

# AZORES

## Travel Recommendations



Urban Waltenspül

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## 1 Preface

In 2013, over Easter, I visited the main island São Miguel for the first time. Together with my sister Regula, we wanted to get a first impression of whether the Azores could be suitable for a project called *Caribou*<sup>1</sup> that we would like to realize once we retire. That day still seemed far away... and then I fell in love with these 9 islands.

In spring 2015, Regula and I went to *São Miguel* for seven weeks to learn the basics of the Portuguese language. It sounds very melodious to me. Paulo, our Portuguese teacher, with whom we have been friends ever since, gave us a thorough introduction.



*Thermal pool with iron-rich water in Furnas  
in the centre of the island São Miguel*



*Coast of Capelinhos in the north of the island  
Fajal, which was newly created in 1958*

My love for this archipelago in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean resulted in this guide of all nine islands. Therefore, it goes without saying that it is my perspective and does not claim to be complete.

Pictures: 90% are mine, some from Nadja and some, e.g. the aerials of islands, are from the internet.

The numbers on the island maps, correspond to the numbering of the individual chapters.

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<sup>1</sup> *Caribou*: North American [reindeer](#) – a word from the [Mi'kmaq](#) Indian language. All natives held the Caribou sacred. When they hunted a caribou, they used every part of it.

*Picture page 4*: Island of *Flores* – north-west coast with the island of *Maria Vaz* and the island of *Corvo* in the background

## 2 Overview

### 2.1 Geography

The [Azores](#) are a jewel with **9 inhabited islands** with about 250'000 inhabitants in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean almost halfway between Europe and America – situated 972 miles directly west of Lisbon Portugal. The **capital Ponta Delgada** is located on the largest island [São Miguel](#) (approx. 750 km<sup>2</sup>/ approx. 140'000 inhabitants) and has an international airport, a hospital and a [university](#). There is a second international airport and a second university on the island of [Terceira](#) with the capital [Angra do Heroísmo](#), which is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

A little south (37 km or about 15 minutes by plane) of the main island São Miguel is the geologically oldest of the Azorean Islands: [Santa Maria](#) (about 100 km<sup>2</sup>/approx. 5'600 inhabitants). It is known for the dark red volcanic earth, similar to some of Australia.

Santa Maria together with São Miguel forms the *Grupo Oriental*.

In the central area of the Azores – about 50 minutes flight from the main island São Miguel – are 5 islands belonging to *Grupo Central*:

- [Terceira](#) with the island capital *Angra do Heroísmo* – approx. 400 km<sup>2</sup>/ca. 56'000 inhabitants
- [Pico](#) with the main town *Madalena* – approx. 450 km<sup>2</sup>/approx. 14'000 inhabitants – The volcano of the same name on the island of Pico is with 2'351 m the highest elevation in Portugal.
- [Faial](#) with the island capital *Horta* – approx. 170 km<sup>2</sup>/ approx. 15'000 inhabitants
- [São Jorge](#) with the capital *Velas* – approx. 230 km<sup>2</sup>/ approx. 8'500 inhabitants
- [Graciosa](#) with the main town *Santa Cruz da Graciosa* – approx. 60 km<sup>2</sup>/ approx. 4'300 inhabitants

From Grupo Central another 50 minutes flight away are the two islands of [Flores](#) (approx. 140 km<sup>2</sup>/ approx. 3,700 inhabitants) with the main town of *Santa Cruz das Flores* and [Corvo](#) (approx. 17 km<sup>2</sup>/ approx. 430 inhabitants), which is especially well known among ornithologists because of the stopover of migratory birds. The only settlement is *Vila do Corvo*. – Both islands together form the *Grupo Ocidental*.

The Azores lie on the [Mid-Atlantic Ridge](#), a geologically extremely active zone.

Deep below the sea surface, **three tectonic plates** of the Earth's crust meet here: The North American plate (with *Flores and Corvo*), the Eurasian and the African plate. As the plates drift apart here, new material is constantly rising from the earth's interior. Over the course of millions of years, a submarine mountain ridge formed, whose highest peaks rise out of the sea as the nine Azores islands.



The average temperatures in the Azores range from about 10°C in winter to 25°C in summer, although some days can be a little warmer or cooler. Swimming in the sea is possible in summer, with temperatures comfortable enough to jump into the sea at least once a day! With climate change, at the end of September 2018, we were able to swim everywhere as the Atlantic Ocean was fabulous 22°C! – The [iodine-rich](#)- sea air stimulates the metabolism, this explains the increased appetite and has a calming effect on our nervous system, which helps us sleep well. Furthermore, the rich salt and oxygen sea air, may help dissolve mucus in the respiratory system, thus helping some to breathe easier.

The Azores are easily reached by plane. From experience I have learned not to try and visit more than three islands during a two week stay. Here the old proverb “less is more” rings true. You will experience nature as rarely possible. Take time to absorb your surroundings. After a hike luxuriate to a refreshing swim in a hot spring, in the sea or in a waterfall!



There is no village nor hamlet without a church or a chapel in the traditional black and white colors. In these two colors is also the mosaic-like cobblestone that characterizes various towns and smaller villages. Portuguese cobblestone tilers are sought after worldwide! One example: in autumn 2018, the new stunning square around the [Open Church of Saint Elizabeth](#) in Basel was built by Portuguese workers in record time.

## 2.2 An Açor – or where the name Azores comes from

The name Azores goes back to a bird, the [Açor](#)! – When the first Portuguese sailors discovered this archipelago, they noticed birds of prey they thought were [hawks](#). In fact, they are [kites](#), which can still be found today on most of the islands.

The Açor (*Portuguese*: hawk) is present on the [flag of the Azores](#) (instead of the kite). Above it, 9 stars for the 9 islands of the Azores are shining in the same golden color. In the [canton](#) is the [coat of arms of Portugal](#).



## 2.3 The Azores High

Many in Europe associate the Azores with the *Azores High* and know that this brings beautiful weather to the European continent. But what is the [Azores High](#)? – Above the Azores, a **high pressure** area forms in view of the location in the [Headley cell](#), which lies between the equator and the northern [horse latitudes](#) (25°-35°). And because the earth rotates from west to east, this high moves with the general [west drift](#) towards the European mainland.

In this zone above the Azores, the weather is constantly changing with the wind often changing direction several times per day.



## 2.4 Flora and fauna

### Flora

Before the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century the islands were densely forested. Today, however, the landscape is often defined by dark lava stone walks and during the summer, **meadows and pastures** are outlined by hedges of blue [hydrangea](#) (22 different species!) as tall as a person. Thanks to the mild, tropical climate, about 60 endemic plants grow, i.e. only native to the Azores, for instance the [azorina](#). And there are many other species, including the [arum orientale](#) and [dracunculus \(calla\)](#) from the family [araceae](#), the [canna](#), [belladonna-lilies](#), [bougainvillea](#), [azaleas \(rhododendron\)](#) and the widespread, invasive, yellow garland flower (also known as Kahili ginger or [ginger lily](#)), which originates in the Himalayas. – The forests dazzle with laurel, juniper, fern trees and blueberry tree.



*Hydrangea*  
*Azalea*

*Azorina*  
*Ginger lily*

*Arum orientale*  
*Bougainvillea*

*Canna*  
*Belladonna-lily*

Sailors, botanists and returning emigrants, imported many of these ornamental plants, along with all **arable crops**, so that a highly interesting botanical garden developed. The fertile volcanic soil allows tea, pineapple, bananas, coffee, tobacco and wine vines to grow. – There is great magic in small things!









## Fauna

The Azores are home to many domestic and farm animals that have been introduced, especially cattle, for dairy and meat production, which are widespread on all islands. Native animals include the bat, wild rabbits, many insects, beetles and numerous birds, such as the [Açor](#). Some birds are endemic, living only in the Azores, such as the 600 or so [Azores bullfinches](#) (Priolo – source:



*eBird*) on the island of *São Miguel*, which is related to our [bullfinch](#). This archipelago is an important breeding ground for the [Roseate Tern](#) regarded as one of Europe's most endangered seabirds along with the [Yellow-billed Cory' Shearwater](#), whose strange calls during the night made us laugh several times. Here a [soundbite!](#)



The Atlantic Ocean around the Azores is populated by many animals of the sea. Of the approximately 80 species of dolphins and whales in the world, more than 20 are found off the Azores. Off the island of *Pico* from the boat we observed three different species of **dolphins** with schools of several dozen animals. Some of them swam nimbly beside the boat and others made wonderful jumps! To experience these playful, agile and intelligent animals so closely is certainly one of the most exciting experiences of a visit to the Azores.



Equally breathtaking is the sighting of **whales** off the coasts of the islands of *Pico* and *São Miguel*. Particularly when they slowly emerge, catch their breath and, as they descend, their prominent caudal fins finally disappear back into the depths of the Atlantic Ocean. These marine mammals were hunted in the Azores from about 1850 - 1984 with small boats – today only with binoculars, cameras and mobile phones. However, one cannot always be sure that a whale encounter will occur, but patience is usually rewarded.



*Sperm Whale* (source: postcard)

## 2.5 People, their language and music

### Language

The national language is Portuguese. However, English is also spoken, especially as some Azoreans who once emigrated to America return – out of love for their homeland. The English language skills they have gained help the returnees to gain a foothold in the growing tourism industry. In America you can feel foreign, but «here we do not know isolation», say some islanders. Portuguese is also spoken in [Brazil](#), [Madeira](#) and in some former African colonies, e.g. [Mozambique](#) or the [Cape Verde Islands](#), or Asian colonies, e.g. [Macau](#). – Although Portuguese also belongs to the Latin languages and sounds similar to Spanish, it is not so easy to learn.

## People

Perhaps it's the remoteness of the Azores that gives the islanders a strong sense of belonging. The Azoreans are open-minded, interested and like to have a short chat. Their friendliness and willingness to help is almost legendary and we have often had very good experiences in this respect.

## Music



Occasionally I listen to [Fado<sup>2</sup>](#), a Portuguese genre, characterized by the melancholy lyrics, about the sea and the life of the poor. These songs are mostly accompanied by the [viola da terra](#), an old form of guitar.

→ [Explanation of the viola da Terra](#) on youtube by [Rafael Carvalho](#)

→ a [music example](#) with the "Queen of Fado" [Amália Rodrigues](#). There is also little-known Azorean music. The [Grupo de Cantares Belaurora](#) is dedicated to this tradition, a polyphonic choral singing accompanied by guitar, accordion, flute and drum → an [example of music](#)

→ for more about Azorian music see: [Chamarrita](#)

## 2.6 Weather

In the Azores, they say, there can be up to 4 seasons in a single day. Therefore, always bring along rain and sun protection, bathing suits and for those who are sensitive to the wind a jacket and a scarf. – Most often there is a lukewarm breeze, however, there can often be a forceful wind, which will pose a challenge for hat-wearers, such as myself.

There are less clouds near the coast. On the other hand, the mountains in the backcountry in particular can be cloudy. However, it can be worth going up even when the volcano is overcast, because the weather changes so quickly, when you reach the top you may already be able to enjoy a wonderful view. When the volcanic hills are clear in the morning, it is worth throwing all other plans overboard and heading straight for the mountains. – It is also worth ordering good weather even before the trip!



*Lagoa das Furnas, Insel São Miguel*

The Azores are familiar with winter storms, which can be very forceful, especially near the coast. Inland, the storms are less severe, but there is a lot of fog and rain, which can lead to local flooding in winter. When the waves are strong, ferry traffic between the islands is suspended. Flights can also be cancelled due to strong winds. We experienced this during the autumn 2013 on the island of Flores; our flight had to be rescheduled for the following day.

<sup>2</sup> Fado is part of the [intangible cultural heritage](#) of [UNESCO](#) since 2011

## 2.7 Flight

I fly with the Azorean airline [SATA](#) from Frankfurt directly to Ponta Delgada. The flight takes about 4 ½ hours. By e-mail ([info@sata.pt](mailto:info@sata.pt)) I let SATA know my exact wishes – e.g. for island hopping – and order the train ticket/access *Rail&Fly*, i.e. the train ticket in Germany. From Basel, my hometown, this is of course ideal, because Basel-Frankfurt only takes about 3 hours!

*Please note:* There are a few direct flights from Frankfurt to Ponta Delgada a week. I prefer to fly out on Sunday afternoon and return on Saturday morning. Usually it's an [Airbus A320](#).

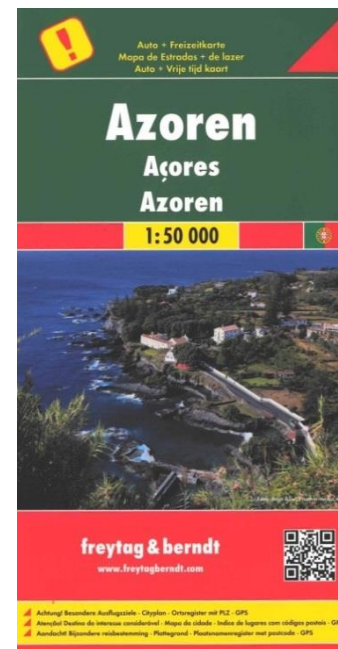
Another possibility is to fly via *Lisbon* or *Porto*. Should you find there is a short transfer between your connecting flight, you may want to consider planning an overnight stay in either of these two wonderful cities!

