



Santa Maria

The Island of the Sun

Area: 97 sq. km
Length: 17 km (11 miles)
Width: 9.5 km (6 miles)
Population: 5,500 inhabitants
Capital: Vila do Porto

Santa Maria is the oldest island of the archipelago. It was here that Christopher Columbus sought refuge in 1493 on his return from his voyage to America. Santa Maria is different from the other islands in that it is flatter and therefore dryer, warmer and with a lower humidity. The west, being the flatter area of the island, has higher temperatures and low growing vegetation. The central mountainous area and the rest of the island are more heavily wooded (with many endemic plants) with high cliffs and hillsides plunging into the ocean. To the south is Praia Formosa, one of the best beaches of the Azores (Blue Flag status) – and one of the few white sand beaches in the archipelago – and the Baía da Praia nature reserve.



There are wonderful exploratory itineraries around the island.

Anjos, where Columbus landed, the quaint town of Sao Pedro, the white Algarve style houses of picturesque Santa Barbara in the forested north and Pico Alto (590m) from where one can see the whole of the island. The 15th century town of Vila do Porto is the oldest in the Azores and has long streets leading to the 16th century cliff top fort of Sao Bras with the port below.

At the tiny village of Maia, the steep hillsides leading down to the ocean have been terraced with black volcanic rocks over many generations to hold the fertile soil in place in order to grow vines, wheat and corn. Maia also boasts a natural swimming pool that has achieved Blue Flag status.

There are also the Baía de Sao Lourenço, Ilheus das Formigas and Baía da Maia nature reserves – all wonderful places to explore.



Highlights

- Sweet Tooth**
 Traditional home-made biscuits and cakes can be found in local bakeries. You must try the Pastel de Nata – a deliciously creamy custard tart! There is a good bakery near Santo Espírito.
- Pico Alto**
 The highest point on the island offers magnificent views over the whole island.
- Anjos Chapel**
 The chapel at Anjos is one of the oldest in the Azores. Christopher Columbus attended mass here on his way back from America.
- Handicrafts**
 Traditional handicrafts include weaved table cloths and clothing.
- Colourful houses**
 The window frames and borders of traditional houses on Santa Maria adopt a colour associated with their specific village. Blues, yellows, greens and reds are used.

Festivals

- Festas de Santo António** (Santo Espírito) – 2nd week of June
- Festas de Sao João** (Vila do Porto) – 23 June
- Festas N.Sra da Assunção** (Vila do Porto) – 15 August
- Festival Maré de Agosto** (music festival in Praia Formosa) – 3rd week of August

Note: Dates subject to change.

Activities (page 28)

- Boat trips
- Fishing (Big game)
- Island tours
- Natural rock swimming pools
- Scuba diving
- Walking (guided)



What to see and do on Santa Maria

A great way to see the islands is on foot. We can pre-book a range of guided walking excursions and island tours – see below for details.

Guided Walks

Entre Serra e Mar (Half day)

This 9.5km (c. 2hrs 30mins) walk starts and ends at the parish church of Santa Barbara and passes typical houses and through rural landscapes. As you travel around the island you will notice the distinctive house chimneys, unique to Santa Maria and the varying number of colours used – the colours relate to the parish in which they are located. Following well used tracks, this walk offers excellent views of the bay of Sao Lourenco. **Grade 2**

Pico Alto - São Pedro (Half day)

This 14km (c. 4hrs) walk starts on the Pico Alto forest road (587m), the highest point on Santa Maria, with views over the whole island – Sao Miguel Island can also be seen on a clear day. You will pass through the Barreiro da Faneca, a unique ecosystem made up of reddish clay soil known as the 'Red Desert of the Azores', and a forest of Japanese red cedar trees. Throughout the walk travellers are treated to views of Anjos, Ponta da Baleia, the Baía da Cré and the Lagoinhas Islet. **Grade 2**

Santo Espírito - Maia (Half day)

This 6.8km (c. 3hrs) walk begins in the parish of Santo Espírito passing through Maia and ending at the Whaling Factory in Ponta do Castelo. The route runs through the village and passes by the splendid waterfall of the Ribeira do Aveiro, the Gonçalo Velho Lighthouse and through terraced vineyards. **Grade 2**

Price is £56 per person for each walk.

Notes

- Daily departures based on a minimum of 2 participants
- Each walk is led by an experienced English speaking guide
- No child reductions
- Pick-up included from/to all hotels on Santa Maria.

Recommended: Why not combine walks on Santa Maria with Sao Miguel (see page 14). Please telephone us for a quotation.

Grading of Walks

- 1 for Easy
- 2 for Medium

Non Guided Walks

Santo Espírito is a 11km (c. 3hrs 45mins) walk starting at the picturesque village of Santo Espírito, surrounded by lush green countryside, before descending through meadows and terraced vineyards to the white sand beach and natural rock pools at Praia Formosa. **Grade 2**

Pico Alto, the highest point on Santa Maria at 587m, is a 13km walk (c. 4hrs) that will enable you to appreciate the fabulous views over the small island of Santa Maria. From Pico Alto, you will see the dramatic coastlines to the east, where high cliffs fall into the ocean, pastures to the west of the island and the mountainous central region. The walk ends at the small village of Sao Pedro. **Grade 1**

Note

- These walks are bookable and payable locally.

