



*Funchal,
Madeira's capital*

MARVELOUS MADEIRA

*These Portuguese islands combine a tropical locale with
European flair.*

BY CASSANDRA BROOKLYN

The volcanic coastline, black pebble beaches and waterfall-studded forests of Madeira might not typically come to mind when you think of Portugal. But these picturesque features are precisely why I first fell in love with this Atlantic Ocean archipelago after spending two weeks hiking, biking and boating there. Tucked about 250 miles north of the Canary Islands, it's one of the most beautiful places I'd ever visited, so this winter, I returned with my sister for our first vacation together in six years.

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Opposite page, clockwise from top left: You can't go wrong with fresh seafood in Madeira; escape the hustle and bustle of Funchal by heading to villages along the north shore; wine barrels at Madeira's famous winery Blandy's Wine Lodge

This page, from left: Welcoming the sunrise with hot tea at Funchal's Savoy Palace; Monte Palace Tropical Garden is one of the largest of Madeira's many lush gardens.

Discovered and colonized by the Portuguese in the early 1400s, this island chain is closer to Morocco than to mainland Portugal. The Madeiran Islands consist of eight volcanic islands, only two of which are inhabited: Madeira and Porto Santo. Madeira provides the cuisine and culture Portugal is known for—fresh seafood, delectable pastries, exquisite wines, terracotta roofed-homes and tiled streets—but it also draws in visitors with stunning natural landscapes that are more often associated with Hawai'i or the Caribbean than Europe.

To help you get the most out of a week in this Portuguese paradise, here's some inspiration for spending seven perfect days

in Madeira, the archipelago's main island.

DAY 1 Start your visit in Funchal, the island's capital city. Take in warm ocean breezes as you walk along the waterfront, and then treat yourself to Madeira's traditional garlic butter-slathered bread, *bolo do caco*. Though the bread is no longer baked on a hot stone (*caco*), this sweet potato bread-meets-English muffin masterpiece remains a staple in everyday bakeries and restaurants across the island.

While strolling along the oceanfront promenade, soccer fans may want to take a picture with the larger-than-life Cristiano

Ronaldo statue, which announces the CR7 Museum, dedicated to the Madeiran-born and -raised *futebol* superstar.

DAY 2 Continue your urban explorations, this time taking to Funchal's city center. Explore the 16th-century Funchal Cathedral; enjoy a concert at the Teatro Municipal Baltazar Dias; snap selfies along the wildly colorful Rua de Santa Maria, affectionately known as Painted Doors Street; and meander around one of the countless city gardens that occupy nearly every corner of the area. The Mercado dos Lavradores farmers market (which is especially lively on Friday and Saturday mornings) is the best place to sample fresh fruit, buy unique spices,

and delve into the heart and soul of the city. Though I stocked up on Madeiran chili peppers, herbal teas and handmade chocolates at the farmers market, my favorite souvenir from city explorations is a large tin of light and crispy molasses cookies. I purchased the tin from the Fabrica Santo Antonio bakery, established in 1894, during my first trip to Madeira and restocked it with more cookies on my most recent trip.

DAY 3 For a bird's-eye view of the city (and an iconic island attraction), catch the Teleférico do Funchal cable car to the hilltop Monte Palace Tropical Garden. Plan to spend several hours in the garden, admiring

its sculptures, visiting the on-site art museum, and taking in thousands of plants, including dragon trees, orchids, azaleas and one of the world's largest collections of cycads.

Instead of catching the cable car back down to sea level, walk a couple of blocks down the main road for a thrilling ride in a *carro de cesto* (wicker cart). This flat-bottom, two-seater carriage on wooden runners slides down the winding, sloping streets with the help of two smartly dressed drivers, who push it one-and-a-half miles downhill.

DAY 4 Just minutes from downtown Funchal, or from the southwestern coastal town of Calheta, dolphin- and

whale-watching boat tours launch into the sea. Although I didn't spot any whales during my tour, dozens of dolphins danced alongside the boat, following in its wake and splashing me each time they jumped in and out of the water.

If the island's clear-blue waters have encouraged you to take a dip, head to one of Madeira's naturally made tidal lagoons that are surrounded by enormous rock arches and volcanic spires. Take your pick between semi-wild options like Seixal Natural Pools, where you need to bring your own towel and snacks, and Porto Moniz, which is larger but a bit more crowded, given its proximity to cafes, shops and restaurants.

Hiking trails like this coastal climb in Boaventura showcase the island's beauty.



BOTH PHOTOS BY CLEVER TOURS

PHOTO BY CASSANDRA BROOKLYN

While Madeira does have a few small black-sand beaches, most of its beaches consist of pebble. Considering much of the coastline is also made up of sky-high cliffs, most hotels have at least one swimming pool.

DAY 5 With dozens of well-maintained pathways spanning 300 miles of the island, Madeira was made for hiking. Choose from challenging full-day hikes that ascend 3,000 feet or short and easy walks, known as *levada* walks, along footpaths beside 15th-century irrigation canals. Thrill-seekers may also want to mountain-bike through Madeira's biosphere reserve, join a canyoning tour to rappel down waterfalls, or embark on a coastering adventure that lets you climb up coastal and inland cliffs and then dive down into the water below.

After your preferred adventure, head to the British-tinged Reid's Palace to indulge in afternoon tea, complete with delicate finger sandwiches, fluffy scones and your choice of two dozen premium teas. The first hotel on the island, this pink cliff-top complex is known for its extensive and elaborate

gardens and for hosting such famous guests as Winston Churchill, who you'll see pictured in photographs on the wall. (At home, I store a tin of black Reid's Blend tea next to my tin of Portuguese molasses cookies, which pair perfectly.)

DAY 6 While you could easily take a winery day trip from Funchal, several wineries double as boutique inns that offer a slower pace and a small-town feel you won't find in the capital. Quinta do Furão, along the northern coast in Santana, is an excellent option, as the 65-room hotel is walking distance to several *levada* trails and offers on-site wine tastings and cooking classes.

Full-day wine tours of Madeira allow you to visit a wider range of wineries, from Funchal's famous Blandy's Wine Lodge to hilltop wineries and family-owned operations across the northern cities of São Vicente and Seixal. As a bonus, the wine tours bring you to small towns and dense forests that you'd be unlikely to visit on your own.

DAY 7 Nobody ever wants to leave paradise, of course, but if you book a flight later in the day, you might have time for a morning swim, stroll or hike. Even if you have an early flight, consider a predawn trip to Madeira's third-highest peak: Pico do Arieiro. Drive (or have someone drive you) 6,000 feet to the top, just in time to see the sun rise from the marshmallow-like clouds, ensuring that your last moments on the island are bound to be some of your most memorable.

If You Go

Many travelers get to Madeira on one of several daily flights from Lisbon, but weekly nonstop flights from New York City on SATA Azores Airlines are now available. Numerous companies are happy to whisk you away on guided tours and day trips, but renting a car is easy and roads are in excellent condition, making it the most practical option if you want to explore at your own pace.