

THE LOCAL GUIDE · 2026 EDITION

Madeira Island 2026 Guide

Seven perfect days, by the people who live here.

BEYONDMADEIRA.COM · VALID AS OF SEPTEMBER 2026

MADEIRA ISLAND 2026 GUIDE

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ORIENTATION

The island at a glance

Madeira is small — 57 km end to end — but the terrain makes everything slower and more spectacular than the map suggests. Four characters, one island.



South & Funchal

The sunny capital — marina, gardens, markets and most of the hotels.

East

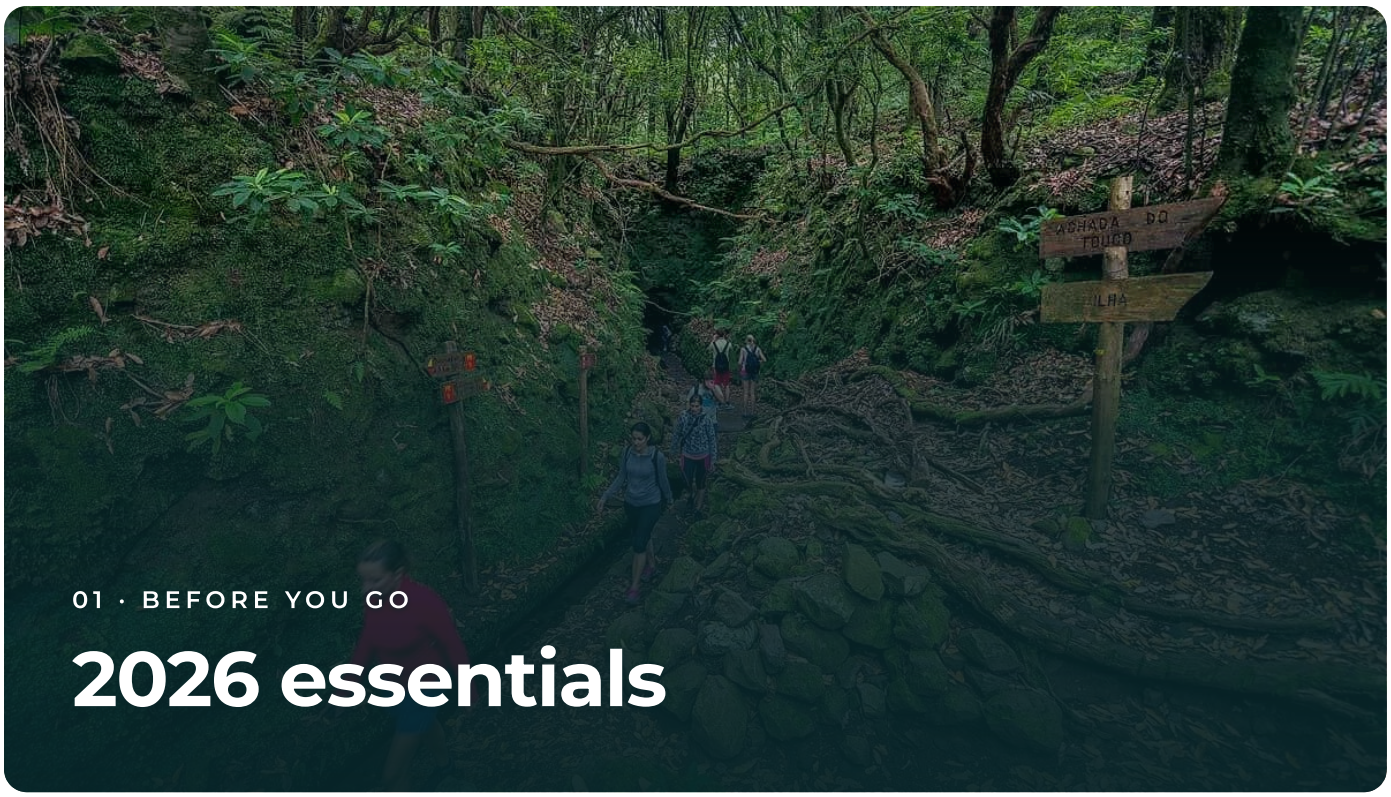
Santana's thatched houses, Machico, and the red Martian peninsula of São Lourenço.

West

Cabo Girão, the Paul da Serra plateau, Porto Moniz pools and the Fanal forest.

North

São Vicente, the green beach at Seixal, waterfalls and the old coast road.



01 · BEFORE YOU GO

2026 essentials

The handful of things that actually changed this year. Read this first — it saves a wasted morning at a trailhead.

Trail reservations are now mandatory

Every official PR walking trail needs an online booking via the SIMplifica portal, with a timed 30-minute entry slot. There is no cash payment on-site.

The fee is €4.50 per person

Standard classified trails cost €4.50 per person, per trail. Madeira residents are exempt. Book and pay in advance — mountain areas have patchy signal.

PR1 (Areeiro → Pico Ruivo) is special

Updated 19 Sep 2026: open daily. The full route Pico do Areeiro → Pico Ruivo is one-way from the Pedra Rija viewpoint onwards, €10.50 per person. Out and back to Pedra Rija only: €4.50. Book and pay on SIMplifica before you go. The Pedra Rija–Pico Ruivo section closes now and then for maintenance, so check the official status the day before.

Funchal cable car — running again

The Funchal–Monte cable car closed in January 2026 for a few months of maintenance and is now back to normal — so the Monte gardens, toboggan ride and cable car are all open again.

Book your hikes with us and skip the admin. As a licensed operator we handle the SIMplifica reservation for you — you just walk, with a guide who knows the trail.

Walk it responsibly

- ✓ Check the live trail status before you set off — closures change with the weather.
- ✓ Start mountain and sunrise walks early: car parks at Areeiro and Rabaçal fill by 8–9am.
- ✓ Layers, water, grippy shoes and a head-torch for tunnel sections. Basalt is slick when wet.
- ✓ Stay on the marked path. The Laurissilva is UNESCO-protected — take nothing but photos.

See guided walks →

Ask on WhatsApp

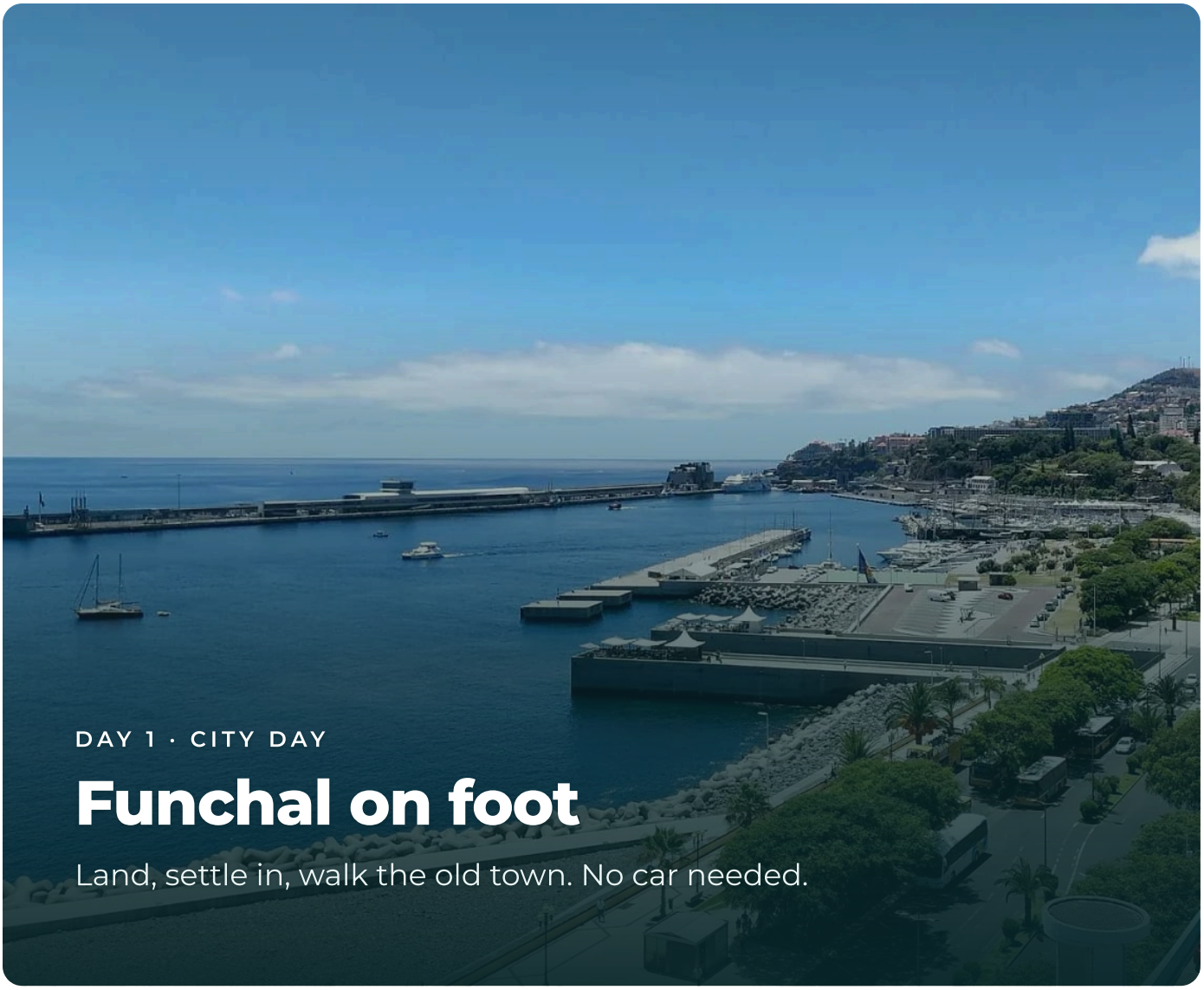


02 · YOUR WEEK

Madeira in 7 days

One island, one perfect week — built the way we'd plan it for a friend flying in.
One page per day: what to see, how long it takes, and what it costs.

Day 1	Funchal on foot	CITY DAY
Day 2	Pico do Areeiro and the ridge	HIGH MOUNTAINS
Day 3	Rabaçal and 25 Fontes	LAURISILVA WALK
Day 4	East coast and São Lourenço	VOLCANIC EAST
Day 5	North coast and lava pools	NORTH COAST LOOP
Day 6	West coast and Cabo Girão	SUNSET WEST
Day 7	Porto Santo, or a day off	SECOND ISLAND



DAY 1 · CITY DAY

Funchal on foot

Land, settle in, walk the old town. No car needed.

Start at Mercado dos Lavradores early, before the cruise crowd. Coffee at a pastelaria on Rua de Santa Maria, then the painted doors down to the sea. Cable car up to Monte, toboggan down if you're curious about the cliché (it is touristy, and worth it once). Afternoon in the Jardim Botânico or the Madeira Story Centre. Dinner at a tasca in Rua da Carreira — ask for espetada and a glass of Sercial. An easy opener that sets your bearings.

Mercado dos Lavradores · Rua de Santa Maria · Teleférico to Monte · Jardim Botânico · Rua da Carreira

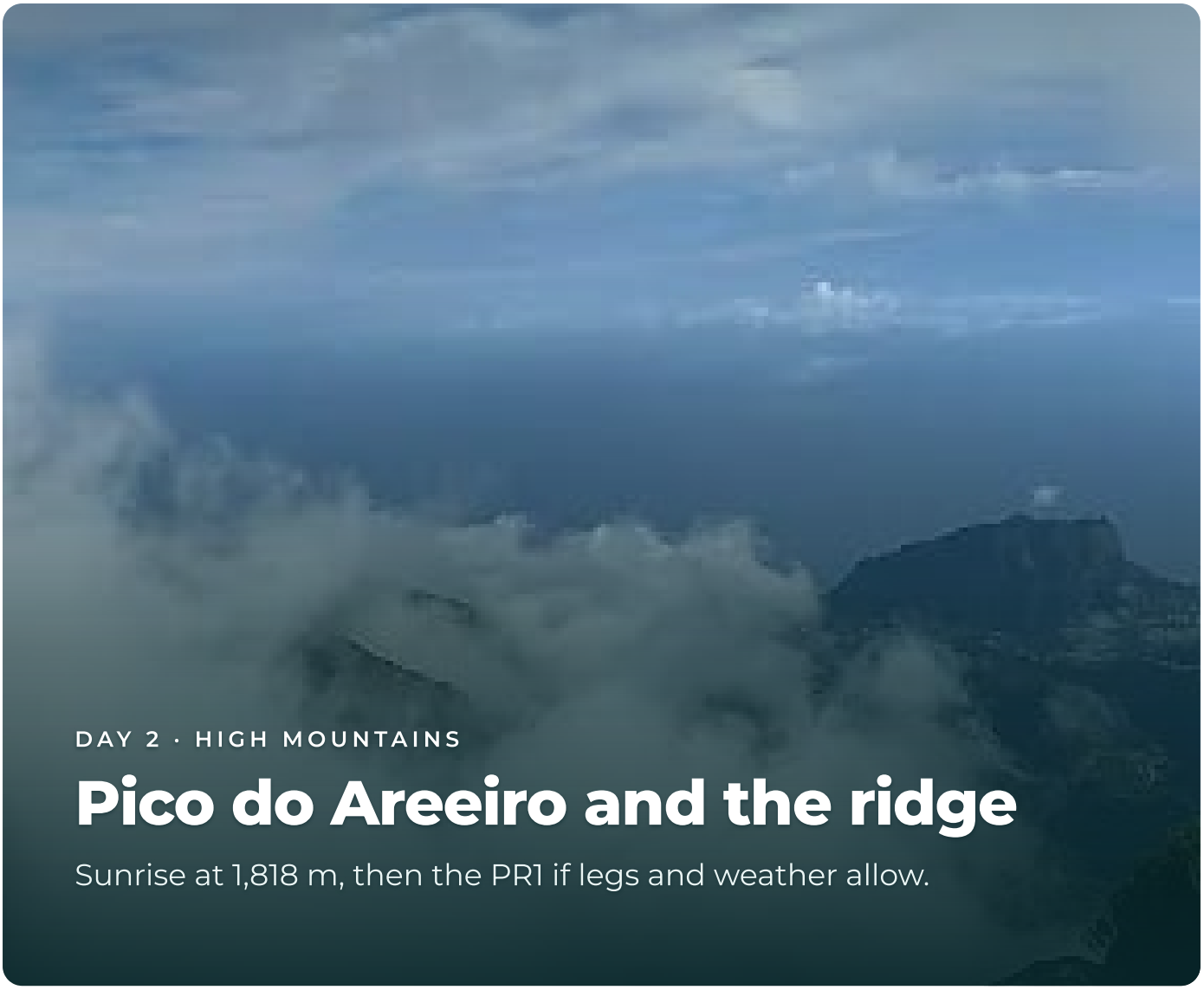
GETTING THERE
Walk and cable car. Taxi home after dinner.

