

Welcome to the real Azores

Sunvil discovered the Azores in 1990 and since then we have been one of the leading promoters of responsible tourism to this, one of the last paradises on earth. We invite you to step into the past and discover the beauty and tranquillity of these fascinating islands.

Geography

The Azores form an enchanting archipelago of nine emerald green islands set in the Atlantic Ocean between Portugal (1,500km) and North America (3,900km). At one time thought to be part of the legendary lost continent of Atlantis, the islands were discovered in the 15th century by Portuguese navigators en route to the New World and became the link between Europe and the Americas. In fact, they belong to Portugal and are part of Europe.

The islands of the archipelago separate conveniently into three groups: the Eastern group of Sao Miguel and Santa Maria; the Central group of Terceira, Graciosa, Sao Jorge, Pico and Faial; and the Western group of Flores and Corvo. Because of their remote location, the traditional lifestyle of the Azores, outside of the main towns, has remained virtually unchanged. There is hardly any industry apart from agriculture and fishing, and pollution is unknown. The pace of life is slow and tourism is in its infancy.

Geology

The volcanic formation of the islands has endowed them with a spectacular natural beauty. Vast craters nurturing glistening blue lakes, sheer black cliffs falling in to the ocean, lush rolling valleys, rugged mountains and hot mineral springs and geysers combine to form a truly diverse scenery found nowhere else in the world. The climate is temperate, which ensures an abundance of flowers strewn across hedgerows and fields throughout the summer season, and the deep greens of the lush grasslands contrast markedly with dark volcanic stone walls and neat whitewashed houses.



Contents

Introduction	2-6
Accommodation at a Glance	7
Sao Miguel	8-25
What to see and do on Sao Miguel	10-14
Accommodation	15-25
Santa Maria	26-29
What to see and do on Santa Maria	28
Accommodation	29
Terceira	30-35
What to see and do on Terceira	32
Accommodation	33-35
Graciosa	36-39
What to see and do on Graciosa	38
Accommodation	39
Sao Jorge	40-45
What to see and do on Sao Jorge	42-43
Accommodation	44-45
Pico	46-51
What to see and do on Pico	48
Accommodation	49-51
Faial	52-57
What to see and do on Faial	54
Accommodation	55-57
Flores & Corvo	58-63
What to see and do on Flores & Corvo	60
Accommodation	61-63
Azores Three Island Tour	64
Azores Four Island Tour	65
Azores Grand Tour	66
Azores tailor-made Holidays	67
Flights & Car Hire	68-69
PRICES	70-71
Sunvil: The Real Selection	73
General Information	74-75
Travel Insurance	76
Booking Form	78
Booking Conditions	79



Accommodation and land only arrangements are protected by AITO Trust, a Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) approved body.

Our AITOT number is 1092



The air holidays in this brochure are ATOL protected by the Civil Aviation Authority.

Our ATOL number is 808.

Photography We would like to thank: Jon Banfield, Barro Acores, Charles Hawes, Carla Coutinho and the Azores Tourist Board for the use of their photographs.



A Z O R E S
A R C H I P E L A G O

When to go

The Azores are accessible and rewarding all year round due to their favourable climate.

Spring

April is a peaceful time on all islands and the month for Azaleas, especially in Furnas (Sao Miguel). The area around Furnas Lake is wonderful at this time of year. May sees the second largest religious festival in Portugal take place in Ponta Delgada (Sao Miguel). The 'Festas de Santo Cristo dos Milagres' (Christ of Miracles) takes place between 11-17 May and includes many cultural events, celebrations and a street procession through the capital city.

Summer

A profusion of hydrangeas can be seen throughout the archipelago during early summer (Jun-Jul) creating colourful natural hedges along roadsides and small pastures. Flores, literally named the island of flowers, is a perfect example best seen in July when the hydrangeas are in full bloom.

