

## THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO MADEIRA

A Portuguese island of volcanic origin situated in the Atlantic Ocean, Madeira has long been a popular year-round resort, noted for its natural beauty, sub-tropical climate, Madeira wine, unique flora and fauna, embroidery, and its New Year's Eve celebrations, featuring a spectacular fireworks show generally considered to be the largest in the world. Its sister island Porto Santo has a stunning 9km beach and a superb golf course.

**Where is it:** Approximately 600 km off the coast of Morocco and 1000km from Lisbon, the islands of the Madeira archipelago are situated just north of the Canaries.

**Why go there:** Equable temperatures giving perennial appeal, an established tourist infrastructure, a diverse landscape, great food and wine, and a genuinely warm welcome. Ideal for those who enjoy peace and quiet, and in particular nature lovers, Madeira also has enough attractions and leisure pursuits to satisfy the most active visitor.

**Where to go:** There are many faces to the Madeira islands. The key areas include:

- Funchal - the capital, with an historic 18th century core, cathedral, marina, museums and an imposing central square.
- Monte - for panoramic views. Ride up on the rack and pinion railway and down on the toboggan
- Machico - Madeira's second largest town: see the Igreja Matriz and the Capela dos Milagres
- Santana - thatched triangular houses
- Ribeiro Frio - beauty spot with trout stream and gardens
- Sao Vicente - volcanic caves and Volcanism Centre
- Porto Moniz - natural rock pools
- Canico - diving
- Camara de Lobos - fishing village beloved by Winston Churchill
- Pico Ruivo - Madeira's highest mountain
- Ponta Sao Lourenco - fantastic combination of rocks, sea and nature
- Santo da Serra - animal park and village market
- Cabo Girao - the second highest cliff face in the world
- Porto Santo - Madeira's neighbouring island, for beaches, golf and the house of Christopher Columbus

**What to see:** From the historical monuments, squares and streets of the capital Funchal to enchanting parks and gardens, picturesque villages, amazing landscapes, impressive volcanic caves, rugged coastlines, beautiful natural beaches and breathtaking views, Madeira is an incredibly diverse island for its size. Not to be missed are the laurisilva forests on the northern slopes of Madeira island, designated a World Heritage Site by UNESCO. Madeira has museums dedicated to many subjects and aspects of its history, including religious and contemporary art, wine, embroidery, sugar and Christopher Columbus, together with several heritage centres and themed attractions. These include the Madeira Story Centre, which tells the history

and development of the islands; the Madeira Theme Park, with a range of unusual attractions and the opportunity to tackle adventure sports such as bungee jumping and wall climbing; and The Blandy Wine Lodge for everything you ever wanted to know about Madeira's most famous product.

**What to do:** Summer in particular in Madeira and Porto Santo is a delight, although the climate lends itself equally to spring, autumn and winter escapes. Golf, too, can be played year-round, at the Palheiro and Santo da Serra courses on Madeira or the Seve Ballesteros-designed course on Porto Santo.

Important dates include New Year's Eve, Valentine's Day, Carnival (February) and the Flower Festival (April). Popular activities include levada walking, swimming, sailing, surfing, riding, tennis, scuba diving, big game fishing, whale and dolphin spotting, helicopter flights, balloon flights, cable car and elevator rides, the world-famous Monte toboggan ride, trips to the uninhabited 'desert' islands of the archipelago, and an array of options for shopping, eating out and evening entertainment.

Madeira is also a paradise for bird-watchers, walkers and nature-lovers. In addition to several endemic bird species, it is an important breeding ground for many seabirds, and has an incredible floral diversity, with a composition similar to the forests found in the Tertiary period that covered Europe and Africa millions of years ago.

**Where to stay:** Madeira has a wide range of accommodation, from mansion houses, townhouses, small hotels and pousadas to luxury resorts and famous hotels such as the Savoy Resort and Reid's Palace. Check out our Hotels section for further details.

**Where to eat:** There are dining options in Madeira to suit every taste, serving a variety of local and international cuisine, ranging from small, friendly restaurants and cafes to beach bars, ocean-view restaurants and fine dining establishments, including several of the top hotels.

Local specialities include bolo do caco bread, served with garlic butter and parsley, grilled limpets, soup-based dishes such as acorda, espetada (beef rubbed in garlic and salt) and picado (small pieces of beef fried with garlic and red peppers). Fish dishes include tuna, espada (black scabbard), bacalhau (codfish), gaiado (codfish) and potas (squid).

Traditional pastries in Madeira usually contain local ingredients, one of the most common being mel de cana, literally sugarcane honey, or molasses. The traditional cake of Madeira is the rich and heavy bolo de mel, which translates as sugarcane honey cake and according to custom is never cut with a knife but broken into pieces by hand.

**Where to shop:** Since the 17th century, Madeira's most important product has been Madeira wine, which the British did much to popularise. There are four types of Madeira - Malmsey, Bual, Verdelho and Sercial - and as well as being delightful to drink whilst on the island itself, it also makes an ideal gift. You can buy it from many locals shops, but in an adega, you can try before you buy. Other popular local products include embroidery, wicker work and souvenirs.

**When to go:** Madeira's geographical position and mountainous landscape result in a delightfully pleasant year-round climate, with some variations between the north side and south side of the main island of Madeira, as well as smaller islands like Porto Santo and the uninhabited Savages. With its mild humidity, the weather is classified as oceanic subtropical.

Average daily temperatures: January 13°C (min), 19°C (max); July 18°C (min), 25°C (max)

Average daily hours of sunshine: January 4.5, July 7.5

Average monthly rainfall: January 103mm, July 2.5mm

Influenced by the Gulf Stream, sea water temperature varies between 26°C (summer) and 17°C (winter).

**How to get there:** There are direct flights to Madeira from destinations around the world with a variety of international airlines. Madeira is within easy reach of Europe: as an example, the approximate flying time from London to Lisbon is 3hrs 40 mins. The islands have two airports, one in Santa Cruz (known as Funchal Airport or FNC) on Madeira and the other in Vila Baleira on Porto Santo.

**Getting around:** Car hire is recommended for getting around Madeira, whilst taxis will often suffice on the much smaller Porto Santo. Transport between the two main islands is by plane (approx 15 mins.) or ferry (approx 2hrs 40 mins), the latter also allowing for the transportation of vehicles. Visiting the interior of the islands is now very easy, due to major road developments, although the old, curving mountain roads are still an exciting way to explore.

#### **Portugal Essentials:**

Monetary unit: 1 euro = 100 cents

Internet domain: .pt

International dialling code: +351

Time Zone: Portugal (mainland and Madeira) is in the Western European Time Zone and operates Western European Standard Time, otherwise known as Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).

Like most states in Europe, Summer (Daylight-Saving) Time is observed in Portugal, where the time is shifted ahead of GMT by 1 hour. After the summer months, the time is shifted back by 1 hour to GMT.