

A geology lesson in the Azores

Spend three unforgettable days together as a family, visiting the islands of Faial, Pico and São Jorge. Whales, mountains and caves... these are just some of the attractions of this particular suggestion.

The city of Horta is the starting point for a thrilling experience that all of your family will love – a boat ride in which you'll be able to watch finback whales, sperm whales and dolphins from close up. Later, at the Peter Sport Café, a popular meeting point for yachtsmen from all over the world, you can explain to the children that, before mobile phones and the internet, it was here that seafarers used to leave messages for one another. And don't miss the Scrimshaw Museum, with its sculptures and engravings carved out of whale bones.

Head for the centre of the island to have a look at Caldeira, a volcanic crater measuring two kilometres in diameter, and then, at the Capelinhos Visitor Centre, discover the history of the volcano that rose up from the bottom of the ocean in 1957. Return to Horta for a visit to the historic centre, or enjoy a few moments of relaxation at the beach of Praia de Porto Pim, a safe bay where the little ones can splash about to their hearts' content. In the evening, take a walk through the Marina and ask your children to help you interpret the brightly-coloured paintings and drawings left by seafarers on the walls and pavement.

The next morning, it's only a 30-minute boat ride to the island of Pico. You'll disembark in the town of Madalena, where the Wine Museum tells you the history of one of the island's main products. Visit Lajido da Criação Velha or Lajido de Santa Luzia, to see how vines are grown between walls of volcanic rock, a landscape that UNESCO has classified as World Heritage.

In Lajes and São Roque do Pico, the Whalers' Museum and the Whaling Industry Museum evoke memories of whale hunting, an activity that is no longer performed today. Another great adventure for the family will be to go down into the Gruta das Torres, a lava tube that stretches deep down into the bowels of the Earth over a distance of 5,150 metres. Return to Madalena along the coastal road and challenge the youngsters to discover the Arcos do Cachorro, a group of rock formations that resemble the shape of a dog.

São Jorge is the island where you'll be spending your last day, famous for the cheese that has been produced here since the 16th century from the milk of the many cows you'll see on all of the islands. Visit a factory at Velas or Topo and show your children exactly how this tasty product is made. The fajãs – fertile plains sandwiched between the sea and colossal ravines – are another trademark feature of this island. Challenge your children once again, and follow the marked footpaths, like the one between Pico do Pedro and Fajã do Ouvidor. Starting at an altitude of 800 metres, you'll reach the island's highest point at Pico da Esperança (1053 metres), and from there you descend to sea level. This breathtaking walk is the perfect ending to your tour of the three islands.



Points of interest along the Itinerary

- Horta
- Peter Café Sport
- Museu de Scrimshaw
- Vulcão dos Capelinhos - Faial
- Marina da Horta
- Museu do Vinho
- Museu dos Baleeiros
- Museu da Indústria Baleeira
- Monumento Natural Regional da Gruta das Torres
- Parque Florestal da Silveira



Points of interest along the Itinerary

Peter Café Sport

Rua Tenente Valadim, 9 9900-027 Horta
Tel. : 292292327
Fax : 292391287
Website : www.petercafesport.com
E-mail : peterpt@mail.telepac.pt

Museu de Scrimshaw

Rua José Azevedo, 9
9900-027 Horta
Tel. : +351 292 292 327
Fax : +351 292 391 287
Website : www.petercafesport.com
E-mail : peter.pt@mail.telepac.pt

Marina da Horta

Cais de St^a Cruz
9900-017 Horta (Ilha do Faial)
Tel. : +351 292 391 693
Fax : +351 292 293 986
E-mail : hortamarina@aptosa.com

Museu do Vinho

Rua do Carmo
9950-364 Madalena do Pico
Tel. : +351 292 622 147
Fax : +351 292 672 276
E-mail : museu.pico.info@azores.gov.pt

Museu dos Baleeiros

Rua dos Baleeiros, nº 13
9930-143 Lajes do Pico
Tel. : +351 292 679 240
Fax : +351 292 672 276
E-mail : museu.pico.info@azores.gov.pt

Museu da Indústria Baleeira

Rua do Poço
9940-361 São Roque do Pico
Tel. : +351 292 642 096
Fax : +351 292 672 276
E-mail : museu.pico.info@azores.gov.pt