August is the month of festivals across the nine Azorean islands. Two of the main festivities take place on the central islands of Pico and Faial. Sea Week on Faial brings the island to life with musical performances and a number of regattas (5-12 August). Whaler's Week (20-26

August) on Pico pays homage to those who worked within the whaling industry and includes musical performances and celebrations. Other festivals include the musical 'Festival of the Sea' on Santa Maria, and the festival of Praia Vitoria on Terceira.

July-September can also be a lovely time to visit the Azorean beaches (weather dependent). The Azores is not a traditional beach destination with most beaches made of volcanic black sand and shingle (Santa Maria and Terceira are the two exceptions with golden sand beaches). In addition to the small beaches and coves, all of the nine Azorean islands have a host of natural rock pools, filled with ocean water and heated by the sun. Swimming in these pools whatever the weather is a delight.

Autumn

One of the best ways to explore this mid-Atlantic paradise is on foot, and each island offers a variety of marked trails to suit all abilities and interests. Walking can be enjoyed all year round due to the mild temperatures of the archipelago but, we love walking during the autumn months when the landscape is ever-changing in colour and the trees turning from lush greens to reds, oranges and yellows.

We operate our own guided walking holidays on three of the islands; Sao Miguel (page 14), Santa Maria (page 28) and Pico (page 48). We feel that these

walks are the most scenic routes that the islands have to offer. Our walks can also be incorporated into a tailor-made holiday, designed to meet individual requirements.

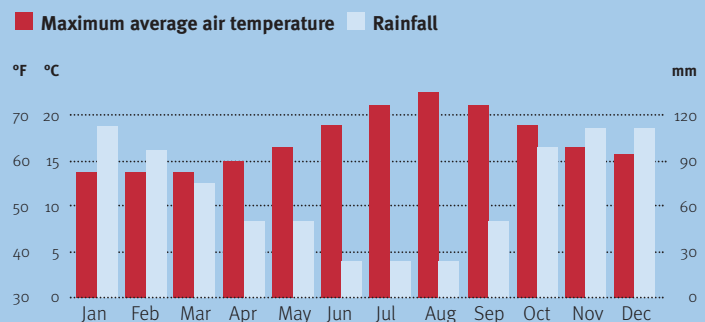
The autumn months of September and October play host to a variety of festivals including the Holy Ghost festivities (April-September). October is also the peak of the bird watching season on the island of Corvo, when North American vagrants pass by.

Winter

During the winter months, with average temperatures of 14°C – much warmer if you're sitting in the sun, unsettled weather means that the islands do not attract a large number of tourists. This is the time to see the real Azores, meet local residents and truly experience their way of life.

Christmas is a relatively low key and traditional affair. This is a religious community and nativity scenes are prevalent in Ponta Delgada (Sao Miguel) and many towns and villages throughout the islands. On New Year's Eve in Ponta Delgada (Sao Miguel), there is a popular firework display in the main square with brass bands, sometimes rock bands, and free food and drink dispersed amongst the crowds. Similar celebrations, on a lesser scale, can be enjoyed in Angra do Heroismo (Terceira), Horta (Faial) and many smaller towns and villages across the archipelago.

In February (18-21 February) Carnival is celebrated throughout the islands. In Ponta Delgada, grand balls are held on the evenings of the 18th and 21st February and a matinee masquerade ball on the 19th February (Sunvil Discovery can pre-book tickets for clients wishing to attend these events); and on the last day of the festival an entertaining water battle takes places at the marina.



ATLANTIC OCEAN



Inter-island flights

Sao Miguel to:

Santa Maria	30-minutes
Terceira	40-minutes
Faial	60-minutes
Pico	60-minutes
Sao Jorge	60-minutes
Flores	90-minutes

SATA Air Acores operate inter-island flights between each of the nine islands, with at least one flight per day from Sao Miguel to each island, and 3-4 flights per day connecting the islands of Sao Miguel, Faial and Terceira.

