



AllWays Traveller

## Madeira

# An island forever in springtime

It's always good to have somewhere in your back pocket.

A year-round destination you can go to when the mood takes and the welcome is as warm as the weather.

Madeira, a Portuguese island in the Atlantic Ocean 300 miles off the coast of Africa, is just such a place.

If there is one thing that has held the place back, it's that Madeira has tended, in the past, to be the domain of elderly and 'well heeled' travellers looking for moderate temperatures and minimum activity.

It may be that these group travellers are quite content to perpetuate the myth – and keep the island to themselves.

But I have no qualms in dispelling it.

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**While Madeira's subtropical climate, makes it a year-round outdoor destination, the island's lush vegetation and dramatic landscape gives it a natural beauty missing on some of the drier, sun scorched, holiday islands.**

Yes, Madeira is an up market destination and no, it cannot claim to compete with other 24-hour party islands.

But for everyone else looking for a sophisticated sunshine break that can be combined with the opportunity to be as active outdoors as one could wish, Madeira really fits the bill.



## A personal view

### Relaxed sophistication with an active edge

by Ashley Gibbins



It must say something about somewhere when the guy in airport security looks at my boarding pass and suggests we swap places.

"My absolute favourite place, Madeira, what a beautiful island", he says and, with the queue no doubt muttering their discontent, proceeds to give me his top tips for my stay.

"You must do the gardens, the fish is delicious and of course the wine". I might have headed off to duty free thinking he says the self same thing to everyone passing through were it not for Ron.

Ron is my window cleaner (I agreed to credit him) and, whenever we get to chat he picks my brain on a destination for his next vacation.

Not this time. "You've never been to Madeira? Why ever not?" There is more than a hint of smugness in his tone.

"Great place. Joan and I have been three times now. Anytime of year. Wonderful walking. Must dash"

And while Ron is off into my neighbour's garden and up his ladder, I am off to Madeira. Tough luck Ron.

### A year-round resort



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## The facts



### Madeira

Madeira, a tropical archipelago in the Atlantic Ocean, is an autonomous region of Portugal.

It comprises the two populated islands of Madeira and Porto Santo, and two groups of unpopulated islands called the Desertas and Selvagens Islands.

Madeira island is 310 miles from the African coast and 620 miles from the European continent.

The Madeira Nature Park covers about two thirds of the island and has been classed as a Biogenetic Reserve with rare species, unique flora and fauna.

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Funchal, the capital, is the main centre of population.

Other cities are Santa Cruz and Camara de Lobos, Canico, Machico and Santana.

Portuguese is the official language of the island although English is widely spoken.

The currency is the Euro.

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## An up-market destination

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## Funchal



Funchal, the island's 500-year-old capital, is the most attractive of cities and accommodation throughout the island is predominantly four and five star.

Dining, the other traveller's prerequisite, ranges from traditional alfresco to sophisticated chic and is of an invariably high standard.

For the active there's all manner of pursuits from whale watching and walking to deep-sea fishing, wind surfing and scuba diving.

The people of Madeira are passionately proud of their island and take great delight in singing its praises and those of its capital.

Funchal, they will tell you is one of the most beautiful of Portuguese cities. And with much justification, for it is indeed a fine place. Spacious yet eminently walkable.

Vibrant and bustling, as befits a thriving city not dominated, or indeed overwhelmed by tourism and safe.

Of its main thoroughfare's, the Avenida do Mar provides a panoramic oceanside promenade stretching from the marina, at one end and beside open-air bars and floating restaurants to the swimming lido.

Once at the old town one is among a cluster of traditional restaurants and open air dining.

Running adjacent to the Avenida do Mar is the Avenida Arriaga.

This is down town Funchal with the shopping mall and a range of upmarket retail outlets along its length, the cathedral and a number of excellent restaurants and bars.

The tourist information centre here is a good place to head for first in order to get orientated and plan your stay.

## When to go

Madeira is a genuine year round destination with average temperatures between 17° C and 21° C. Summer is pleasantly warm with temperatures rarely rising above 28°.

The bay of Funchal, protected by the highest peaks, enjoys the best of the sunshine.



## How to get there

Madeira International Airport in Santa Cruz, 16 kms from the city of Funchal, is the main gateway to the region and is served by the main European airlines.

## Where to stay

Madeira offers a fine selection of accommodation from large spa resorts and boutique hotels to country and town houses.

### Reids Palace William

Reid opened his hotel on the western edge of Funchal bay in 1894 and Reids Palace has remained a place to stay, or at least to take afternoon tea, ever since.

Among its celebrity guests, George Bernard Shaw learnt to dance at the hotel and Winston Churchill painted the village of Câmara de Lobos from its gardens.

[www.reidspalace.com](http://www.reidspalace.com)  
[www.madeiraisland.travel](http://www.madeiraisland.travel)  
[www.madeirarural.com](http://www.madeirarural.com)  
[www.charminghotelsmadeira.com](http://www.charminghotelsmadeira.com)

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## In the gardens



As the guy at checkout said, you must do the gardens and in particular the botanical and the tropical gardens.

### The Madeira Botanical Garden

Over 2,000 exotic plants from all over the world are to be found on the 35,000 square metres of hillside that is the Madeira Botanical Garden.

It is also known as a centre of science and culture in the defence of endangered species of plants.

[www.sra.pt/jarbot](http://www.sra.pt/jarbot)

### The Monte Palace Tropical Garden

The Monte Palace Tropical Garden, in Quinta Monte Palace, has a collection of 100,000 species.

These include azaleas, heather and a wide variety of ferns and 60 of the 72 known species of cycads (encephalartos), which are considered living fossils.