Island Tour

Sunvil is able to pre-book the following private taxi tour on Santa Maria. Tours can also be tailor-made to suit the individual requirements of our clients, please telephone us for a quotation.

Full day

Depart from Vila do Porto to the small seaside resort of Anjos and its small chapel where Christopher Columbus attended mass on his return from America. From Anjos, on a clear day, it is possible to see the island of Sao Miguel on the horizon. Continue to the pretty village of Santo Espírito, surrounded by green pastures and hills, where you will visit the beautifully restored 17th century baroque church. Return to Vila do Porto via Maia and the viewpoint overlooking the bay of Sao Lourenco.

From Vila do Porto

Price is £222 per taxi

Notes

- Prices are based on a maximum of 3 people per taxi
- Lunch and entrance fees to museums and parks are not included
- Itinerary is subject to change.

Swimming

Praia do Formosa, located in a wide bay at the foot of steep cliffs, has a white sand beach that is very popular in summer (Jul-Sep). There is also a designated surfing area.

Maia in the southeast and Sao Lourenco in the northeast have natural sea swimming pools and, the latter, has several small, white sand beaches between the rocks.





Baia de Sao Lourenco

Hotel Santa Maria, Vila do Porto

Airport: 1km Santa Maria

- 3-star hotel ■ Bed & Breakfast ■ Swimming pool
- Air-conditioning

The Hotel Santa Maria has been completely renovated and restored to create a spacious modern hotel with ambience. Despite its close proximity to the airport (only 3 flights per day), the hotel is located in one of the most peaceful and tranquil parts of Santa Maria, offering a perfect base from which to enjoy the serene beauty of the island of sunshine.

Accommodation

50 air-conditioned rooms including single rooms, standard rooms and suites ■ All rooms have a bathroom (bath & shower), telephone, satellite TV and French doors opening on to a terrace ■ Some rooms have a complimentary WIFI internet connection ■ Standard rooms can accommodate an extra bed for an adult or child ■ Both suites have a double bedroom (king size bed) and a separate living room ■ Suites will accommodate 2 adults and 2 children (fold-up beds).

Amenities/Leisure

Buffet breakfast ■ Restaurant serving Portuguese cuisine ■ Large lounge with bar, fireplace, satellite TV and views over the inner gardens ■ Games room (snooker table and card tables) ■ Complimentary WIFI internet connection in the lobby and restaurant ■ Hairdryer and safe (free of charge) at reception ■ 2 tennis courts (free of charge) ■ Swimming pool (29,70 x 9,40m) open May-Oct – pool towels provided ■ Children's pool ■ Free parking ■ Hotel transfers available to villages and beaches around the island (local charge) ■ 5-minutes drive to the centre of Vila do Porto.



Hotel Colombo, Vila do Porto

Airport: 1km Santa Maria

- 4-star hotel ■ Bed & Breakfast ■ Swimming pool
- Air-conditioning

The Hotel Colombo, located on the south coast of Santa Maria facing the ocean, is the only 4-star property on the island and offers comfortable lodgings in modern surroundings. The bedrooms and apartments are located in the right wing whereas all the social areas are in the left, so as to minimise the noise level when guests are at rest. The hotel is suitable for business clients as well as family holidays.

Accommodation

87 air-conditioned rooms including standard rooms, suites and one-bedroom apartments ■ All rooms have a bathroom (bath or shower), hairdryer, telephone, satellite TV, minibar, safe deposit box and balcony with south facing ocean view.

64 Standard rooms (sleep 2+1)

The standard rooms can accommodate an extra bed for an adult or child ■ Some standard rooms have a king size bed.

5 Suites (sleep 2)

The suites have a double bedroom (king size bed), bathroom (Jacuzzi, bath and shower) and separate living room.

18 one-bedroom apartments (sleep 2+2)

The apartments have a twin bedroom, bathroom (bath & shower), separate living room with two single sofa beds which will accommodate two adults or children and a



kitchenette (2 electric hobs, microwave/grill, kettle, coffee making machine, fridge and small freezer).

Amenities/Leisure

Buffet breakfast ■ Panoramic restaurant serving regional cuisine (buffet and à la carte menu) ■ Bar with live performances in summer ■ Café bar with terrace and pool table (6 Euros per hour) ■ Cable TV lounge ■ WIFI internet connection at reception (payable locally) ■ Lift ■ Outdoor swimming pool (19 x 17m) open all year – pool towels provided ■ Well maintained gardens with lawn areas ■ Health club with Turkish bath, Jacuzzi (free of charge), gym and treatment rooms (payable locally) ■ Iron/ironing board on request at reception (c.20 Euros per day) ■ Free parking ■ 10-minutes drive from the centre of Vila do Porto ■ 15-minutes drive or 1 hour walk from the town beach (sand) at Praia Formosa.

Note

■ The Hotel Colombo can be combined as a 2-centre holiday with the Antillia Hotel Apartments on Sao Miguel – please see page 18.