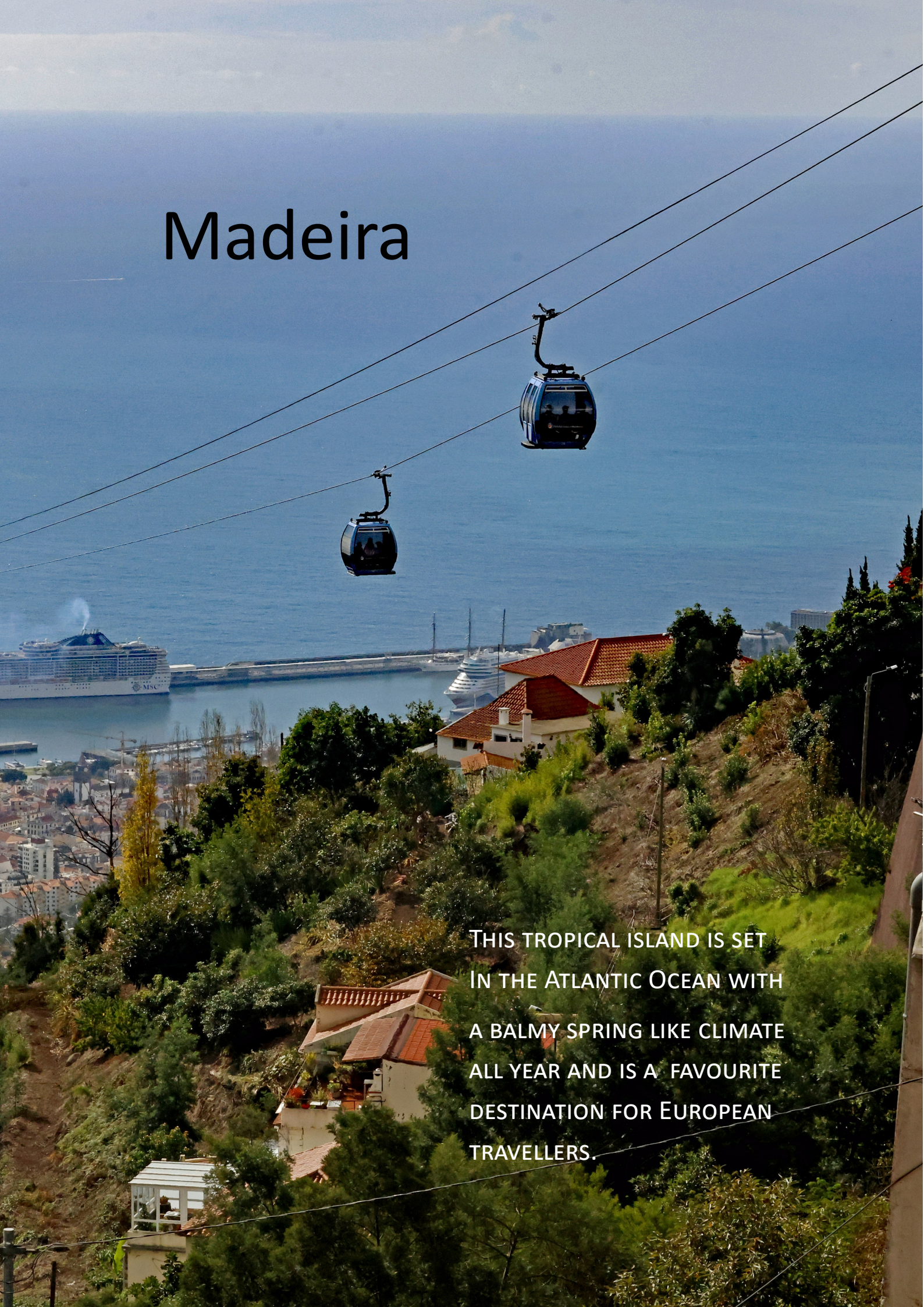


# Madeira



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VIEW POINT ABOVE FUNCHAL

# Madeira

## Europe's Leading Island destination

### Location

*Madeira is part of an archipelago of volcanic origin in the North Atlantic. It is a lush island with a permanent spring-like climate although thanks to its mountainous topography and warm ocean currents it also has diverse microclimates. Although Portuguese in every way it lies over 1000 miles from Portugal and just 300 miles from Morocco. It has rugged natural landscapes including rocky coves, mountains and pebble or black-sand beaches and over two thirds of its woodland and colourful tropical vegetation is protected and listed as a UNESCO World Heritage site.*

### Funchal

Funchal is its capital and it cascades down steep hillsides towards the blue glistening sea. Its narrow roads are steep and we laid back as our car propelled us upward and we held our breath as we swept downhill. Often with stone walls on either side and a hair's breadth between car and stone. Here and there we found viewpoints where we stopped to admire the vista spread out below us.

Although summer had long passed tropical flowers were still in bloom and they added splashes of bright colour. There were also giant succulents with names etched into their fleshy leaves - so much better than other forms of graffiti!

The gondola of the Funchal Cable car transports people from the lower section of the town to the suburb of Monte. As usual we had to be unconventional and took the journey in reverse. It meant great sweeping views in the car on our way up as well as the vistas from the cable car on the way down. Beneath us there were patches of bright colour, a remnant of the botanical gardens outstanding floral beauty in summer time

It also enabled us to walk along the promenade without parking problems when we reached the town. The broad path was punctured with some great sculptures. We stopped to indulge in giant ice cream sundaes and basked in the warm sunshine.





The Farmers market is well worth a visit. Here the flower sellers wear the traditional Madeira costume which consists of brightly coloured striped skirts and a cap which resembles a piece of fruit cut in half with a strig protruding from the top! There are multiple exotic blooms for sale, seeds and baby plants. Tourists buy them in great quantities but I think many will find the climate in the UK unfavourable.

