



Madeira

The Pearl of the Atlantic

Area: 801 sq km (320 sq mi)
Length: 57km (35.41 miles)
Width: 22km (13.67 miles)
Population: 247,399 inhabitants
Capital: Funchal

The lush, sub-tropical island of Madeira has much to offer the independent traveller. The sheer diversity of scenery on an island of such manageable size makes it the ideal holiday destination.

Madeira is famous for its abundant vegetation: bananas, oranges, lemons, melons, avocados, passion fruit as well as bougainvillea, jacaranda, orchids and the national flower, the Bird of Paradise.

Funchal, lying on Madeira's south coast, is the island's capital and location of the majority of hotels, museums and historic buildings. Old streets are lined with beautiful houses perched on low cliffs and backed by green terraced mountains.

Deep ravines, winding roads, cultivated fields falling into the sea and an abundance of Mediterranean and tropical plants are typical features of southern Madeira. The charming fishing village of Camara de Lobos, a favourite spot of Winston Churchill is one of the few places on the island which has remained untouched by the passing of time. Further west is the scenic viewpoint of Cabo Girao, famed as Europe's second highest sea cliff (more than 500 metres above sea level) and the coastal town of Calheta immersed amongst flourishing vineyards and banana plantations.

The interior is a region of high peaks and deep ravines covered in lush green vegetation. The Serra de Agua mountain range offers nature trails for walkers of all competence levels.



Bird of Paradise

The North of Madeira is an area of rugged beauty covered by green forests, terraced vineyards and small cultivated fields. One of the most spectacular views is from Sao Vicente to Porto Moniz, a narrow road carved into sheer cliffs passing through tunnels and countless waterfalls. Remember to take a swim in the natural sea pools carved from the volcanic rock at Porto Moniz.

Activities

- Big game fishing
- Canyoning
- Golf
- Island tours
- Levada walks (guided / non-guided)
- Monte cable car
- Mountain biking
- Natural rock swimming pools
- Paragliding
- Porto Santo day trip
- Sailing
- Scuba diving
- Surfing
- Tropical & botanical gardens
- Whale & dolphin watching

When to go

Madeira's climate is mild, with temperatures between 61°F in winter to 72°F in summer (16-22°C), making it the perfect year round holiday destination.

Highlights

■ Afternoon tea

The Tea Terrace at Reid's Palace (see page 76) has an unrivalled view as well as offering the quintessential Afternoon Tea between 15:00-17:30. Reservations are advisable.

■ Cabo Girao

Climb to the top of Cabo Girao, on the island's south coast, for a dramatic view. This sea cliff, at 1,932 feet above sea level at its peak, is the second highest in Europe.

■ Levada walks

There are more than 200 'levadas' – irrigation channels on Madeira, built by the early settlers to take water to inaccessible farmland. Today, the levadas are popular with hikers as they are a great way to see the island's unique flora.

■ Madeira wine

Take home a bottle of fortified Portuguese wine - produced in a variety of styles ranging from dry wines which can be drunk as an aperitif to sweet wines more usually consumed with dessert.

■ Mercado dos lavradores (Farmer's Market)

This colourful market, best viewed on a Friday morning, is a great place to buy local produce in Funchal including fruit, vegetables, fish, flowers and wickerwork.

■ Rose garden

The Quinta do Arco in Arco de São Jorge (see page 85) has one of the largest collections of rosebushes in Portugal. The collection consists of more than 1,000 varieties of rose bushes.

■ Sao Vicente caves

Take a 30-minute walk to the centre of the earth, past lava formations and stalactites.