TIME
Full day, relaxed pace

COST
Cable car return around €22. Botanical garden around €7.

Do this day with a guide →

Ask on WhatsApp



DAY 2 · HIGH MOUNTAINS

Pico do Areeiro and the ridge

Sunrise at 1,818 m, then the PR1 if legs and weather allow.

Leave Funchal at 4.30 in summer, 6.30 in winter. The drive up is 45 minutes and you want to be at the top before the cloud lifts from the south. PR1 to Pico Ruivo takes 3 to 4 hours one way, with serious exposure and steps — not for vertigo. If that's too much, walk 40 minutes to the first viewpoint and turn back. Lunch in Santana, see the triangular houses, home via the ER101. A big day, but the photograph you came for.

Pico do Areeiro · PR1 Vereda do Areeiro · Pico Ruivo · Santana triangular houses

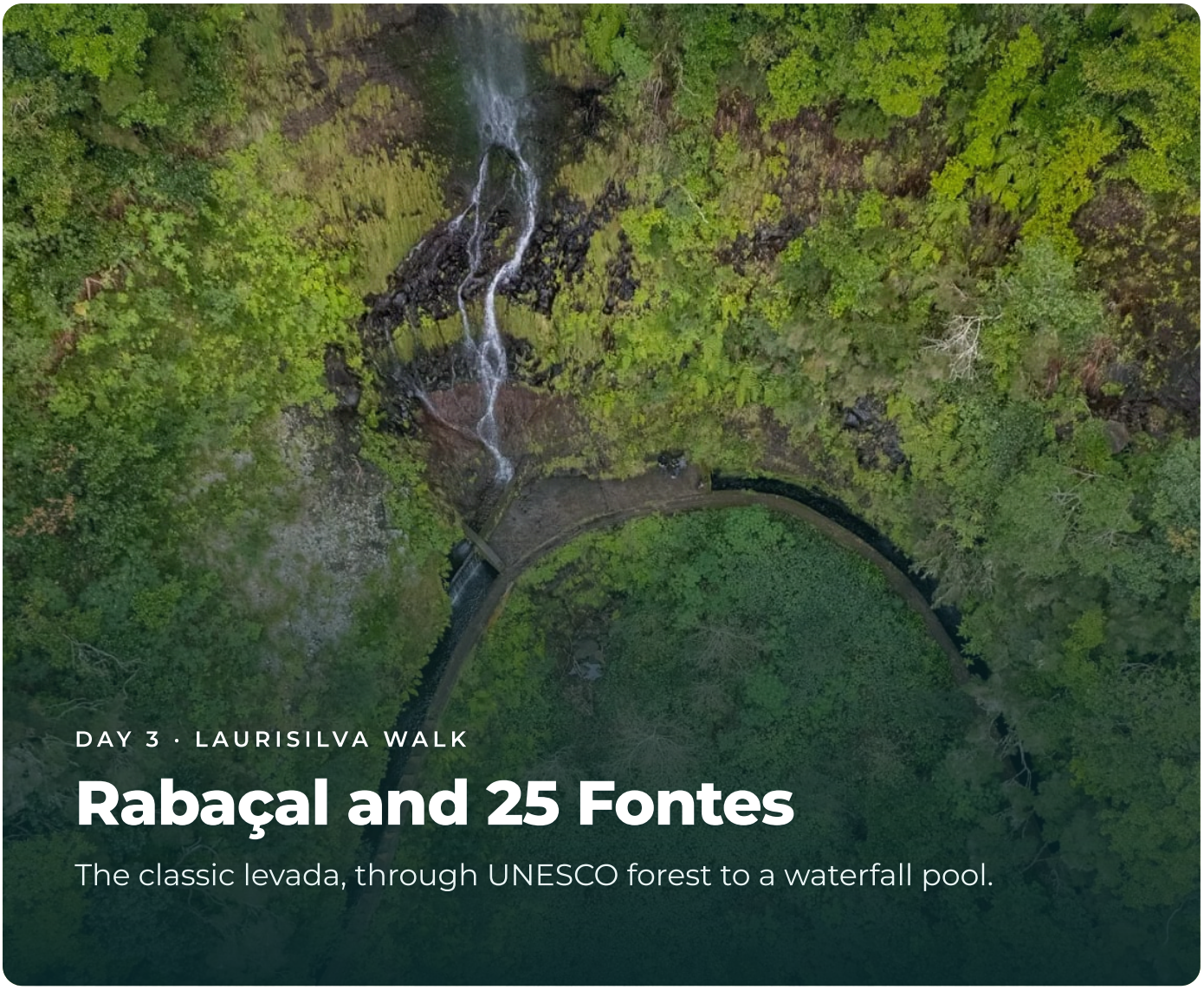
GETTING THERE
Rental car essential. 45 minutes from Funchal.

TIME
Full day, dawn start

COST
Parking free. Bring layers — 10°C colder than the coast.

Do this day with a guide →

Ask on WhatsApp



DAY 3 · LAURISILVA WALK

Rabaçal and 25 Fontes

The classic levada, through UNESCO forest to a waterfall pool.

Book the IFCN shuttle from Rabaçal car park in advance — you cannot drive the last 1.5 km down. The PR6 to 25 Fontes is around 11 km return, mostly flat along the levada, with one narrow stretch where you'll want your hand on the rock. Pack lunch or eat at the forestry house at the top. In the afternoon, stop at Paul da Serra on the way back — the plateau looks like Scotland if Scotland had broom in bloom. Quiet, soft, worth the miles.

Rabaçal car park · PR6 Levada das 25 Fontes · Risco waterfall · Paul da Serra plateau

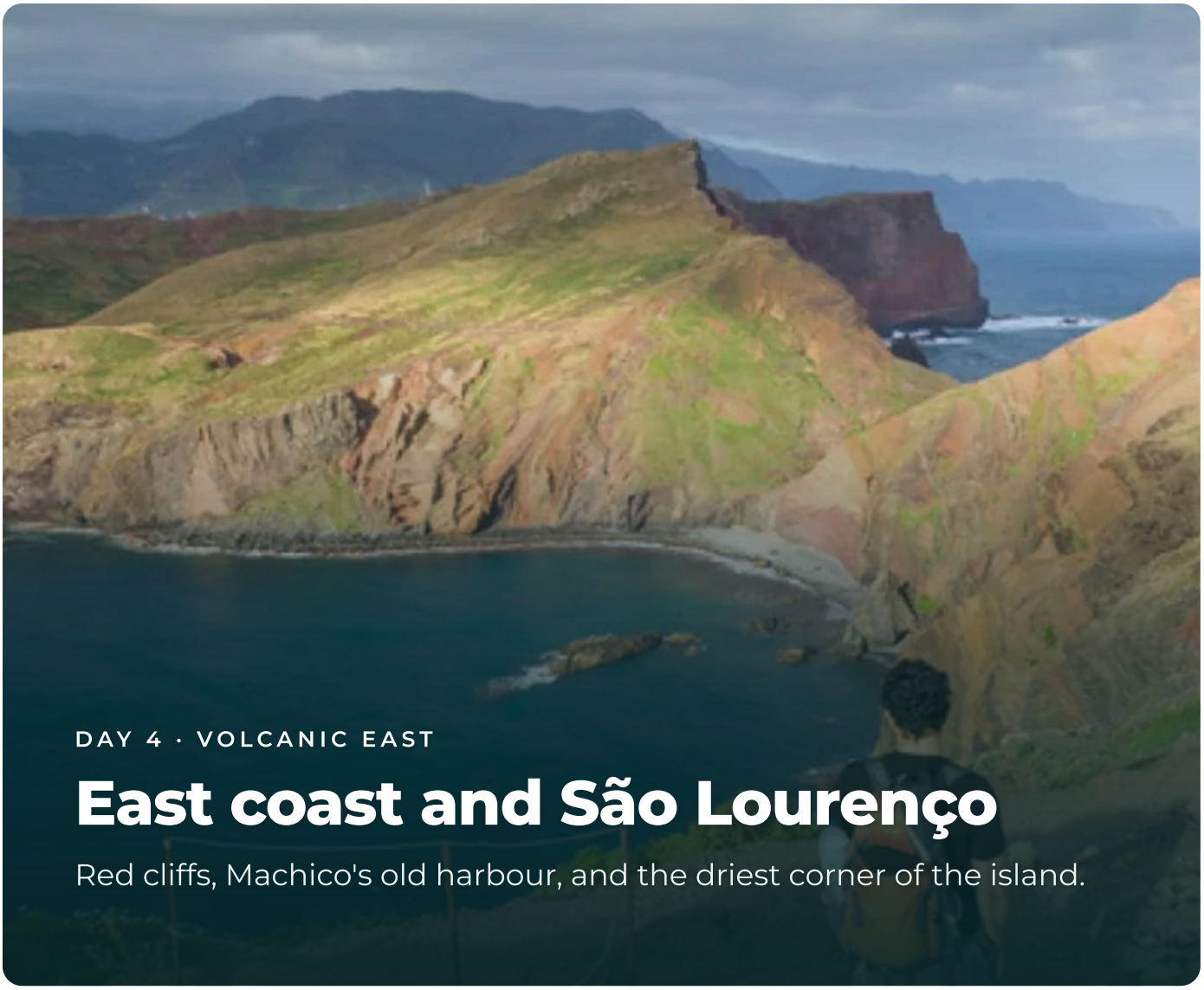
GETTING THERE
Rental car plus IFCN shuttle €4.50 return

TIME
5 to 6 hours walking, full day out

COST
Torch useful if you also do PR6.1 (tunnel section)

Do this day with a guide →

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DAY 4 · VOLCANIC EAST

East coast and São Lourenço

Red cliffs, Machico's old harbour, and the driest corner of the island.

The PR8 at Ponta de São Lourenço is the opposite of Rabaçal — no trees, no shade, 8 km of exposed cliff in ochre and rust. Start before 9 or after 4 in summer. Swim at the end if the sea is kind. Drive back via Machico for a late lunch at a beachfront tasca; the town is underrated, older than Funchal, and much quieter. Finish with a wine at Caniçal harbour watching the fishing boats come in. A gentler day after the mountains.

PR8 Ponta de São Lourenço · Prainha black sand beach · Machico old town · Caniçal harbour

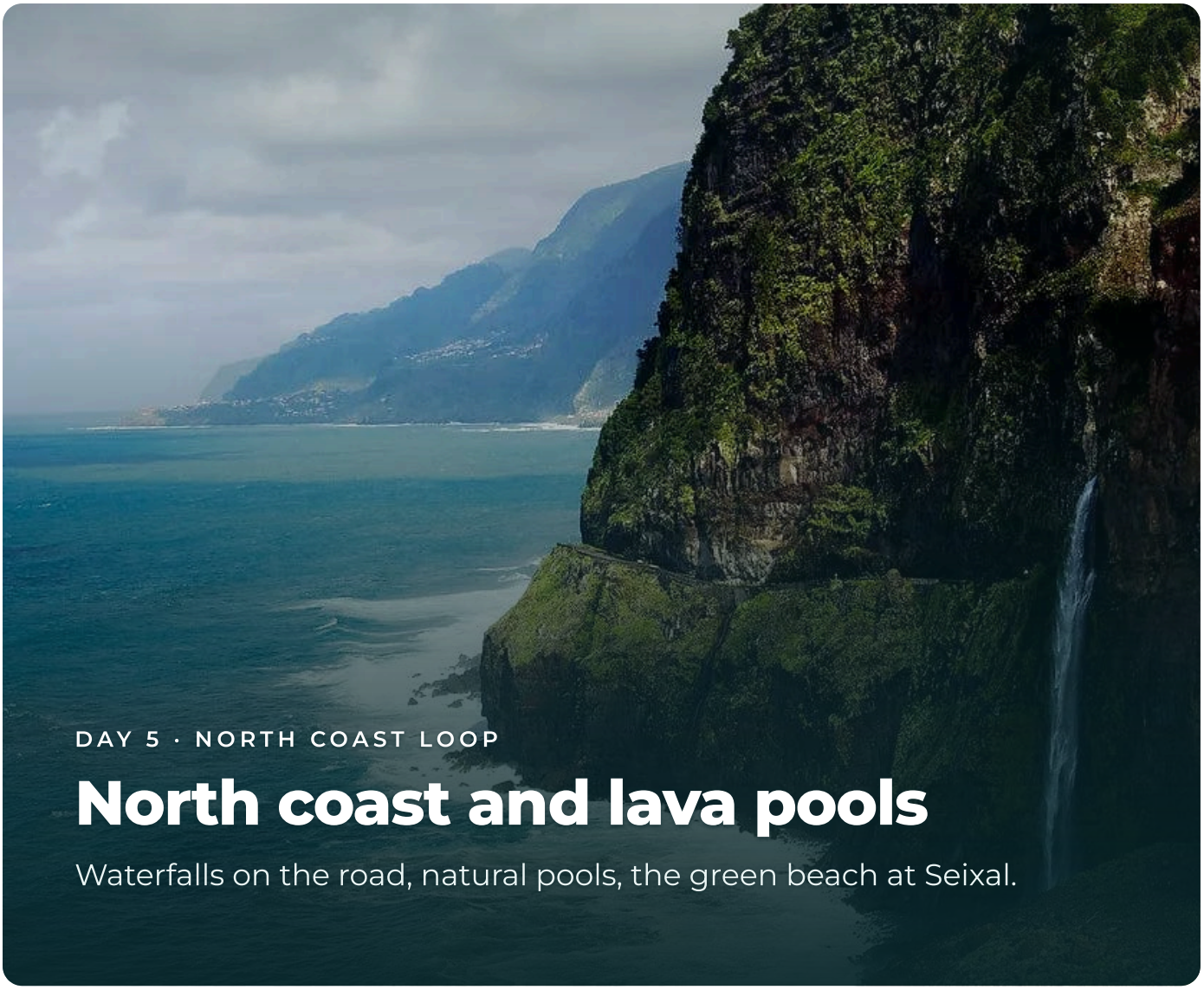
GETTING THERE
Rental car. 30 minutes from Funchal on the VR1.