[www.montepalace.com](http://www.montepalace.com)

For the more vigorous visitor, the forests on the northern slopes of the Island are designated a World Natural Heritage Site by UNESCO.

## The cable cars

Madeira has coped with its rugged, mountainous landscape by constructing a number of cable cars and scenic elevators.

In addition to getting visitors up to and back from hill top attractions these provide stunning views on the way.

## What to eat

The seas around Madeira are rich in fish stocks and the island's restaurants take pride in offering the Espada Black Scabbard fillet fish of Madeira, tuna steak and limpets with lemon and garlic.

Espetada, a marinated beef brochette, is another island speciality.

... and drink.



Madeira wine, of course, which is a fortified wine tasting of caramelised sugar. It was originally created by the primitive shipping conditions of the seventeenth century.

This wine is very popular as a sundowner.



## Getting around

The island's bright yellow taxis are easily recognised and available.

Equally important they are officially regulated and metered.

There is also an excellent bus service, particularly in and around Funchal'

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## The Madeira sledges



The Madeira sledges were introduced around 1850 as a means of getting the affluent residents of Monte down into Funchal.

Today, it is the tourists who thrill at sliding at high speed down the narrow, winding streets down to Funchal in the two-seater wicker sledges.

Gliding on wooden runners, they are pushed and steered by two men traditionally dressed in white cotton clothes and a straw hat, using their rubber-soled boots as brakes.

## Walking the levadas



The Madeira levadas are a network of 200 man made water channels created to carry water from the mountains to the plantations below.

Today they also provide hiking routes into remote villages, through forested hillsides, by waterfalls and along cliff hugging ledges.

Each levadas trail requires strong legs and sturdy footwear and, for those new to the experience, an organised tour with a professional guide is recommended.

The Madeira Walking Festival and Madeira Orienteering Festival both take place in January.

## What to do

### Attractions

#### The Madeira Story Centre

The Madeira Story Centre is Funchal's latest visitors' attraction and provides a fascinating, interactive insight into the islands history and development. It is located in the Old Town opposite the Monte Cable Car Station.

[www.storycentre.com](http://www.storycentre.com)

If you go to the north coast of Madeira, two sites of scientific and educational importance are the São Vicente Caves and the Volcanism Centre.

The Madeira Theme Park in Santana is an exhibition centre devoted to the history, science and traditions of the Madeira Archipelago.

### Festivals

#### The Madeira Wine Festival

The Madeira Wine Festival takes place in early September and is held during the main period of grape harvesting.

The festival begins in the village of Câmara de Lobos with the picking of the grapes, the pickers' parade, the treading of the grapes and other wine traditions.

In Funchal, the festival brings wine and food tasting and live entertainment onto the streets.

#### The Atlantic Festival



The Atlantic Festival throughout June comprises the Madeira Music Festival with performances throughout Funchal city centre and the International Fireworks Competition,

The latter offers spectacular displays each Saturday evening during the month.

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## Canyoning

Canyoning is an energetic way to get down the rivers of Madeira and see undiscovered and untouched parts of the island.

During summer the northern rivers are the most appropriate, as the flows are high and there is enough white water to create an exciting challenge.

During winter, the streams to the south provide gentler, quieter flows.

## Simply charming



While there is a wide choice of quality accommodation throughout Madeira, one option is the four Quinta's (manor houses) that comprise Charming Hotels Madeira

**Quinta das Vistas Palace Gardens** is located on the brow of a hill with panoramic views over the mountains, the ocean and Funchal's city centre.

**Quinta do Monte** is located in the heart of the historic village of Monte in the hills above Funchal.

It is short walk from the cable car terminal that takes you to the old town and the departure point for the island's famous wickerwork toboggans.

**Quinta Perestrello** is a restored boutique hotel in Funchal itself.

**Quinta do Estreito** is a newly restored hotel with landscaped in countryside some 15 minutes from Funchal.

Guests at one Quinta can enjoy the facilities of all four and the connecting shuttle.

[www.charminghotelsmadeira.com](http://www.charminghotelsmadeira.com)

More information : [www.madeiraislands.travel](http://www.madeiraislands.travel)



## Activities

### Big game fishing



Madeira's warm waters attract huge blue marlin and tuna.

The Atlantic Blue Marlin season in Madeira runs from May to October with the average fish being estimated at around 700 lbs.

Most marlin fishermen practise a system of 'tag and release' returning the fish unharmed.

### Whale and dolphin watching

Madeira is the summer haunt of many species of whales and dolphins, which can be viewed via a number of safari boating excursions.

### Diving

Under water, scuba and deep sea diving have both increased in popularity in Madeira and there are also a number of underwater nature parks to explore.

### Bird watching

The Madeira archipelago also offers opportunities to spot 43 breeding species of land and sea birds.

### Golf

Madeira offers two golf courses: the 27-hole Santo da Serra Golf Club and the 18-hole Palheiro Golf Course, which is set in the hills to the east of Funchal

[www.santodaserragolf.com](http://www.santodaserragolf.com)  
[www.palheirogolf.com](http://www.palheirogolf.com)

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## The International Travel Writers Alliance



*AllWays*

*AllWays* is the consumer travel service from the International Travel Writers Alliance.

### **The International Travel Writers Alliance**

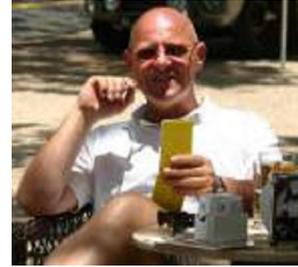
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