

The Azores

Archipelago

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1

to Sao Miguel & Ponta Delgada

After arriving at João Paulo II Airport it is just a ten minute drive to Ponta Delgada where we can settle into our Hotel. Depending on the time of arrival we will be able to visit one of the marvellous XIXth Century city gardens or just walk around the historical city centre and visit the Portas da Cidade and the Mother Church.

Day 2

Caloura, Lagoa do Fogo and Ribeira Grande, also Sete Cidades and Mosteiros

We are going to try and fit a lot into today! We start with the beautiful coastal area of Caloura, just twenty minutes from our hotel. Here we will see a colony of Common Terns and Roseate Terns as well as a few waders.

We will then head up onto the famous Fogo Volcano and its astonishing lagoon, where the scenery and the native flora will be the highlights.

Fogo has a particularly wide range of ferns including the Killarney Fern *Trichomanes speciosum*. Growing with familiar plants such as *Equisetum telmateia*, Hard Fern and Soft Shield Fern, are *Polypodium azoricum*, Elegant *Diplazium caudatum* and the endemic *Asplenium azoricum*. Just in case you thought the entire island was covered in ferns we will see some fine flowering plants here too including endemics such as *Viburnum treleasei* and *Scabiosa nitens*.

After lunch we'll visit the massive volcanic crater of Sete Cidades volcano. We will start our tour in Serra Devassa and have an introduction to the birds and flora of the Azores around Lagoa do Canário. Nearby is a spectacular view over the crater and some of the lagoons it holds inside. We will then drive down to the twin lake of Sete Cidades and check for migratory water birds, particularly ducks, coots, herons and egrets (North American species frequently turn up in the Azores...), but the bird highlight of the day will probably be the Atlantic Canary. Many of the Azorean archipelago's finest endemic plants grow around the region around the many volcanic lagoons. Growing amid the magnificent scenery we can find *Angelica lignescens* and *Rumex azoricus*, and we should also be able to see *Lactuca watsoniana*, rarer on San Miguel than on other islands. Orchid-lovers will be delighted to two endemic *Platantheras*, for both *Platanthera pollostantha* and *Platanthera micrantha* occur here. We hope to be able to show you the only San Miguel population of *Euphorbia stygiana* here.

To end a busy day we'll move to Mosteiros, a tiny village located on a Fajã, an unusually flat coastal platform created from collapsing cliffs, landslides or lava flows, where we will be looking for waders. Here we'll find the endemic *Tolpis*

succulenta and hopefully the unusual and very beautiful (and on San Miguel very rare) maroon-flowered *Lotus azoricus*. On the way back to Ponta Delgada we will stop, if time permits, at Ponta da Ferraria, another interesting Fajã where there is a natural thermal-water pool by the ocean.

Day 3

Pelagic trip, Ponta Delgada gardens, Gorreana Tea Factory and Lombadas

Today we will go to sea on a pelagic trip searching for cetaceans and seabirds. During the pelagic we can expect to see plentiful Cory's Shearwaters while Bulwer's Petrel, Little and Great Shearwater are all possibilities. Cetaceans will include the resident Sperm Whales – the Azores has a very healthy population of these impressive leviathons. We'll come across pods of Common, Risso's and Bottle-nosed Dolphins, and some of the migratory species, such as Stripped Dolphin, Fin, Mink and Blue Whales.

Once we get back to solid ground we will check out from the hotel and have our picnic in one of the XIXth Century city gardens where many native and exotic plants will be seen. We will then leave Ponta Delgada and drive about half an hour to the Gorreana tea plantations and factory, where we can taste this unique high-quality black tea. From there we will drive to another of the island's fascinating natural attractions, the valley of Lombadas, where we can explore the native flora amongst the splendid scenery. Then we will descend to Furnas where our next hotel will be waiting for us.

Day 4

Graminhais Plateau and Tronqueira Mountains

Today we'll visit two remarkable natural areas. We start by driving to Salto do Cavalo from where we'll be able to look out over the whole Furnas Valley and lagoon. We will then move to Graminhais plateau, where we will walk amongst a fabulous peat bog, home of the Citrine Forktail which breeds in a very unusual way. Amazingly all of these tiny (barely an inch long) damselflies on the Azores are now known to be female and they reproduce by parthenogenesis! Both Woodcock and Snipe will be displaying at their best, a sublime show that deserves to be seen and heard. The Sphagnum dominated boglands are dotted with Australasian tree-ferns *Dicksonia antarctica* naturalised here and exceedingly happy about it, and here growing alongside its native counterpart *Culcita macrocarpa*. Between tufts of very healthy-looking Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* growing smaller plants such as the perhaps familiar Cornish Moneywort *Sibthorpia europaea* and Trailing St John's Wort *Hypericum humifusum*, the endemic *Cardamine caldeirarum*, and two clubmosses, *Huperzia suberecta* and *Huperzia dentata*.