TIME
3 hours walking plus lunch

COST
No fee. Zero shade — water and a cap, not optional.

Do this day with a guide →

Ask on WhatsApp



DAY 5 · NORTH COAST LOOP

North coast and lava pools

Waterfalls on the road, natural pools, the green beach at Seixal.

Take the old ER101 coast road from São Vicente to Porto Moniz at least once — the new tunnels are faster but you miss the point. Swim at the Porto Moniz natural pools when the Atlantic is calm, then back to Seixal for the black sand and, if the sea allows, the Laje pool at Lagoa. Waterfall shower by the road at Véu da Noiva is a photo stop, not a destination. The grutas de São Vicente are closed, so don't plan around them. Dinner back in Funchal, or sleep a night in Porto Moniz if you like the quiet.

Porto Moniz natural pools · Seixal green beach · Véu da Noiva viewpoint · São Vicente village

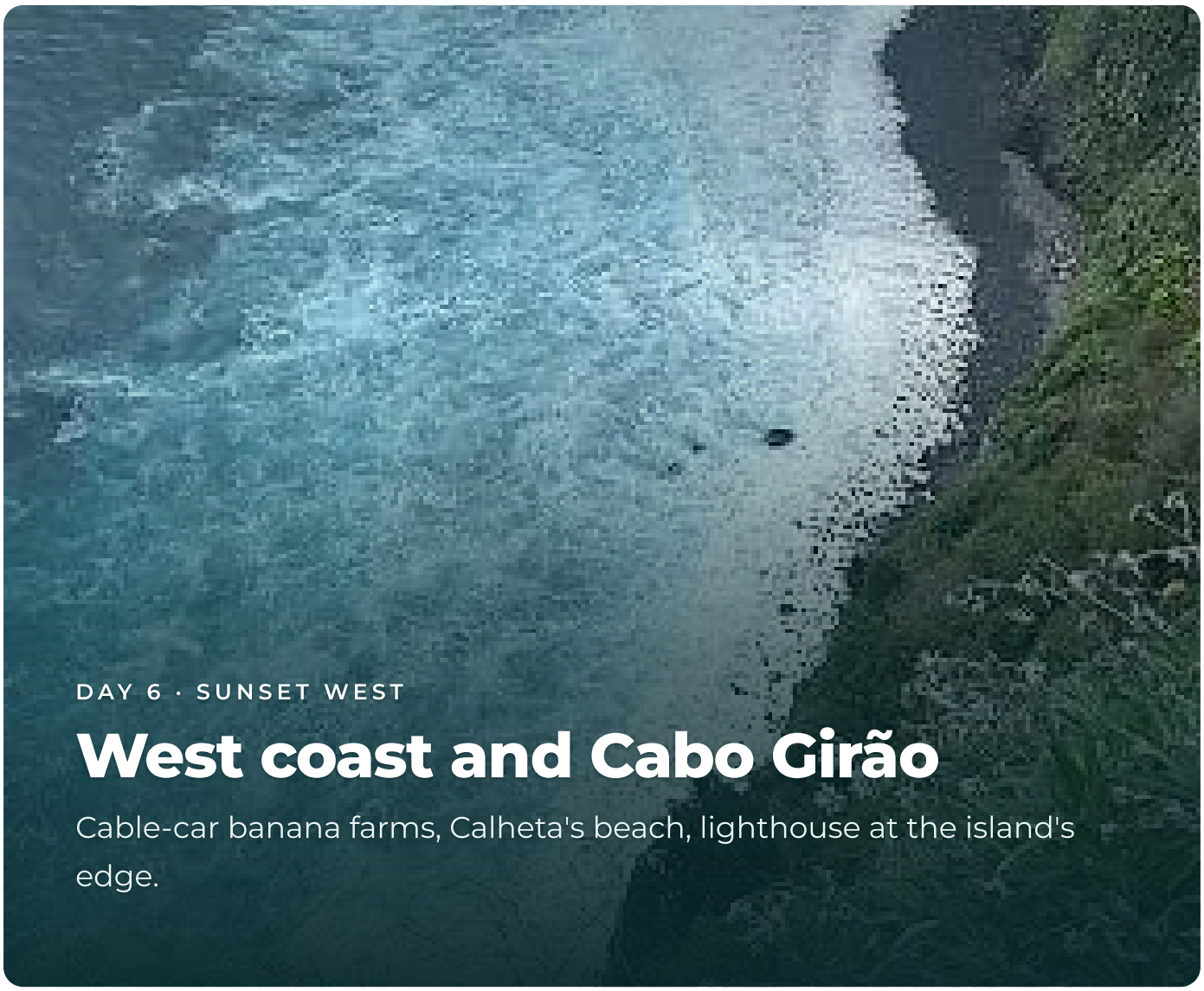
GETTING THERE
Rental car. 90 minutes Funchal to Porto Moniz.

TIME
Full day, loop drive

COST
Natural pools around €3. Towel and flip-flops.

Do this day with a guide →

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DAY 6 · SUNSET WEST

West coast and Cabo Girão

Cable-car banana farms, Calheta's beach, lighthouse at the island's edge.

Cabo Girão skywalk first — €5, and yes it's touristy, but 580 m of cliff straight down is still 580 m of cliff straight down. Drop to Fajã dos Padres by cable car for lunch if the booking gods favour you. Calheta has imported sand and a surprisingly good art museum, Mudas. Push on to Ponta do Pargo for the westernmost lighthouse, stay for sunset, drive back in the dark via the VE4. Long day, fewer people, more of the island you don't see on the postcards.

Cabo Girão skywalk · Fajã dos Padres · Calheta beach and Mudas museum · Ponta do Pargo lighthouse

GETTING THERE

Rental car. 1 hour to Cabo Girão, 1h45 to Ponta do Pargo.

TIME

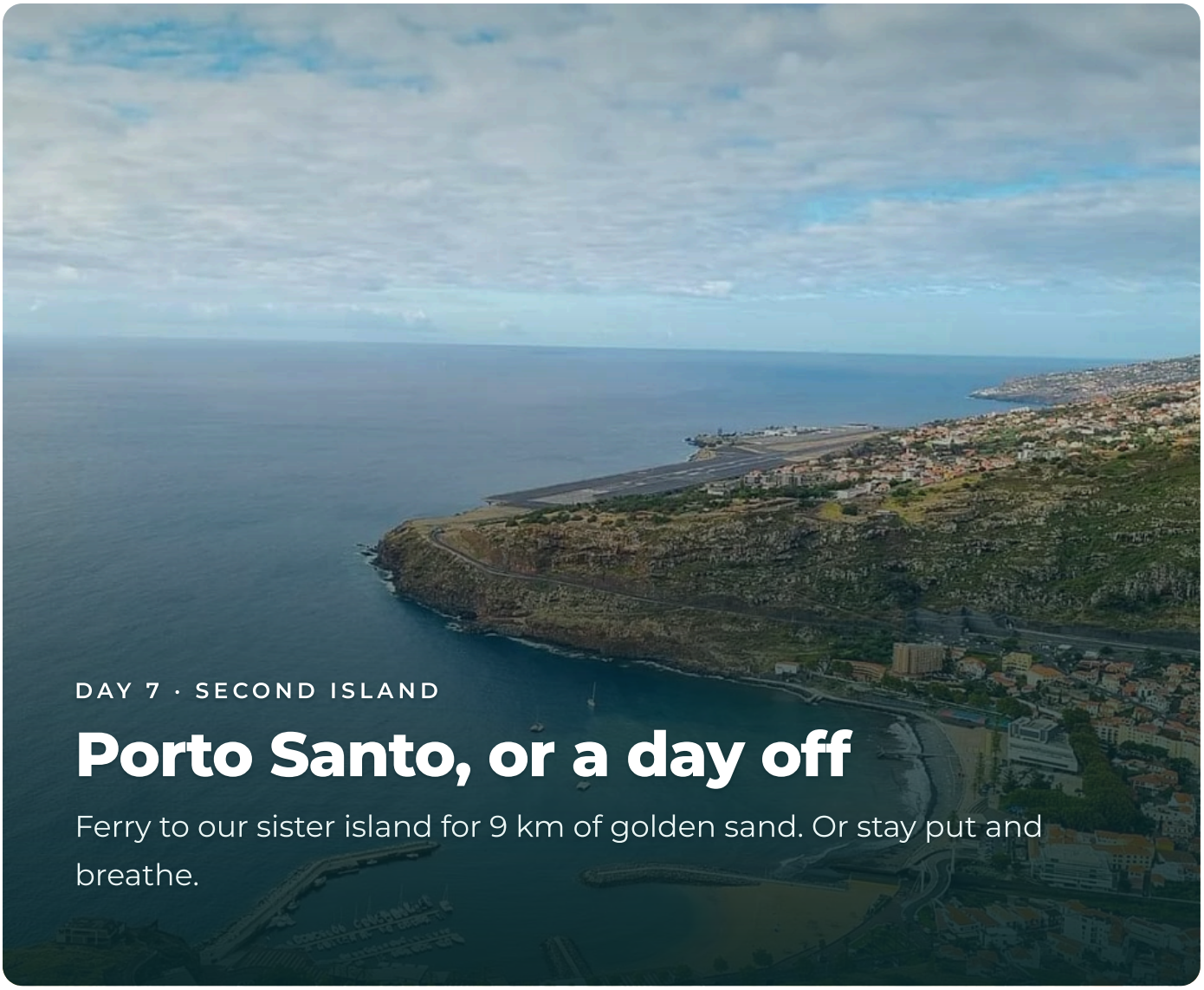
Full day, sunset finish

COST

Cabo Girão skywalk €5. Fajã dos Padres cable car around €10 return.

Do this day with a guide →

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DAY 7 · SECOND ISLAND

Porto Santo, or a day off

Ferry to our sister island for 9 km of golden sand. Or stay put and breathe.

The Lobo Marinho ferry leaves Funchal around 8 and comes back around 6. Crossing is 2h15 each way, often rough — take a pill if you're sensitive. Porto Santo is the second inhabited island in our archipelago (we are two, not nine — that's the Azores) and the beach is the reason to go. Hire a bike, ride the length of the sand, lunch at Vila Baleira. If the forecast is poor or your legs are done, skip it: take a proper lie-in, a long lunch at a solar in Câmara de Lobos, and pack slowly. Both are the right answer.