Boat crossings

Faial to:

Pico	30-minutes
Sao Jorge	90-minutes

Pico to:

Sao Jorge	60-minutes
-----------	------------

Sao Jorge to:

Graciosa	90-minute
----------	-----------

Flores to:

Corvo*	90-minutes
--------	------------

*Jun-Aug only



Interesting facts about the archipelago

A cuppa Europe's oldest

Producing black, green and oolong tea since 1883, the Gorreana Tea Factory on Sao Miguel produces up to 40 tonnes per year. This 45-hectare plantation is the oldest tea estate in Europe. Here you can learn how tea is harvested, processed and packaged, enjoying the scent of fresh flowers and sweeping ocean views.

Botanical bliss-out

Sao Miguel has a profusion of public gardens filled with tropical fruits and rare plants. The Jardim Antonio Borges in Ponta Delgada is especially remarkable, and the stunning 30-acre Terra Nostra Garden in Furnas - with its giant araucarias, tree ferns, romantic streams and geothermal bathing pool - is a must and has an exotic, internationally significant collection of plants. Also worth a visit are the recently extended botanical gardens on Faial.

33 Blue Flag beaches & natural swimming pools

Imagine stretches of silky black sand in stark contrast to the white foam and deep blue of the sea. Although not a traditional beach destination, the beaches of the Azores provide the ideal place from which to sit back, relax and watch the world go by.

There are some nice sandy beaches and coves on the north coast of Sao Miguel near Ribeira Grande (near the Quinta de Santana - page 19) and on the south coast at Agua de Alto (near the Hotel Bahia Palace - page 20). The shingle beach of Porto Pim on Faial is easily accessible, c. 5-minutes' walk from the

centre of Horta (pages 55-56), and even some gold sand beaches can be found on Santa Maria (page 29) and Terceira (pages 33-35). In addition, all of the islands have natural rock pools - filled with ocean water and heated by the sun - meaning many unexpected private swimming opportunities.

Cetacean expectation

Throughout the year the Azorean waters attract a number of cetacean species. A pod of male Sperm whales, Common dolphins, Bottlenose dolphins and Risso's dolphins call the Atlantic waters surrounding the archipelago their home. During the summer months (July - September) migratory species including pods of Sperm whales, Pilot and Beaked whales, Atlantic-Spotted dolphins, Striped dolphins and Turtles pass the islands. Whereas, in winter (October - June) species of Baleen whales such as Fin whales, Sei whales, Humpback whales and Blue whales are likely to be seen.

Cheese-bored (not)

You can't be: each of the islands produces its own - and, paired with good Portuguese wine, it makes for wonderful post-dinner indulgence. On Sao Jorge its famous namesake cheese is still made in the traditional farmhouse way and aged for over 120 days.

Fabulous, unfussy food

Portuguese cuisine that's tasty and wholesome: delicious soups, superb fish and seafood, locally sourced beef, spicy sausages, good bread and an abundance of fruit. On Corvo, home to just 400 people - try turbot, swordfish,

sea bream, grouper, moray and conger, and local specialities such as couves fritas (fried cabbage) and liver sauce.

The endemic Azores Bullfinch

Sao Miguel is home to one of Europe's most endangered species: The Azores Bullfinch, only found in a few square kilometres of wood in the eastern region of the island. You can join a one-day volunteer programme to assist with the species' conservation - see details on page 12.

Modest holiday money

The cost of living in the Azores is extremely reasonable. A coffee is about 60p; a draft beer just 90p; a main course for dinner including drinks c.£22. And island-hopping - between the central group of Faial, Pico and Sao Jorge - is no big deal financially when a boat ticket from Faial to Pico, for example, costs about £5 each way.

Pineapple plantation

In Faja de Baixo on Sao Miguel you will see the fruit at different stages of its greenhouse-bound growth and learn the labour-intensive method used to make them so sweet. Taste the very palatable pineapple liqueur, try the boiled sweets, or have it freshly sliced for dessert.

Terra incognita

The islands really are the Atlantic's best-kept secret. If you are looking for an unusual destination, this is guaranteed off-the-beaten-track territory. Sao Jorge, for example, had only 8,000 visitors last year.