
Faial, blue, cosmopolitan island

ABOUT



Photo: Publiçor

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Faial is located in the central group of the Azores archipelago, and is part of the so called "triangle islands", together with São Jorge and the neighbouring Island of Pico, separated by the Faial Channel, a narrow sea inlet about 8 km wide.

The Island covers an area of about 172km², and is 21km long, with a maximum width of 14km. It was discovered in 1427 and colonised in 1432 by a number of Flemish settlers. It was given the name Faial because there are many beech trees here (faias), but no other island can boast such a huge mass of **hydrangeas** in different shades of blue, which frame the houses, separate the fields and border the roads, justifying the **nickname Blue Island**.

Faial underwent considerable development from the 17th century on, making it an **important trading post** due to its geographical position as a safe haven between Europe and the Americas. More recently it was the communications hub between the continents and **today is a mandatory point of reference for international yachting**.

The **highest point** is **Cabeço Gordo**, in the centre of the island, at 1,043m above sea level. It is a **magnificent natural viewpoint** which in fine weather enables you to see all the islands of the triangle and as far as Graciosa.

Close by lies a **huge crater** called **Caldeira**, about 2km in diameter and 400m deep. It is surrounded by blue hydrangeas and lush vegetation, amongst which cedars, junipers, beeches, ferns and mosses stand out, and some of which are important examples of the original vegetation of the island. This area, the **Faial Natural Park**, was the **first Portuguese tourist destination awarded the EDEN prize** (European Destination of Excellence).

Its geographic situation provides the city of **Horta** with unbeatable views of the island of Pico and sometimes S. Jorge. It is flanked by **Ponta da Espalamaca** and **Monte da Guia**, whose **viewpoints**, together with those on **Monte Carneiro**, offer rich panoramic views over city and the immensity of the sea.

At the western end of the island, the majestic **Capelinhos Volcano** is witness to the last volcanic eruption in the Azores during 1957 and 1958, which added new earth to the existing land. Entering this area is like landing on a lunar surface. You can visit the **Interpretation Centre** here, equipped with the most modern presentation and multimedia techniques. A visit to this centre ends with a climb to the top of the lighthouse for an unparalleled visual and emotional experience.

The **Capelo road**, en route to the south coast, offers one of the most beautiful panoramas on Faial - **Varadouro** - a beautiful bay, dominated by the jagged black rocks of the Castelo Branco hill, vineyards and flowers. This holiday area par excellence has a number of **pools** formed by crevices in the volcanic basalt rocks and **hot springs**.

The **North Coast** offers a succession of panoramic views. Access to this area is from Horta, following the coastal road via **Praia do Almojarife** and the town of **Pedro Miguel**. Further on, you come across Ribeirinha, Cedros and Ribeira Funda, and you continue on the same road to get to Praia do Norte, where the Costa Brava viewpoint, 320m above sea level, overlooks Fajã. Next, Fajã da Praia and Norte Pequeno offer a contrast between the fields of black lava and the lush vegetation.

Castelo Branco and Feteira, on the south coast, provide breathtaking scenery of the island of Pico. Near Horta, Lajinha and Ponta Furada are notable for their sulphur pits and curious lava arches.

Nowadays the **Island of Faial** is a perfect destination for all **nature lovers**, and its **marina in Horta** is one of its greatest features – a welcoming place, through which the most diverse nationalities and cultures have passed for many years.

Horta, a picturesque little town, has a lot to visit. The **churches of São Salvador, Nossa Senhora da Carmo and S. Francisco** (including the **Museum of Sacred Art** and the **Horta Museum**) are just a few examples.

Don't miss

- > take a picture of one of the island's symbols - the mills
 - > visit the Botanical Garden of Faial, at Quinta de São Lourenço, in the Flamengos valley
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ACTIVITIES

The link between Faial and the sea remains strong. Horta is an important centre for whale watching, swimming with dolphins, scuba diving and boat trips. It is possible to go through the channels between the islands in well-preserved whalers or rented kayaks.

Good conditions for other water activities like sailing, windsurfing, rowing and surfing can be found in different parts of the island.

On land, the dozens of miles of trails that run through the mountainous interior of the island and the coastal areas offer unforgettable excursions on foot or by bike. And the adrenaline flows on the circuits suitable for mountain biking, 4x4 jeep and kart-cross.

GASTRONOMY AND HANDICRAFTS

Octopus stewed in wine is one of the most typical dishes of Faial. At the table, the maritime importance extends to fish soup and bouillabaisse, preferably accompanied by bread and corn cake. As for meat, sausages and black pudding are served as a meal or snack, accompanied by yam.

Typical desserts include Fofas do Faial: dumplings flavoured with fennel seeds and baked in the oven before being filled with a cream based on egg yolks, milk, sugar, flour and lemon zest.

As for Handicrafts, there is a predominance of pieces made of sperm whale bone and tooth, varied embroidery, pieces and objects in rattan and straw, fish scale flowers, as can be seen in the interesting Art & Craft School of Capelo.

FESTIVALS

While the Feast of the Holy Spirit is also a tradition in Faial, the great religious festival on the island is the annual Feast of Nossa Senhora das Angústias. The procession and popular festivities fill the streets of Horta on the sixth Sunday after Easter, in a celebration that dates back to the time of settlement and relates to an image brought from Flanders.

St. John is one of the most popular patron saints and is celebrated on 24th June. This celebration originates from the

time of colonisation of the island by noblemen coming from Terceira.

In August, the deep blue sea dominates the festivities. On the 1st, to celebrate the Feast of Our Lady of Guia, a procession of boats escorts the image of the Virgin from Porto Pim beach to the port of Horta. The excitement continues with Semana do Mar (Week of the Sea). Initially dedicated to yachtsmen, this festival week is now shared by visitors and Faial residents alike. The extensive programme of activities includes concerts, craft exhibitions, a food fair, regattas for whaling boats and various water sports competitions that bring Horta and Porto Pim bays to life.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Apart from taxis, car rental services and tours organised by a number of travel agencies, Faial is served by a public transport network with several routes to anywhere on the island. The following public transport networks operate on Faial:

Route: Horta> Feteira> Castelo Branco> Capelo> Norte Pequeno> Praia Norte> Pedro Miguel> Praia do Almojarife> Lomba> Horta

This route runs daily from June to September. During the winter, it runs on Monday and Thursday only.

For more information please consult the following websites:

- <http://turismo.cmhorta.pt>

- www.visitazores.com

Try Horta on Wheels, themed heritage routes that enable you to get to know the most important historical developments on Horta. Visits are by:

-Horta on Wheels Kits - by electric bike (plus accessories) and the Guide to Historical Horta On Wheels.

-Tourist Mini-Bus - with stops that provide information not only on the Mini-Bus route, but to the related history as well.

More information at: <http://turismo.cmhorta.pt>

GETTING HERE

There are regular connections between Lisbon and Horta airport and the flight time is approximately 2 hours. "SATA Air Açores" operates daily flights from São Miguel (1 hour) and Terceira (40 minutes).

For more information and timetables, visit: www.sata.pt

Among the various islands of the Central Group - Faial, Pico, São Jorge, Terceira and Graciosa - there are regular connections by boat during the summer season (June, July, August and September). The links are also regular in winter, but less frequent.

A passenger and vehicle ferry that connects all the islands also stops on Faial.

For more information and timetables: www.atlanticoline.pt and www.transmacor.pt