This market also offers a wide variety of local fruits and vegetables, many unknown to us. There are aromatic herbs and spices, vegetables, meat, wines and local crafts. In the little bakery I had the best Portuguese tart

I have ever tasted. Flaky and warm from the oven. The lower floor of the market is given over to a large and busy fish market

One of Madeira's most famous attractions are the famous sledge rides. The Monte Toboggans Sledges first originated in the early 19th century when they were used as "downhill" public transportation by the local residents who wanted to travel quickly from the village of Monte to the city of Funchal. Today these wicker sledges carry visitors downhill at speed guided by two drivers dressed in white with straw boaters. They use their boots as brakes. Few visitors can resist the

FUNCHAL MARKET

FOLK EVENING

THE TOBOGGAN RUN

GRAFFITIED SUCCULENTS

FLOWER SELLER

thrill and there are always plenty of tourists wanting rides

### Into the mountains

Above Funchal the mountains are often shrouded in mist creating an air of mystery which we found enticing so we were soon twisting and turning upwards to discover what was there. At the highest view point the thick clouds hid the view





from sight but as we peered below they parted and pockets of mountains and villages appeared intermingled with wisps of swirling whiteness. Eucalyptus trees were interspersed and many stood stark and white. All around were agapanthus flowers which had turned to seed. In late June they must be awesome.



Driving away from the coast we took in Pico Arieiro and Pico Ruivo where the mountains stand above the clouds A phenomenon which is an everyday occurrence. We then returned south down mountain roads which twisted and turned constantly and we found ourselves in several different climatic conditions and at times the temperature plummeted. The vegetation was dense with a few scattered hamlets and after heavy rain during the night the waterfalls gushed and splashed and in the misty pockets along the way the rocky outcrops were often wet and shiny

When we stopped end route for refreshment at a rustic looking restaurant we found ourselves in a place akin to a ski lodge with blazing log fires.! It seemed so bizarre when down in Funchal it was 24 degrees and sunny.



