

Funchal

Madeira, Portugal



The port

The cruise ship berths are to the west of the waterfront at Funchal. Generally a shuttle bus is provided that takes you to the town centre, or you can walk and it would take about 20 minutes at an average pace.

Port Facts:

Port: Funchal

Country: Madeira Portugal

Area: 309 square miles (Madeira)

Population: 268,000 (2011)

Language: Portugese, some English

Currency: Euro (€)

History

At the start of the 15th century, Prince Henry the Navigator set out to extend the knowledge of the coast of West Africa.

Two young sea captains, Zarco and Teixeira, were blown off course and after many days at sea and found land on a small island that they named Porto Santo.

On reporting to Henry they were promptly ordered to return and colonise the island.

The captains had reported a dark mass of clouds visible on the southern horizon. They were now encouraged to investigate.

As they approached, the huge Atlantic waves and the turbulence of the cross currents wouldn't have reassured them.

They discovered a heavily forested island that they named Madeira, meaning island of timber.

Prince Henry immediately organised the colonisation of the island, with the first families coming from the Algarve region of Portugal.

The early settlers worked with the fertile soil and warm climate to grow sugar cane and they became rich through this white gold.

Facts & Figures

Madeira is a Portuguese island, about 500 miles off the coast of Africa and 600 miles from Portugal itself.

Madeira is actually the largest island in a group – though only 2 are inhabited, Madeira and Porto Santo

It is 30 miles long, by 13 miles at its widest point, and a coastline of 80 to 90 miles.

Towering volcanic peaks, dramatic gorges, great swathes of primeval laurel forest, river valleys clad in luxuriant vegetation, terraced hillsides planted with vines and bananas, cliffs of awesome dimensions - these are just some of the contrasts Madeira offers its visitors.

Things to do

The prominent building on the seafront is the Fortaleza de Sao Lourenço, built in the 16th century to guard the bay from pirates. Today it is the residence of Madeira's military governors.

Walking up the side street with the Fortaleza on your left, you will come to the statue of Zarco – the discoverer of the island. Turn left for a building covered in azulejos, and the Municipal Gardens.

Or turn right and then you have the Palace of the Regional Government on your left and the cathedral in front of you.

The Sé (cathedral) is a mix of European-Gothic and Moorish architecture. This is one of the few buildings on the island that has survived virtually unchanged since the island's early colonisation. Inside is more impressive than the exterior...with impressive altar-pieces and painted choir stalls.

North of the Sé, you will find the city's main square, Praça do Municipio, with magnificent black and white mosaic paving and three significant buildings.

- City Hall in an 18th century palace
- Collegiate Church
- Museum of Sacred Arts

Mercado dos Lavradores (Market), a veritable riot of colour and fragrances....fruit, flowers, vegetables, fish and wickerwork.

Cable Car – takes you up to Monte, a hilltop village with the famous Monte Palace Tropical Gardens. These gardens are like a tropical rain forest, with hints of the orient. They are quite steep as they are on the mountain-side.

You can come back down via the TOBOGGAN RUN!

The Orchid Gardens (north-east of the town centre) are very close to the Botanical Gardens (2 miles from the centre of Funchal) - the island's most comprehensive public garden containing a specimen of almost every plant that grows on Madeira.

Reid's Palace Hotel – a luxury hotel with beautiful grounds. Famous for its Afternoon Tea (booking required)

Pico dos Barcelos – a viewpoint which overlooks Funchal for the postcard view!

Old Blandy Wine Lodge – still run by the same family after 200 years. A chance to taste and buy.

Things to see

Camacha is a pretty village just north-east of Funchal - centre of the island's wicker industry.

Porto Moniz (north-west tip of the island)
A small village clinging to the coast, with a little rocky outcrop of black lava rock called the Mole Island and a natural swimming pool at the edge of the ocean - formed by volcanic reefs.

Paul da Serra – the only plateau on the island, bleak, windswept moorland with only grass and gorse growing. This offer a vivid contrast with the jagged mountains elsewhere.

Calheta - a coastal village sitting among vineyards and banana plantations. A popular resort with a golden sand beach and good fish restaurants.

Ribeira Brava – a pretty place for a stroll around, with an interesting church and paved main square.



Cabo Girao – the second highest sea cliffs in the world, awesome!



Camara de Lobos – a fishing village with a lovely harbour and brightly coloured boats. It is popular with artists and it was a favourite painting location for Sir Winston Churchill when he stayed at the Reid's Palace Hotel.

Pico do Serrado – view-point that looks down into a deep ravine to see the valley called Curral das Freiras, meaning Nun's Refuge. The nuns of the Santa Clara Convent took shelter here in the 16th century.

Levadas - These are man-made water channels across the island, designed to move water from the wetter northern parts to the drier south to irrigate the crops. Today, they not only move water and provide hydro-electric power but give a remarkable network of walking paths. Some are simple and others are high-risk.

PLEASE SEEK LOCAL ADVICE BEFORE WALKING THE LEVADAS

Notes

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