trees today? If so, you will hear the branches creak and see drops of water sliding off the leaves. Life on the peaks of Anaga is much harder than in the gullies that you have passed through. Here the most frequently found species of trees are different, with smaller leaves, some even with needles, like tree heath (*Erica arborea*) and tejo (*Erica scoparia*).

Did a bird swoop by you at full speed like a small fighter plane? That was a swift, a bird that uses air currents to catch insects on the wing.

5 As you have seen, laurisilva is made up of a diversity of organisms. Many of them live only in the Macaronesian islands, or only on Tenerife, or even only in Anaga. And every year new ones are discovered! Why is it that this forest has so many unique species?

In fact, the area in which you stand has the European record for endemic species per square kilometre.



6 You are leaving the ridge and going down the slope. Although we are still in the laurisilva forest, everything is changing once again. Sometimes the tree trunks are only damp on the north side.

Would you be able to tell after this point if the route is taking you along a ridge, a slope or a gully?

Legend

- Self-guided route
- 📍 Starting point
- Road
- Forest track
- Municipal boundary
- 👁 Viewpoint
- P Car park
- 🏠 Management Centre
- 👤 Visitor Centre
- 📄 Tourist information
- 🚌 Bus
- 🍽 Restaurant
- 🍽 Cafeteria
- 🍽 Food shop

- If you missed anything, you can always come back...
- Listen to the branches creak.
 - Discover fungi on a dead tree trunk.
 - Smell the damp soil.
 - Watch a swift swooping past you.
 - Hear the flapping wings of a laurisilva pigeon.
 - Touch the damp moss on the north side of the tree trunks.
 - Find a spider web.
 - Feel the water as it drips on you from the trees.
 - Touch the muddy ground.
 - Be surprised by the warning cry of a blackbird.

Most representative species