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## 2.8 Car rental and road map

I recommend renting a car, preferably at the airport. We have had positive experiences so far with the Azorean provider [Ilha Verde](#). However, when visiting the main island, it is worthwhile to take a taxi to the hotel in Ponta Delgada (10 €), take 1-2 days for sight-seeing and only then rent a car in one of the two rental agencies in the capital. We have also rented a car at the airport of Ponta Delgada and headed directly to the interior of the island. From our accommodation we went on excursions – also to the capital Ponta Delgada. Everything is very close!

I recommend purchasing a good road map that includes all the back roads and hiking trails, for example the Azores map by [freytag & berndt](#) – in Switzerland for about 18 francs. Maps are also available at the airport in Ponta Delgada (in the shop next to the car rental companies for 12 €). This includes all back roads and some good hiking routes.



## 2.9 Accommodation



Casa da Fontinha – Fajã Grande – Flores

Through [booking.com](#) there are good hotels on most of the islands and also accommodation with cooking facilities. The hostels ([Pousadas de juventudes Açores](#)) on 5 islands also offer a good standard. In 2019 we stayed for the first time in an [Airbnb](#) – on the islands of Flores and Pico – very positive experiences. Also a look at [Housetrip](#) or [Casas Açorianas](#), either can be worthwhile.



## 2.10 Eating and drinking

As one might expect, the Azores offer everything the heart desires. Fish and seafood<sup>3</sup> are abundant along with meat, cheese and vegetables. Exotic fruits such as pineapple and bananas are also grown in the Azores; tea is grown on *São Miguel* and coffee on *São Jorge*. Since local products are not sufficient such as rice and grain, additional food is imported, especially from mainland Portugal.

On *São Miguel* they offer the delicious, slightly sweet **Bolo Lêvado**, which tastes delightful with pineapple and cheese but also with one of the many Azorean jams!



*traditionally e.g. pineapple and blood sausage*

→ [A Brief Introduction to Azorean Cuisine](#)

**Wine** is traditionally grown on plots of land with walls of piled up black lava stones. The main wine growing area for white and red wine is on the island of **Pico**, e.g. a *Terras de Lava*, a rather light white and red wine, which is always a good choice. Alternatively other wines can be tasted. On the islands of Graciosa, Terceira and *São Miguel*, wine is cultivated but it is not available everywhere. Native, Azorian wine is inexpensive (restaurant for 12-24 €/bottle).



→ [Azorean wine has a unique place in Portugal's winemaking history](#)

**Beer** is currently experiencing a renaissance. It is rising like the phoenix from the ashes: initially a common folk drink transforming into a first-class, natural and healthy drink.

There are several local microbreweries on the Azores. In Altares on the island of *Terceira*, the local beer **Brianda** was inspired by the legend of the heroine **Brianda Pereira**, a legendary resistance fighter who drove away Spanish invaders in the battle of Salga in 1581 with the help of wild cattle.



<sup>3</sup> I can only recommend the wonderfully fine **lapas** cooked with butter and garlic and doused with lemon.

## 2.11 Sports and sports-related services on various islands

The Azores are very suitable for sports enthusiasts. These insider tips are little known to date:

- [Cycling](#)
- [Golf](#) – see the brochure Azores Golf Islands in the dossier Azores Brochures
- [Canyoning and kayaking](#) (São Miguel)
- [Diving](#) (São Miguel, Terceira and Pico)
- [Surfing](#) (São Jorge)
- [Riding](#) (São Miguel)
- Whale watching (personal rating: 1<sup>st</sup> Pico and 2<sup>nd</sup> São Miguel)

## 2.12 Travel guide

I highly recommend you have a good travel guide at hand. They provide the reader with researched facts regarding the history and culture, which you might otherwise overlook. For your visit to the Azores, I recommend your guidebook include hiking routes. Among the ones I have found to be useful are the English travel guide [Azores from Sayers, Stewart and Fogle](#), the German [Michael Müller travel guide](#) and the [Rother hiking guide](#).



*Caldeira Funda in the centre of the island of Flores*



*Caldeira – Island of Graciosa (source: pinterest)*

### 3 SÃO MIGUEL

The largest island in the Azores, São Miguel, has much to offer! The south coast climate is milder, the north coast accordingly rougher. With a length of 62 kilometers and a maximum width of almost 16 kilometers, it is the largest island of the archipelago.

Here are some highlights numbered on the map.



#### 3.1 The capital of the Azores Ponta Delgada

The capital city [Ponta Delgada](#) is unmistakably characterized by the impressive patterns of the black and white cobblestones. Worth seeing in the centre is the church *Matriz de São Sebastião* as well as the three-arched city gate *Portas da Cidade* from 1783, which is alongside the harbor. The café on the piazza in front of the church invites you to linger. Be sure to order a café (= espresso) or galão (= coffee with milk in a glass) there and enjoy a traditional [Pastel de Nata](#).



A nice walk to discover the city is to take a stroll along the Avenida harbor. It begins in the west at the *Forte de São Brás*. Around the halfway point, you will find restaurants (which are primarily frequented by tourists) along with booking offices for whale watching tours. Whale watching is a popular activity with tourists; unfortunately, I had no luck observing any whales here.

In the center part of the marina there is a public sea bath (3 € entrance fee). Located at the eastern end is the AZOR Hotel. Opened in 2016, it became the first 5-star hotel. It's grand scale and various amenities such as a Casino, created controversy among Islanders, because it departed from the traditional seaside hotel accommodations.



From here, a 15-20 minute walk along the sea will take you to the restaurant [Marisera](#). I highly recommend this restaurant. They serve wonderful fresh fish and seafood. In the city I can recommend: [Alcides](#) (steak), [Boca de Cena](#) (Diagonally across from the theater, Everything was delicious), [Mercado de Peixe](#) (good fish) and the [AZOR – A terra fornaria](#).

For early risers, a visit to the fish market is a must. It is part of the *market hall* in the city centre. The cheese counter is also worth a visit. Should time permit, a visit to the [José Canto botanical garden](#), will indulge your senses. Here Victorian architecture, peculiarly shaped monumental trees and tropical plants will not disappoint. Also the much smaller [Jardim](#)



[António Borges](#) has a few surprises in store. At the upper end is the *Shopping Mall* [Parque Atlântico](#).

**Accommodation** in the city center is available at the traditional [Hotel do Colégio](#), which was once a music school. The [youth hostel](#), located a brisk 10 minute walk from the city center offers a number of amenities, such as self-catering and shared accommodations. Personally I did not like the *Vila Nova Hotel*; I found it old-fashioned and lacked ambience. All hotels along the marina with a view to the sea and harbor are said to be very nice. *Tip*: From the public bar on the 7th floor of the AZOR hotel you have a lovely view over the marina.

### 3.2 Sete Cidades with Lagoa Azul and Lagoa Verde

The [Caldeira](#) (craters) with the two lakes *Lagoa Azul* (blue lake) and *Lagoa Verde* (green lake) and the village [Sete Cidades](#) belongs on a must-see to the Azores. Good weather is a prerequisite for enjoying this extraordinary landscape. – **2A)** On the way up, it is worth stop-



*Sombrieros facing Sete Cidades (2B)*

ping at the halfway point, from where you have an impressive view across the entire island. **2B)** A second stop is recommended at the small *Lagoa do Canario*. From there a 20-30 minute walk will take you to *Sombrieros*. Here you will find fabulous views of the Caldeira.

**2C)** Before going down to the lakes there is a third stop *Vista do Rei*. From this viewpoint, with the remains of an incomplete hotel, one

can see across both crater lakes to the Atlantic Ocean.

The way down to *Sete Cidades*, leads across a bridge between the two lakes. It is worth visiting the historic church, accessible via a small avenue. Afterwards the path leads up on the other side of the crater in westerly direction towards the ocean.



### 3.3 Ponta da Ferraria – lukewarm sea bath

In order to reach Ponta da Ferraria, you will need to drive down a steep narrow road with a series of hairpin turns. Park the car and continue on foot the short walk to the coast [Ponta da Ferraria](#). You will pass the restaurant of [Termas da Ferraria](#). Here a sulphuric hot spring is inviting you to swim. Please note: a) There is no beach. The rocks are very sharp! There are changing rooms at the top of the stairs. b) Strong winds create unsafe conditions and reduce the temperature of the water.

### 3.4 Mosteiros



The massive rock formations of the Ilhéus dos Mosteiros, are visible from a distance. They are accessible from a section of black sandy beach, from where one can swim around the rocks and the edge of the cliff. The view from the beach up along the steep, rugged coastline is fantastic.

As the sun sets in the far west into the sea, these giants provide a perfect subject for picture taking of impressive sunsets (get your inspiration on [the Internet](#)).

### 3.5 Ribeira Grande

My visit here took place during a pouring rain, therefore I have little to report. During our visit we were the only tourists enjoying a meal at the restaurant [O Silva](#). The menu included a delicious steak. – [A la Bote](#) is another good restaurant, located along the ocean front.

### 3.6 Chá Gorreana

Another must on the island is the [Chá Gorreana tea plantation](#). Chá means tea. I believe it is the only tea plantation in Europe – Grown near the sea, conditions are rendered inhospitable to pests, thus allowing them to be grown 100% organically. There you can see the 19<sup>th</sup> century



equipment that is still in use today. Black and green tea is still sorted by hand.

I found the snack area a bit dated

and uninviting. However, the sales counter offers unique teas for onsite tasting and purchasing.



In the neighboring village of **São Brás** is the commendable restaurant [Cantinho do Cais](#). The fish is brought in from the neighboring port of *Porto Formoso*. The restaurant offers fine wines – also in small 3,75 dl bottles, such as my favorite white wine from Pico, the *Frei Gigante*.

A short distance away, along the north coast, lies the small village Maia. There is a tobacco museum, which is more of a memorial to the past success of tobacco farming. I have yet to stay at the historic manor [Solar de Lalém](#), which has a good reputation.

### 3.7 Hike to Poço Azul, Salto da Farinha and sandy beach

I did not discover this gem until 2019. From Achadinha, a hike of about 15 minutes will take you down to **Poço Azul** (*English*: blue fountain). The ocean is a short walk away. Be sure to



bring your swimsuit along so you can take a swim in the refreshingly cool water! – From here I continued to **Salto da Farinha**. The trail is well posted and follows the road approximately 200 meters. Before reaching the beach, after about 45 minutes, the path leads back to the valley and to the waterfall with a barbecue area. Although it had rained the days before, the waterfall resembled a trickle. After a few pictures, head back to the grill place and from there 5 minutes down to the beautiful **beach of Salga**. It has a lot of

rocks, with about a 100 meters wide sandy beach in the middle, which invites for a swim in the sea. To return, one can take the same way back or walk along the street – or alternatively order a taxi, as the way back is quite steep. I was fortunate and got a lift back with a couple from mainland Portugal.

rocks, with about a 100 meters wide sandy beach in the middle, which invites for a swim in the sea. To return, one can take the same way back or walk along the street – or alternatively order a taxi, as the way back is quite steep. I was fortunate and got a lift back with a couple from mainland Portugal.



### 3.8 Hike to the Pico da Vara

Pico da Vara (*English*: Mountain of the wild rabbits) at 1'103 meters is the highest mountain of São Miguel and on a clear day offers stunning views across the island. From Achada it's a 15 minute drive to the hiking trail. Please note that the last quarter of the drive consists of a dirt road.

As you set out, the trail is almost flat over a high moor with jumping and croaking frogs along the way. After about half an hour, the terrain begins to vary slightly, followed by a half hour climb to the Pico da Vara.

Just below the summit, there is a cross in memory of an accident. In 1949 Air France [Flight 009](#), outbound from Europe on the way to America, was approaching Santa Maria, for a scheduled layover. The flight's altitude was too low, and the aircraft crashed into the mountain. All 48 people were killed, including the [world famous violinist Ginette Neveu](#).



When her body was found, she was holding her [Stradivari](#) violin in her arms. The instrument was broken but not burned.

Once you reach the summit, the views are fantastic. I arrived on a cloudless day and was overcome by the beauty. Stretched out as far as I could see, green mountains, smooth crater lakes, rugged coastline and all around there was water, as blue as the horizon. I firmly and distinctly felt the ground under my feet – for a few moments I felt a connection to the other end of the island.



The hike down to *Achada* takes 2½ to 3 hours. However, from the top there are two alternate possibilities to hike down to either *Santo António* or *Lomba*. – This half day trek was a wonderful experience!

### 3.9 Calderões – a waterfall near Achada

[Parque Natural de Ribeira dos Caldeirões](#) near Achada there is a small waterfall. Those who dare the 8-minute walk into the gorge will find a smaller one with a pond. From time to time, one also sees the [canyoning adventurers](#) venturing alongside the little river.



There is a snack bar below the parking lot where one can buy local specialties and drinks. I was moved by the inscription on the wall, which says, «Where you keep the beauty of a place, there is a God who shows you the way of the spirit.» – *Natália Correia*.

There is a narrow path at the bottom of the tourist complex. If you follow it northwards, for about 10 minutes, along a small river, you will



come to a historic bridge. The area appears to be seldom visited, and so the path leading away on the opposite side of the bridge has been abandoned. So, you will need to return along the same path leading to the bridge.

The distinctive bridge in the small town of **Nordeste** is worth seeing and the food at the restaurant [Tronqueira](#) is traditional.

*Note:* I caution against driving down to the Farol (lighthouse) at **Ponta do Arnel** as the path is much too steep! You will enjoy the “breathtaking” hike...

### 3.10 Miradoro on the east coast

Those who drive alongside this coastal section discover numerous beautiful viewpoints (Miradoro) with *small parks* facing the sea, featuring fireplaces (to barbecue is a popular weekend activity of the Azoreans) and with a splendid view over the Atlantic: *Ponta do Sossego, Ponta da Madrugada*.