Lobo Marinho ferry · Porto Santo 9 km beach · Vila Baleira · Pico do Facho viewpoint

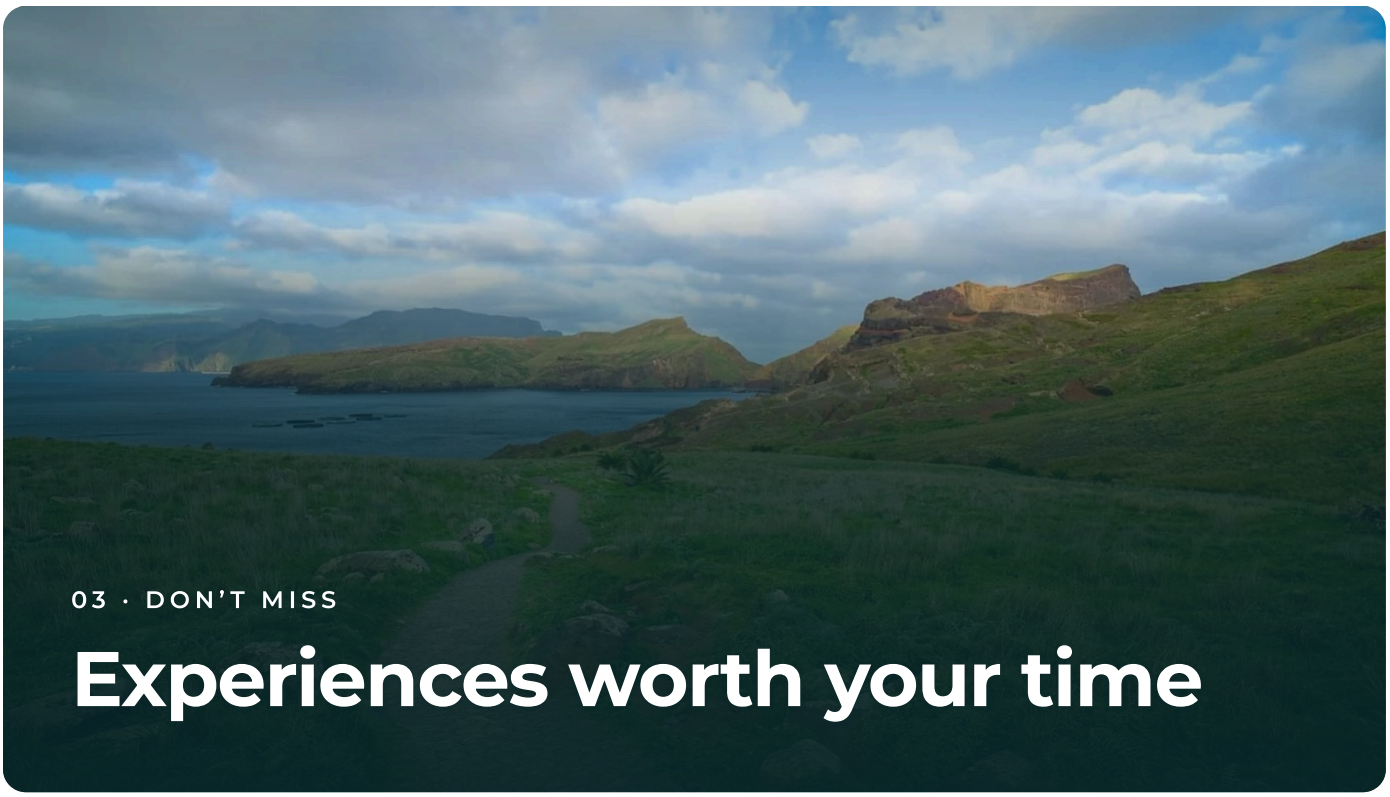
GETTING THERE
Ferry from Funchal port, or stay on Madeira

TIME
14 hours door to door if you go

COST
Return ferry around €60. Book ahead in summer.

Do this day with a guide →

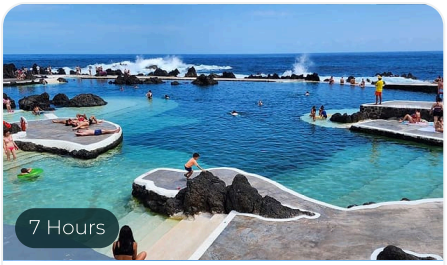
Ask on WhatsApp



03 · DON'T MISS

Experiences worth your time

The things we'd book first — small groups, local guides, no scripted patter.



Porto Moniz, Fanal & Cabo Girão — Full Day 4x4

Explore the west of Madeira on a 4x4 tour, visiting Cabo Girão Skywalk, Fanal Forest, Seixal and Porto Moniz. Scenic rou

from €65 Book →



Ponta São Lourenço Snorkeling Boat Tour

Speedboat to the wild Ponta de São Lourenço and snorkel its clear, protected waters — volcanic reefs, warm shallows and

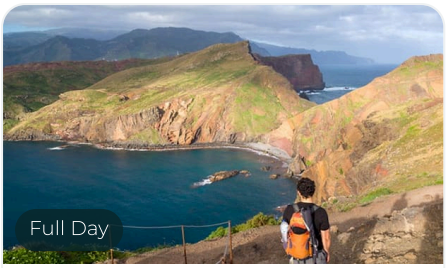
from €35 Book →



Catamaran Whale & Dolphin Watching

Catamaran whale and dolphin watching cruise from Funchal with coastal views, swim stop at Cabo Girão and onboard bar ser

from €35 Book →



PR8 Ponta de São Lourenço Guided Walk

Full-day guided walk along Madeira's most dramatic volcanic peninsula. Cliffs, ocean views, endemic flora — pickup inclu

from €48 Book →



Intermediate Canyoning Madeira Level 2

Intermediate canyoning adventure in Madeira with rappels, jumps and natural pools. Includes equipment, photos and insura

from €80 Book →



Surf Lesson – Beginners & Intermediates

Surf lesson in Madeira for beginners and intermediates with certified instructors, small groups, and all equipment inclu

from €65 Book →



West Madeira Mini-Van Tour: Fanal & Porto Moniz

West Madeira guided mini-van tour with Cabo Girão Skywalk, Fanal Forest, Porto Moniz natural pools, Seixal and north-coa

from €40 Book →



Pico do Arieiro, Santana & East Coast — Full Day 4x4

Full-day 4x4 jeep tour across East Madeira, from Pico do Areeiro to Santana and Ponta de São Lourenço. Scenic views, off

from €65 Book →



Santa Maria Columbus Ship Cruise Madeira

Catamaran whale and dolphin watching cruise from Funchal with coastal views, swim stop at Cabo Girão and onboard bar ser

from €45 Book →

See all experiences →

Ask on WhatsApp

SAVE WITH A PACK

Madeira at Ease

Three signature experiences, one price — €149 · up to 12 guests.



West Coast 4x4 — Porto Moniz, Fanal & Cabo Girão



East Coast 4x4 — Pico do Arieiro & Santana



Catamaran whale & dolphin watching

See the pack →

Ask on WhatsApp



04 · BY REGION

Region by region

The island changes character every twenty minutes. Here’s how to split it.

West Madeira: 10 Places That Make the Drive Worth It

The west of the island is a longer drive than most day-trippers plan for. From Funchal you're looking at 45 minutes to Ponta do Sol on the VE3, closer to 90 by the time you reach Ponta do Pargo or Fanal. The ER101 old coast road is slower still, tunnels that pre-date mandatory lighting and hairpins that don't forgive a phone glance. Worth the time, all of it. Calheta's beach is imported sand on a coast that doesn't grow any of its own. Paul do Mar is where the surfers go when the south is flat. Jardim do Mar sits on a cliff shelf with one road in. Fanal, up at 1,150m, is a laurel forest that holds cloud like a bowl. We've put the ten places below in the order we'd drive them over two days. One day works if you skip the levadas.



Fanal

A 500-year-old til laurel forest at 1,150m, between Ribeira da Janela and the Paul da Serra plateau. UNESCO Laurissilva, Natura 2000, and the only place on the island where the fog earns its reputation. Mornings and late afternoons are the atmospheric ones. Do not climb the trees; the fences exist for a reason.

Local tip: Check the Fanal webcam before leaving Funchal. Clear skies here look pretty and ordinary. You want mist.



Miradouro Farol da Ponta do Pargo

The westernmost point of the island. Working lighthouse, small museum (open until 16:00 on weekdays), free parking and a 15-minute cliff walk to the edge. On a clear evening the sun drops straight into the Atlantic with nothing in the way.

Local tip: It's windy. Properly windy. Bring a layer even in August and keep children away from the cliff edge.



PR 6 – Levada das 25 Fontes

Madeira's most walked levada. Starts in Rabaçal, descends through Laurissilva forest to a lagoon fed by twenty-five springs off the Paul da Serra plateau. Around 11km return, shaded for most of it, busy from 10:00 onwards.

Local tip: The shuttle from the upper car park costs 5€ one-way, 8€ return. Walking down is fine, walking back up after 11km of hiking is the conversation-ender.



Ponta do Sol

The sunniest village on the island and the best base for a west-coast night. Pebble beach, a proper promenade, and Sun Spot Café at the far end with wooden loungers facing the break. Digital-nomad friendly without being overrun.

Local tip: Park up top near the church and walk down. The seafront car park fills by 11:00 and the one-way system back out is slow.



Cascata dos Anjos

A waterfall that falls across the old coast road between Ponta do Sol and Madalena do Mar. You can drive through it or park and walk under. Five minutes, max, and worth the detour off the VE3.

Local tip: After heavy rain the council occasionally closes the road for rockfall. Check before you drive and obey the signs.



Praia da Madalena do Mar

Pebble beach and sea pools below a banana-growing village. Swimmable on calm days, proper spectacle when the Atlantic is up and the waves break over the pool walls. Quieter than Calheta, no entry fee.

Local tip: Read the sea before you get in. The pools fill with surge very fast and locals stay out on big swells for good reason.



Praia da Ponta do Sol

Wide pebble beach directly below the village, with cafés on the promenade and a small breakwater. Shoes in the water unless you enjoy pain. Evenings are the move: sunset hits the cliffs west of you.

Local tip: Tide goes out far enough to scramble along the rocks. Slippery concrete blocks on the breakwater — not worth the selfie.

East Madeira: 10 Places Worth the 25-Minute Drive

East Madeira Guide: 10 Places Worth Driving For

The east is the part of the island most visitors underestimate. It is 20 to 30 minutes from Funchal on the VR1 — same road, same tunnels, far less rain. This is where Madeira changes character: green laurel forest gives way to red volcanic cliffs, the wind picks up, and the landscape starts to feel more Cape Verde than Scotland. It is also where Portuguese explorers first landed in 1419, where the airport sits, and where you will find the island's only proper sand beach. Ten spots worth the drive, in a rough loop you can do in a single day if you start early. A note on the clock: every drive time below is from central Funchal via the VR1 motorway. Tolls are zero. Traffic is rarely a problem outside rush hour.



PR8 — Vereda da Ponta de São Lourenço

The one everyone talks about, and rightly so. A 3 km each-way trail across a narrow volcanic peninsula at the easternmost tip of the island — no trees, no shade, just red and ochre cliffs falling into the Atlantic on both sides. On a clear day you see Porto Santo and the Desertas from the path. It is a moderate walk with steps and uneven rock, not a stroll; allow three hours return and go early. Parking along the road is free but full by 10am in summer. Two snack wagons at the car park. No toilets on the trail. If the wind is above 50 km/h, skip it — the exposed sections are no joke.



Miradouro Ponta do Furado

The payoff at the far end of the PR8. You cannot drive here — it is a viewpoint only reached on foot, and that is the whole point. Volcanic cliffs in every colour from rust to black, the Desertas sitting low on the horizon, nothing else for miles. Fewer people make it all the way out, which makes the last kilometre the best part of the walk. Bring water, bring a windproof.



Miradouro da Ponta do Rosto

If you cannot face the hike, drive here instead. A narrow road climbs to a headland looking straight down the São Lourenço peninsula, with the Desertas beyond. Parking is tight — six or seven spaces — and the wind rarely drops below a whistle. A snack bar keeps things simple. Best at sunrise; worst mid-afternoon when the coaches arrive.



Prainha Beach, Caniçal

Madeira's only natural black-sand beach. A short flight of steps from the car park takes you down to a sheltered cove with rock pools on either side. The sand is volcanic so it gets hot; bring something for your feet. When the swell comes up the waves slam into the pools and it turns into something between a swim and a theme park ride — fun if you know what you are doing, dangerous if you do not. Small café at the top.



Praia de Machico

Imported golden sand from Morocco, breakwaters to keep the Atlantic calm, showers and changing rooms, lifeguards in summer. It is not wild and it is not pretending to be — it is a town beach built for families, and it works. Machico itself is where Portuguese explorers first landed in 1419, which gives the old quarter a weight you will not find in the resort strips. Plenty of lunch options a two-minute walk away.



Miradouro do Pico do Facho

The best free show on the island: planes coming in to land at Madeira Airport. The runway sits directly below this viewpoint on its famous concrete stilts, and on a westerly wind you watch the approach turn at eye level. Historically this was a signal point — fires were lit here to warn the town of pirate ships. Snack bar, clean toilets, picnic tables, resident cats. Thirty-minute walk up from Machico if you want to earn the view.



Miradouro da Portela

The pass between the east and the north coasts. From here you see Penha d'Águia — the 600 m sea-cliff that separates Machico from Santana — rising out of the ocean like a fortress. There is a small bar at the viewpoint that has been there for decades and feels like it. Parking is free, the trailhead for a short walk down towards Porto da Cruz starts right here.

North Coast Madeira — 10 Places Worth the Detour

The north coast is a different island. Wetter, greener, wilder. Where the south is terracotta and postcards, the north is basalt cliffs, waterfalls falling straight onto the road, and villages that still feel like villages. From Funchal, you reach it in 40 minutes via the VR1 through São Vicente, or the old ER101 if you want the scenic route (expect tunnels, blind bends and the occasional spray off the sea). Here are the ten stops we send people on, west to east.



Parque Florestal do Fanal

A thousand-year-old til forest on the Paul da Serra plateau, about 1 hour 15 from Funchal via the VR1 and ER209. On clear days it's a wide green meadow; roll in with fog and it turns into something else entirely — twisted trees, no sound, no signal. Go early, bring a coat, mind the sheep.



Porto Moniz Natural Swimming Pools

Lava pools at the island's north-western tip, roughly 1 hour from Funchal via the VR1. Entry is a couple of euros and they're kept clean and lifeguarded. Worth pairing with lunch at Cachalote or Orca. Skip if the sea is rough — the swell comes over the walls.



Cachalote Natural Swimming Pools

Porto Moniz has two sets of pools and most visitors only notice the big ones. Cachalote sits 300 metres east, free to enter, smaller and quieter. In summer it fills by 11am; in winter you might have it to yourself. Same lava, fewer queues.



Levada do Moinho & Levada Nova

A circular walk out of Lombada (Porto Moniz), starting behind the church. Around 10km if you do the full loop, mostly flat, with old water mills and a waterfall you can stand under. Less trafficked than the Santana levadas and a proper rain-forest feel after wet weather.