The cheese and sausage platter with all its accompaniments was great. So too were other offerings on the menu. As we drove back towards the capital small hamlets with terraces of cultivation began to appear

FUNCHAL

FUNCHAL CABLE CAR

PICO ARIEIRO



and the verges on either side were edged with hydrangeas for mile after mile. These had now finished flowering and left behind lacey dried flower heads but here and there balls of blue flowers could still be seen. Later we entered banana growing country. The giant bunches of fruit looked almost ready to harvest and each was cocooned in a giant blue bag to protect it from pests.

### **Madeira wine and traditional drinks**

At a winery we got to taste many different types of Madeiran wines and discovered that there are many strengths and ages and knowing what to choose can make a whole lot of difference. The most significant fact I gleaned was that the semi-sweet 10-year-old is usually paired with dessert and a five-year-old with savoury dishes.

Then there is the Traditional Poncha - a strong alcoholic drink made with aguardente de cana (distilled alcohol made from sugar cane, honey, orange/lemon juice.) Traditionally it was made with just lemons but today it comes in many flavours.

Poncha is served in small glasses, with or without ice. Our first encounter was on day one when we stopped for lunch. It is sold accompanied with peanuts. Our nuts came in small tubs and the pigeons hovered and searched the empty shells in case any peanuts had been missed but, in some locations, everybody throws the shells on the floor and they crunch beneath your feet as you walk.

The drink has no known author, or date. But it seems that the first 'Poncha' to emerge on the island was the same that is still known today, as 'Poncha à pescador' It was created by fishermen to warm themselves in the cold nights in Câmara de Lobos, the village known as the 'fisherman's village'. This is located just a short distance from Funchal. A place much favoured by Winston Churchill and a place where he loved to paint. The colourful picturesque boats and scenery where we had breakfast one morning were a direct contrast to the black Scabbard fish which they catch here at night. Often referred to as 'monsters from the deep' they have rows of sharp teeth. They are extremely ugly but considered a wonderful fish to eat!

GLASS WALKWAY  
CÂMARA DE LOBOS  
THERMAL POOLS  
RAINBOW







At Porto da Cruz we visited the old rum distillery filled with old industrial machinery and many casks of rum. The site was dominated by a tall architectural chimney and in the adjoining tasting area and shop we sampled a few potent samples and learnt how to make the cocktail we indulged in. Consequently, when we returned to the car those in the back were very merry!

## Other highlights not to be missed

### The natural lava pools

These are located in the north of the island. En route we encountered several gushing waterfalls and when we reached the north shores of the island the waves of the Atlantic pounded the coast. Great waves crashed on the rocks and formed seething pockets of white foam. We stopped for a coffee and encountered strange Alien looking plants which hung in giant loops. At Porto Moniz there were swimming pools formed by volcanic lava and naturally filled with the crystal-clear pounding ocean.

### Levados

Alongside its natural beauty, Madeira has another no less surprising beauty to offer: its great network of irrigation channels - the Levados. These waterways are a living reminder of the titanic effort of past generations to distribute the abundant water that flows from springs at the top of the mountains amongst the slopes and valleys. They cover several protected areas including, most importantly, the Madeira Natural Park and the Funchal Ecological Park. Most



THE EAST COAST

PONCHA

PREPARING BLACK SCABBARD IN THE MARKET



of the trails are quite accessible and provide foot paths which allow access to unique solitary areas but some more remote trails are best visited with guides

### Glass walkway

A short journey along the southern coast a glass walkway at the top of the towering Cabo Girao allows visitors to walk out and admire the stunning vistas. At the entrance we encountered a weirdly dressed man playing bongo drums and singing in strange tones. Quite why we never found out

As we left a rainbow formed overhead so we drove up the nearby hillside to get a better view. Here there were many eucalyptus trees and the air was heavy with their pungent scent. It reminded us very much of Australia's Blue Mountains. All that was missing was the blue haze and the sheer number of trees. We soon found that the micro climates create rainbows everywhere so it is difficult not to encounter many as you transverse the island and you will see plenty of perfectly formed arches in a blue sky

