

Madeira

Wildlife at Leisure

A Greentours Itinerary

Day 1 To Funchal

Arrival and welcome dinner at the Casa Velha in the hills above Funchal.

Day 2 Vereda de Balcões & the Dragon Tree Sanctuary

We'll start the tour by walking the short (1.5km) trail known as the Vereda de Balcões. This literally translates as the Balcony Trail. The trail follows one of the islands many Levadas (gently sloping man-made irrigation channels) and takes us through beautiful natural Laurisilva forest before finishing at the Balcões (balcony) which has views from the ocean to Pico Ruivo, the highest peak on Madeira at 1,862 meters. Of course, the highest peaks are not always visible but the landscapes are truly spectacular. *Laurus novocanariensis*, *Persea indica*, *Ocotaea foetens* are the dominants in the forest here and we'll also encounter *Isoplexis sceptrum*, *Heberdenia excelsa*, *Clethra arborea* and hopefully both *Ilex* spp., *Ilex perado* and *Ilex canariensis*. Exotic species such as *Platanus x acerifolia* and *Quercus robur* also occur at Ribeiro Frio.

After lunch we'll descend to the Dragon Tree Sanctuary at Neves. Here some very old specimens of these peculiar and rare trees are looked after with great affection. The sanctuary is also a beautiful place in itself. If we've time we'll finish a day full of delights at the Quinta de Palmeira whose sloping terraced gardens have lovely views down over Funchal. The gardens are noted for their flowering trees.

Day 3 Ponta de Sao Lourenco & the Monte Palace Gardens in Funchal

The dry and exposed peninsula of Ponta de Sao Lourenco is more like the outlying Desertas Islands than other parts of Madeira. The coastal vegetation, though somewhat degraded, contains a range of plants not easily seen elsewhere on Madeira.

The geology is fascinating with revealing overlapping ash cones interbedded with lava and interlaced with near vertical dykes revealed by the sea's erosive powers. Here are the Cardoon *Cynara cardunculus* var *ferocissima*) and Safflower *Carthamus lanatus*), *Aizoon canariensis* and the lovely endemic *Echium nervosum*. Endemic are in fact many. There's *Calendula maderensis*, *Helichrysum devium*, *Crambe fruticosa*,

Lotus macranthus, *Matthiola maderensis* and *Euphorbia piscatoria*, also known as the Fish-stunning Spurge.

Returning to Funchal we'll have to spend a couple of hours in the Monte Palace Gardens which have an impressively vast collection of plants that has been garnered from the four corners of the globe. The gardens that surround the châteaux-like Monte Palace are just part of the experience though, for the cable car ride up from Funchal to Monte offers stunning views over the harbour and bay. The plantings surround several small lakes well-known for their Black Swans. Throughout these gardens are displayed an important collection of mostly 15th and 16th century Moorish and Hispanic ceramic tiles. A three-story museum houses an exceptional collection of minerals and two of the levels are dedicated to sculptures from Zimbabwe.

Day 4 **Ribeiro Bonito**

The Laurisilva forests of Madeira are characterised by the presence of the Lily of-the-valley Tree *Clethra arborica* and are also the only place in the world where the rare Madeiran Laurel Pigeon can be found. The forests we'll walk through at Ribeiro Bonito are some of the most beautiful on the island with much *Clethra*, an interesting genus with many species through the Americas as well as several in Eastern Asia and Malesia. And in the rest of the world? Just one, found only on Madeira. There's Madeira's full suite of *Lauraceae* species here too and we'll see *Vaccinium padifolium* and *Erica arborea* too. Endemism levels are high in Madeira. There's 113 species which are endemic to the archipelago, around 10% of the total flora. Amongst the more attractive of the endemic flowers are the Madeiran Marsh Orchid *Dactylorhiza foliosa* which is quite common, Anemone-leaved Stork's-bill *Geranium palmatum*, Madeira Stock *Matthiola maderensis*, Yellow Foxglove *Isoplexis sceptrum*, Everlasting *Helichrysum obonicum* and White Everlasting *Helichrysum melanophthalmum*.

Day 5 **the Palheiro Ferreiro estate**

We'll have the whole week in fact at the splendid Palheiro Gardens (formerly called the Blandy Gardens) however our morning and evening meanderings may not have yet revealed everything the gardens have to offer so this is our chance to really get to know the place. Palheiro began in the early 1800s when the Count of Carvalhal planted exotic trees from around the world and began the Camellia (*Camellia japonica*) collection for which the garden is now justly famous. In the same century Mildred Blandy introduced more exotics notably proteas from South Africa. She went on to create so much including the Main Garden, the Sunken Garden, Ribeiro do Inferno, and the Lady's Garden. There are some impressive trees in the gardens such as a 30m tall tulip tree *Liriodendron tulipifera*, a truly huge 45m Norfolk Island Pine

Araucaria heterophylla and a fine coast redwood *Sequoia sempervirens* as well as three giant New Zealand Christmas Trees *Metrosideros excelsa* with bright red flowers.

In the afternoon we'll head to the upper edge of Funchal and the Alegria Valley. Centuries ago this was the main route northwards from Funchal over the mountains. It's now a local beauty spot/picnic area but rather off the beaten track/tourist radar. Though much of the land is forested with introduced species there's still some interesting things to see. Down on the coast we'll visit the harbour at Pinaculo where lovely *Musschia aurea* and *Lavandula pinnata* grow on the rock face above the road and there are splendid views out to sea.

Day 6

Rabaçal

Today we'll head for the Paúl da Serra and walk towards Rabaçal. This is quite a long walk and today there will be a shorter walk option as well. The Paúl da Serra is a large moorland plateau at around 1500m. Grazed by herds of sheep (grazing animals are rather uncommon in Madeira!) the landscape and vegetation is unlike anywhere else on the island. We'll walk down towards Rabaçal following the Levada system. This will take us through impressive forests of Tree Heath *Erica arborea* as well as some superb Laurisilva forests. We'll have distant views of *Pittosporum coriaceifolium* (difficult to get close to!) as well as *Sambucus lanceolata* and *Euphorbia mellifera*.

Day 7

Paul do Mar

The northern side of Madeira is lush and green and rainfall is high producing the lovely sub-tropical vegetation we'll have seen much of in previous days. However towards both the southeastern and southwestern tips of the island the climate is substantially drier. We'll spend the day exploring the more Mediterranean type habitats to be found in the latter part, in the vicinity of the fishing village of Paul do Mar. We'll start inland at Prazares and follow the Caminho do Paul do Mar trail down to the sea. The views down to the coast five hundred metres below at the trailhead are stunning. The trail descends through terraces with cultivation and natural vegetation that includes a lovely 'tree' *Euphorbia* with often thickset but short trunks – *Euphorbia piscatoria*. One of the most photographed of Madeiran plants is found here – the lovely *Echium nervosum*. We'll walk through strands of the native *Olea europea* var. *madeirensis* as well as finding *Sideroxylon marmulano*. We'll finish down in the scenic harbour at Paul do Mar where we'll have the chance to relax, get a cold beer, and wander the streets or go for a swim at a picturesque little beach.

Day 8

The Jardim Botânico. Departure from Funchal

Created in 1881 by the Reid family The Jardim Botânico was originally a private collection which over the years has become one of the most beautiful gardens in the region. There's a fascinating collection of plants from all over the world as well as research and conservation areas, and the views over the city and harbour are wonderful. Also outstanding are the arboretum, succulents and large cacti, palms, and plants cultivated for food and aromatic use.

An early afternoon departure from Funchal.

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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