Miradouro do Véu da Noiva

A roadside viewpoint on the ER101 between Seixal and São Vicente, 50 minutes from Funchal. The 90-metre Bride's Veil waterfall drops straight into the Atlantic. You can no longer walk under it — the old road is closed — but the platform, café and small car park make it a natural five-minute stop.



Véu da Noiva Waterfall

Same waterfall, different angle. If you carry on along the old ER101 towards São Vicente, you pass under smaller cascades that hit the windscreen in winter. Not a stop so much as a stretch of road — the sort of drive that explains why the north coast gets its own reputation. (Note: the São Vicente show caves nearby are currently closed.)



PR 1.2 – Vereda do Pico Ruivo

The short route up Madeira's highest peak at 1,862m, starting from Achada do Teixeira above Santana — about 1 hour 10 from Funchal. 6km return, paved path, last 700m of stairs. Go for sunrise if the forecast is clear; above the cloud line you look down on half the island.



05 · WALKS

Levadas & trails

Eleven walks we actually send people on — honest notes on difficulty, distance and parking.



PR 6 - Levada das 25 Fontes

Rabaçal · Calheta

PR 6 – Levada das 25 Fontes in Rabaçal, Madeira. Moderate levada walk through Laurissilva forest leading to the iconic 25 Fontes lagoon and natural springs.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	8,6 km	3 Hours

START

Rabaçal (ER105) · 25 Fontes



PR 6.1 – Levada do Risco

Rabaçal · Calheta

PR 6.1 – Levada do Risco in Rabaçal, Madeira. Easy levada walk through Laurissilva forest leading to the Risco waterfall viewpoint.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Easy	3 km	2 Hours

START

Rabaçal (ER105) · Risco



PR 9 – Levada do Caldeirão Verde

Parque Florestal das Queimadas · Santana

PR 9 – Levada do Caldeirão Verde in Santana, Madeira. Moderate levada walk through Laurissilva forest with tunnels, cliffs and a dramatic waterfall lagoon.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	17.4 km	6 Hours

START

Queimadas Forest Park · Caldeirão do Inferno



PR 18 - Levada do Rei

São Jorge · Santana

Moderate levada walk in São Jorge leading to the serene Ribeiro Bonito, passing farmland, forest tunnels and Laurissilva landscapes.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	10.6 km	3 hours

START

ETAR de São Jorge · Ribeiro Bonito



PR 6.2 - Levada do Alecrim

Rabaçal · Calheta

Easy levada walk in Rabaçal with wide valley views, Laurissilva forest and a scenic lagoon at the source of the levada.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Easy	7 km	2.5 hours

START

Rabaçal (ER105) · Alecrim Levada Source (Dona Beja Lagoon)



PR 1 – Vereda do Areeiro

Pico do Areeiro · Santana / Câmara de Lobos

Iconic high-mountain trail between Pico do Areeiro and Pico Ruivo, currently accessible up to Pedra Rija viewpoint with dramatic views.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Hard	6.1 km	5 Hours

START

Pico do Areeiro · Pico Ruivo



PR 1.2 – Vereda do Pico Ruivo

Achada do Teixeira · Santana

Short but rewarding mountain walk from Achada do Teixeira to Pico Ruivo, offering high-altitude views over Madeira's central massif.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	5.6 km	1h45

START

Achada do Teixeira · Pico Ruivo



PR 8 – Vereda da Ponta de São Lourenço

Ponta de São Lourenço · Machico

Scenic coastal walk on Madeira's easternmost peninsula, offering ocean views, volcanic terrain and unique wildlife in a semi-arid landscape.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	6 km	2.5 hours

START

Baía d'Abra · Casa do Sardinha



PR 11 - Vereda dos Balcões

Ribeiro Frio · Santana

Easy levada walk in Ribeiro Frio leading to the Balcões viewpoint, offering wide views over Laurissilva valleys and Madeira's central peaks.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Easy	3 km	1.5 Hours

START

ER103 (Ribeiro Frio) · Balcões



Vereda do Larano

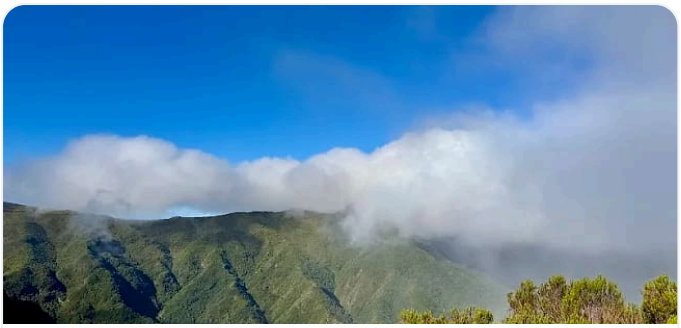
Machico · Porto da Cruz

Vereda do Larano in Madeira. Challenging coastal walk from Machico to Porto da Cruz with dramatic cliffside ocean views.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	12.1 km	4 Hours

START

Machico · Porto da Cruz



PR 13 - Vereda do Fanal

Paul da Serra (Assobiadores) · Porto Moniz

Moderate walk across Madeira's Laurissilva forest, linking Paul da Serra to the iconic Fanal plateau with ancient laurel trees.

DIFFICULTY	DISTANCE	TIME
Moderate	10.8 km	4 hours

START

ER209 (Assobiadores) · ER209 (Fanal)

Walk with a guide →

Ask on WhatsApp



06 · EAT & DRINK

Where to eat

Where locals actually eat — plus the dishes and drinks to order.

Traditional Madeiran Food: 10 Places That Get It Right

Espetada on laurel sticks, bolo do caco straight off the stone, poncha at the counter. The honest list.

Madeiran food is mountain food that happens to sit in the Atlantic. Beef threaded onto laurel branches and grilled over coal. Wheat-and-sweet-potato flatbread cooked on a hot stone, split open, stuffed with garlic butter. Limpets seared in their shells with lemon. Black scabbard fish, pulled from 800 metres down, fried in a pan and paired, oddly and brilliantly, with fried banana. Poncha, the national drink, is cane spirit, honey and lemon, mashed by hand with a caralhinho. Here are ten places across the island where locals still eat, where the menu hasn't been softened for visitors, and where the cooking stays close to how our grandparents did it.



Santo Antonio

Espetada grilled on a laurel stick over coal, served hanging at the table with milho frito and bolo do caco. Estreito de Câmara de Lobos, the village where the dish was born. €€. The owner runs the grill himself.



Abrigo Do Pastor Mountain Cuisine

Espetada, black pork and sweet potatoes finished with dark cane honey, cooked in a stone lodge up in the Caniço hills. €€. Reserve on Sundays or wait half an hour — it fills with Madeiran families, which is the point.



O Polar

Half-skewer espetada, homemade chips, garlic bread. Câmara de Lobos, 20 minutes from Funchal by taxi. €. Cash or Portuguese card only — no international cards, so plan ahead. Locals arrive 15 minutes before opening for a table.



Viola

Fillet-steak espetada on the laurel stick, sweet potato and fried corn on the side. Estreito de Câmara de Lobos, a short drive from its neighbour Santo António. €€. Full house most evenings — worth booking.



O Lagar

Big-hall espetada for groups: beef skewers by the metre, milho frito, fries, vegetables. Câmara de Lobos. €€. Plenty of parking, live folklore some evenings, the kind of room where a table of twelve isn't a problem.



Snack Bar A Pipa

Lapas grelhadas — limpets seared in their shells with garlic butter and lemon — and a proper seafood rice. Porto da Cruz, on the north coast. €€. Wooden benches, no view, local crowd, fish off the boats that morning.



Beer Garden

Picado: diced beef with garlic, bay and piri-piri, piled on chips, eaten from the pan with toothpicks. Funchal. €. The small portion feeds two. Grilled limpets and garlic bolo do caco round it out.



Taberna Do Petisco

Picadinho and shrimp Jordão style — pan-cooked in garlic, butter and beer — served in the kind of portions that arrive twice the size you expected. Santa Cruz, near the airport. €€. Busy, loud, fair prices.



A Bica

Filete de espada — black scabbard fillet fried with the traditional banana on the side — plus cod and proper garlic bread. Central Funchal. €. Huge plates, honest prices, more Madeirans than cruise passengers.

Best Restaurants in Funchal: 10 We Send Guests To

Ten Funchal tables we actually book for friends, from €5 pregos to tasting menus at Reid's.

Funchal eats well. Not in a showy way, but in the way a port town eats when the fish arrives at six and the beef comes off coal at seven. The list below is what we recommend when a guest asks where we'd go tonight — not what ranks highest on a booking engine. We've kept it to ten. Old Town tabernas, a steakhouse in Ajuda, fine dining above the Atlantic, and one beer-garden picado worth the walk west. Prices run from € to €€€€. Some take walk-ins. Most of the better ones want two or three days' notice, especially April through October.



Akua By Chef Julio Pereira

Contemporary seafood from Júlio Pereira, in Mercado dos Lavradores. Codfish tacos and tuna tartare at the kitchen counter, €€ set menu. Book a week ahead for counter seats — it's the best show in Funchal.



William

Fine dining at Reid's Palace, above the Atlantic in Estrada Monumental. Lobster and wine pairings with a sommelier who actually listens. €€€€, jacket helpful, book two weeks out. Special-occasion territory.



Kampo

Farm-to-table and grill by Júlio Pereira in the Old Town. Tuna tartare, premium cuts, surf and turf at the chef's table. €€ and fair for the quality. Reserve three or four days ahead.



Vaca Negra

Azorean beef steakhouse in Ajuda, west of the centre. Tomahawk and provoleta are the order. €€, no atmosphere to speak of — you come for the meat. Book a day or two ahead.



Casal Da Penha Fine Dining Seafood

Seafood with a terrace near Hotel Zone, ten minutes' walk from the marina. Grilled octopus and seafood pasta, generous plates, €€. Sit outside and book a day ahead in summer.



Taberna Madeira

Old Town taberna on Rua de Santa Maria. Octopus, garlic shrimp and tuna done properly, tapas-style. €€ with honest portions. Walk-ins possible off-season; book for Friday and Saturday.



Restaurante Marisqueira O Barqueiro

Seafood on the western seafront near Lido. Mixed shellfish platter, grilled fish, warm garlic bread to start. €€, portions for two will feed three. Worth booking in high season.

Best Poncha Bars in Madeira

Poncha is the drink of our island. Aguardente de cana — the spirit pressed from Madeiran sugarcane — stirred with honey and lemon juice using a wooden stick called a mexelote. Three ingredients. No ice. That's the classic. Fishermen used to drink it before heading out of Câmara de Lobos in the cold morning, and for a long time it was prescribed as medicine for a cold. These days it comes in variations — passion fruit, tangerine, orange — and the price sits between €2.50 and €4 in a proper bar. Drink it in the wrong place and you get a pre-mixed syrup and a hangover. Drink it in the right one and you understand the island. Here are eight bars we actually use.



Bar Castrinhos

Classic lemon poncha is the one to get — honey-forward, properly strong, around €2.50. The crowd is Madeiran, the English is limited, and the tuna sandwich costs less than a coffee in Funchal. Go after a walk and sit at the bar.



Restaurante Bar Madalena do Mar

The maracujá poncha is made with fresh fruit, not concentrate — you can see it sitting in bowls behind the bar. Around €3.50. Sit outside as the sun drops behind Ponta do Sol and order one before dinner.



Barreirinha Bar Café

The passion fruit poncha here is the one locals recommend to friends. About €3.50. Pair it with a prego (steak roll in a bolo do caco bun) and sit facing the Atlantic. Not a secret, but not touristy either.



Poncha Tavern

The poncha pescador (classic fisherman's recipe, no fruit) costs €3.50 and is made in front of you with the mexelote. Touristy, yes — but the drink is honest and the Nikita is made with fresh fruit now, not frozen. Stop on the way west.



O Polar

The lemon poncha here is old-school: strong, honey-heavy, no ice, about €3. The espetada (beef skewer on a bay stick) is the dish to order alongside. Cash is easier than card here.