### 3.11 Hike to the Salto do Prego



From the low-lying village of *Faial da Terra*, a narrow path surrounded by lush vegetation, gradually winds its way up to [Salto do Prego](#). After 1½ hours hike you will be rewarded when you arrive at the beautiful waterfall. Be sure to bring your bathing suit along so you can plunge in for a refreshing swim at the base of the waterfall!

On your way down be sure to stop by *Sanguinho*, a very dreamy hamlet which includes banana plantations. *Note:* when exiting the hamlet, you will need to follow a steep, serpentine-like cobblestone path. Therefore, only follow this path when the cobblestones are completely dry!



### 3.12 Povoação

Colonization of the island began in 1432, with [Povoação](#), which means «settlement» in Portuguese. In the last few years the harbor has been completely rebuilt. Since then, the tiny town is protected from the devastating winter storms through a heavy concrete breakwater structure build with [tetrapods](#). Here a new lido, located on the sandy beach, provides an inviting spot for a swim in the sea. The restaurant [Cantinho do Churrasco](#), offers views of the rugged coastline, along with fresh fish and meat. – Povoação is known for plenty of sunshine.

### 3.13 Ribeira Quente

[Ribeira Quente](#) warm spring, has a beach formed by a stretch of black lava sand. By the parking lot next to the beach, there are shower and changing facilities. Here a series of submarine hydrothermal vents warm the sea water, making a swim here, a memorable experience!



### 3.14 Furnas

Another must is [Furnas](#)! – This small village with its complex of geothermal springs is located in the center of the main island. This large caldeira can be optimally seen from one of the three viewpoints ([14A-C](#)) as described below.

In the center of the village, one can see the sulphur hot springs, steaming and bubbling. Here locals prepare *corn on the cob* in the boiling hot geizer water. In the parking lot they can be purchased for 1 € – very tasty!



*Here the corncobs boil*

A second sulphur hot spring, can be found at about 1 km north of Lagoa das Furnas. Hikers can walk around the lake. At the southern end there is a historic [chapel](#) and an [observation center](#) with a café. The northern hot

springs are very touristy, plus there is a fee for parking. Here one can observe how the traditional dish [Cozido](#) is prepared in white bags and pots, which are lowered into “hot holes” in the earth and retrieved several hours later. Note: If you want to try this local stew, I recommend you to pre-order yours at the restaurant at the [Terra Nostra Garden Hotel](#).

Next to the northern hot springs is the [Parque Grená](#), which was opened in 2019.

**Thermal baths:** The rust-brown, iron-rich water that flows into the two pools in Furnas is about 39°C warm. However, given the sheer size of the pool, the water soon cools, and swimming in it is very relaxing.

- a) Along the outskirts of the village lies the beautiful, open bathing area of the [Poça da Dona Beija](#). It is situated at a warm stream and equipped with 5 small pools (entrance fee 3 €).
- b) Somewhat more touristy is the large, oval thermal pool of the [Terra Nostra Garden](#) (with two external, small whirlpools), which are enjoyable! The entrance fee (8 €) also includes a visit to the botanical garden. It is home to trees and plants from all over the globe. One could easily spend a couple of hours there immersed in the natural surroundings, which makes it a memorable experience (entrance to the park for Terra Nostra Park Hotel guests, is included).



*Note:* For swimming, use (old) dark bathing suits, as the rust-brown residue will leave stains!

I can recommend the [Terra Nostra Garden Hotel](#) in Furnas. While it is touristy, it offers all the advantages of a 4-star hotel. The restaurant caters for most tastes. The terrace makes for a comfortable break for refreshments and/or afternoon tea is also open to the public. The stunning botanical garden is a must with plants from all over the world. – *Note:* I suggest you make hotel reservations early, as it quickly fills from pre- to post-season!

The [Furnas Boutique Hotel](#), while offering fewer amenities, is also very pleasant.

There are three ways to enjoy the extraordinary scenery around Furnas: **14A)** About 2 kilometers to the north, just before the golf course, there is a viewpoint at *Pico do Ferro*. – **14B)** From *Pico do Salto do Cavaló*, about 5 kilometers away – heading north to *Salga* – one can enjoy the most expansive view of this really impressive area! (see photo at right) – **14C)** On the way to [Vila Franca](#), after about 5 kilometres, turn right up to *Castel Branco*. From here you look down across the lake to Furnas. – *Note:* If you continue on this small road, you will come across the small crater lake [Lagoa do Congro](#) in the interior.



### 3.15 Lagoa do Congro

A visit to [Lagoa do Congro](#) is definitely worthwhile. However, it is weather dependent!! This small crater lake is near a perfect maar<sup>4</sup>. It is not easily found, and you will need to be on the lookout for a small signpost. Once you park the car, a 20 minute hike along a relatively steep path will lead you to the lake. Provided the weather is cooperative, the view across the dreamy quiet little lake (with fish) is enchanting and tempts you to sit and stay a while.

### 3.16 Vila Franca do Campo

The city of [Vila Franca do Campo](#), with its small island close by, became the first capital of the island in 1427. It has a few old churches and a «Convento». This former [Franciscan convent](#) dating to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, today has been transformed into an elegant and peaceful accommodation, which retains much of the original features. Amenities include period furnishings, beautiful grounds which include an outdoor pool and a small pineapple plantation. There is a fine breakfast buffet with local dishes including pineapple! Local landmarks and attractions are within easy reach of the hotel – thus, I can warmly recommend this wonderful place!



*Ilhéu de Vila Franca*

A walk to the harbor leads to several restaurants, among them is the restaurant [Atlântico](#) with a roof-top terrace for a dinner at sunset (*book early!*) with a view of the small island [Ilhéu de Vila Franca](#). Just a few steps further, around the corner, is the restaurant [Estrela do Mar](#) «O Jaime» with its front terrace (serves all day) – both cozy and highly recommended, especially in suitable weather.

The regional pilgrimage place [Ermida de Nossa Senhora da Paz](#) is also a worthy of a visit.

<sup>4</sup> [Maar](#): A bowl or funnel-shaped depression of volcanic origin which is sunk into a pre-volcanic land surface. It was formed by steam explosions at the meeting of groundwater and hot magma, in most cases in a single period.

### 3.17 Caloura in Água de Pau

Those who like to relax and jump into the water will be delighted by this pool in Água de Pau. In *Caloura* there is a sea water basin and right beside it, one can jump over the rocks into the open sea. During the day, in high season, there is a life-guard on site, as the sea can be rough. Depending on the season, the restaurant [Caloura](#) can be tour-isty. However, I recommend it anyway (all day service).



At the west of Água de Pau, there is *Praia de Água d'Alto* with an extended sandy beach. A little further, towards Vila Franca do Campo, is *Praia da Pedreira*, also with a sandy beach. The resort [Pestana Bahia Praia](#) is located here. It has an international rather than an Azorean touch.

### 3.18 Lagoa do Fogo

Before you reach the city of Lagoa, a road winds up into the mountains to [Lagoa do Fogo](#). It's worth waiting for good weather, because when one arrives at the top of the large crater lake, a wonderful view over this Caldeira awaits. Personally, I deem it one of the most beautiful! Those who enjoy hiking can take the steep path down to the lake.



Once there, you can walk around the lake, a hike which takes between 2-3 hours. Or you can relax on the sand and pebble beach. – *Note:* Swimming is prohibited! Remember to bring along some sunscreen.

### 3.19 Caldeira Velha

From *Lagoa do Fogo*, a short drive along a switch back road, will take you to *Caldeira Velha*. The views along the way are stunning. An entrance fee (of 5€) gives you access to the thermal pools, which are draped by lush vegetation. There are changing rooms and a tiny information center. For some, the hot springs in Furnas, are not considered a "must". I however, the charm here is that the trees, including the fern trees, are right above the pools. When it rains, believe they offer an uniquely charming experience; particularly, when it rains.

### 3.20 Lagoa – natural pool by the sea

To date, I haven't had the opportunity to explore the city of [Lagoa](#). However, I did notice the [pool complex](#) located at the sea has a natural pool and it looks is impressive.



### 3.21 Beach of São Roque – Praja do Pópulo – with restaurant

At the *Praia do Pópulo* in São Roque adjacent to Ponta Delgada there is a long, extensive fine sandy beach that invites one to walk or stretch out. At the edge of this sandy beach there is the restaurant [Pé na Areia](#) (*English*: foot in the sand), in relatively quiet surroundings, that I can also recommend.



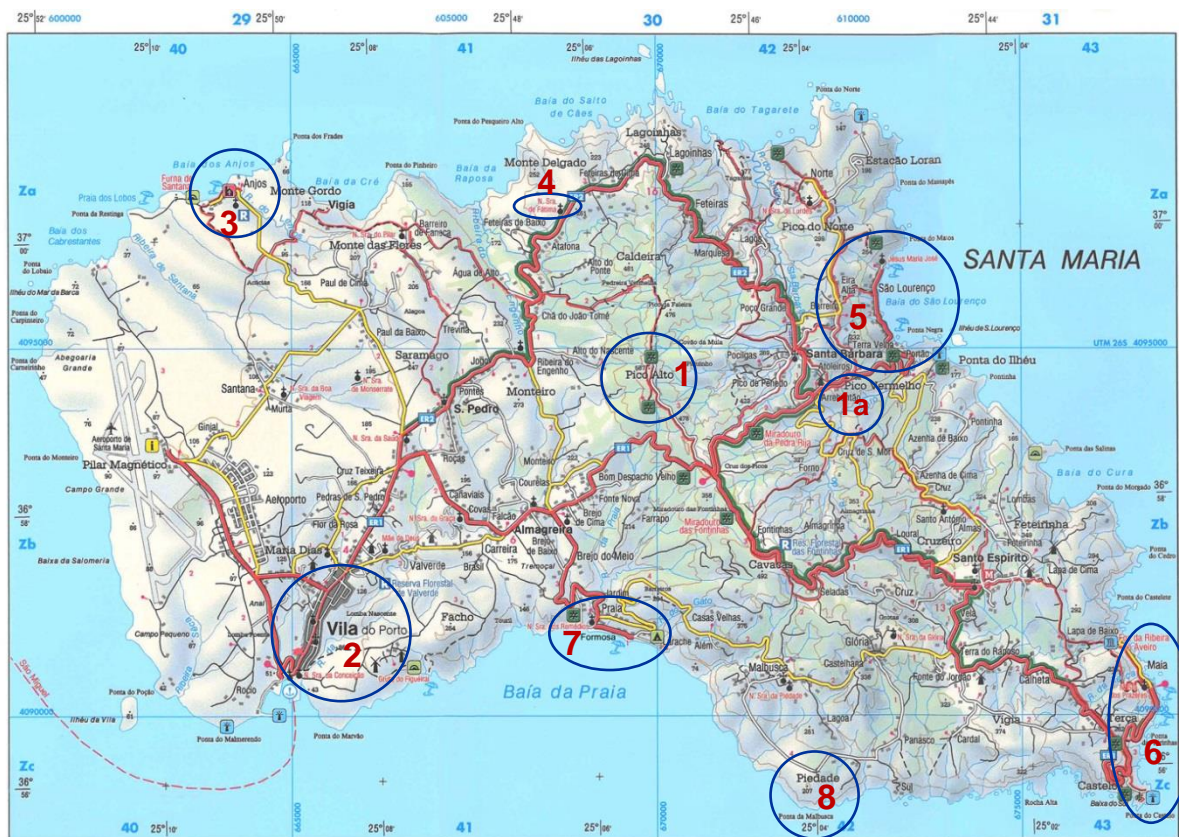
### 3.22 Overview restaurants and accommodation

Place	Restaurant	What
Ponta Delgada/São Roque	<a href="#">Marisera</a>	Fish and seafood
Ponta Delgada	<a href="#">AZOR – A terra fornaria</a>	Fish and steak
Ponta Delgada	<a href="#">Alcides</a>	Steak
Ponta Delgada	<a href="#">Boca de Cena</a>	Steak and fish
Ponta Delgada	<a href="#">Mercado de Peixe</a>	Fish
São Roque	<a href="#">Pé na Areia</a>	Fish and steak
Água de Paul/Caloura	<a href="#">Caloura</a>	Fish
Vila Franca do Campo	<a href="#">Atlantico</a>	Fish
Vila Franca do Campo	<a href="#">Estrela do Mar</a> «O Jaime»	Fish
Furnas	<a href="#">Terra Nostra Garden Hotel</a>	Fish, steak, <a href="#">Cozido</a>
Povoação	<a href="#">Cantinho do Churrasco</a>	Fish
Nordeste	<a href="#">Tronqueira</a>	Fish
São Brás	<a href="#">Cantinho do Cais</a>	Fish (fresh from the harbour!), wine
Ribeira Grande	<a href="#">O Silva</a>	Steak (and fish)
Ribeira Grande	<a href="#">A la Bote</a>	Fish and steak
Praia de Santa Barbara	<a href="#">Tukátulá Bar</a>	Fish
Santo António	<a href="#">4 Plátanos</a>	Seafood
Place	Accommodation	What
Vila Franca do Campo	<a href="#">Convento São Francisco</a>	former Franciscan monastery
Vila Franca do Campo	<a href="#">Pestana Bahia Praia</a>	classic resort ( <i>who likes it</i> )
Ponta Delgada	<a href="#">Hotel do Colégio</a>	4*-Hotel downtown
Ponta Delgada	<a href="#">Pousada de Juventude</a>	Youth Hostel
Furnas	<a href="#">Terra Nostra Garden Hotel</a>	4*-Hotel with park
Furnas	<a href="#">Furnas Boutique Hotel</a>	4*-Hotel
Maia	<a href="#">Solar de Lalém</a>	Guest house in family business

- Full travel guide – [São Miguel](#)
- Azores.com – [São Miguel](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [São Miguel](#)
- The most beautiful trails on [São Miguel](#)

- Bus connections [São Miguel](#)
- Wikitravel – [São Miguel](#)
- Lonely Planet – [São Miguel](#)
- Trip savvy – [São Miguel](#)

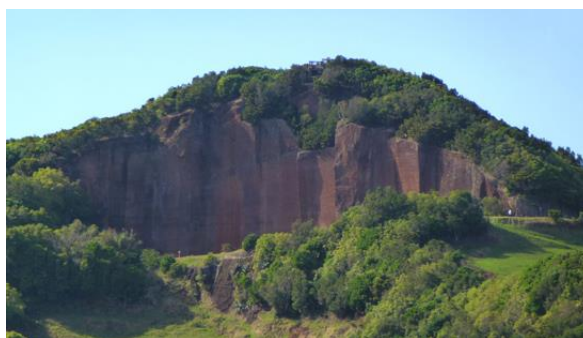
## 4 SANTA MARIA



### 4.1 Pico Alto

Santa Maria is the geologically oldest island of this archipelago. It is known for its red lava stone. At *Pico Vermelho*, near Santa Barbara, there is an old quarry (*Poço da Pedreira* – 1a) its colors are very impressive.