### Semana

Semana was next to see the traditional tiny 'A' frame houses with straw roofs. Inside each something different was on offer. I especially enjoyed

the woman spinning yarn for her handicrafts and the home-made cakes, biscuits etc in another. Here the flavour of home baking outstripped the usual tourist offerings and we were able to taste much that we had only seen packaged. We received some interesting baking instructions using local ingredients like the syrup from the sugarcane often referred to as honey cane.

### Quinta do Lorde

On the east coast we explored the coast line with its wild rugged cliffs towering high above the crashing rocks below Here the rocky terrain appeared 'frilly' and smooth porous stones of various colours littered the landscape. A couple of small vans in different locations displayed artwork created from them. Beautiful but very pricey. Here many people hiked across the terrain but we were content to take the narrow roads and stop off at the viewpoints.

### Gastronomy

Madeira's regional bread is known as Bolo de caco and named after the caco or basalt stone slab that it's cooked on. The bread is extremely soft, and it's eaten everywhere. It comes toasted and soaked in garlic butter with many different fillings Estapada is food cooked on a skewer, and it's a style of cooking that's particularly popular in Madeira. The wooden skewers are made from bay laurels (the



Giant vegetation

Rum Factory





FORTRESS OF SÃO TIAGO TS GOURMET CUISINE

trees that bay leaves grow on) which gives the meat a unique flavour.

The most typical fish of Madeira is the black scabbard fish “Espada “, which swims in deep waters and has a fearsome appearance. However, it is also very tasty, especially when prepared the “Madeiran Way”, with passion fruit and banana sauce. Having seen it for sale in the local market I could not bring myself to try it, but it is said to be delicious and, on a return, visit I will try it for myself

Madeira’s fine dining is enhanced by its atmospheric venues. Established in 2001 the historical Fortress of São Tiago (17th Century) stands majestically rising above the waves. Its yellow ochre paint was peeling creating a shabby sheek effect which complimented the classic cars in the courtyard. We were made most welcome and the award-winning food did not disappoint. It began with appetizers, followed by

amuse bouche, mains, desserts and Portuguese and an international cheese selection with home-made jam, dried fruits and home-made toast. Likewise, the food at the Design Centre in Funchal was again artistic and faultless and displayed floral embellishments.

At a traditional folk night the essence of the island comes to the fore. The one we attended was excellent value for money and even the liqueur and wine were included in the price and every course was more than we could eat. The tomato soup was full of chopped hard boiled eggs and vegetables. The main course included pieces of steak threaded onto long skewers which hung from enormous hooks down the centre of the table. My choice of fruit salad for dessert contained many unknown fruits with strange textures but was delicious.

The meal was followed by singers and dancers who made a real im-





## FRESH FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

### EVERY DAY MEALS

pact. Partly due to the fact that each one was such a unique character. From the small fat lady who sang above everybody else and gave her all to the old man with a nobly stick who did nothing but gaze at the diners. In their brightly coloured folk costumes with their traditional but comical hats they really made us smile with enjoyment. It was lucky that the evening came with a driver as after so many drinks getting home by ourselves was not an option!

### Festivals

Every month in Madeira herald's new events and festivals, many of which



reflect its botanic excellence. The crowning event being the Flower festival which takes place in the spring. This consists of a parade with flower bedecked floats, dancing and singing and in Colégio Square the children build a wall of hope in flowers symbolising the hope for a better and more peaceful world. Flower carpets appear in the streets and there are prizes for the best deco-

rated shop windows. The perfume of the flowers is awesome.

From these observations you will see that it does not matter which month you choose to visit and whatever your age there will be many things to interest you. Being a small island, you will be able to see most of its charm and whether you come to walk

or explore in a car you will be well satisfied and like all visitors plan a return visit

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