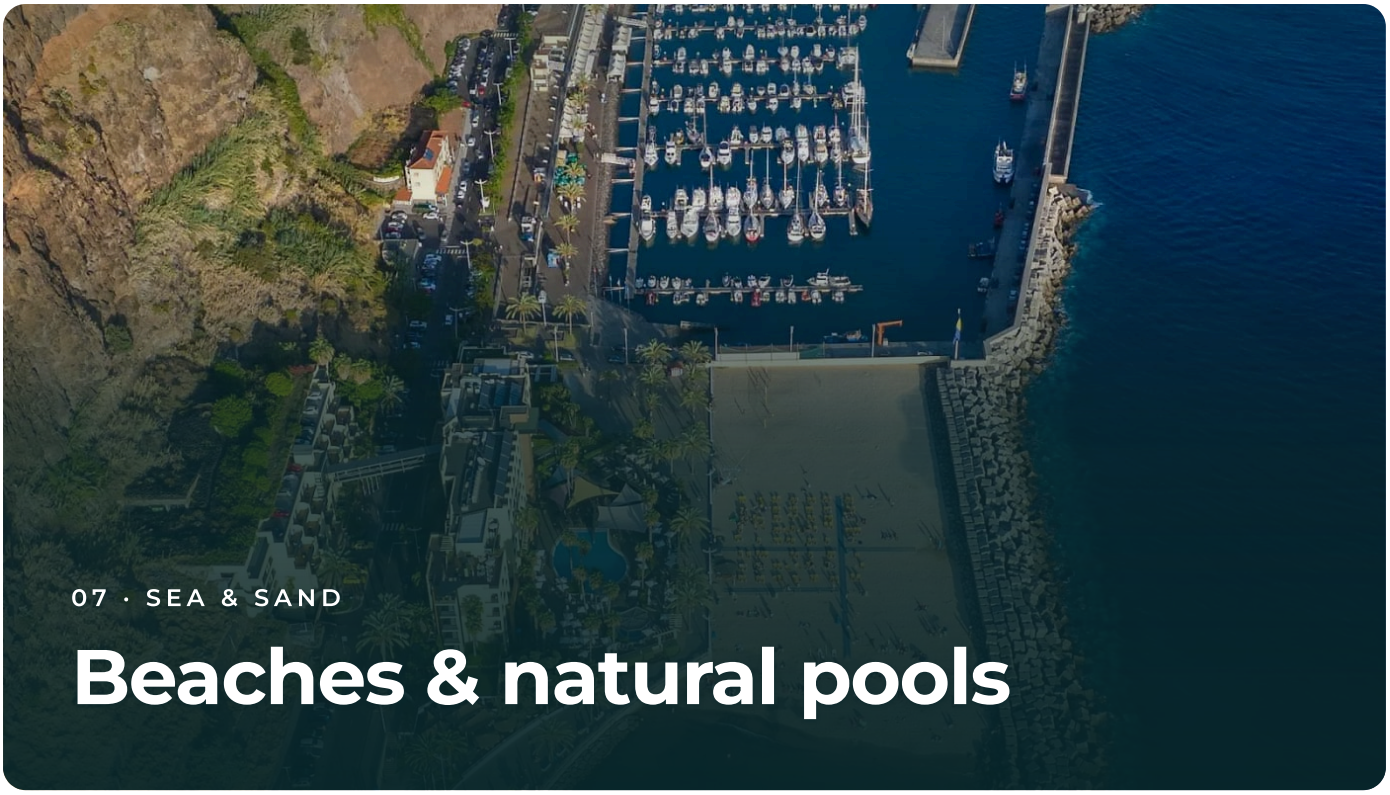


Taberna Madeira

Order the tangerine poncha when it's in season (November to February) — around €4. Otherwise the classic lemon. Good stop for a drink before dinner without the pre-mixed rubbish they serve two streets over.

Find a table →

Ask on WhatsApp



07 · SEA & SAND

Beaches & natural pools

Black-sand bays, lava pools and the calm spots locals swim at.



Alagoa beach

Porto da Cruz

Located in Porto da Cruz, Machico, Praia da Alagoa is a scenic black sand beach set against lush green mountains and the clear waters of the Atlantic Ocean. The beach offers visitor facilities such as restrooms, sun loungers, and parking, and is popular for swimming, sunbathing, and surfing, making it a perfect spot to enjoy both Madeira's natural beauty and seaside recreation.

Fun Fact Alagoa Beach is formed by black volcanic sand, created from eroded lava fragments — a direct result of Madeira's volcanic origin and one of the clearest examples of natural black-sand beaches on the island. Tip Because of its north-coast exposure, swimming conditions can change quickly. This beach is especially popular with surfers, while swimmers should always assess sea conditions before entering the water.



Cachalote Natural Swimming Pools

Porto Moniz

Located at the entrance to the village of Porto Moniz on Madeira's north coast, the Piscinas Naturais do Aquário/Cachalote are striking saltwater swimming pools formed naturally within volcanic rocks, where crystal-clear Atlantic water flows in with the tides. This free-access bathing spot is one of the municipality's most scenic attractions, offering visitors an unspoiled seaside setting ideal for swimming and relaxing beside dramatic rock formations.

Fun Fact The name Cachalote (sperm whale) reflects Madeira's long maritime history and the strong presence of large cetaceans off the island's north coast. Tip These pools are more exposed than Porto Moniz's main complex, so choose calm sea days for safer swimming.

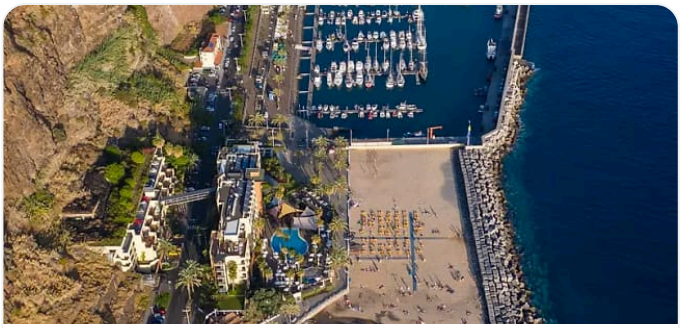


Cais dos Sardinha Beach

Vereda da Ponta de São Lourenço (PR 8)

Located at the eastern tip of Madeira at the end of the Vereda da Ponta de São Lourenço (PR 8), Cais do Sardinha is a scenic rocky bathing spot rather than a traditional beach, known for its crystal-clear Atlantic waters and striking volcanic landscape. After exploring the dramatic, arid scenery of the Ponta de São Lourenço walk, visitors often use Cais do Sardinha as a refreshing place to cool off and admire wide ocean views that can include the Desertas Islands and Porto Santo on the horizon. There are no formal support services or lifeguards, so caution is advised when swimming.

Fun Fact This beach sits next to one of Madeira's most important traditional fishing areas, closely linked to tuna and sardine fisheries. Tip The water here is usually clearer in the morning before winds increase in the afternoon.

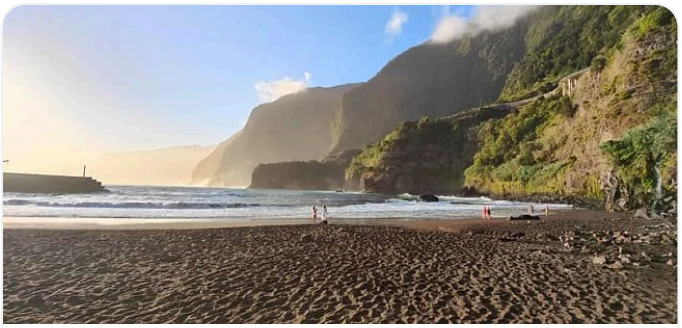


Calheta beach

Calheta

Praia da Calheta is one of Madeira's few golden sand beaches, created with imported sand from Morocco and mainland Portugal. This man-made beach offers calm waters and excellent facilities, making it a favorite among families and sunbathers.

Fun Fact Calheta Beach is one of Madeira's few artificial sandy beaches, created with imported golden sand to provide calmer swimming conditions. Tip It's one of the best beaches for families due to its sheltered bay and reduced wave action.



Clube Naval do Seixal's Swimming Pools

Seixal

Located in Seixal, on Madeira's north coast near Porto Moniz, the Piscinas do Clube Naval do Seixal are scenic volcanic-rock natural swimming pools set against a backdrop of green mountains and the Atlantic Ocean. The free-access bathing complex features support facilities such as showers, toilets, a bar with terrace, a sunbathing area with loungers, and also offers kayak and diving equipment rentals for those seeking more active marine experiences. With easy sea access and striking coastal scenery, it's a popular spot for relaxation and aquatic fun amid Madeira's dramatic north-coast landscape

Fun Fact These pools combine natural volcanic rock formations with built structures, creating a hybrid bathing area unique to Madeira's north coast. *Tip Visit on weekdays for a quieter experience, especially during summer months.*

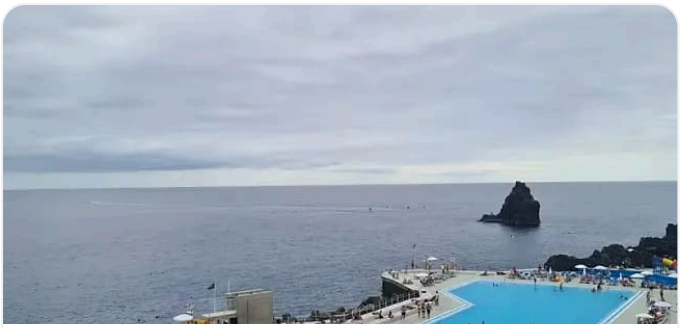


Complexo Balnear da Ponta Delgada

Ponta Delgada

Located in the parish of Ponta Delgada, in São Vicente on Madeira's north coast, the Complexo Balnear da Ponta Delgada is a paid seaside leisure facility set beside the village's main church, ideal for a day of swimming and relaxation. The complex features two saltwater swimming pools—one for adults and one for children—with treated water, a spacious solarium and sunbathing area, balneários (changing rooms), a bar/esplanade, first-aid services and parking, and is also accessible to visitors with reduced mobility. Thanks to protective rock barriers built at the site, a small sheltered beach in a protected bay was formed, offering a pleasant spot for sea bathing amid scenic coastal surroundings

Fun Fact This bathing complex was developed to provide safe ocean access in a region traditionally exposed to strong north-coast waves. *Tip Check sea conditions locally, as access may be restricted during rough weather.*

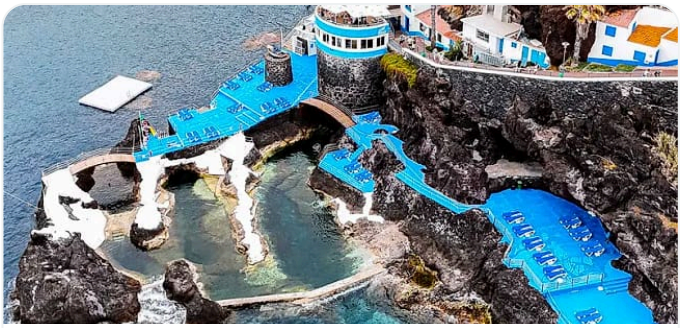


Complexo Balnear do Lido

Funchal

Located next to the Passeio Público Marítimo in Funchal, the Complexo Balnear do Lido is Madeira's most famous seaside bathing facility, offering two salt-water swimming pools (including one for children) and direct sea access via steps. Open year-round, the complex features a large solarium, support infrastructures, lifeguard supervision, and accessibility features such as ramps and amphibious chairs, making it a popular spot for both locals and visitors to enjoy swimming and relaxation beside the Atlantic Ocean

Fun Fact The Lido Complex is part of a network of sea-access facilities that transformed Funchal into a major coastal leisure area during the 20th century.
Tip Early mornings are ideal for swimming, before the area becomes busier.



Doca do Cavacas Natural Pools

Funchal

Located on the south coast in Funchal, between the Lido and Praia Formosa, Doca do Cavacas is a small volcanic-rock swimming complex where visitors can bathe in natural lava-formed pools with direct access to the Atlantic Ocean. Also known locally as "Poças do Gomes," it offers scenic views toward Cabo Girão and combines the unique experience of ocean bathing with basic support facilities such as showers, toilets, changing rooms and a bar, making it a popular seaside spot all year round.

Fun Fact Doca do Cavacas offers direct ocean views toward Cabo Girão, combining swimming with one of Madeira's most dramatic coastal backdrops. *Tip Low tide provides easier access to the pools and calmer water circulation.*



Piscina do Porto da Cruz

Porto da Cruz

Located in Porto da Cruz, on Madeira's northeastern coast, the Complexo Balnear do Porto da Cruz is a family-friendly seaside leisure area set along the town's oceanfront promenade. The complex features two saltwater swimming pools—one for adults and one for children—along with support facilities such as balneários (changing rooms), showers, toilets, a bar, sun loungers and parasols for rent, and nearby public parking. Visitors can enjoy refreshing dips, sunbathing and views of the Atlantic and surrounding mountains within a relaxed coastal setting

Fun Fact This pool sits right on the edge of the Atlantic, offering swimmers the sensation of ocean bathing with added protection. *Tip After swimming, take time to explore the village promenade and nearby surf spots.*



Poça das Lesmas

Seixal

Located in Seixal on Madeira's north coast, Poças das Lesmas (also known as the Seixal Natural Pools) are volcanic rock-formed tidal pools near Praia da Laje ("Jamaica Beach"), where dark basalt contrasts with the turquoise Atlantic. In 2024, lifeguard supervision was introduced and support facilities like showers, toilets and a bar. Although beautiful and sheltered, visitors should exercise caution when swimming, as waves can be unpredictable. The area is surrounded by scenic coastal landscapes, with hiking trails, waterfalls and Laurissilva forest nearby.

Fun Fact The name Poça das Lesmas reflects traditional local naming, often inspired by natural features or wildlife rather than formal designations.
Tip Footwear is recommended, as volcanic rock surfaces can be uneven and slippery.



Poço dos Chefes

Curral das Freiras

Poço dos Chefes is an informal freshwater bathing spot located in Curral das Freiras, formed in the bed of a mountain stream. The pool results from a small human-made retention structure created by locals to slow the water flow, allowing a deeper natural basin to form during periods of lower rainfall. Unlike Madeira's coastal natural pools, Poço dos Chefes is a river pool, fed by fresh mountain water and surrounded by steep valley walls. It has no official bathing status or infrastructure and is primarily used by locals during warmer months.

Fun Fact Poço dos Chefes is an example of how Madeiran communities historically adapted natural watercourses, using simple engineering to create functional spaces for daily life and leisure long before formal recreational facilities existed. *Tip This is an informal and unsupervised spot. Water levels and currents can change quickly after rainfall, so it should only be visited during stable weather and with caution.*



Porto Moniz Natural Swimming Pools

Porto Moniz

Located in the town of Porto Moniz on Madeira's north coast, the Piscinas Naturais do Porto Moniz are the iconic volcanic rock-formed seawater pools that have become the municipality's signature attraction. These natural pools are regularly refreshed by the tidal Atlantic water and offer a large swimming area (about 3800 m^2) with facilities including children's pool, playground, changing rooms, bar, first-aid post, sun loungers and parasols for hire, parking, and disabled access, making them ideal for family bathing and seaside relaxation.