From *Pico Alto*, which is located in the center of this multi-faceted island, one has a wonderful panoramic view: in the north, the island is rather barren. However, as you travel south, the landscape becomes increasingly more vegetative, and so do the number of cows (mostly brown).



*Poço da Pedreira*

### 4.2 The main town Vila do Porto

A bumpy, very noisy and almost straight cobblestone road leads up one kilometre from the harbor. The parish church from the 15th century is worth visiting. Outside of town, the *Hotel Colombo* unfortunately comes across as dated and run down, giving the impression of a schoolhouse from the late 70s. The better choice would probably be the *Hotel Charming Blue*

in the city centre. A B&B or a small house (by Airbnb) directly in *São Lourenço* would seem the best choice!

There are only a handful of restaurants on this island. In the [Travessa](#) in Vila do Porto Marc – a former Bavarian – cooked a fantastic [sirloin steak](#)! We also had dinner in the [Central pub](#).

### 4.3 Anjos

The small village of Anjos is the oldest township on Santa Maria. The coastal village was founded in 1439 and is located in a secluded area in the northwest of the island. To get there,



one has to cross a dry plain that reminded me of North Africa. I reached this place after an almost 3-hour hike. During this hike, I observed birds nesting in small lava caves, a horse and some inquisitive cows. It was hot and luckily I had plenty liquids with me!

Directly at the sea the lido is very pleasant and the tidal differences are clearly visible and perceptible. In the

[Bar do Anjos](#) next door one can enjoy a hearty meal; depending on the season, a reservation for the evening may be advisable or even mandatory.

### 4.4 Chapel of the Nossa Senhora de Fatima

A long steep staircase leads up to the chapel, from which there is a panoramic view of pastures as well as the sea. On a clear day one can see all the way to the island of São Miguel.



From the locals, I have learned that every island in the archipelago has similar chapels to this one in honor of the [Virgin of Fatima](#).

In Santa Barbara is the bright church of [Saint Barbara](#). Several hiking trails start from this little village. I walked comfortably from there via *Barreiro* down the very steep path to *São Lourenço* in about two hours.





## 4.5 São Lourenço

The highlight of this island is definitely the crescent-shaped bay (or Baía) do [São Lourenço](#)!



The long white sandy beach is impressive and is among the most beautiful of the Azores. To protect against the winter storms, a new, seawall has been built along which one can walk. The natural swimming pool is nice. The snack bar next to it caters to tourists and has a limited menu.

Countless wine terraces cling to the slopes and from a distance look

like an amphitheatre. The lava soil here is very fertile, so that the grapevines thrive. Unfortunately, the wine is not available for purchase by the general public. In order to do so, one will need a local contact person.

## 4.6 Maia

The road heading down to Maia is impressive. In the distance the [Farol Ponta do Castelo](#), the lighthouse at the most south-eastern point, can be spotted. Arriving in Maia there is a big, round, inviting sea pool (with a view to the lighthouse, *see picture on your right*).



Unfortunately, during my visit, the waterfall of the *Ribeira do Aveiro* was nearly dried up.

## 4.7 Praia Formosa

The bay of *Praia Formosa* is a protected nature reserve. Terraces have been planted here too, some with vineyards, others with bananas. The beach is located at the base of the towering cliffs, the sand is fine and almost white and sometimes gets washed away by the winter storms. In winter hardly anyone lives here. However, during the summer this beach is highly popular with tourists.



## 4.8 Piedade – notes and links

- At the south end, near *Piedade*, there is the *Calçada do Gigante*, a huge columnar basalt rock with a waterfall of the *Ribeira de Maloás* which I hope to visit next time.
- We picked up the rental car at the airport.
- Santa Maria is located at 36.9667° N, 25.1000° W; and this is where I first encountered *mosquitoes* on the Azores (against all odds)!

→ Azores.com – [Santa Maria](#)

→ VisitAzores.com – [Santa Maria](#)

→ Azoreschoice.com – [Santa Maria](#)

→ Casa do Norte – [Santa Maria](#)

→ Portugal Travel Guide – [Santa Maria](#)

→ Weather forecast for [Pico Alto](#)



*Santa Maria is dotted by houses such as this one.*



*Calçada do Gigante ([Source](#))*





## 5 TERCEIRA



**Terceira** – Portuguese «*the third*» – The third island to be discovered. The island is 29 km long and the capital [Angra do Heroísmo](#) (1) is a UNESCO World Heritage site. The Universidade dos Açores has one of three campuses on the island. Life for the approximately 56'000 people living on this island takes place along the coast and is concentrated in the two towns of Angra do Heroísmo and Praia da Vitória. The interior of the country is sparsely populated. Agriculture and fishing are important industries for the island.

There is an international airport on Terceira called [Lajes Field](#). It is located on the northeastern side of the island and shares the runway, control and support structure with a US Air Force base, which was an important strategic point during World War II.

### 5.1 Angra do Heroísmo – UNESCO site

A jewel in the middle of nowhere – in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean – the architecture, the narrow streets lined with lanterns, and hanging baskets, along with its setting amidst the stunning natural beauty of the island; had me charmed. We stayed at the Hotel [Azoris](#)



on the [Praça Velha](#), main square beside the impressive town house [Paços do Concelho](#). There is no parking available at the hotel. We located a spot near the harbor, a 10 minute walk away. Otherwisw everyting is in close proximity to the hotel: such as the many street cafés, restaurants, the small shops and boutiques.



*Monte Brasil*, the inactive volcano on this island rises from the peninsula. It is a protected landscape and the hike here is worth the effort to observe the wildlife and the city from the viewpoint. Many tourists take advantage of the coaches that offer rides to the viewpoint.



Behind the hotel the park *Jardim Duque de Terceira* is a manicured garden in the historical center. The park's coffee shop was much appreciated. We soon spotted another wonderful street café. Indeed, one really feels at home here! – From the park a footpath leads up to the Obelisk *Alto da Memoria*, the first island fortress (1474), today a lookout with an expansive view of the city.



On New Year's Day 1980 a 8.5 magnitude earthquake laid the city in ruins. The historic area, was particularly hard hit. Within a very short time the city was rebuilt. In 1982 a fire damaged the cathedral *Igreja do Santíssimo Salvador da Sé* along with other newly restored buildings. One of the two towers was completely destroyed and the other partially. Fortunately, a large part of the church treasure was saved, so that

after reconstruction in 1985, the cathedral shines again in its full splendour. I found the restoration remarkable and was impressed by the interior of the cathedral. Next to the cathedral is the *Palacio Bettencourt*, built in the 17th century. The library houses two million historical documents dating back to the 16th century, making it one of the most important historical archives in the country. In the entrance area of the Palacio, several large, impressive wall tiles in blue and white depict historical points of this island.

As you make your way to the harbor, down the steep stairs alongside the blue church *Igreja da Misericórdia* and through the two gates of the city *Portas da Cidade*, you are greeted by the head of the large sculpture of the Portuguese explorer [Vasco da Gama](#). His fleet was on its way back to Lisbon, after discovering a passage to India. They disembarked on Terceira, to tend to his ailing brother, who later died on the island.



*Note:* Another hotel reported to be very good is the [Terceira Mar Hotel](#). During our first visit we rented a small house at the *Morgado* beach – a few kilometers east of Angra – the [Casa da Fajã](#). The evenings we spent outdoors enjoying the sunsets and sea views are truly memorable.

*Link:* [The Hidden History behind Angra do Heroísmo: Oldest City in the Azores](#)

## 5.2 Quinta dos Açores



Agriculture plays a major role on the island and much of the island is cultivated for that purpose. A stop at the [Quinta dos Açores](#) is well worth it. I enjoyed the varieties of cheeses on offer as well as the ice cream.

## 5.3 Serra do Cume (Viewpoint)



At approximately 500 metres high, the hill of the Serra do Cume is frequently blanketed by fog. However, on a clear day, from the lookout Sierra do Cume, one can enjoy the view over the cultivated fields. With the assistance of a pair of binoculars one can see farmers at work.

*View from the Serra do Cume*

## 5.4 Praia da Vitória

[Praia da Vitória](#) with its approximately 6'700 inhabitants, is the second largest town on the island and is one of the most modern towns in the Azores. The airport is located nearby.

Parking is available outside the center of town. From there, a cobblestone road leads down to the pedestrian oriented plaza, with attractive shops and historic buildings. I particularly enjoyed seeing the small balconies with the wrought iron railings and pretty flowers. A visit to the market is worthwhile; besides, it offers ideal protection in case of heavy rain. From there make your way down to the harbor and stroll along the boardwalk to relax for a while and write some postcards.

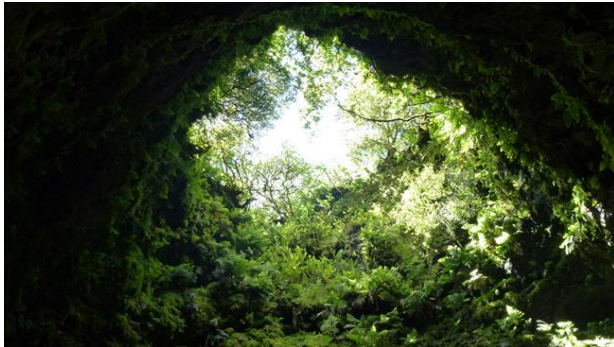


## 5.5 Volcanic signs

- A) The [Gruta do Natal](#) (Christmas cave) is located next to a tiny lake. There is a hiking trail indicated on the map, which I have not had the opportunity to explore. Upon entering the cave, one is issued a helmet as sections are very low. The air is hot and humid, and I found the experience a little overwhelming.
- B) The [Furnas do Enxofre](#) is an area with fumaroles (sulphur springs) similar to Furnas on the island of São Miguel. A well-developed circular path leads through this natural phenomenon.
- C) The [Algar do Carvão](#) is, one of the few volcanoes in the world you can visit and the only one in which visitors can explore a volcanic chimney and secondary magma chamber. Tours begin at 14:00 h, they are closed on Sundays! This is an absolute must, as it provides truly unique experience – which begins as soon as you enter the parking area.

**Something phenomenal:** If one takes the car out of gear or puts it in neutral, the car rolls towards the parking lot, however, *emotionally* one feels like driving backwards! (similar to when another train pulls out of the station and you are not sure if you or the other train is moving).

A staircase, followed by a footbridge, leads to the uppermost platform of the large cave, which reaches down 90 meters into the earth to a small, up to 15 meters deep lake (depending on the season). The well-lit cave has several platforms with different rock formations. At one point, a black [obsidian](#) about one and a half meters in size can be observed.



On the uppermost platform, guides lead small groups through the cave. Catching a glimpse of the sky through a large [volcanic vent](#), covered with vegetation such as mosses, makes for a memorable experience.

## 5.6 Santa Bárbara (Viewpoint)

If the weather is favorable, it is worth your time to drive the challenging switchback road up to the Santa Bárbara lookout (at a height of 1000 meters). Be advised, it is easy to miss the turn onto this road. Look for the cobblestone pavers to the entrance. The view across to the Caldeira and over the sea is stunning!

## 5.7 Altares



Mixed meat

This picturesque village is perched above the sea and backed by a small hill. From there, extensive views can be seen across endless pastures. In Altares there is a wonderful restaurant [Caneta](#) which I can recommend. – Parking is located to the rear of the restaurant.