We'll take our picnic amongst the picturesque Ribeira dos Caldeirões watermills. The afternoon will offer us one of the highlights of the week as we will visit Tronqueira mountain range, a very special protected area home of the endemic Azores Bullfinch and of the best kept laurel forest of São Miguel Island. Amongst

the laurels we can find the endemic Tree Heath *Erica azorica*, *Juniperus brevifolia*, upon which grows another Azorean endemic the parasitic *Arceuthobium azoricum*, the Azorean Bilberry *Vaccinium cylindraceum*, *Woodwardia radicans*, the local St. John's Wort *Hypericum foliosum* and the local form of Yellow Pimpernel/Loosestrife, the endemic *Lysimachia azorica*. We will come back to the hotel at Furnas for dinner but there's the option of leaving the hotel again after duck and visiting the nearby village of Ribeira Quente where we can listen to the amazing sounds of Cory's Shearwater coming back from the sea to their nests.

Day 5

Furnas valley and lagoon, Terra Nostra Botanical Park and Pico da Areia

We will spend the day having a relaxed exploration of Furnas and will start with a cultural and scientific guided tour around the valley to see its thermal springs. This area is rich in bryophytes and has a number of thermophilous tropical weeds thriving around the hot springs. The tour will end in the Terra Nostra Botanical Park where there are many exotic plants, magnificent centenary trees and a fantastic XVIIIth Century thermal water pool. We'll take our picnic in the garden as well.

After lunch we will walk around Furnas lagoon to enjoy this beautiful and relaxing environment and also look for water birds. Later in the afternoon we will go to Pico da Areia where there is a remaining patch of native vegetation, typical from lower altitudes. Here conditions are dryer and shrubs will be dominant, amongst them grow the orchid *Serapias cordigera* as well as *Myrsine africana* and the endemic *Centaurium scilloides*.

Day 6

Tronqueira Mountains, Azores Bullfinch Interpretation Centre, and Bartolomeu Peak

Today we'll explore a variety of vegetation types from coastal cliffs, through mid-level Laurel Forests all the way up to high montane vegetation

We'll go back to Tronqueira to visit a habitat restoration project in an area of mid altitude laurel forest. The recent removal of invasive species has opened space for many small native plants that will be flowering. The tree and shrub flora amongst the dominant *Laurus azorica* includes many endemic species such as the holly *Ilex perado*, the cherry *Prunus azorica*, *Morella faya* and *Frangula azorica*. Lianas such as *Smilax azorica* and the ivy *Hedera azorica* trail through the thick green mantle also populated with *Rubus hochstetterorum* and *Picconia azorica*. *Rubia agostinhoi* (not endemic – unlike most everything else that grows in this habitat!) and *Chaerophyllum azoricum* are found amongst the trees and of course the forest is rich in fern species too with the macronesian endemic *Elaphoglossum semicylindricum*, familiar *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, *Pteris incompleta*, and a range of *Dryopteris* species including widespread *affinis*, *aemula*, and the endemic *azorica*.

After this we'll visit the Azores Bullfinch Interpretation Centre where we can learn a lot more about this important passerine, the laurel forest and all the conservation work that is currently under way in this protected area. We'll have lunch around

the centre, after what we'll visit another patch of restored forest where species richness is quite high. We'll then go to Bartolomeu Peak, almost 900 metres above sea level (2900 feet) where we'll find a truly montane natural vegetation where species like *Silene uniflora*. In all of these areas we'll have a good chance of seeing the Azores Bullfinch once again.

If we still have time we'll visit the Lombo Gordo beach on our way back to Furnas, where we can see some endemic plants from coastal habitats such as *Azorina vidalii*, the pretty umbellifer *Ammi seubertianum*, *Pericallis malvifolia*, and *Spergularia azorica*.

Day 7

Pelagic from Vila Franca do Campo

Our second pelagic trip, this time from Vila Franca do Campo. Sperm Whales are resident and we'll see groups of Common and Bottle-nosed Dolphins. We'll again hope to encounter some migratory species, notably Striped Dolphins, which can provide spectacular entertainment if we can find them jumping. We'll again keep our eyes on the lookout for the large baleen whales such as Fin Whales and Blue Whales, and we hope to encounter Pilot Whales as well. Turtles are not infrequently encountered in these pelagics – Green and Loggerhead the most likely.

Day 8

Pico do Ferro and Porto Formoso tea factory and departure

We'll check out from the hotel and depending on the time of the flight we'll still try to visit a couple of places for native vegetation. Once again, if we have time we'll also make a short stop at Porto Formoso to have a cup of another local brand of tea and explore the coastal vegetation which is very good here.

If you would like to ask about any other aspect of this holiday, please call 01298 83563 or email us at enquiries@greentours.co.uk.

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