Fun Fact These pools were formed by ancient lava flows, creating natural barriers that refresh continuously with ocean water. *Tip Arrive early in the day to enjoy clearer water and fewer visitors, especially in summer.*



08 · VIEWS

Viewpoints & photo spots

Altitude, access and when to turn up.

Madeira's Best Viewpoints — 12 Worth the Drive

Altitude, access and when to turn up.

Madeira has more viewpoints than villages. Some sit at 1,818 metres above sea level, some at five. The best ones are worth the drive; a few are worth the hike. Here are twelve we actually send friends to, spread across the north, south, east and west of our island, with honest notes on access, weather, and when to turn up. If a car park is chaos at sunrise, we say so. If the road in is a single-lane test of nerves, we say so. No filler.



Viewpoint Pico Do Areeiro

At 1,818m, the island's third-highest peak and the one you'll see on every postcard. The PR1 trail to Pico Ruivo starts here. Roads are paved but cloud sits on the summit half the year — check the live webcam in Areeiro before driving up.



Miradouro Da Eira Do Serrado

1,095m above Curral das Freiras, the old crater village locals call Nuns' Valley. Paved road all the way, large car park, café and souvenir shop at the top. Mornings are clearest; afternoons the valley fills with cloud from below.



Miradouro Do Ninho Da Manta

A 30-minute walk from the Areeiro car park along the PR1, clinging to the ridge at roughly 1,600m. Looks straight down into the Ribeira das Cortes valley. Go mid-morning — sunrise has become a scrum of tripods and it ruins the place.



Miradouro Paraiso Machico

Above the historic bay where Portuguese explorers first landed in 1419. East-facing, which means the light hits the water from the moment the sun clears the ridge. Paved road up, small car park. The town sits directly below you — Machico looks like a scale model from here. Combine with Pico do Facho five minutes away for a second angle on the same bay.



Miradouro Da Ponta Do Rosto

The easternmost stretch of Madeira, looking out over the São Lourenço cliffs and the Desertas on the horizon. Narrow road in, limited parking, strong wind every day of the year. Best at sunrise if you can stand upright.



Miradouro Ponta Do Furado

The far tip of the São Lourenço peninsula, only reached via the PR8 trail — about 3.5km each way over exposed volcanic ridges. No shade, no water, no shortcuts. Red rock, turquoise water, the Desertas in full view. Start before 9am.



Miradouro Do Guindaste

Two glass platforms bolted to the cliff above Faial, reopened in 2022. Looks east to Ponta de São Lourenço and, on clear days, across to Porto Santo 40km away. Paved access, small car park, quiet at sunrise. Vertigo warning.



Miradouro De Sao Cristovao

A long balcony over the Boaventura coast on the wild north shore, with Restaurante São Cristóvão next door for bolo do caco and espada. Easy roadside stop on the old ER101. Afternoon light turns the cliffs green and gold.



Miradouro Da Beira Da Quinta

A lay-by on the old coast road between Faial and Santana with the full north shore in one frame, Porto Santo visible on clear days. Pull-in parking only. Works even in fog — the clouds roll through below you. No facilities.



Miradouro Do Veu Da Noiva

The 90-metre Bride's Veil waterfall drops straight into the Atlantic at Seixal. Viewed from a platform on the ER101 — the lower access road to the waterfall base has been closed for years. Small car park, souvenir kiosk, toilets. Fifteen-minute stop.



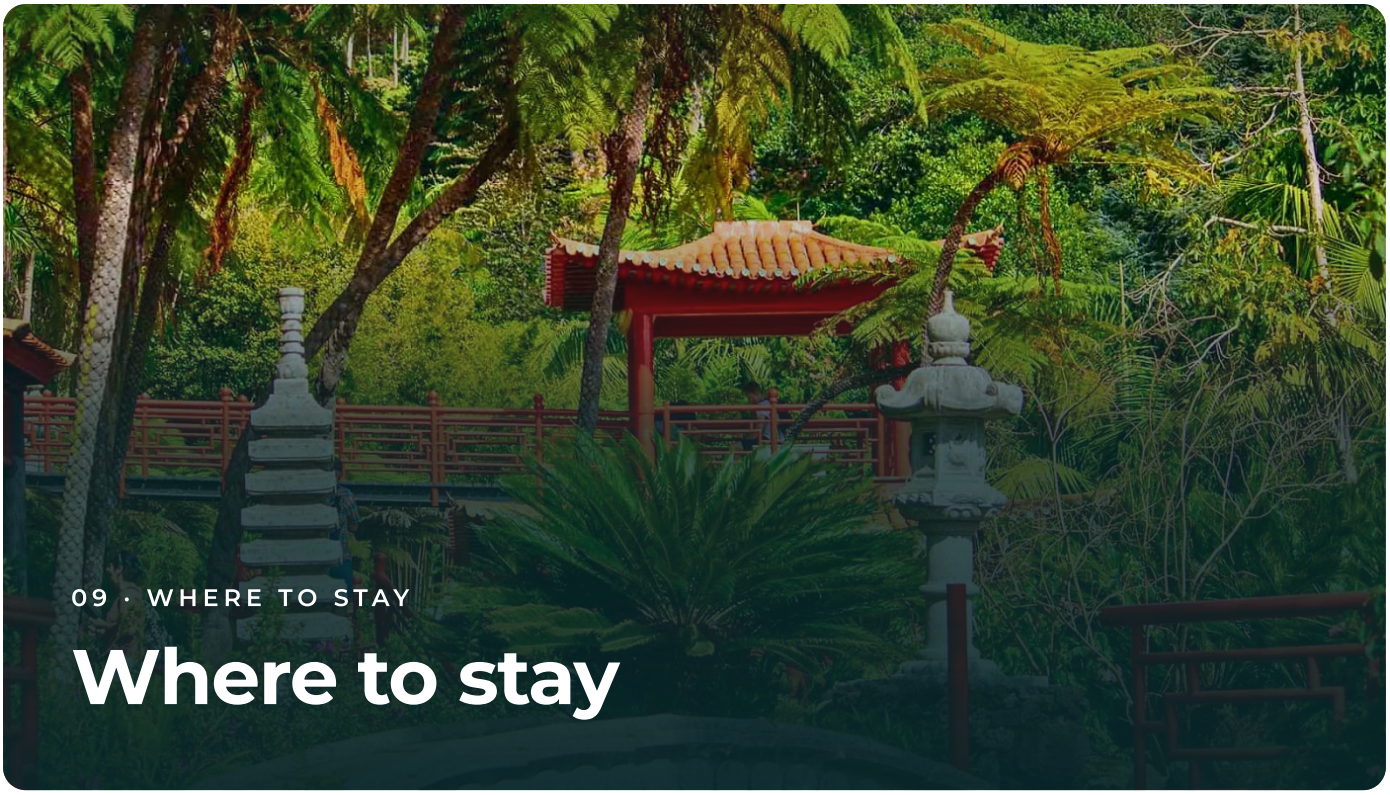
Miradouro Ilheus Da Ribeira Da Janela

Almost at sea level, looking at three volcanic sea stacks — one pierced by the window-shaped arch that gave Ribeira da Janela its name. Big car park, toilets, rock beach below. Pair with Fanal forest, a 15-minute drive uphill.



Miradouro Da Santinha

A short uphill from Porto Moniz on the ER101, looking down on the natural lava pools and Ilhéu Mole offshore. Plenty of parking, rarely crowded. Late afternoon light is best; the village glows white against the black rock.



09 · WHERE TO STAY

Where to stay

From the island’s grande dame to quiet boutique quintas — a shortlist worth your money.



Belmond Reid's Palace

★★★★★

Funchal · €€€€

★ 4.8 · 1922 reviews

Madeira's most iconic hotel since 1891. Set on a cliff with 4 hectares of subtropical gardens. 6 restaurants including William (1 Michelin star). Spa by the sea, 3 pools, direct ocean access.

- 6 restaurants incl. William (Michelin)
- 3 pools + direct sea access
- 4 hectares subtropical gardens



The Cliff Bay

★★★★★

Funchal · €€€€

★ 4.8 · 1163 reviews

5-star on a natural peninsula. Home to Il Gallo d'Oro - Madeira's only 2-Michelin-star restaurant. 3 pools, private sea access.

- Il Gallo d'Oro (2 Michelin)
- Private sea access
- 3 pools + jacuzzi



Savoy Palace

★★★★★

Funchal · €€€€

★ 4.7 · 2403 reviews

Modern luxury benchmark. Member of The Leading Hotels of the World. 6 restaurants, 4 pools, full spa. 1,300+ reviews.

- Spa, fitness & tennis
- 4 pools (indoor + outdoor)
- 6 restaurants & bars



Three House Hotel

★★★★

Funchal · €€

4-star boutique in Old Town. Rooftop bar, restaurant, pool. Location 9.8, couples 9.9, staff 9.9. 1,130+ reviews.

- Rooftop bar - spectacular views
- Pool & garden
- 9.8 location - Old Town



Castanheiro Boutique Hotel

★★★★

Funchal · €€€

Boutique hotel in historic centre. Rooftop pool, spa with hydrotherapy. 9.9 location score.

- Rooftop pool + hydromassage
- Spa, sauna, Turkish bath
- 9.9 location score



Quinta do Furao

★★★★

Santana · €€

★ 4.8 · 2012 reviews

Clifftop in Santana with north coast views. Gourmet restaurant, wine cellar. 1,760+ reviews.

- Wine cellar & gourmet restaurant
- Cliff-edge restaurant
- 2 pools + sauna



Estalagem Ponta do Sol

★★★★

Ponta do Sol · €€

★ 4.6 · 1061 reviews

Renovated quinta on a cliff in Madeira's sunniest village. 2 pools including infinity. 1,125+ reviews.

- Sunniest village in Madeira
- 2 pools incl. infinity pool
- Spa, sauna, massages



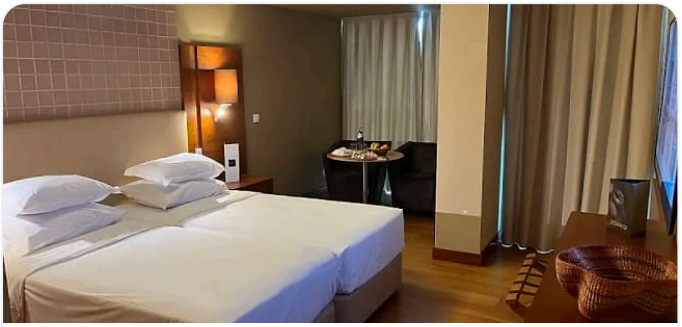
Barcelo Funchal Oldtown

★★★★★

Funchal · €€€

Design hotel in central Funchal. Rooftop pool with panoramic views. 2,250+ reviews, 9.8 location score.

- Rooftop pool, panoramic views
- 2 restaurants + bar
- 9.8 location score



The Views Baia

★★★★

Funchal · €€

★ 4.5 · 3273 reviews

Adults-only with Desarma (1 Michelin star). Four Feelings Spa with free water circuit. Live music bar.

- Desarma (Michelin)
- Four Feelings Spa (free circuit)
- Indoor + outdoor pools



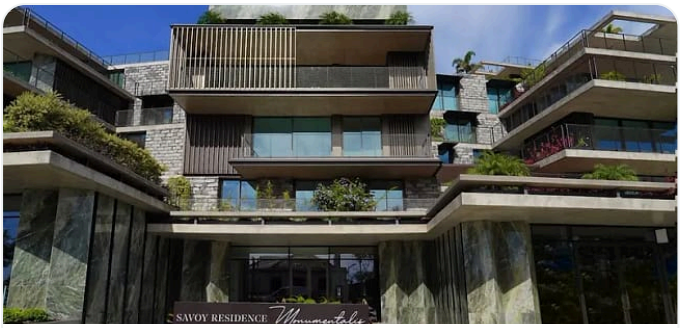
NEXT by Savoy

★★★★

Funchal · €€

Savoy Signature on waterfront. Rooftop pool, ocean dock for swimming, spa. 2,330+ reviews.

- Rooftop pool - top of Funchal
- Ocean dock for swimming
- Spa, sauna, yoga

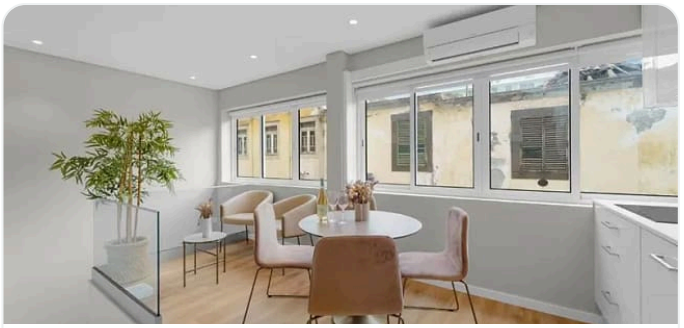


Savoy Residence N&N

Funchal · €€€

140m2 luxury apartment. Private pool + complex pool. Sea-view terrace. Staff 10/10.

- Private pool + complex pool
- Sea-view terrace
- 10/10 - staff 10/10



Cozy Apartment

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10 · WHAT'S ON

Events 2026, month by month

Carnaval in Madeira — What to Expect in Funchal

Two parades, one week, and the bits the tourist board leaves out.

Carnaval in Funchal is two events pretending to be one. The Saturday before Ash Wednesday brings the Cortejo Alegorico — the big allegoric parade with feathers, floats and the samba schools down Avenida do Mar. Tuesday belongs to the Trapalhao, a rougher comic parade where offices, villages and football clubs take the mickey out of the year's news in Portuguese so local nobody outside Madeira gets the jokes. Between the two, the city barely sleeps. We've watched it since we were children, taken friends for the Saturday show, and we'll say the quiet part out loud: it is not Rio. It is smaller, more family-run, and better for it. Here's how to do it without getting fleeced or freezing in a bleacher seat.