Monumento Natural Regional da Gruta das Torres

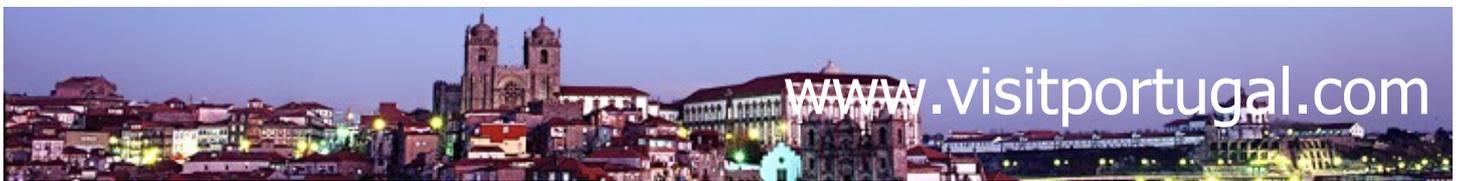
Tel. : +351 913 459 081
Website : www.montanheiros.com



E-mail : nucleodopico@montanheiros.com; grutadastorres@sapo.pt

Parque Florestal da Silveira

Ribeira Seca - Calheta - Ilha de São Jorge



Suggestions

Azores: Capelinhos in Faial

The Ponta dos Capelinhos, at the far western end of the island, is one of the main tourist attractions due to its unusual landscape in comparison with the lush green vegetation of the rest of the island.

The whole of the archipelago is of volcanic origin and the Ponta dos Capelinhos is one of the places where we can see what was left after the last great moments of volcanic activity on Faial.

The Capelinhos volcano entered into activity in 1957/58, adding a whole new part to the island, formed by the sedimentation of its ashes. Somewhere in this arid landscape, frequently compared to the view that we might have of a lunar landscape, stands the old lighthouse, now buried amidst the ashes. The history of the volcano's eruption and its consequences for the region is expertly shown in a small exhibition of photographs.

In the middle of Faial's exuberant vegetation, let yourself be pleasantly surprised by a landscape that is both desert-like and yet magical at the same time.

Azores: Caldeira do Faial

Now designated a nature reserve, Caldeira is one of the last refuges of the laurisilva forest, the original vegetation that covered the island before its human settlement.

From the top of the cone, you can look down into the vast crater, 2000 metres in diameter and 400 metres deep, all covered in spectacular hues of green, with a small lake at the bottom.

The climb to the top is an extremely beautiful walk and, along the way, you will see enormous hedges of hydrangeas dividing the fields, as well as having the chance to enjoy spectacular views over the city of Horta and the islands of Pico and São Jorge. There is a footpath all the way around its perimeter.

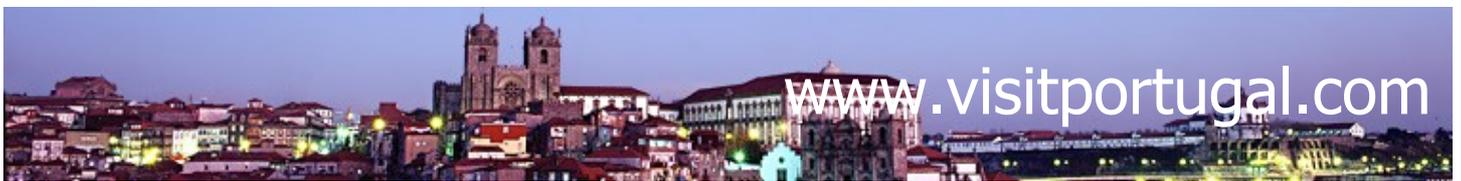
Although there are countless cauldrons and craters to be found all over the archipelago, the Caldeira do Faial is special because of its great size and extraordinary beauty. Don't miss the spectacle waiting for your visit from sunrise to sunset!

Azores: whaling industry

Once the island's second largest town, São Roque still shows many signs of its historical importance in its various remains, such as its heritage of religious buildings and its many interesting houses that were built very much in their own particular style. At Cais do Pico, there is a commercial port and an old fishing harbour that played a major part in the historical activity of whale hunting, one which has a long tradition in these parts.

Pico began by providing harpooners to the American whaling boats, which came here to hunt for sperm whales until the end of the 19th century. After this, the activity was then continued at the initiative of the island's own inhabitants, who ventured forth to sea in narrow rowing-boats.