Limpet

## 5.8 Biscoitos

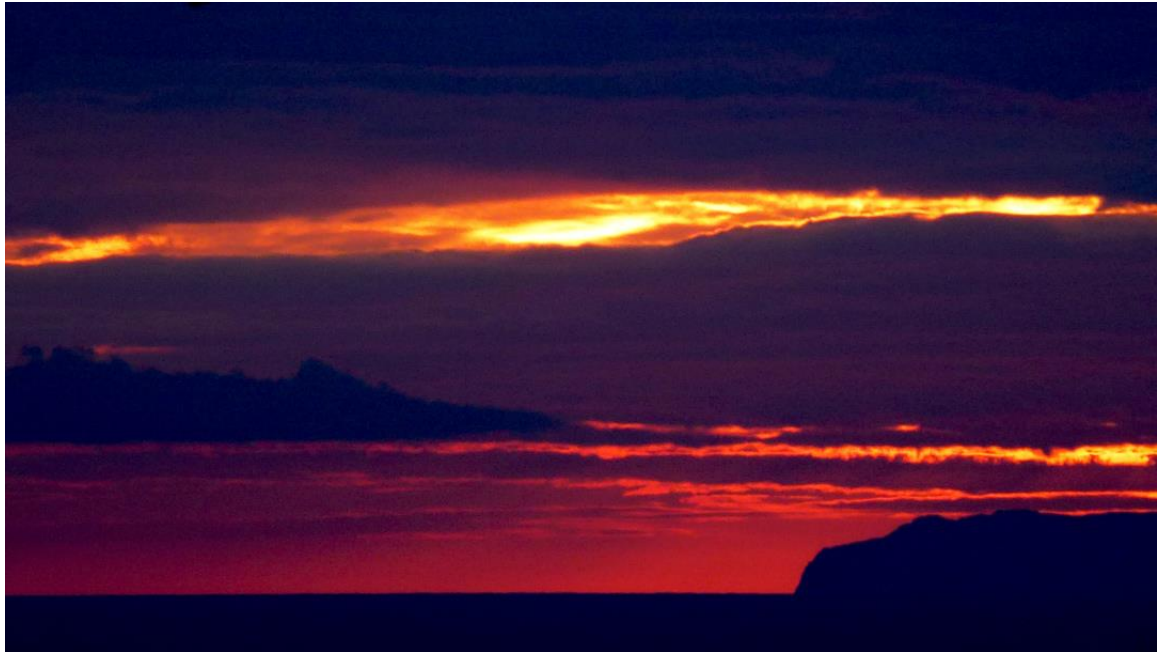
In the north, at the rocky beach of *Ponta dos [Biscoitos](#)*, one can enjoy a wonderful swim in the sea! There are well maintained and relatively flat paths leading to the natural pools. The beach restaurant is perfect for thirsty guests and offers a variety of snacks. Near the parking area, several stands with local products, invite you to browse.



The [Biscoitos wine cooperation](#), carries out research on a variety of grapes. The wines



that have established themselves on Terceira are the Magma and the Muros de Magma. – As an example: *Este vinho branco é fruto da vinificação de uvas da casta verdejo, nascidas em curraletas basálticas, salpicadas pelo Atlântico e lapidadas pela evolução em cascos de carvalho.* – This white wine is the result of the pressing of green grapes, grown in small basaltic areas, sprinkled with Atlantic salt and subsequently matured in oak casks.



*Sunset in Altares with view of the island Graciosa*

## 5.9 Hike to the pigeon grotto

The (round-trip) hike to *Furna das Pombas* (Pigeon Grotto) was somewhat challenging (and warm) due to the difference in altitude. Highly recommendable!

\* \* \* \* \*

- Tripsavvy – [Terceira](#)
- Azores.com – [Terceira](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [Terceira](#)
- Azoreschoice.com – [Terceira](#)
- Portugal Travel Guide – [The City of Angra](#)

## 6 FAIAL



**Faial** is a “feel good” island where you easily relax. The capital **Horta** has lots to offer! The 1957 newly created island section **Capelinhos** in the northwest (3) is an absolute must...

Horta can be reached by taxi (10 €) from the airport in the south in about 10-15 minutes.

### 6.1 Horta

Horta is especially appreciated for transatlantic sailors: it is THE preferred destination returning from America. The cruise start in Europe, heading down to Africa, from there onward via **Cape Verde** (a former Portuguese colony) and on to Brazil, where Portuguese is also spoken. From there they travel northwards to North America, and subsequently back to Europe with the **Gulf Stream**.

It is on this passage that the sailors make a stop-over in Horta. It's believed that superstition led sailors to paint murals on the breakwater. Doing so is to attain divine protection during their journey. Some of these paintings have become quite famous.

A visit to Horta is well worth it, whether it's a stroll through town, a climb up the promontory for a spectacular view, or a stay at the Hotel **Pousada Forte da Horta**, a converted 16<sup>th</sup> century fort, at



the edge of the harbor – which offers views over the sea to Pico. Be sure to mention your preference for a room with a view of the sea. Rooms without these prime views are probably quieter during the high season in midsummer. – The small pool was very pleasant as was the food at the restaurant.

[Genuíno Madrugã](#), owner of the restaurant [Genuíno](#) located along the beautiful **sandy beach**, told us he had sailed around the world alone in 2000 and 2002 as well as around [Cape Horn](#) in 2007 and 2009. Luckily, the food was not as adventurous as his stories and the glass of wine from the neighboring island of Pico complimented the meal nicely.

### Madalena and Whale Watching

A ferry from Horta crosses several times a day to [Madalena](#), the main town of the island of [Pico](#). From there whale watching tours are offered.



Be sure to check the weather forecast as you want a clear day for this adventure. During our outing, we spotted three different dolphin species. Some of them swam alongside our small boat, for some time. We were unable to spot any whales that day. – Excursion to see these unique marine mammals – *the guardians of the planet's oceans* – is really worthwhile and memorable!

## 6.2 Canto dos Saquinhos – Cabeço Gordo

Weather conditions greatly affect how you are able to experience unique sites like these. The drive along the winding road up the volcano to *Canto dos Saquinhos*, takes you through a nature reserve. After parking, you enter a short volcanic tunnel which leads you to the rim. As you emerge you are greeted by a remarkable view inside the massive Caldeira and where the evolution of materials deposited has resulted in the growth of vibrant green and yellow vegetation. The Caldeira is the most important biological reservoir of the island – fascinating! The summit of *Cabeço Gordo* – the second viewpoint – can be reached from the other side of the island.



## 6.3 Capelinhos

The recently formed portion of [Capelinhos](#), is a must see. The barren volcanic landscape stands in sharp contrast to the rest of the lush island. In 1958 the volcano erupted and physi-





cally extended the island. The lighthouse survived, partially buried by the eruption and remains standing at the juncture between the land masses. An underground [Visitor Center](#) was built, which provides information about the eruption along with a great geological collection of different minerals. A path leads from the lighthouse to the newly formed portion of the island and can be explored on one's own. The scenery resembles a lunar landscape. Small lichen and tufts of grass have begun to grow and in some spots poisonous sulphur vapour continues to escape through small crevices. I was impressed by the different rock colors and how they were changed by light and fog.

## 6.4 Restaurant O Esconderijo



Restaurante  
O Esconderijo

Rua Janalves 3, Cedros  
9900-341 Horta / Faial  
Acores / Portugal  
E-mail: [einjo@web.de](mailto:einjo@web.de)  
f O Esconderijo  
Tel: 00351 - 292 946 505

From Cedros take the road south, past the village of Outeiro there is a barely visible sign for the: *Restaurante O Esconderijo*, which means «The Hiding Place». – This *bijou*, run by a German dropout<sup>5</sup>, has limited seating along with limited menu, however, the dishes are very tasty. It is open from 18:00-21:00 h, closed on Tuesday. The small valley behind the restaurant contains a large selection of unique flowers such as the pineapple blossom on the right.



Note: At *Espalhafatos* along the northeast coast there is a modern chapel (5) open to the public. Along the eastern part of the coast (6) the beach of Praia do *Almoxarife* offers a wonderful sandy beach.

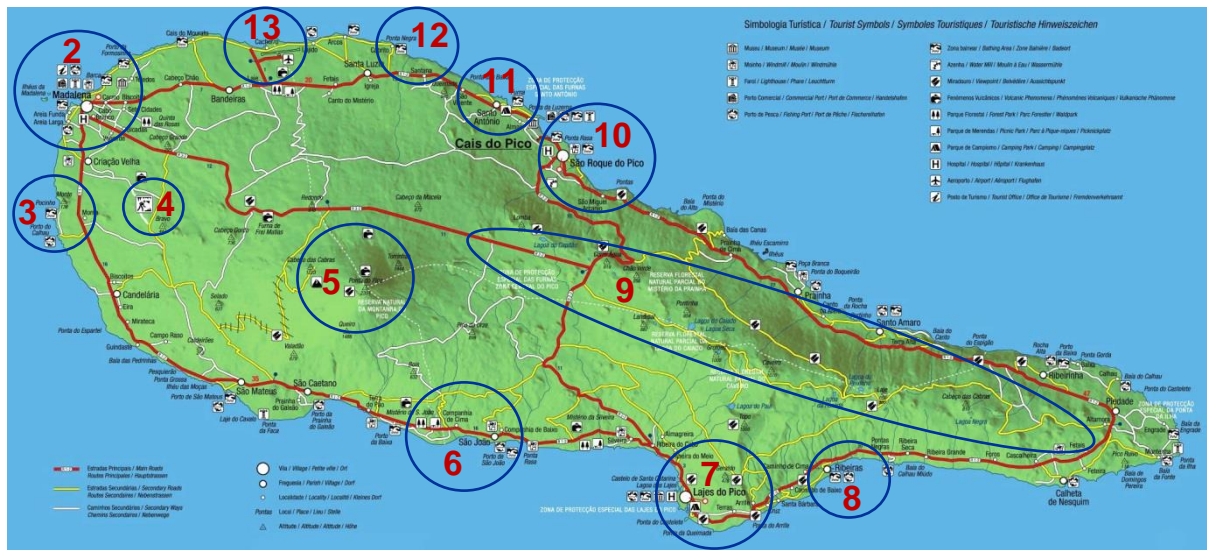


*Pico – from the whale-watching boat*

- youtube – [Faial](#)
- Azores.com – [Faial](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [Faial](#)
- Azoreschoice.com – [Faial](#)
- Portugal Travel Guide – [The Capelinhos Moonscapes](#)
- Portugal Travel Guide – [The Intricate Art of Scrimshaw](#)

<sup>5</sup> *dropout*: a person who has rejected conventional society to pursue an alternative lifestyle or who has abandoned a course of study

## 7 PICO



### 7.1 Description – viticulture – cheese – whaling

The second largest and geologically youngest island can be reached by air via the main island São Miguel. We came from Flores and landed on Faial. A taxi brought us to the harbor of Horta. From there we took a ferry to Madalena located at the western tip of the island of [Pico](#) (*English*: peak). In beautiful sunshine, the 20-minute crossing is very pleasant. We had a rental car waiting for us at [Ilha Verde](#), a car rental service adjacent to the port.

*Note:* If staying on Pico, consider taking the ferry to visit the quaint little town of Horta with a wide sandy beach – see [description of Horta](#).

Pico is 42 km long and 15 km wide. It was named after the 2'351 m high volcano [mount Pico](#), the highest mountain in Portugal. To the east, lies a plateau at around one thousand meters altitude with smaller volcanic cones and craters. The large wafts of mist surrounding it, reminded me of the Scottish Highlands. There are also herds of cattle. The cheese produced here, [Queijo do Pico](#), is famous.



First settled in 1460, the island is characterized by the grey-black volcanic basalt stone that can be seen along many coasts and which the «Picorians» use to demarcate their innumerable vineyards. This [particular vine cultivation](#) was included in the 2004 UNESCO World Heritage listing. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the wine was exported to the court of the tsars to Saint Petersburg, before the mildew destroyed countless vines in the area. – With its many scattered houses along the dark basalt coast, this landscape with its dominating mountain reminded me very much of Hawaii.

«Baleeiros», Portuguese for whalers, set out from Pico in their small boats manned by a crew of 10-20 oarsmen to hunt the whale in a similar way as described in Herman Melville's tale [Moby-Dick](#). I highly recommend visiting the [Whaler's Museum](#) in *Lajes do Pico*, along with the Whaling Industry Museum in *São Roque* located in a restored whale factory. Both preserve the history of an activity which shaped life of the islanders for over a century. Officially, the last sperm whale was hunted by a group of whalers in 1987, although whaling in general had ceased in 1984. → For more information see section 7.7 *Lajes do Pico*.

Today Pico is a center for [whale watching](#). From *Madalena* and *Lajes do Pico* some companies offer boat trips to observe and experience these unique marine mammals.

## 7.2 Madalena

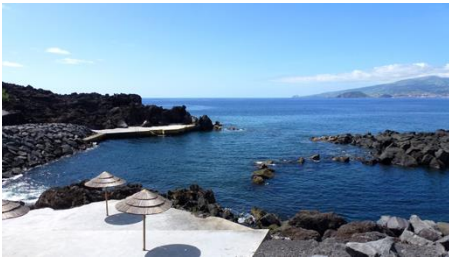
What drives [Madalena](#) is it's port, handling of goods, the people and tourists who come over with the ferry from the island of Faial. Otherwise the city seems very quiet. The [Museu do Vinho](#), a wine museum, showing the history of wine making in the area, was established in 1999 in a former Carmelite monastery. On the grounds there are several extraordinarily large [dragon trees](#), which could be up to 1000 years old. Their red sap was used to dye textiles and to produce a painkiller for centuries until the 1960s.



Picture: [Wine museum with dragon trees](#)

At the southern tip of the *Areia Funda*, near the chapel by the sea, I can highly recommend the restaurant [O Aconadouro](#). On several occasions, we enjoyed the sunset over the neighboring island Faial while savoring delicious seafood and fish. The restaurant opens at 19:00 h and fills quickly! During one of our visits we were fortunate to be seated just prior to opening.

## 7.3 Pocinho



Pocinho (small fountain) is a sun bathing area with a few shady spots, sunshades, barbecue area, toilets and a wonderful, large, open, inlet pool – with stairs leading into it.