What Carnaval actually is

The main event is the Cortejo Alegorico on the Saturday night — seven or eight troupes, around 1,000 dancers, costumes sewn through the winter by hand in workshops across Funchal. Each troupe has a theme and competes for a prize. It runs down Avenida do Mar from about 9 pm and lasts roughly two hours.

The Trapalhao on Shrove Tuesday afternoon is the one locals turn out for. Neighbourhoods, workplaces and school groups march in home-made costumes, satirising the year's politics, football transfers and island gossip. The humour is Madeiran and Portuguese — you'll laugh at the visuals even if the punchlines pass you by. Starts around 4 pm, same avenue, finished before dark.

Around those two parades you get school parades through the week, the children's parade on Thursday or Friday, and music in Praça do Municipio most evenings. It's free unless you want a seat.

Carnaval 2026 dates

Carnaval 2026 runs 14 to 17 February. Saturday 14 February is the Cortejo Alegorico. Tuesday 17 February is the Trapalhao. Ash Wednesday falls on 18 February and the city goes quiet again overnight.

School and neighbourhood parades spread across the preceding week — the full programme is published by Camara Municipal do Funchal in late January. If the dates above are the only thing you pin down, you'll see the two parades that matter.

Where to watch

Avenida do Mar is the parade route — the seafront road between the marina and the cable car. Ticketed bleacher seats line the central stretch in front of the CR7 statue and the Camara stage. Expect to pay €15 to €30 depending on where you sit; tickets go on sale at the Camara in late January and sell out for the Saturday allegoric.

Free standing is fine if you arrive early. The sides of the avenue — the pavements behind the bleachers and the stretches beyond the ticketed zone toward the marina — open to anyone. Get there 45 minutes before kick-off for the Saturday parade, 30 minutes for the Trapalhao.

Our honest advice: pay for a seat on Saturday if you want to see the costumes properly, and stand for free on Tuesday. Tuesday is about the crowd reaction, not the view.

Practical

Book the hotel by November. Funchal fills up for Carnaval week and the central hotels — Savoy, Pestana, the ones along Avenida do Mar — are the first to go. Leave it to January and you'll be sleeping in Canico.

Pickpockets work the crowd on Saturday night. It is not the Ramblas, but it's the one night of the year we tell visitors to keep phones and wallets in front pockets. Leave the good watch at the hotel.

No umbrellas in the bleachers — security won't let you in with one, and you'll block the people behind anyway. Hooded jacket if rain is forecast. February nights run 14 to 16 degrees on the seafront; add a layer once you stop moving.

Street parties and the night before

The Friday night before the allegoric parade is when Funchal actually lets go. Bars along Rua de Santa Maria in the Zona Velha stay open past 3 am, the Praca do Municipio has live music, and the streets between the cathedral and the market fill with people in costume drifting from one place to the next. No ticket, no plan — wander and follow the noise.

School parades earlier in the week are worth catching if you're here with kids. Smaller crowds, younger dancers, same avenue. Check the Camara programme for times.

How it differs from Rio

Visitors arrive expecting Brazilian Carnival and leave pleasantly surprised it isn't. Funchal's is smaller — one main avenue, one night for the big parade, crowds in the tens of thousands rather than millions. The samba schools compete but the prize money is modest and the rivalry friendly.

It is also more parade-focused and less street-party than Rio or Salvador. The blocos you'd find in Brazil don't really happen here — people watch the parades, then go home or go for dinner. Good for families, good for visitors who want to see a show without queuing for four hours to get into a block party.

And the Trapalhao is the thing Brazil doesn't have — a full comic parade built around local humour. It's the one you'll remember even if you don't get every joke.

Madeira Flower Festival 2026: Dates, Parades, Practical Guide

30 April – 24 May 2026 in Funchal. Two allegoric parades this year: 3 May and 17 May.

Every May, Funchal turns itself over to flowers. Floats, costumes, carpets laid along Avenida Arriaga, and about 1,500 performers — most of them children — walking a seafront route in hand-sewn floral dress. The Cortejo Alegórico has run in its current form since 1979, and the Muro da Esperança children's ceremony has been part of the opening weekend for just as long. Funchal's parade associations build the floats themselves across the year. It's a civic effort, not a commissioned production — which is why the atmosphere on parade day feels closer to a town festival than a tourist event, despite the crowds.

The 2026 programme — dates and venues

How to watch the main parade (17 May)

Free standing along Avenida do Mar is the default and it's how most locals watch. Be in place by 14:30 for a front-row spot near the start of the route, by Teatro Baltazar Dias. Further along the avenue the crowd thins and you can still see the floats pass around 16:00. Café terraces on Avenida Arriaga and around Praça do Povo get booked by regulars weeks ahead — ask your hotel to call a day or two before the parade, not the morning of.

Seated tickets on the Avenida Arriaga bleachers are sold through the parade associations, the Funchal Tourism Office and some hotels. Previous years have been around €30 per seat; official 2026 pricing hasn't been confirmed by Turismo da Madeira. Pickpockets work the denser parts of the crowd, as at any large European street event; keep your phone in a zipped pocket, not a back one.

Where to stay during the festival

Funchal centre hotels fill up by February for festival week. If you're reading this now, book tonight — not tomorrow. If the centre is gone, Câmara de Lobos is ten minutes west by car and Caniço is fifteen minutes east, both with regular taxis and decent hotels. A room with a sea-facing balcony near Avenida do Mar is the one genuine luxury for this week — you get the parade from your own terrace.

Parking in central Funchal vanishes on parade days. Avenida do Mar closes entirely; surrounding streets go one-way or shut. Use your hotel's garage or the public garage under the marina (Anadia/Almirante Reis) and walk. Do not drive in on the afternoon of 3 or 17 May.

What else to see the same week

The flower theme spills beyond the parades. The Mercado dos Lavradores is busier but worth the early start — regional flowers, poncha, bolo do caco. Monte Palace gardens and the Jardim Botânico are at their best in May, and the cable car up to Monte runs as normal.

New Year's Eve in Funchal: what to actually expect

Every 31 December, Funchal bay turns into a 270-degree firework amphitheatre. The city held the Guinness World Record in 2006 for the largest pyrotechnic display on earth, and the scale has not dropped since. We live here. We have watched it from the ridges, from the harbour wall, from friends' kitchens in São Martinho. Below is what we tell family when they fly in for the week.

The fireworks, in numbers

The show runs about eight minutes of full pyro, with roughly sixteen minutes counting the build-up from 23:50. Twelve-plus launch points line the bay: from Loo Rock and the marina at the west to Forte de São Tiago and the cliffs above Barreirinha to the east, plus higher positions up the hillside in Monte and São João. Every direction you face, something is going off. The 2006 Guinness entry logged 66,326 fireworks in under seven minutes — the display has evolved but the choreography is still the selling point. Locals time the build-up: the city bells at midnight, the ships in the bay sound their horns, then the first salvo lifts off from the harbour.

Where to watch — honest rankings

Each viewpoint trades off sightline, crowd, and getting home after.

Practical things that catch people out

The city shuts in stages. Avenida do Mar closes to traffic from 18:00. From 21:00 no cars move in the centre at all — barriers go up on Avenida Arriaga, Rua Dr Fernão de Ornelas, and the roads feeding the marina. If you are staying in the hotel zone, walk in along the sea promenade (20–30 minutes from Lido to the harbour). Taxis will not enter the perimeter. Public buses run a reduced night service; Uber and Bolt work in Madeira but surge hard after midnight. ATMs around the Sé cathedral run out of cash by 22:00 — withdraw earlier. Bars in Zona Velha stop serving bottled drinks outdoors from around 23:00 for safety; plastic cups only.

Hotels — when to book

Funchal has roughly 14,000 hotel beds and they sell out for NYE before most people think about the trip. Rule of thumb: book by July of the previous year for the Lido five-stars, by September for three- and four-stars, and by October if you are flexible on neighbourhood. Expect minimum stays of four to seven nights over the New Year window, and rates two to three times the shoulder-season price. Gala dinners are usually mandatory on 31 December at four- and five-star properties and priced separately from the room. If the big names are gone, look at Estalagem Ponta do Sol, Quinta Jardins do Lago, or aparthotels in São Martinho — all within taxi distance of a viewpoint.

The cruise ships in the bay

Between ten and fifteen cruise ships anchor in Funchal bay for the night — Cunard's Queen Mary 2 is a regular, along with MSC, AIDA, Marella and P&O. The ships line up as a floodlit backdrop to the fireworks and sound their horns at midnight. If you want to be on one, book twelve to eighteen months ahead through the cruise line directly; Madeira NYE itineraries are among the first to sell out each year. Landside viewing is better value and frankly a better show — you see the ships and the fireworks. From a deck, you only see the fireworks.

How Madeirans actually celebrate

The tourist bits are real, but there is a domestic version running in parallel. At home we open a bottle of sparkling Bairrada (the mainland Portuguese sparkling, not champagne — this has been the island's NYE wine for decades) and a small bowl of raisins. You eat twelve raisins at midnight, one per bell strike, each one a wish for the new year. The midnight kiss is standard. The cake on the table is bolo de mel de cana — a dense, dark molasses and spice cake made with sugarcane honey, baked in November, traditionally broken by hand rather than cut. Many families also keep a small piece of the previous year's bolo de mel as a charm. After the fireworks, the walk back through the old town is half the night — people singing, bars open until 04:00, queues for bifanas at the kiosks on Rua de Santa Maria.



11 · PRACTICAL

Getting around

Driving, parking and the small stuff that trips people up.

Driving in Madeira — Everything You Need to Know

Roads, tolls, parking, fuel, and the bits Google Maps doesn't tell you.

Driving here is not like driving on the mainland. The island is 57 km across and you're never far from a tunnel — we've got over 150 of them, including one that runs almost 3 km under the mountain. The VR1 motorway hugs the south coast and gets you from the airport to Funchal in twenty minutes, toll-free. Step off it onto the old ER101 and you're suddenly on hairpins carved into cliffs, cows grazing above you, fishing villages below. Go north and the road climbs past 1,000 m, where the weather changes in the time it takes to light a cigarette. None of this is scary once you know what you're doing. Drive cautiously, park with a plan, and the island opens up. Here's what we'd tell a friend before they collected the keys.

Hire car basics

Most people collect at Madeira Airport (FNC) in Santa Cruz — the desks are a two-minute walk from arrivals and the multi-storey is next door. A handful of agencies also deliver to hotels in Funchal, which saves the €20 taxi if you're not driving on day one.

EU and UK licences are accepted as they are — no International Driving Permit needed. Minimum age is 21 with at least one year of licence; under-25s usually pay a young-driver fee. Automatics exist but book early, especially July to September. Most locals drive manual and so does most of the fleet.

Take the insurance seriously. Basic CDW leaves an excess of €1,000–€1,500, and the narrow lanes in old Funchal take wing mirrors off weekly. A zero-excess top-up is worth the €8–€12 a day.

Roads to know

The VR1 is the spine of the island — a proper dual carriageway with long tunnels that links the airport, Funchal, Ribeira Brava and the west. Speed limit is 100 km/h, traffic flows well outside rush hour, and it's free. No tolls anywhere on Madeira.

The ER101 is the old coast road, mostly replaced by the VR1 but still in use on sections the motorway skips — the stretch past Paul do Mar, the climb above São Vicente, the coastal loop around Porto Moniz. Expect hairpins, one-lane tunnels with traffic lights, and the occasional waterfall on the windscreen. Slow down, enjoy it.

Mountain roads to Pico do Arieiro, Achada do Teixeira and across Paul da Serra are fully paved and fine in a normal hatchback. You don't need a 4x4 for any public road on the island — we'd rather you spent the money on a better car with working AC.

Parking

In Funchal, aim for the underground garages below the marina — Anadia and Almirante Reis are the two locals use. Around €1.20/hour, open 24/7, and five minutes from the cathedral. Street parking is blue-zone paid (Mon–Sat, free Sundays) and enforced. Most restaurants out of town have free parking, and many Funchal hotels include it.

Mountain car parks are the pinch point. Pico do Arieiro and Rabaçal fill up between 7 and 9 am in summer — after that you'll be circling, or walking the last kilometre uphill. Go early or go late (after 3 pm). Beaches like Praia do Garajau and Calheta have small car parks that fill on weekends; Seixal and Porto do Seixal have more space.

Fuel

Petrol stations are spread across the island — Galp, Repsol and BP are the main chains, and every town of any size has one. Prices in 2026 sit around €1.70–€1.85 per litre for unleaded, a touch more for diesel. Cards work everywhere, including contactless; you rarely need cash.

Fill up before you head up. Paul da Serra, the high plateau in the west, has no petrol stations at all, and neither does the stretch between Santana and São Vicente on the north coast. A full tank lasts most visitors the whole week.

What to watch out for

Basalt gets slippery when wet. The roads are well surfaced but the stone underneath loses grip fast in rain — brake earlier, take bends slower, and give the car in front more room. Morning fog on the north coast and above 1,000 m can drop visibility to twenty metres in minutes.

On Achada do Teixeira and the road to Encumeada you'll meet cows and sheep on the tarmac. They don't move for horns. Wait, go round them slowly.

Speed cameras sit on the VR1 near Câmara de Lobos and in the tunnels approaching Funchal. Limits drop to 80 km/h inside tunnels and they're enforced. Keep left only to overtake — Portuguese drivers will flash you otherwise.

Rent a car →

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