There are two museums that have remained to tell the history of whaling. One is the Museu da Indústria Baleeira (the Whaling Industry Museum), housed in the old Whaleboat Factory in the town of São Roque, which was in business from 1946 to 1984. This museum was opened in May 1994 and is internationally considered to be one of the best industrial museums of its kind, exhibiting boilers, furnaces, machinery and other equipment used in the exploitation and transformation of whales into oil and flour. It offers you the chance to make an interesting discovery about the ancient practices linked to a now extinct activity, which only a very few people actually know about.



Climb to Pico, Azores

Considered one of the world's most beautiful volcanoes, Pico, when seen from afar, looks easy to climb and therefore presents an obvious challenge to many visitors to the island.

The footpath begins close to Cabeço das Cabras (roughly 1200 metres). After this, you are faced with a climb that calls for experience and some physical preparation, appropriate clothes and footwear, and the further absolutely essential requirement of being accompanied by a guide. Altogether, the ascent and descent of the mountain will take 4 to 5 hours, allowing you to appreciate natural phenomena and landscapes of rare beauty.

Furna is a hollow inside the cone of the volcano, covered by thick endemic vegetation, which becomes scarcer and scarcer until it disappears at an altitude of roughly 2000 metres.

The central crater or Pico Grande, roughly 700 metres in diameter, is truly majestic. From inside this, there springs the Piquinho, a volcanic cone that rises some 50 metres above the edge of the crater, with three or four fumaroles at the top.

If there are no clouds, you can see the other islands of the central group (Faial, São Jorge, Graciosa and Terceira). Even though you may be feeling tired, we are sure that the wonderful panoramic view that you enjoy from the top will more than make up for your great effort. We'd just like to make one more small suggestion, however: Sunrise seen from the very top of Pico is an absolutely unforgettable spectacle!

The Fajãs in the Azores

Although they exist on almost every island, they are to be found in their greatest numbers on the island of São Jorge, where there are 46 fajãs in total, mostly situated at the bottom of high cliffs.

The island's northern coast is a succession of 30 tiny fajãs lying at the bottom of ravines hundreds of metres high. Because of their singular appearance, the following are undoubtedly the most notable: the Caldeira de Santo Cristo, with an underwater cave and a lagoon; the Fajã dos Cubres, with another absolutely crystalline lagoon, and the Fajã do Ouvidor, its edges turned into pretty lacework by the sea.

It should be mentioned that the lagoon of the Caldeira de Santo Cristo is the only place in the Azores where clams are to be found, and truly delicious ones, as it happens.

The fajãs are normally very fertile, although it required a great effort over several centuries to cultivate them. The recent abandonment of many of them now makes it possible to enjoy some fascinating journeys back in time to discover the houses, water-mills and springs used by the population that lived there for centuries.

São Jorge cheese

Its vast green fields are grazed by the countless cows that provide the milk for the island's traditional dairy industry, in which the art of cheese making dates back to the 16th century, possibly as a result of the influence of the Flemish settlers who established themselves there.

Considered to be the best cheese in the Azores, the cheese from the island of São Jorge has gradually gained an important international reputation and is now exported to several countries, where it is greatly appreciated for the spicy flavour that it acquires over time, making it a most tasty snack. Consisting of a hard or semi-hard paste, between 7 and 12 kilos in weight and with a powerful aroma, the cheese of São Jorge is a delight for all of its many appreciators, who frequently also use it for cooking purposes, in dishes that range from the most simple to the most sophisticated. It is cured for several months in rooms that are kept at a constant temperature and its manufacturing process still follows the traditional artisanal methods and the same initial formula. It is made at small farms dotted all over this island, which is yet another excellent reason for travelling to all of the island's main viewpoints.

Velas and Calheta are the main cities, but from Pico da Esperança you can see all the other islands in the central group of the archipelago.



Useful contacts

Posto de Turismo - Horta

Rua Vasco da Gama
9900-117 Horta
Ilha do Faial
Tel. : +351 292 292 237
Fax : +351 292 292 006
Website : www.visitazores.travel
E-mail : turismoacores@visitazores.travel

Posto de Turismo - Pico

Rua Conselheiro Terra Pinheiro
9950-329 Madalena
Ilha do Pico
Tel. : +351 292 623 524
Fax : +351 292 623 524
Website : www.visitazores.travel
E-mail : turismoacores@visitazores.travel

Posto de Turismo - São Jorge

Rua Conselheiro Dr. José Pereira nº 1 r/c
9800-530 Velas
Ilha de São Jorge
Tel. : +351 295 412 440
Fax : +351 295 412 491
Website : www.visitazores.travel
E-mail : turismoacores@visitazores.travel