For swimming in the sea, this is the ideal place!

## 7.4 Hike to Gruta das Torres

From *Monte*, a path gradually leads up to *Cabeço de Cima*, past the [Gruta das Torres](#) (tower grotto) which is a lava cave. This geological formation of volcanic origin was formed by the flow of underground magma rivers. After an introductory film in English and furnished with helmet and flashlight, one can embark on an expert guided hour-long tour into a portion of this 500 m long lava cave.

Be prepared for an experience unlike any other. Deep below the earth lies a unique world! I returned from this depth feeling rejuvenated.



Upon returning to *Monte*, the winding path provides wonderful views across *Faial*.



## 7.5 Mont Pico – the mountain

This majestic *Montanha do Pico*, at 2,351m, or 7,713 ft, is more than twice the elevation of any other peak in the Azores. Pico rarely presents itself unobscured by some form of cloud cover. It makes for an impressive subject to photograph, and is best captured in all its glory from the two neighboring islands, *Faial* or *São Jorge*. To me, it appears as the sublimely Almighty of the Azores! Just as revered as the Japanese [Fuji-san](#) on the main island of Honshū.



It must be a special experience to watch the sunrise on the 2'351 m high volcano and to enjoy the view over all five islands of the *Grupo Central*. To do so, one has to start hiking practically in the middle of the night or spend the night on top of the mountain. The weather has to play along too! The best way to find out the weather forecast is to call [Casa da Montanha](#) – open 24 hours during the high season. The only access to Pico is located at 1'225 m above sea level. Once there, one has to register for the hike (20 €) and for safety will obtain a GPS tracker. Then the 3 ½ hour ascent begins. The volcanic rock is quite slippery. It is recommended that you wear good shoes, use hiking sticks and bring food. Adequate clothing is essential as it gets cold and the wind is persistent all day.

One can climb Pico *individually* from Casa da Montanha or with a *tour operator* like [Tripix Azores](#), which offers guided tours and over-night stays.

I intended to climb Pico in 2019 and prepared accordingly. A little late, but fortunately not too late, I realized that I probably would have a hard time to climb down for three hours without getting severe knee pain and therefore I decided not to do the climb. During training I had not anticipated to practice descending with poles, which is easier on the knees.



(© Herbert Terra, via [Panoramio](#))

## 7.6 Coastal hike near São João

From the port of São João a trail leads along the coastline. Which include rocky and jagged tips that penetrate into the sea, small sheltered inlets, several hundred-metre-high cliffs



dropping almost vertically into the sea (past two seaside resorts). Along the way we discovered a wonderful array of flowers, trees and even a pineapple. The small natural rock pool of **Poço**



**de maré do Verdosó** (*English*: Tidal Fountain of Verdosó) is very isolated and dreamy and invites to splash around but not to swim. Approximately 20 minutes further west lies **Zona de balnear da Ponta Negra**. There are two natural pools which include amenities such as barbecue areas with tables and fig trees.

## 7.7 Lajes do Pico

Lajes do Pico served as a main base for whaling for the islands, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century until the late 1980's, at which time a whalers' museum was opened at the harbor in 1988. It displays a collection of original equipment used for hunting the sperm whale, as well as carvings and engravings of whale bones and whale teeth, an artisanal technique known as



«scrimshaw».

In 1989 the first whale watching station opened in the Azores, which among other things, informs the operators of current locations of the marine mammals. Just opposite the museum I was pleased to find a small well-run tourist office, with informational material pertaining to all nine islands. There are several whale watching businesses located at the harbor.

Some whale watching tour companies promote both ecofriendly and respectful tours. They aim to educate their clients that while whales around the Azores are no longer victims of hunting, care must be exercised, to ensure these mammals don't become the victims of the disastrous consequences of over developed ecotourism.

In the tiny old town, the bright Trinity Church (*Igreja da Santíssima Trindade*) stands tall and next to it is the post office.

Outside town is the Supermercado (Supermarket) *âncora PARQUE*, which offers an impressive variety of items and opens from Mon-Sat 08:30-20:00 h and Sun until 18:00 h.

The musician Manuel Francisco Costa Júnior was born in *Lajes do Pico*. In recent years, his music has not only travelled through the Azores and the Portuguese mainland, but around the globe. He is an excellent guitarist with an extraordinary voice. His simplicity and communicative power as well as his knowledge distinguish him as a luminary, not only in music but also in the Azorean culture of today. Since 2000 he has been the director of the museums of this island.

Via YouTube I heard his interpretation of the song [O Garajau](#) (by [Manuel Tomás](#)) at the [gala](#) celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Azorean radio. – His CD can be purchased at the tourist office in Lajes do Pico.

## 7.8 Piscinas das Ribeiras

Well-preserved whaling boats are displayed along the port in Ribeiras was adorned with a well-preserved, beautiful whaling boat. A few steps away are the well maintained piscinas (pools), along with a small café and kiosk. If natural saltwater pools aren't to your liking, there is a large freshwater pool.



## 7.9 Central Plateau with volcanic cones and crater lakes

The central plateau, a volcanic ridge, extends over more than 25 km and is situated at an altitude of 750 to 1,000 meters and has around 200 volcanic cones. It runs from *Piedade* at the easternmost end of the island to the northern edge of Pico and is crossed by the main ER2 connection, which runs from Lajes to São Roque. Those who drive from this crossing approximately 2,5 km westwards, will find the small *Lagoa do Capitão* with some endemic juniper trees that brave the wind. A path leads up to the hill from where there is a wonderful view of the entire neighboring island São Jorge.

We drove across the entire plateau to *Piedade*, past a wind farm and the pretty crater lakes *Lagoa do Caiado*, and to the somewhat remote *Lagoa do Paúl*, *Lagoa da Rosada* and *Lagoa do Peixinho*.

## 7.10 São Roque

With its approximately 3'400 inhabitants, [São Roque](#) is the largest city on the island. Larger merchant ships dock at the harbor in *Cais do Pico*. From here ferries depart to the other islands. On the outskirts of town along the road to the mountains there is a geothermal power station. There was once a whale processing factory here that produced oil, wax, blubber and bone meal (as fertilizer and animal feed). Working conditions were unpleasant and dangerous. When the two large boilers were operating, an acrid stench engulfed large parts of the area. In 1984 the business was shut down. On 22 May 1994 the Industrial Museum of Whale Processing opened, which reminds visitors of the significant impact the whaling industry had on the economic development of the Azores.

The [youth hostel](#) is located in the old Franciscan convent [Convento de São Pedro de Alcantara](#). The venerable old building has been renovated and offers a nice and quiet atmosphere.





### 7.11 Piscinas do Santo António



Another possibility to refresh in the cool water is in *Santo António*. During high season these two pools directly at the sea and one natural seawater pool are well frequented.

The restaurant [O Rochedo](#) with a café is adjacent to the pools and provides a nice spot from which to enjoy view.

### 7.12 Ponta Negra

Here the basalt stone in its innumerable forms can easily be observed particularly the natural stone bridge into the sea. It is an amazing place where the volcanic landscape has round shapes instead of rugged edges. In some places one can clearly see the direction of lava flow in the basalt stone, which has been broken into larger and smaller plates by the violent cooling. There is a natural pool here, however the amenities are a bit dated.



### 7.13 Porto Cachorro



North of the airport, *Porto Cachorro* has a very unique basalt rock formation, its shape resembles that of a dog (Brazilian: *cachorro*) and is visited, idolized and photographed by numerous tourists.

Place	Accommodation	What
Candelária	<a href="#">Vinhas do Calhau</a>	4*-Aparthotel
Lajes do Pico	<a href="#">Aldeia da Fonte</a>	4*-Natur Hotel
São Roque	<a href="#">Pousada de Juventude</a>	Youth hostel in the former Franciscan monastery
Place	Restaurant	What
Madalena	<a href="#">O Aconadouro</a>	Fish and seafood
Madalena	<a href="#">Cella Bar</a>	for wine lovers
Santo Amaro	<a href="#">Adega da Buraca</a>	traditional, touristy, for groups

### Links

- [Nature parks on Pico](#)
- [Whalers' museum](#)
- [Azores.com](#) – [Pico](#)
- [VisitAzores.com](#) – [Pico](#)
- [Azoreschoice.com](#) – [Pico](#)
- [Portugal Travel Guide](#) – [Climb up to Mount Pico](#)
- [Portugal Travel Guide](#) – [The Baía da Barca aparthotel](#)
- Youtube: [Travel Tips Hiking & Exploring Pico Island](#)

## 8 SÃO JORGE

The island of [São Jorge](#), is 53 km long and approximately 7 km wide. We nicknamed it «the needle». Cliffs along the rugged coastline can reach up to 600 m in height.



It is believed that the number of cows on the island is at least double that of the inhabitants. The clean, salty air as well as the nutrient rich grass give their milk a unique taste. The cheese produced here is widely known and is one of the finest delicacies of the Azores.



### 8.1 Velhas

The main town of [Velhas](#), built on a steep slope, consists of 2000 inhabitants. We rented a little house [Aldeia da Encosta](#) (hamlet on the hillside) situated enthroned far above the village. From there we enjoyed a fantastic view of mount [Pico](#), which rises 2'351 m above the sea.



After some extraordinary experiences on São Jorge, we left this beautiful island. At the harbor at [Velas](#) we took the ferry *Santorini* of Atlânticoline to [Praia](#) on [Graciosa](#).





## 8.2 Farol dos Rosais



extreme caution is needed when walking around the area.

A steep road leads up to the main road. Heading northwest, the road leads to the abandoned lighthouse *Farol dos Rosais*. Due to the poor condition of the road, we choose to walk the *Reserva Florestal das Sete Fontes* through the heathland to the «needle tip». Significant damage was caused to the area during the earthquakes of 1964 and 1980. Subsequently the lighthouse complex was abandoned! Therefore

## 8.3 Hike to Fajã da Caldeira do Santo Cristo

Due to the very steep coast, there were mountain slides or lava flows in different places of the island. There are approximately 50 "Fajã" on this island. They are distinct features of the Azores, particularly on the island of São Jorge. They are small extensions of flat land which becomes detached from collapsing cliffs during the formation of the island. These Fajã are fertile strips of land and have a small number of inhabitants.



One of the most picturesque hikes led us from *Piquinho da Urze*, where we parked the car and hiked down to *Fajã da Caldeira do Santo Cristo* and then further along the northern coast to *Fajã dos Cubres*. After a *cerveja* (beer), which quenched our mighty thirst, we took a taxi, back to our car.

Some details: The descent to *Ponta da Calderia* is about 450 m and is pleasurable. It takes you through dense forest and lush vegetation and past a small, thunderous waterfall. The view up the steep coastline is very impressive. There is a small lake at the beach which contains mussels. This



beach is considered an "insider tip" among surfers, as the powerful surf produces fantastic waves. The walk along the sea to *Fajã dos Cubres* was very relaxing.

## 8.4 Nunes coffee house in Fajã dos Vimes



The steep slopes of this island create a unique microclimate in which bananas, tobacco and even coffee thrive. *Café Nunes* is located at the end of the village of *Fajã dos Vimes* where they grow and roast coffee. As far as I know, this is the only coffee roasting plant in the Azores: of course, we had to taste this coffee. As I ordered an espresso at the counter, several elderly gentlemen were seated at the tables, chatting. When the barista shouted, «um café»! I replied: «No, I want an espresso!», which was followed by loud laughter from the group. Immediately,

the barista explained: «A 'café' is an espresso». – Learned yet another important Azorean coffee wisdom ☺



## 8.5 Topo at the south-east tip

The long drive to the «head of the needle» is worthwhile. It takes you through several small villages. The red lighthouse at the eastern end of the island provides a nice view to the tiny islet *Ilhéu do Topo*. During the summer a herd of cows graze alongside the many nesting bird species. I wonder how the cows got there...?



## 8.6 Pico da Esperança



From Beira in the north, a narrow road crosses the center of the island southeast over the gentle hills to the 1'053 m high *Pico da Esperança*. Here you will find several small crater lakes. A short drive further south-east, leads to the main road between Norte Grande and Norte Pequeno.

\* \* \* \* \*

Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I was unable to participate in any hiking tours or to visit any of the dairies which are open to the public. Perhaps during my next visit...



*Fajã dos Cubres*

- Azores.com – [São Jorge](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [São Jorge](#)
- Azoreschoice.com – [São Jorge](#)

## 9 GRACIOSA



### 9.1 Santa Cruz

The island of [Graciosa](#), which is only 60 km<sup>2</sup> in size, is very dry. In the early days, to have enough water for the cattle, two water basins were built to capture the rain water in the capital [Santa Cruz](#). The red and white color basins are now adjacent of the towns center piazza.

The settlement began in 1450 by two families: *Correia da Cunha* (believed to be a brother-in-law of Christopher Columbus) and *Sodré*. In 1486 Santa Cruz (*English*: Holy Cross) was established as the official administration for the island.

Santa Cruz da Graciosa was very quiet. We took the public bus to the center of town, where the two red and white-water basins





are surrounded by numerous old trees, flowers and beautifully restored streetlamps. A short hike took us along the sea to *Ponta da Pesqueira* and back to the small town.

## 9.2 Praia

We found it unnecessary to rent a car during our stay in Graciosa. We took the boat from *São Jorge* to *Praia*. There we rented a restored [windmill](#) which made for an interesting stay, as occasionally the wind from the sea created quite a draft.



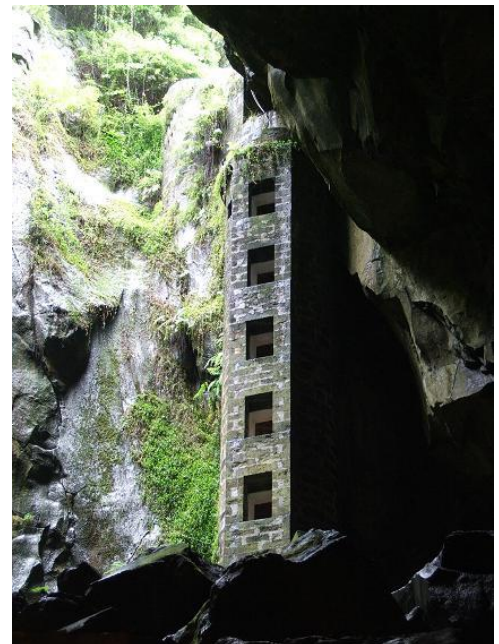
## 9.3 Furna do Enxofre

We took a day excursion to *Furna do Enxofre*. After a hour long walk we reached the edge of the Caldera. Hiking along the narrow rim of the crater at approximately 400 m above sea level provided stunning views across the island. The grass was wet which soaked our boots. On the



way down, there is a passageway in the north west of the Caldeira through which one gets into the interior of the crater. The steep slopes are covered in vegetation, which makes for quite an impressive sight! A stone path leads to a tower-shaped stone stairway down into the interior of the once active volcano [Furna do Enxofre](#) where a small lake has formed. From a certain spot, you can

look straight up through thick vegetation to the blue sky above. Here heaven and earth really do unite. Despite the all the wonders I had witnessed, on that day; this was by far the highlight.

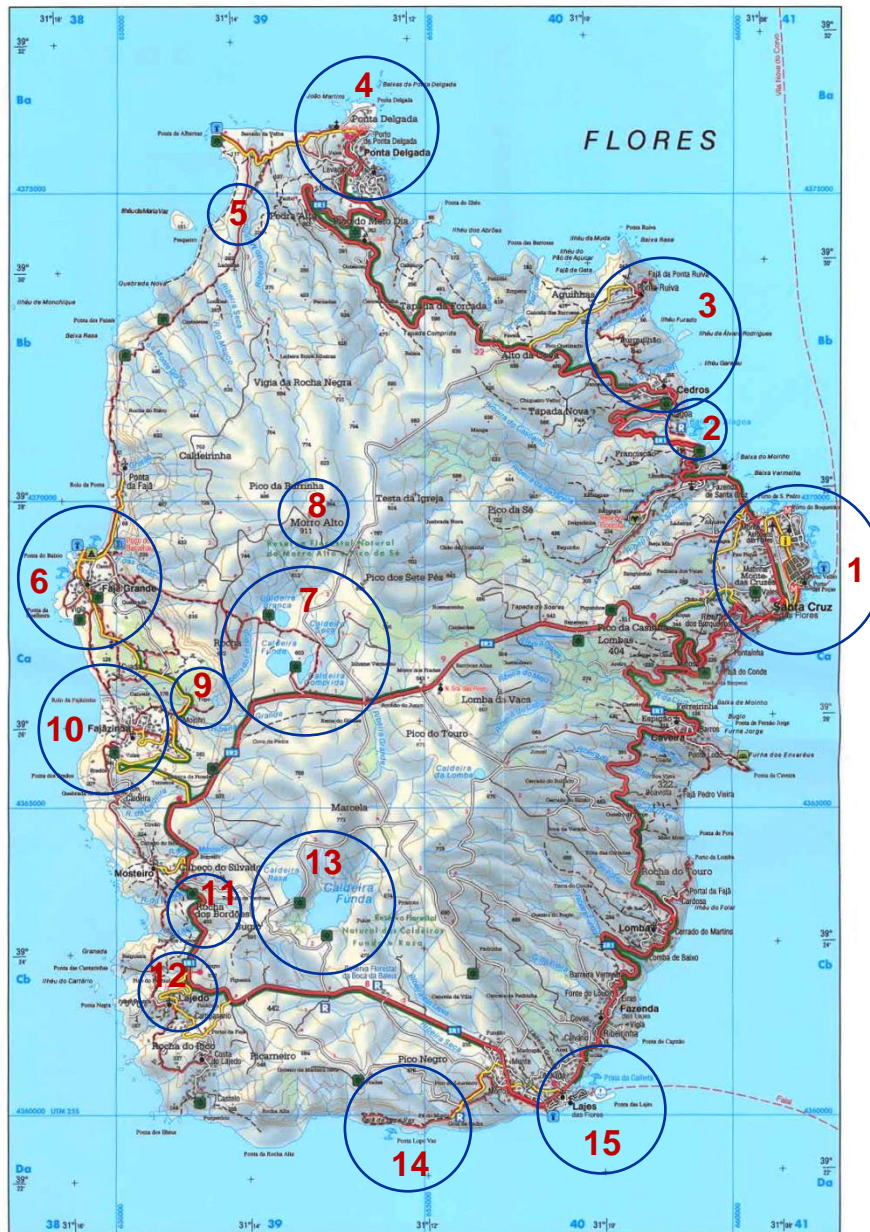


- Azores.com – [Graciosa](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [Graciosa](#)
- Azoreschoice.com – [Graciosa](#)

Picture: Pinterest



## 10 FLORES



**Flores** – also known as *the island of flowers*, due to the thousands of Hydrangeas blooming during the summer, has 1'600 inhabitants and is located (together with *Corvo*) 520 km or one and a half hours flight from the capital *Ponta Delgada*. This island with the main town **Santa Cruz das Flores** is only about 17 km long and 12 km wide and has been a UNESCO **bio-sphere reserve** since 2009.

Those who enjoy a sense of tranquility which comes from being in a remote area will discover in this island a gem. Here picturesque waterfalls; enchanting crater lakes; deep valleys, high peaks and stunning coastlines, will capture your attention. You will soon begin to appreciate the meaning of «island of slowness».

Hiking trails on the island, provide unique experiences, provided the weather is agreeable. Fog seldom settles along the coasts, but rather on the high plateaus. This is why I recommend activities alongside the coast on such days; however, you should be prepared for weather conditions to change with little warning.

## 10.1 Santa Cruz das Flores

The small airport is located along the eastern coast of the island behind the main town [Santa Cruz das Flores](#). Should you wish to stay nearby I recommend the [Inatel Flores Hotel](#). It sits at the coast and offers spectacular views. There are several other hotels nearby, none of which I feel comfortable recommending.

From *Monte das Cruzes*, there is a beautiful view down to Santa Cruz and it is a wonderful place for watching airplanes land and depart.



## 10.2 Baía de Alagoa



A narrow road leads down to the small parking area at Algoa Bay, a hamlet with about half a dozen cottages. A 5 minute walk takes you above the coast to a meadow with a few barbecue fireplaces. From there another 5-minute walk takes you down to the pebble beach of the *Baía de Alagoa*. The five prominent rock

formations protruding from the water make for an interesting observation; however, this is not and an area for safe for swimming.

## 10.3 Hike 1: Ponta Ruiva - Cedros

Endurance and surefootedness: medium, sections of very slippery cobblestones

Hiking time: 2 h

In the village of *Ponta Ruiva* an old house been converted into a local history museum. I



often find myself wondering how people managed to function without the modern amenities we take for granted. From *Ponta Ruiva* the hike begins with a slight descent past some fields and gardens down into the valley of *Ribeira Funda*. Across the valley a moss covered cobblestone path leads into the forest. The topography of the trail at times varies greatly. However, it makes for a pleasant hike with the sound of the ocean in the distance.

After the climb exiting the forest with the village of *Cedros* already in view, we decided to turn around and head back to *Ponta Ruiva*. – As the trail primarily runs through the forest, it is ideal during a hot day.



## 10.4 Ponta Delgada

A winding road leads to [Ponta Delgada](#), in the north of the island. At the tip of the island there is a small lighthouse adjacent to the harbor. Barely a stone's throw away is a flat little islet.

To the west, located along the edge of a cliff, sits the larger lighthouse and light keepers quarters of *Ponta de Albarnaz*. From here, one can see the small islet *Ilhéu da Maria Vaz*.

## 10.5 Hike 2: Fajã Grande - Ponta de Albarnaz

Endurance and surefootedness: good  
Hiking time: 2 h 15 (northwards until *Ladeiras*,  
292 meters above sea level)

From *Fajã Grande* one drives north along an asphalt road, past the waterfalls to *Ponta da Fajã*. From here a hiking trail follows along the cliffs into a windy turn and from there begins to rise, through a dense forest full of distinctive trees. The trail soon levels off and continues for about an hour, all along hugging the edge of the cliffs drop-off up to 300 meters to the sea! The views across the ocean are breathtaking. At different times the island of [Corvo](#) can be spotted in the distance. Here you will be astonished to discover heather trees. They grow to be as tall as a person! Before we reached the steep descent to the lighthouse *Ponta de Albarnaz* we decided to turn back at *Ladeiras* and hike to *Fajã Grande*.

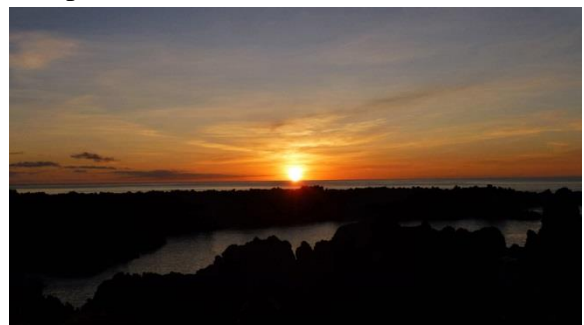


## 10.6 Fajã Grande

In order to ensure we could enjoy the impressive sunsets, we looked for accommodation on the west side of the island. The drive across the island takes 20 minutes. In *Fajã Grande* there are numerous cottages for rent. I have fond memories of the morning sandwiches I enjoyed at the coffee shop *Mercearia Jose Antonio Ramos Teodosio* which is located opposite the village fountain.



North of the village there are numerous tall waterfalls, some like rivulets. The scale and volume of water of the *Poço do Bacalhau* (Cod Fountain) make it extremely powerful. At certain times high wind will whip the flow of water into different directions. There are two restaurants near the harbor which I can recommend. Outdoor dining in front of the restaurant [Maresía](#), provides



stunning views of the sunset across the sea. A fresh and fine menu is available during 3 seating's (19:30 – 20:15 – 21:00). As there



are only 7-8 tables, a reservation is recommended. The restaurant [Papdiamandis](#) serves all day and is also well attended. After a short wait for a table we were able to enjoy a meat dish. The menu included [sirloin steak](#) and [filet mignon](#) as well as a variety of fish dishes.

### 10.7 Hike 3: Fajã Grande - Caldeiras Funda e Comprida

Endurance and surefootedness: until Rocha heavy, then easy

Hiking time: 2 h 40

Weather: attempt only during favorable weather conditions!

Line: Fajã Grande - Rocha - Caldeira Branca - Caldeira Seca - Caldeiras Funda e Comprida

Our most varied hike started in *Fajã Grande*. Standing in front of the steep face of the mountain, it is difficult to imagine how and where a path could possibly lead up there. Surprisingly there is actually an old stone, stair-like mule track which winds its way up the almost vertical tree lined wall! These pack animals were made to haul heavy loads up and down these inhospitable tracks!



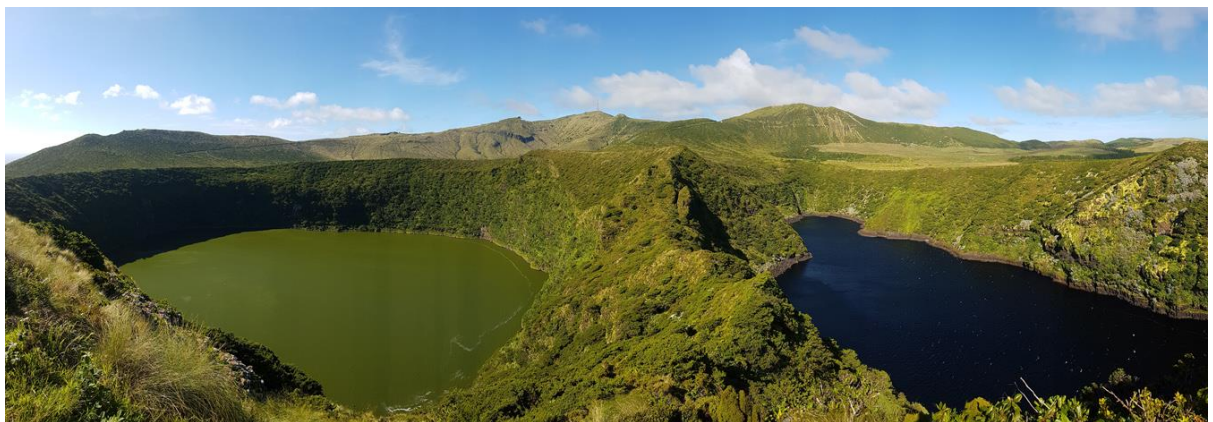
It takes about 50 minutes to make it to the top. Once there, a path leads first along the ridge, then across extensive heathlands (with few cows) towards the high plateau with its lakes in the center of the island.

From Rocha you have a magnificent view of the vast and colourful *Caldeira Branca*, where from mid-September through the end of October due to adverse weather some migratory birds make a voluntary stopover.



dark blue color.

From Rocha, the route follows the natural road down to *Caldeira Branca*. A relatively easy, narrow footpath leads across the road, where one can look down into *Caldeira Seca* – a dried up volcanic basin. From here it takes about 20 minutes up and down to reach two crater lakes. *Caldeira Funda*, glows in green, while *Caldeira Comprida*, impresses with its



There is also a road leading to the viewpoint of two crater lakes (*Miradouro*). We were fortunate that two young German tourists on their way to Fajã Grande offered us a ride back to our starting point.

## 10.8 Moro Alto

The Moro Alto (*English*: high hill) at 911 m is the highest elevation on the island. From Rocha, it can be reached in 1 ¼ hours, along a winding (easily passable) natural.



A large transmitter mast makes it easy to spot from most anyplace on the island. The view all around is impressive but not breathtaking – however the strong wind is!

One can also drive up the natural road to Moro Alto by car from the road ER2, which crosses the is-

land in the middle.

## 10.9 Topo next to Fajãzinha

This is one of the «classic photo subjects» of the Azores: The tiny lake with approximately a dozen enchanting waterfalls against the backdrop of steep green slopes of the “topo” (*English*: summit) invites you to dream and linger.



From the car park, this treasure is reached by a 20-minute walk along the main road. The path is paved with large flat stones. Due to high humidity levels they can become very slippery. Good footwear is strongly recommended.



### 10.10 Restaurant Pôr-du-Sol in Fajãzinha

Of immense pleasure were the meals we enjoyed watching the sunset in *Fajãzinha* at the restaurant Pôr-du-Sol (*English*: sunset ☺). Nomen est omen! The restaurant is clearly tourist-oriented, but this does not detract from its comfort and quality. The dishes are traditional: there are various stews and other local specialties. Meat, fish and seafood – all fresh and delicious – a real treat!



### 10.11 Rocha dos Bordões near Lajedo



Upon first seeing this prominent rock formation near Lajedo, perched atop of high hill; one is left awestruck by the sight of it. The peak is covered by mosses and other vegetation, while the lower portion consists of stark vertical columns, known as columnar jointing. The color of the basalt rock changes throughout the day, along with the change in daylight.

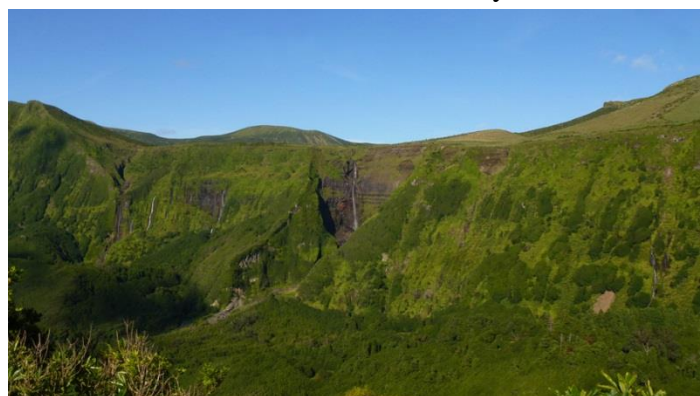
### 10.12 Hike 4: Fajã Grande - Fajãzinha - Mosteiro - Lajedo

Endurance and surefootedness: middle  
Hiking time: 3 h 30

The coastal path to Fajãzinha begins relatively easy, then runs along sections of steep coastelescarpments. Before one arrives at the beautiful church *Nossa Senhora dos Remédios* (built 1776-1783) there is a tiny village restaurant. To the rear of the church, you will follow an old cobbled mule track which steeply ascends to an altitude of 250 meters. Once you reach the lookout at *Miradouro do Portal* by the transmitter mast, there is a wonderful view across the whole basin to *Fajã Grande*.

From there a little less than half an hour southwards, along the asphalt road, one reaches *Caldeira*. In the 1990's, this small village of ruinous stone houses was abandoned by its inhabitants, due to the them emigrating to the USA, in part due to the lack of modern amenities such as electricity.

From there continue along the road to *Mosteiro*. You will embark on a trail along some challenging terrain. This includes stretches of steady up and down walking along uneven paths, and the climbing of some boulders to cross the *Ribrita de Lapa*, where the massive *Rocha Dos Bordoes*, towers above. From here follow the cobbled mule track to *Miradouro* which offers impressive views of the coast. The remainder of the way to *Lajedo* is followed all the way down the hill. Our visit took place during the school holidays during which time





the bus services departs 1¼ hours later than usually. Without a restaurant to stop for refreshments, the wait was long.

On the ocean side in the west lies *Ponta Negra*, which can be reached on foot. Here one can get very close to a striking group of jagged rock and feel the power of the Atlantic surf!



### 10.13 Southern crater lakes



In the centre of the southern end of the island there are several small crater lakes: the green *Caldeira Funda* and the dark blue *Caldeira Rasa*. As with their northern neighbors, the exchange of light and shadow is unique particularly with the fog, which changes every minute.

### 10.14 Hike 5: Cruz da Pedra - Fajã de Lopo Vaz

Endurance and surefootedness: middle  
Hiking time: 50 minutes

At Ponta Lopo Vaz, at the southern point of the island, there is a long black pebble beach. From the parking area of *Cruz da Pedra* a path descends comfortably down the steep slope. This isolated narrow stretch of shoreline sits at the base of rugged basalt cliffs. The steep coastline against the lush green Fajã makes for a stunning backdrop for relaxing; taking in the view or birdwatching. However, it not ideal for swimming. Among the many unusual visitors, is the frequent sighting of Hammerhead Sharks, which is rare elsewhere in the Azores. This is also one of the only places where wild goats still exist on the island.



### 10.15 Lajes

Located in the south east, [Lajes das Flores](#), became one of the first settlements on the island during the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. It has a busy harbor, which is also a commercial port.

A passenger ferry runs several times a week from Lajes to the neighboring island of [Corvo](#). In July and August a ferry runs once a week to the islands of [Faial](#), [Pico](#) and [São Jorge](#).

Unfortunately, the island of Flores was hit extremely hard by hurricane *Lorenzo* on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2019 – with wind speeds of up to 190 km/h and waves of 10-15 metres. This [violent storm](#) partially destroyed the port of Lajes, as a [video](#) shows.

An old farmhouse dating to 1763, has been converted to a [farmer-museum](#), and houses a large collection of equipment.



The contemporary designed *Museu das Lajes* was opened in 2003 and offers various services such as a computer centre, a library, an exhibition room as well as an auditorium for conferences and film screenings. Its mission is to study and preserve the cultural heritage of Flores, as well to promote and disseminate the culture and identity of both Flores and the Azores.

\* \* \* \* \*

### Restaurants on Flores:

Place	Restaurant	What
Fajã Grande	<a href="#">Maresía</a>	only one menu – reservation necessary!
Fajã Grande	<a href="#">Papdiamandis</a>	<a href="#">meat</a> and fish
Fajãzinha	<a href="#">Pôr du Sol</a>	traditional
Santa Cruz	<a href="#">Sereia</a>	traditional



*Fajãzinha with rainbow*

- Azores.com – [Flores](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [Flores](#)
- Azoreschoice.com – [Flores](#)

## 11 CORVO

### 11.1 Description

**Corvo** – (*English: Raven*) – at 17 km<sup>2</sup> it is the smallest island of the Azores and can be explored during a day trip from Flores. It is popular with ornitologists who, a few years ago,



much to their delight discovered Aztec seagulls, yellow-billed shearwater and indigo finches, drifting migratory birds that found a new home here.

430 inhabitants live on the extinct volcano, almost all of them in the capital [Vila do Corvo](#). It is the only village on the island and is located on a Fajã. Their diet consists primarily of meat and dairy provided by the herds of cows and cattle raised on the island.

An approximately 7 km long road leads up to the large and very impressive Caldeira of the *Monte Gordo*. With a diameter of 2 km and a depth of 300 metres, it is the largest complete caldeira in the Azores and forms its own biosphere. In 2007 UNESCO included the island in the list of [biosphere reserve](#). At its bottom lies the rugged twin lake [Lagoa do Caldeirão](#), can be comfortably walked around in 1½ to 2 hours while passing many cows and cattle. At the southern edge of the crater is the 718 m high slope *Morro dos Homens*, which means: *the hill of the people*.

### 11.2 Transfer to Flores

The island, which is 15 km away from Flores, can be reached by plane, ferry [Ariel](#) (20 €) or by a boat operated by a tourist operator (35 €), i.e. [Flores by sea](#) or [Viagem à ilha do corvo](#). With their boats, the tourism companies head to interesting places along the east coast of Corvo with its hidden waterfalls, cliffs, rocks and caves that can even be entered (it is advised to ask the provider details in advance). – Unless one has a week on Flores, it is worth booking the ferry before the trip, e.g. via [RIAC in Santa Cruz das Flores](#) (+351 800 500 501). It departs from the port of *Santa Cruz das Flores* at 08:30 h and returns to the port of *Vila do Corvo* at 17:00 h<sup>6</sup>.



<sup>6</sup> Because the ferry was defective, we had to cross over with a red, 500 HP strong tourist boat, which resembled a 40-minute [bull ride](#) in beautiful weather with normal swell.



### 11.3 Hike to the crater rim

At the harbor of *Vila do Corvo*, taxi buses wait for visitors to take them up to the rim of the Caldeira (5 €): (there are no car rentals or buses available). It is also possible to take the asphalt hiking path, past the church, and up to the rim of the crater. The hike takes about 1½ - 2 hours.

Visitors who wish to add an additional half hour loop to the viewpoint *Pão de Açúcar* (*English*: Sugar Loaf) should cross the asphalt road and hike up past pastures, and enjoy the beautiful view over the deep blue ocean. After about an hour the trail returns to the asphalt road (via an unfortunately badly signposted side road), back up to the crater rim.



### 11.4 Hike in the Caldeirão

Along the rim of the crater, the play of colors of the green slopes and the crater lake is breathtaking! We enjoyed our picnic lunch there and were nourished both by the food and by this unique scenery.

The hike down to and around the lake is worth the approximately 200 metres! Various water birds can be sighted year round. From mid-September, North American migratory birds, which are rarely seen elsewhere in Europe, can be observed here. Due to the interplay of various, mostly meteorological factors, they are forced to depart from their usual routes off America and stop over here.



## 11.5 Way back

From the edge of the crater the taxi busses drive at irregular intervals back down to the village centre.

Once back in Vila do Corvo, five minutes walk from the harbor, along the coast is the restaurant [O Caldeirão](#).



*Vila do Corvo – with Island of Flores in the distance*



*Pão de Açúcar*

- Azores.com – [Corvo](#)
- VisitAzores.com – [Corvo](#)
- Azoreschoice.com – [Corvo](#)



## 12 Even more Azores links

- [Azores Web](#)
- [Visit Azores](#)
- [Azores Islands](#)
- [Holydays Azores](#)
- [All about the Azores](#)
- [List of caves in the Azores](#)
- [Azores Tourist Information](#)
- [Azores Islands: Map and Travel-Guide](#)
- [Azores Adventure Guide – Redbull](#)
- [How to get around the Azores Islands](#)
- Youtube: [The Azores Islands – What You Need to Know \(2:31\)](#)
- Youtube: [Ben Fogle – Adventure In The Azores \(9:03\)](#)
  
- [Azores Food Guide](#)
- [Tour operator São Miguel](#)
- [Condé Nast Traveller – São Miguel](#)
- [A four days budget trip on São Miguel](#)

### *Portuguese*

- [byAçores](#) (Information and pictures of all 9 islands)
- National Parks: [Rede Regional de Áreas Protegidas](#)

### **Accommodation**

- [Airbnb](#)
- [Housetrip](#)
- [booking.com](#)
- [Casas Açorianas](#)
- [Pousadas de juventudes Açores](#)



*Ilha de São Miguel*

## 13 Gratitude

A big thank you goes to **Nadja**, who has accompanied me on many trips to the Azores since 2013 and has proofread these travel recommendations! She shares with me her love for nature, gastronomy and the changing sceneries of these magnificent islands – and, of course, the hiking on many hour-long trails through green, almost deserted landscapes, past crater lakes and along some steep coasts. To go on a voyage of discovery with her is always fun and entertaining. I appreciate her openness, her unrestrained curiosity and the desire to try and experience something new. Often, she looks even closer, asks questions and discovers details that I missed. Therefore, I find the exchange with her very enriching and satisfying.

Thanks also to her good driving skills on different surfaces with changing rental cars on each island. Her calm and vigilant driving contributed to relaxing travels for me – in the role of pathfinder with a map.

I would also like to thank **Manfred**, who accompanied me in 2018 on São Miguel and Santa Maria. He was looking for a guide and I was looking for a driver. We immediately got along and as he is an experienced driver, it was a win-win situation for both of us. I always felt very safe with his sporty driving style, as we explored new places, and talked about «God and the world».

A special thank you goes out to **Paulo**, my Portuguese teacher on the island of *São Miguel*. During class he dealt with my linguistic challenges. His support enabled me to make good progress. I appreciate his courteous manner, our deep conversations and the valuable local travel tips, specifically in the north-east of the island which he willingly shared with me.

I would like to thank my sister **Regula**! Through her conceptual work, her vision of establishing *Caribou* has come one step closer to realization every year. Her practical implementation skills lead to various explorative trips to the *Azores*.

Lastly, I also thank the **ancestors in the light** of the nine Azorean Islands! They take care of the many fascinating places and sites in the background on the ethereal level and try to preserve their beauty and power so that all visitors feel comfortable.

**Thanks for all these gifts! – Yeah, I'm a lucky guy!**

\* \* \* \* \*

I am at your disposal for questions, information,  
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